

# The Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.]

[Sub-Editor, J. M. WHEELER.

Vol. IX.—No. 21.]

SUNDAY, MAY 26, 1889.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.



DOWN WITH BLASPHEMY!

## LETTERS TO THE CLERGY.—I.

ON "CREATION"—(Concluded).

To the Bishop of Carlisle.

FROM metaphysical arguments, my lord, I turn to what you say on Design. "The argument from design," you allege, "is, in fact, one of the foundation stones of natural theology, and remains unshaken." But I doubt if you really mean this, for if the argument is "unshaken" it is difficult to see what induced you to support it afresh. "Helps to Belief" is a title which implies that belief is enfeebled.

You have the sense to drop Paley's preposterous illustration of the watch, and you dilate upon the human eye, which is an optical instrument so "delicate and complicated" that it must be held to "indicate design," and to deny it is "something like an absurdity." Agair, my lord, I say you are begging

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the question. However delicate and complicated an organ may be, if we discover how it became so we have explained it; and if the process, at every stage, has shown nothing but the action of natural causes, what necessity is there for a supernatural hypothesis? When Napoleon said to Laplace that his system left no room for God, the great astronomer replied "Sire, I have no need for that hypothesis." The law of parsimony forbids the assumption of occult causes when known causes are adequate to account for the phenomena.

Now, my lord, it is indisputable, and you are well aware of the fact, that the human eye did not spring into existence suddenly. We are able to trace the evolution of this organ down to its beginnings in low forms of life, where it is but a local susceptibility to the stimulus of light. To this you reply that the result is no "less ingenious or an indication of design, because you can trace the process by which the result is attained." The ingenuity, my lord, is not in the result but in the process. You must find

It there or not at all. You seem to admit Natural Selection as an established truth, but is it not incompatible with Design, except in that universal sense in which Design can only be an assumption? If adaptation can be explained as a result, without introducing design as a cause, theology has nothing to gain by pointing to any organ however exquisitely developed. And if Natural Selection involves, as it does, the elimination by wholesale massacre and torture of countless unfit specimens, does not this conflict with all our notions of the wise use of materials and the intelligent adjustment of means to an end?

There is also, my lord, an aspect of the case which you prudently conceal. According to your theory, God has been making eyes for hundreds of thousands and perhaps millions of years. How is it, then, after such long and extensive practice, that he produces so many failures? How do you account for short-sighted eyes, and even blind eyes? What is your explanation of ophthalmic hospitals? Would not any human workman be laughed at who turned out such multitudes of mistakes?

You declare, my lord, in the language of Paley, that "a man cannot lift his hand to his head without finding enough to convince him of the existence of God." In a certain sense the remark may be true. Should the head be dirty, the man might find one of those objects which satisfied the magicians of Egypt that Moses and Aaron were inspired, and induced them to exclaim "This is the finger of God."

For the purpose of your case you dwell upon the greatness of man. Your language savors more of the platform than the pulpit. Century after century your Church has taught the doctrine of the Fall, and man's utter depravity. You, however, speak of his "front sublime," which, if the human race be taken as a whole, is positively absurd; you speak of his "grand powers," which are difficult to find in a savage who can only count three; and of his "exalted instincts," which are not discoverable in countless millions of mankind. Thus you praise "God's handiwork" to prove his wisdom and beneficence; while, in the pulpit, you go to the other extreme to prove the doctrine of original sin.

Pursuing the Design argument, you point to "the truth" that "every arrangement in a plant or animal accomplishes some definite end." What then, you ask, is "the justifiable conclusion as to the origin of the organism? Is it not this, that the organ is the outcome of a creative mind?"

Supposing the statement to be true, your conclusion is not a necessary one. In the struggle for existence the superfluous is harmful, and its possessors would tend to extinction. In the long run also, as organs grow by use and atrophy from disuse, the useful organs would flourish and the useless decay and disappear. There is no magic in the process, and nothing magical in the result.

But your statement is not true. Man himself possesses rudimentary organs, which are of no service; they fulfil no function, being useless relics of a long anterior state. One of them, the vermiform appendage of the cæcum, has been known to harbour seeds, which have set up inflammation and caused death. Man has a rudimentary tail; rudimentary muscles for moving the ears and the skin; rudimentary hair over the body; and rudimentary wisdom-teeth, which are a great nuisance, and a common cause of neuralgia. Through the law of inheritance, likewise, the generative and nutritive organs of one sex are partially transmitted to the other. Perhaps your lordship will be good enough to inform me what "definite end" is served by the rudimentary mammæ in men.

You merely allude to these things, my lord, as "very exceptional cases," as though a theory need not cover all the facts. You even venture on the remark that "exceptions prove rules," which is not an admitted law in any system of logic I am

acquainted with. You also observe that these "exceptions" only raise "a plausible objection" to the Design argument. Haeckel considers them "a formidable obstacle," and I prefer his opinion to yours, especially when I watch your curious attempt to explain away "the plausible objection."

"A friend once presented me with a warm garment of exceedingly ingenious construction, and bade me wear it during the coming winter. I did so, and for some time I had two feelings with regard to the garment: one, that of admiration of the ingenuity of its construction; the other, that of gratitude to my friend for thinking of me and trying to keep me warm. But one day an observing neighbor, with a keen eye and much penetration, discovered a button which appeared to be of no use. I may say that the explanation of the button was that it was an essential part of a garment, somewhat like mine, and which my friend had originally intended to give me; but in the course of the construction he had determined to adopt a somewhat improved form, and so the tailor altered the pattern, but omitted to remove the button. My observing neighbor suspected that this was the case; for my own part I had no strong opinion on the subject. It seemed to me that, button or no button, the garment was admirably contrived, and that the kindness of the giver was beyond a doubt."

God then, my lord, forgets the buttons! It is a poor compliment to his omniscience. He decided to make things in one way, altered his mind, left in some of the old pattern through inadvertence, and hence the presence of rudimentary organs. How charming! How pretty it would be in a nursery book! Do you really mean it, my lord; and do you really see any analogy between the making of a coat and the growth of an organism?

Turning to the mental and moral aspects of the world, you are confronted, my lord, with the existence of evil. You are obliged to admit the presence of "phenomena which it seems difficult to reconcile with the most obvious notions of perfect benevolence." You allow that God "permits the existence of much which is evil," and you are ashamed to fall back upon the orthodox theory of Satan, who does all the harm while the Deity does all the good. Accepting evolution, at least up to the point of man's "soul," you must be perfectly aware that pain and misery are not on the surface of things but part of their very texture; and that Natural Selection acts through a struggle for existence which makes the earth a shambles. "Kill or be killed" is a strange rule of life for Benevolence to impress on its creation. You see this, my lord, and you have two ways of surmounting the difficulty.

First, you say that the abounding evil of this world is "inconsistent with certain conceptions which we have formed." It is to be presumed you mean that God's ways are not our ways. I concede the fact, my lord, but how is it to be reconciled with your theory? Why do you call the Deity "good" if you mean that his goodness and ours are different "conceptions"? Can you expect me to worship a God whose beneficence has to be vindicated by arts which insult my understanding? Let me remind you of the memorable protest of Mr. Mill in his reply to Dean Mansel, whose footsteps you follow with a faltering tread. "I will call no being good," he said, "who is not what I mean when I apply that epithet to my fellow creatures; and if such a being can sentence me to hell for not so calling him, to hell I will go."

Secondly, you suggest that God was hampered by unfavorable conditions. "Perhaps, if we knew all," you say, "we should know, as in our ignorance it may be permissible to guess, that the method of Creation actually used by the Creator was the only one possible in the nature of things." You say again that God is carrying out a purpose, and that he knows the best, or "perhaps the only way of doing it." You also surmise that "he was pleased to submit himself to limitations."

If the Deity submitted himself to limitations, who imposed them? If he had a choice, as your language implies, is he not responsible for the selection? Did he not create "the nature of things,"

and if it was unsuitable could he not create another "nature of things?" Can you conceive any limitations of Omnipotence? Is it possible to imagine Omniscience doing "the best in the circumstances"? You trust that "somehow things will come right at the last." But is not this the language of blind faith? Is it not also an admission that things are wrong at present?

I see no force in your remark that "he who does not believe in God does not get rid of the evil and sorrow." He may try to lessen them, my lord; and he gets rid of the belief in a monster. At the very worst "The grave's most holy peace is ever sure," and meanwhile it is a comfort to think that,

No Fiend with names divine  
Made us and tortures us; if we must pine  
It is to satiate no Being's gall.

In your opinion "Atheism is connected either with the excessive ingenuity of a subtle intellect, or with moral considerations of a perverse and morbid kind." I differ from you, my lord; but I allow that you have cleverly dressed up the old fiction that every Atheist is a fool or a rogue.

Atheists are not to be deceived by phrases. When you say that "life must have come from a fontal origin of life" you are only making a "mystery" more mysterious. When you say that "the egg contains a principle of life, which postulates a giver of life," you are once more begging the question.

You are an Evolutionist except at the beginning and the end. You assume that God created life, and you are loth to believe in the natural genesis of man. You remark that the "missing link" is "not to be found in any of the geological records of the past." How do you know that? The geological record is imperfect, and the preservation of "missing links" is not a natural necessity. Nor have geological investigations been made in any part of the world where the human race could have originated. You smile at Haeckel's belief that "the remains of our early progenitors are embedded in the depths of the Indian Ocean," and you remark that "an imaginary continent is, of course, not science, and does not really help us." The continent, however, is not so "imaginary." Certainly it is not so imaginary as the supernatural theories you introduce to account for what we do not understand, and to contradict what we do. Nor is it so imaginary as the "distinction" you find in Genesis between the life of man and the life of the lower animals. The Revised Version informs us that the "living soul" or "breath of life" was common to both.

The "soul" elicits one of your characteristic sentences. "Here," you say, "Science fails us altogether, Philosophy speaks with a doubtful accent, and Theology remains master of the field." True, my lord; theology is always master of the field of ignorance, and where our knowledge ends our religion begins. What we know is Nature, what we do not know is God. Science is ever widening the circle of light in which we live and work, and on the border of darkness the theologian plies his trade, passing off as the voice of the Infinite the echo of his own babblings.

G. W. FOOTE.

A clergyman visiting an old woman in the agricultural district read to her the description of the crucifixion, and the scenes previous to it. She listened very attentively and moaned audibly, and at last fairly cried. He was naturally pleased at such a proof of the power of his ministry, and, unwilling to weaken the effect, closed the book in silence. The old lady continued wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron. "Deed, sir, it's all vera sad I'm sure; but," she added briskly, "as it happened a long way off, and a good while ago, let's hope it's not true."

## WHAT LANGUAGE DID JESUS SPEAK?

ALTHOUGH to the Secularist such a question as this cannot be of any vital importance, it is, as we shall see, one of the utmost moment to the Christian who investigates the grounds and reasons of his faith. It places him, indeed, on the horns of a dilemma. Why, if Jesus came to all the world, did he not speak in a language which all could understand, and so that his very words could be recorded to all without the necessity of any translation? On the other hand, if, as he is said to have said, he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, how comes it that the gospels recording his teaching are written in a language the Jews could not understand? Was there ever a more ridiculous absurdity than sending a revelation to a people in a language different to their own? How is it possible that the Jews could call their Messiah by the Greek term Christ? How could Jesus, a Galilean Jew, make a pun upon the Greek term *πετρος*, as Jesus is made to do in Matt. xvi., 18?

The solution of these problems will be found to throw much light on the origin of Christianity and to contribute to the large array of proof that that religion sprang from Alexandria and not from Jerusalem. Reserving for a future paper the origin of the term Christian, we will address ourselves to the immediate question before us.

An attempt has recently been made by the Rev. Dr. Roberts to evade the difficulties of the question for the Christian side by contending that Jesus spoke in Greek and that even the gospel of Matthew was originally written in that language in which it now appears, although the early Fathers, Papias, Irenæus, Origen, etc., testify that Matthew wrote his gospel for the Hebrews in their own tongue. Many scholars give their opinion that our gospel of Matthew is not a translation, whence it follows that the gospel alluded to by the Fathers, and the only one known to them, was a different gospel to that which forms part of the Canon.

The hypothesis of Dr. Roberts has not been received with favor by competent scholars. Indeed the evidence is overwhelming that any Jew living in Palestine at the alleged time of Jesus must have spoken the corrupt Hebrew known as Aramaic.\* The testimony of the New Testament is all in the one direction. In Acts i., 19, mention is made of a Jewish tongue different from the Greek and Roman, which being the language of the capital must have been prevalent in the surrounding neighbourhood.

The word *Aceldama* אקלדמא referred to as "in their proper tongue" is Aramaic. When Paul wanted to speak to the people of Jerusalem "he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue" (Acts xxi., 40) and we are told (xxii., 2) that "when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence." They suspected his devotion to Judaism, but his command of their language ensured their respect. This in itself would be sufficient to refute the idea that the Jews spoke Greek. But there is much else. The Gentiles, in opposition to the Jews, were always called Greeks, which would not have been appropriate if the Jews spoke Greek. Embodied in the first two gospels are many words of Hebrew origin put into the mouth of Jesus—such as Raka, Gehenna, Mammon, Rabbi, Corban, Talitha cumi, Ephphatha, Eli, Eli, lama Sabachthani, etc. Paul, when he alleged that Jesus spoke to him from heaven says "I heard a voice speaking unto me and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." So it is evident Paul thought that Jesus retained his own language even after his ascension.

\* A Babylonian offshoot of Hebrew to which it stood in a somewhat similar relationship as Scotch to English.

Josephus, the Jewish renegade, testifies to the same point. He says that none of his contemporaries could have like himself composed such a work as his *Jewish Antiquities* in the Greek language. He himself, though he had taken great pains to understand it, could not pronounce Greek with sufficient exactness, for, says he, "our nation does not encourage those that learn the languages of other nations" (*Ant.* xx., 10-2). Yet Christians must believe that "unlearned and ignorant men" (*Acts.* iv., 13) were competent to write the Greek gospels, while Dr. Roberts would have us believe that a Galilean carpenter speaking to the common people used the Greek language. *Credat Judæus.*

Josephus wrote his *Antiquities* for the Greco-Roman world. His *Wars of the Jews* he composed, in the first instance, in Hebrew for his own people, and afterwards translated into Greek for the conquerors. He tells how when Titus, during the siege of Jerusalem, repeatedly summoned the besieged fanatics to surrender, this was always done in Aramaic, whether Titus commissioned Josephus to speak or spoke in his own name by the help of an interpreter (*Wars* v., 9, 2; vi., 2, 1; vi., 6, 2).

Those of the Apocryphal books which were written in Palestine were also originally written in Aramaic. The Targums, written for the Jews in Palestine and Babylon, were also in the same dialect. The Jewish Christians, so the fathers tell us, used Aramaic versions of the gospels. In the fourth century Epiphanius says the Jews of Palestine possessed translations of the gospel of St. John and of the Acts of the Apostles. These translations were undoubtedly prepared because they did not understand these works in the Greek language. Indeed, all the evidence shows that the more Greek culture threatened Judaism the more strict and separatist did the Palestine Jews become. The translation of their scriptures into Greek by the Jews of Alexandria was so deplored in Palestine that a solemn fast was instituted in commemoration of the event. The Mishna mentions (*Sota* 49) that at the time of Titus it was forbidden to any one to have his son instructed in Greek. We read in *Acts* x., 28 that it was "an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation." The national party at Jerusalem were jealous of the cosmopolitanism that was fatal to the exclusive pretensions of their faith. The Jews of the dispersion were unavoidably brought in contact with the Greek language and philosophy, and with the spirit of Universalism which was then stirring and budding in the Greek and Roman world. But there is little likelihood that a Galilean peasant had the slightest acquaintance with these or with any language but his own. That the gospels are written in Greek and not in Aramaic is a decisive proof that they were produced outside Palestine, and were consequently not published in the place where they could have been effectually contradicted.

J. M. WHEELER.

#### THE NORTH EASTERN SECULAR FEDERATION.

The following circular has just been issued:—

We beg to inform you that a number of the Branches of the National Secular Society, in the counties of Northumberland and Durham, have joined themselves into a Federation under the above title, for more efficient Propagandist purposes. Their aims and objects are:—

- To encourage and bring out Local Lecturers;
- To distribute Freethought Literature;
- To organise Freethinkers in the country districts, where, up till now, no organisation has been attempted;
- To Nominate and support Secular and Freethought Candidates, on School Boards, County Councils, Town Councils, etc.

And generally to promote the Freethought cause.

When we consider the great efforts that are being made by the Church of England and the other Christian bodies in our

midst, it will be obvious to every sympathiser with Freethought how important it is that an organisation such as ours should exist, and be effective and strong, in order to counteract the baneful effects of superstition. We therefore appeal to you for pecuniary support, feeling confident that the movement we are at present originating is the most important of its kind that has ever been attempted in the North, and ought to have the support of every Rationalist in the district.

Signed on behalf of the Council of the N. E. S. F.,

SAMUEL MORLEY PEACOCK, *President.*

35, Baring Street, South Shields.

JOSEPH BROWN, *Secretary.*

86, Durham St. Bentinck, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

JAMES TULLEN, *Treasurer.*

137, Burt Street, Gateshead.

## ACID DROPS.

From the letter of Mr. J. Addison, M.P., which appears in another column, we learn that Mr. Samuel Smith read out extracts from the *Freethinker* in the House of Commons. Evidently, therefore, our letterpress is as objectionable as the illustrations; and the only way to satisfy the bigots is to drop this journal altogether. We trust this fact will be remembered by the majority of Freethinkers who think our pictures "extreme." The fact is the bigots naturally fix upon the most advanced Freethought to illustrate what they mean by "licence." If this journal did not exist they would fall back upon the most objectionable one left; and in default of fresher material they would unearth "blasphemy" from old numbers of the *National Reformer*.

We hear that pious Samuel Smith, M.P., was distributing tracts in St. James's Park on Monday. He is evidently bent on Christianising the masses. He maintains a Christian Evidence lecturer, and, in case that gentleman's arguments should fail to persuade, he has the Blasphemy Laws to fall back upon, which he has just helped to put in a fine state of repair.

After defeating the Blasphemy Bill by a terrific majority the Godites in the House of Commons passed a Flogging Bill. Thus we see intolerance and brutality going hand in hand. Coercion is the rule all along the line. Force is the only idea that enters into their heads, and they are ignorant alike of philosophy and human nature. Not only so, but the men who prate the loudest about Jesus Christ are the worst violators of his teaching. There are many and grave mistakes in the Sermon on the Mount, but they do not lean to violence and repression. You may generally rely on a Christian's doing the very opposite of Christ's teaching in everything.

The Lord's Day Observance Society has held its annual meeting, with a lord in the chair and a live bishop and a live member of Parliament among the speakers. The income amounted to £2,154, and, after paying the secretary, the Rev. Dr. Gritton, the rest of the cash has been spent in trying to make everybody unhappy on Sunday. General Booth was complained of for selling the *War Cry* on the Lord's Day, and a protest was made against Sunday evening concerts in a Catholic chapel at Newcastle, where the *Stabat Mater* and "other Roman Catholic compositions abhorrent to the Protestant conscience were performed." Then the meeting, which was small but very fanatical, went home and prayed for a few striking judgments on Sabbath-breakers.

The Church of England used to back up its boast that it was the church of the people by an appeal to marriage statistics. So many were married in church who never went there on any other occasion that they made a good show. People are, however, finding they can be married more cheaply and with less nonsense by the registrar. Hence efforts are being made to draw them back to the church. It is now proposed to allow a man to be married in any parish in the diocese, provided the banns are put up in the parish in which the man resides, and then the fees are to be made as low as those for marriage before the registrar. This will touch the clergy in their vital part, the pocket, and the *Record* is accordingly agghast at the latter part of the proposal.

The British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among the Jews, the smallest, we believe, of three societies for that purpose, has held its annual meeting in Bloomsbury Hall. The Rev. J. Dunlop, secretary, presented the report, which showed an income of £8,926 and an expenditure of £8,911. The number of missionaries on the staff was stated at 31, assisted by more than 90 voluntary workers, but the number of their converts was prudently withheld.

The famine in China is scarcely over when the loving Father Almighty begins to desolate Ganjan, a province of India, whence 1,000 deaths are reported out of a population of 13,000.

Praise the Lord all ye floods, and praise the Lord all ye victims of floods, for his tender mercies are over all his works, and shall not the judge of all the earth do right?—This scripture is a little mixed, but all correct at bottom. We commend it to the attention of newspaper readers, who have shuddered over some of the pathetic incidents of the recent floods in Austria. Fancy the Lord looking on while two little children clung for hours to the bough of a willow tree, and were finally drowned in the mad waters!

This is how they retail Scripture in the House of Commons. Thus said the gold king, Mr. P. Morgan:—"The first instance of a royalty was when Joseph went down to a land he (the speaker) had no right to name in that House (Goschen). He established a corner in corn, and did a very good thing indeed. . . . The next year he went back, got the land, and then found that he had the whole bag of tricks in his hand."

Labby tells a good tale about the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill. "A day or two after the division," he says, "I was talking to a hereditary legislator who had taken part in it. 'Vote against it?' he exclaimed, with every appearance of intense indignation, 'of course I did! An infamous bill! I would oppose it at any sacrifice.' 'But why do you feel so strongly about it, my friend?' I asked. 'Strongly? Why, because I regard it as an utterly unjustifiable outrage to compel a man to marry a woman whom he possibly detests.' This poor creature really thought that the bill proposed to render marriage with a deceased wife's sister compulsory. I dare say that there were many more of them in the lobby who had equally hazy views on the subject."

"I explained to this worthy peer—a most estimable man, but no Biblical scholar—that, although no one now proposes to force a man into marriage with his wife's sister, the Law of Moses formerly compelled a man to marry his deceased brother's wife. When I further explained that it was this very same Law of Moses which is alleged to prohibit marriage with a deceased wife's sister, and that the opposition to the present bill is founded upon the Law of Moses, the poor peer was utterly mystified. I am afraid that I have rather shaken his faith in the consistency of Moses, but nothing could have been further from my intention."

Spurgeon has been talking like a theological old fogey at his annual Conference. He said he felt sure there was no mistake in the Bible, either in its science or its natural history. He was aware, however, that many could not see the Bible to be such a book as that; they thought their judgment to be infallible; but it was humbler to believe in the Bible than in themselves.

"Humble" is a good word in Spurgeon's mouth. There is hardly a man in London with a greater conceit of his own cocksureness in all the mysteries of faith. "I" occurs in his sermons with "humble" frequency, and he constantly begs sinners to come to "my" Savior.

Spurgeon's Conference ended funnily. His hearers were told that at last year's supper £3,750 was subscribed, and several friends had promised to double their subscription this year. Yet the collection, after all, only amounted to £2,800.

The Christian Socialists heard some unpleasant things at the meeting they convened in the Library of the Memorial Hall. Mr. Cunninghame Graham, described himself as not

a professing Christian, and was greeted with demonstrations of sympathy. Mr. Herbert Burrows called himself a Secularist, and pitched into the Samuel Morley type of Christian philanthropist. This brought up the Rev. Fleming Williams, who waxed eloquent about the great things Samuel Morley *intended* to do for his workpeople, forgetting the old adage that the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

How the creeds are crumbling! The Chicago *Interior* is a Presbyterian paper, and being asked whether it is honest to remain in the Church if you don't believe the Confession of Faith, it answers, "The Church does not ask its members to believe in the Confession of Faith; it asks them to believe in Christ." And what is believing in Christ? Well, you know, believing in Christ is just believing in Christ. That's plain, even to a simpleton, and most Christians lean that way.

While the Chicago *Interior* writes thus, it is amusing to see the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland sitting in judgment on the Rev. James Stuart, who is charged with having "traversed the Confession of Faith." There is every likelihood of the sinner's being expelled from the fold.

There was a pretty dispute at the annual conference of the Congregational Union as to whether the sky-pilots who preached extempore or those who used manuscript received the larger share of inspiration. The party in favor of dispensing with written sermons thought the Holy Ghost did most for the extempore preachers, while the opposite party declared this a "monstrous assumption." We should like to hear the Ghost on the question.

After Dr. Parker's little squabble with the Rev. C. Berry, it is amusing to read the following passage from one of his recent prayers in the City Temple: "Pity our little weaknesses, our want of love for one another and trust in one another."

Edward Thompson is a man of strong religious convictions. He was engaged in very intricate bridge-designing work, and his spare time which should have been spent in rest, was devoted to studying the Bible. The result was a mental capsule, which brought him before the Westminster magistrate charged as "a person of unsound mind wandering without proper control."

Mr. Justice Butt came down heavily on Peter Parkin, a Wesleyan local preacher, who was co-respondent in the case of "Harper v. Harper and Parkin." One of his canting letters to the injured husband was read in court, and the judge remarked that "if a preacher of the Gospel ran away with another man's wife, he always wrote a letter full of appeals to heaven and religion, and all that sort of thing."

Rev. Brother E. C. Smith a methodist divine of Cleves, Ohio, was shamefully arrested by a base constable, April 23rd. He had done nothing in the world unlawful unless you call sawing off the horns of eight cows unlawful. Two of the cows died, their brains oozing out. The wicked pronounced it "a horrible case of cruelty to animals," and forgetting his holy office, the man of God was punished like an ordinary cow-boy.

The only sentiment possible towards the majority of gospel-grinders is one of contempt. They are usually either dull or dishonest, sometimes both. Just fancy the intellectual status of the Rev. Mr. Fairbrother, who has been found guilty of plagiarising from Talmage. We might possibly respect the taste of a man who "conveyed" from Jeremy Taylor, or even from Tillotson. But from Talmage!

A woman named Smyth, daughter of a highly-respected inhabitant of Barnstaple, North Devon, drowned her child in a bath in her father's house. She afterwards went in great distress to her father and told him what she had done, remarking that "she supposed she would have to go to an asylum, and she would like her little boy to go to heaven first." Another instance of the blessedness of religious belief.

Dr. Chandler, the Cambridge professor of Moral Philosophy, has been found dead from a dose of prussic acid. Dr. Becker, the lay reader at Dulwich College, has also committed suicide. More facts for Talmage.

Sarah Ann Alice Moxon believed in faith healing. She wouldn't take medicine, she repulsed the doctor her father called in, and her paternal parent did not administer the medicine because he "did not like to limit the Almighty's power." The result was she died, and the coroner's jury severely censured her father and mother. This happened at Kilburn, in a city called London, the largest in what is supposed to be the civilised world.

A poor woman at Melrose plunged into the river with the object, as she said, of serving the Lord. This service will probably land her, as it has landed many, in a lunatic asylum.

We stated last week that the Liverpool Branch had been injured to some extent by the Sunday Society. This remark has been pounced upon by "J. W. B.," who, in a letter to the *Liverpool Mercury*, commends "this testimony of an adversary to the consideration of those good people who oppose the Sunday Society on religious grounds."

It seems necessary to explain. The Liverpool Branch is not in a state of "decay," as this writer insinuates. It has suffered from the Sunday Society because several Freethinkers are promoting that organisation instead of developing their own, and because some of the old frequenters of Camden Hall go to the Rotunda to hear the cheap music and sit in "respectable" company. This does not much affect the audience of special lecturers, though it diminishes that of less popular speakers.

The Sunday Society will not turn Freethinkers into Christians, but it will gradually draw people away from churches and chapels. For the moment it injures organised Freethought, but in the long run it will be to our advantage.

One of our readers, living at Hampstead, has lost his mother, and desiring to place an inscription on her tombstone he selected the words of Thomas Paine, slightly altered—"The world was her country and to do good her religion." But the Burial Board refused to allow these words to be inscribed. It considers them an "outrage" on the Christian sentiment of the community, and shows what freedom is in the orthodox vocabulary. We presume the Burial Board wishes it to be understood that the world is not a Christian's country and to do good is no part of his religion.

The Rev. Hugh Price Hughes "raised the standard of peace" at St. James's Hall, London, on Sunday afternoon, and called upon the Pope of Rome and the Archbishop of Canterbury to rally round it—which, of course, they will do in about a fortnight. It will take that time to come over. Mr. Hughes also wished to see Christians cease quarreling among themselves, which is an excellent wish; though if its realisation has to precede the other arrangement, the other arrangement is a good way off.

Now we have a word for Mr. Hughes and his like. They cry out lustily for peace in general, but for peace in particular they display no very strong affection. Where were they when Mr. Gladstone's Government was bombarding Alexandria? Who heard their sweet voices when the Soudan sands were reddened with innocent native blood shed by British bullets and bayonets? Mr. Bradlaugh and his friends held a demonstration of protest in St. James's Hall, but the pulpit fraternity did nothing. Their policy is to shout loud, and get a big reputation for humanity, when their words are harmless. When the fighting begins they find twenty good reasons for silence. Mr. Gladstone is a good Christian; or a Liberal Government can do no wrong; or these things will happen, you know!

The appeal for £2,000 for the Bishop of Lincoln's Fund has as yet only produced £411. The Ritualistic press is much annoyed at the Archbishop not having quashed the proceedings. The *Guardian* considers the Archbishop's assertion of his authority to try the case as equivalent to "a new Papacy." It advises the Bishop to appeal to the

temporal courts, a proceeding which will land the sacerdotalists in the equally uncomfortable position of having to acknowledge State supremacy. It is evident that, the longer the legal manœuvring lasts, the fiercer will become the contention between High and Low Church, and the nearer the day of Disestablishment.

A Liverpool merchant has given Canon Lefroy £100 to distribute amongst his poorer brethren in the soul-saving business. How about the poor Arabs in the Liverpool streets, the multitude of half-starving wretches in its slums? Might not the overworked tram-slaves have been benefited instead of the easy-going ministers, who, if they are hard up, should pray for what they require, knowing that the Lord will give them anything, on the principle of "ask and ye shall receive"?

A Baptist minister at Teignmouth has been preaching against infidelity. He says there will be no infidels in hell. We agree with him. Every seat is booked by Christians.

"Father Ignatius" has been attacking scepticism in the Westminster Town Hall. He terms it a canker-worm eating into the religious life of the nineteenth century, and denounced the liberal divines who he says "hammer out Christianity to the thinness of tissue paper in order to avoid its collision with science."

Three of them got into a compartment together at Willington station. One was a commercial traveller, one a sky-pilot, and the other an Atheist. The train had gone a mile or so when the sky-pilot opened his Jack-the-Ripper bag and produced a bundle of tracts. "Will you take one?" he said to his sceptical fellow-traveller. "Certainly," was the reply, "if you'll take one of mine." "With pleasure," said the holy beetle, and the tracts were exchanged. But the beetle's jaw dropped when he saw *Bible Blunders*. He tore the tract into bits, and his own was at once served in the same way. The beetle glowered, the Atheist smiled, and the commercial traveller burst into a roar of laughter.

Newcastle Cathedral has been restored and re-opened. The ceremony was imposing, and eminent sky-pilots were imported to give *éclat* to the performance. The Bishop of Glasgow preached a long sermon, and came down on those who whisper that "God could be as satisfactorily worshipped in the green fields and under the blue sky as he could be within the sacred walls of the house of prayer." The Dean of Edinburgh also dwelt on "the importance of adorning and embellishing the house of God, and especially when that house was a cathedral"—one of the Almighty's superior residences. Moral—a thousand sovereigns wanted to pay the "leetle bill." Let us prey!

Christians cry out in England against the policy of "outrage," but over in India they adopt our method in attacking the native religions. The Brahmins, it was stated at the Religious Tract Society's meeting, are issuing tracts against the Bible in reply to the missionary periodicals; and it was remarked that "they were obliged to explain away the legends about their gods, and to whitewash their religion." That is precisely what the Christians are obliged to do here under the fusillade of Freethought, but when we tell them so they cry out "blasphemy." There never was, since religion began, such a hypocritical faith as this Christianity.

Professor Tafel has been replying to Professor Huxley. He appears from the report in the *Islington Gazette* to have not got beyond the views of Swedenborg in the last century. Thus he says the antagonism between science and revelations is between what comes from man and what comes from God, and asks, Which is right—the creature or the Creator? He knows that not only man but all the objects of the animal world are created beings because they had a beginning. Professor Tafel can no more conceive of something come from nothing than any other man. Surely he has heard of evolution, although he is a professor of theology and not of science.

Who was St. Elizabeth? Reply: *The Virgin Mary's husband's wife*. So said a youngster to one of the Liverpool diocesan inspectors at an examination one day this week.

## MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

Sunday, May 26, Station Road Camberwell (open air): 11.15, "The Devil." Secular Hall, New Church Road, at 7, "The Fear of Death."

June 9, N. S. S. Conference; 23, Hall of Science, London; 30, Hall of Science, London.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

LITERARY communications to be addressed to the Editor, 14 Clerkenwell Green, London, E.C. All business communications to Mr R. Forder, 28 Stonecutter Street, London, E.C.

THE *Freethinker* will be forwarded, direct from the office, post free to any part of Europe, America, Canada and Egypt, at the following rates, prepaid:—One Year, 6s. 6d.; Half Year, 3s. 3d.; Three Months, 1s. 7½d. Australia, China and Africa:—One Year, 8s. 8d.; Half Year, 4s. 4d.; Three Months, 2s. 2d. India:—One Year, 10s. 10d.; Half Year, 5s. 5d.; Three Months, 2s. 8½d.

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.

IT being contrary to post office regulations to announce on the wrapper when the subscription is due, subscribers will in future receive the number when their subscription expires in a colored wrapper.

C. K. LAPORTE.—The question is somewhat out of the way for us, and, dealt with in that way, it only advertises the obnoxious firm.

H. HOLLING.—(1) We don't answer legal questions. (2) Cousins are free to marry each other.

INQUIRER.—You will find the text of "Wine which cheereth God and man" in Judges ix., 13.

BLOOMFIELD STEVENS.—(1) You have been hoaxed about the author of *Supernatural Religion* modifying his general tone. Bishop Lightfoot's nibbling criticisms do not affect his main arguments. (2) Among the reasons for rejecting the Petrine authorship of the second Epistle attributed to Peter are, 1st, it is not mentioned by any of the early fathers; neither Clement, Barnabas, Ignatius, Polycarp, Papias, nor Justin Martyr. Irenæus mentions the first Peter in his epistle in a way to imply that he knew no second. Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria and Cyprian did not know it. Origen says Peter left but one acknowledged Epistle, and Eusebius (340 A.D.) reckons it among the disputed works, and it was rejected by Chrysostom. 2nd, It is not included in the Muratorian Canon. Nor is it in the Syriac or the old Itala versions, nor in the Apostolical Constitutions. (3) Its similarities to Jude and Josephus show its later date. (4) Its style and tone of thought is different from that of the first epistle. It has been rejected by the best critics since the time of Erasmus. If not genuine it can only be called a forgery since it pretends to be written by Peter. See *Freethinker*, May 2, 1886.

R. COBB.—Toland was a Pantheist. Some of his writings are still of value, but they can only be picked up second hand.

R. S. SEAGO, on behalf of Mr. Rose, the secretary of the Bruno Cricket Club, referred to last week, desires to state that the matches will take place on Sunday.

J. BROWN, secretary of the North-Eastern Secular Federation, acknowledges the gift of parcels of literature from Mr. C. Bradlaugh and Mr. H. J. Blessett.

WALSALL FREETHINKER.—(1) We have published the "Parson's Creed" as a tract for several years, but we frequently have it sent to us in manuscript as a new discovery. Once, only once, a literary kleptomaniac sent it as his own production. (2) Don't trouble your head about Baxter's nonsense. His family has been in the prophetic business for nearly half a century. They have several times prophesied the end of the world, but they have always been wrong. This old planet is still "world without end." Let us add "Amen!"

H. LA CROIX.—(1) We are unable to advise you legally. It is an infamous act of bigotry. Write to Mr. Bradlaugh, whose legal knowledge is always at the service of Freethinkers. (2) There is only one English edition of Strauss's *Old Faith and the New*, translated by Mathilde Blind. Perhaps you confuse it with the *Life of Jesus*, which is published by Trubner and Co., Ludgate Hill.

R. JAMES.—We have received other complaints as to Freethought literature not being on sale at our open-air lecture stations in London. Columbia Road, Clerkenwell Green, and Battersea Park have been mentioned. We trust there is some mistake. It would be inexcusable to neglect the sale of literature when the N. S. S. finds most of the funds for the outdoor work of the Branches.

W. ROSS.—Always glad to receive cuttings and to hear from our friends.

E. TRUELOVE (Reigate) has collected half-a-crown from his Freethinking friends; this he invests in pamphlets and papers for distribution among "the heathen." He considers this a course which might be widely adopted with great advantage.

No. 12.—Delighted to hear you are still dosing the Devonshire "dumplings" with our medicine. They make wry faces, of course, but it will do them good.

A. HUBBARD.—Thanks for the batch of jobs.

A. PERRY.—We should like to see an open-air station at Kensal Green, and would be glad to hear from any Freethinkers in the district who are willing to co-operate.

C. E. FORD.—The Krishna legend is not proved to be older than that of Christ. There is quite enough of Christian mythology, doctrine, and ritual to be found in ancient India and Egypt, without unfairly pressing a dubious point.

FOX.—We will consider the suggestion. The other matter is one we know nothing about.

J. CLOSE.—You do us a real service by lending the *Freethinker* about and distributing tracts. See paragraph.

RECEIVED.—West Cumberland Times—Open Court—Liberator—Freethought—Bulletin des Sommaires—Western Figaro—Brighton Times—Newcastle Chronicle—Twentieth Century—Truthseeker—Der Lichtfreund—Boston Investigator—Islington Gazette—Secular Thought—Ashton Evening Reporter—Sussex Evening Times—Liverpool Mercury—Porcupine—Edinburgh Evening News—Ironclad Age—Brighton Examiner—Belfast News-Letter.

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.

THERE was a much improved audience at Milton Hall on Sunday evening, to hear Mr. Foote's second lecture on "God Help Us." This evening (May 26th), Mr. Foote lectures in the Camberwell Secular Hall on "The Fear of Death." This is a new discourse on a theme of almost universal interest.

NEXT Friday evening (May 31st) there will be a concert and ball at Milton Hall, under the auspices of the N. W. L. Branch. Any profits will go to the London Secular Federation. Mr. Foote has promised to attend, and the Branch hopes to see a good gathering.

THE Bruno Statue will be unveiled on Sunday, June 9, with great solemnity. Deputations of students from all the Italian universities will be present, as well as a deputation from the University of Paris. We have not yet heard whether Colonel Ingersoll has decided to attend on behalf of the American Freethinkers.

PROF. ERNST HAECKEL, the eminent German evolutionist, has been received with enthusiasm by the students of Rome, where he will stay to attend the unveiling of the Bruno statue.

"THE Pope," says the *Daily News*, "in a consistorial address, will protest strongly against the erection of the monument to Giordano Bruno, which has deeply offended the susceptibilities of his Holiness. He has repeatedly referred to it of late, and always with expressions of indignation."

*Semper Idem*—Always the same, is the Papal motto. Three centuries ago the Church burnt Bruno to ashes; to-day it lacks the opportunity, not the will, to repeat such infamies; but it does what it can to maintain its character, and screams "outrage!" and "blasphemy!" against those who set up a monument to one of its murdered victims.

THE Rome correspondent of the *Catholic Tablet* is much exercised over the preparations for the inauguration of the monument to Giordano Bruno. He mysteriously alludes to sundry "gloomy propositions which have found their way even into the columns of sensible journals, of insurrection and revolution as part of the programme of the day"; and while he does not endorse these, he says that "so marked and articulate a celebration will deepen the tinge of Radicalism which holds Italy in an iron embrace is undoubtedly and unfortunately true."

THIS correspondent's soul is further vexed that Whit Sunday should be chosen as the day of inaugurating the heretic's monument "with a special defiance of the sacredness of the day." He says "It has been desired by the Vatican—I speak on authority—that some counter celebration, some pious outburst of an opposite emotion should be encouraged for the day, and that the two movements should be pitted against each other." Probably the Pope will find Whit Sunday a fitting occasion for a state procession from the Vatican to St. Peter's, in order to draw off at any rate some of the vast crowd that will flock to the

Campo dei Fiori, where two hundred and eighty-nine years ago the great-souled martyr rejected the crucifix offered to him by the priests.

*The Philosophy of Secularism and The Bible God* by Mr. Foote are in the press and will be on sale in a few days.

MR. FOOTE'S speech before Lord Coleridge in the Court of Queen's Bench has long been out of print. A new edition is now in course of preparation, and will be issued under the title of *Defence of Free Speech*. A long introduction and many footnotes will make the speech quite intelligible, at every point, to those who are not familiar with the details of the case. The circulation of this pamphlet would be very useful now that the Blasphemy Laws are again brought before the public attention.

*Darwin on God* is the title of a thick brochure which Mr. Foote has in the press. It deals with the Darwin family from last century, and shows their sceptical tendency. Some fresh details are given of Darwin's father, gathered for Mr. Foote by the Rev. Edward Myers, the Unitarian minister of Shrewsbury, the city in which Dr. Darwin resided. Darwin's religious ideas, and his sceptical development are traced by means of the *Life and Letters*. Most of his works are laid under contribution, every passage being extracted which has any bearing on the subject, the work being thus a perfect *valde necum* for those who have not the means to buy or the leisure to read so many large and expensive volumes. Mr. Foote also contributes his share to the discussion of how religion is affected by evolution.

PART VI. of Mr. Wheeler's *Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers* will be ready next week. Those who wish to obtain the work at the least expense should purchase the parts as they appear.

MIDDLESBOROUGH has decided for cremation, and a public crematorium is to be erected. But the reform has not been carried without fierce opposition. Dr. Malcolmson, the medical officer of health for the borough, has been mobbed by infuriated females who smell brimstone already, and the Mayor has received anonymous letters warning him to prepare for his latter end.

WE are pleased to see the Christian element at Middlesborough doing its best to oppose the reform, for the more Christianity appears in its true light the sooner it will perish. The vicar of All Saints' has addressed a meeting on "Christian Burial v. Cremation," and after his discourse a resolution was passed condemning cremation as "an anti-Christian and unnatural practice." The Town Council was also called upon to rescind its resolution, which was described as "an outrage on the feelings of the community."

THE word "outrage" in this connexion throws a light upon its use in regard to the *Freethinker*. By outrage the Christians obviously mean something which affronts their prejudices; simply this, and nothing more. The Middlesborough pietists will still be able to be buried when their souls have done with their bodies. But that does not satisfy them. They want to make everybody follow their fashion, and those who don't wish to do so are guilty of "outraging" their "feelings."

WE are pleased to note that Messrs. Harman and Walker, of Valley Falls, Kansas, have been acquitted of the charge brought against the journal *Lucifer* by Anthony Comstock of the American Vice Society. The verdict is a righteous one. Since his prosecution of D. M. Bennett, Anthony has enjoyed the contempt of rational men, and his latest discomfiture will rejoice all lovers of individual liberty.

MAX NORDAU in his volume *From the Kremlin to the Alhambra*, tells how the pious Neapolitans altered the catastrophe at the end of Hamlet. The dramatic censors considered that the killing of a king, however justifiable from Hamlet's personal and family point of view, was the sort of achievement with which it would be highly undesirable to familiarise the Neapolitan public; so they modified Shakespeare's sanguinary *dénouement* in the following

ingenious manner. Hamlet, having accidentally discovered his royal uncle's resolve to poison him, addresses a moving discourse to Claudius upon the criminality of the latter's unnatural purpose. After some painful self-introspection, the King not only abandons his toxicological design but undertakes a pilgrimage to Rome in order to obtain Papal absolution for his previous misdeeds. The Queen retires to a convent, and Hamlet, having solemnly espoused Ophelia, who is miraculously cured of her melancholy madness, dedicates a church to his father's memory, and orders a splendid monument to be built at Elsinore in honor of the good old gentleman's military feats against the enemies of Denmark.

IN a very adverse criticism of Mr. Salt's *Life of James Thomson*, the *Saturday Review* says "That Thomson was a man of very remarkable and exceptional poetical talent is altogether beyond denial." The reviewer says he has not seen and does not care to see Thomson's prose *Satires and Profanities*. He probably would not relish the article on the *Saturday Review*.

THERE is to be another Co-operative Festival at the Crystal Palace. This year's gathering will take place on August 17, and Mr. G. J. Holyoake, as Vice President, will be to the front. Here, as elsewhere in progressive movements, the leading spirits are Freethinkers.

IN the Dutch *Theologisch Tijdschrift*, Daniel Volter attacks the genuineness of the four first and chief epistles ascribed to Paul.

MR. J. F. IRVING writes in the *Spectator*, that education in Victoria is not altogether godless. What he calls "a thin Theism" is left, but he declares it is "Anti-Scriptural and Anti-Christian."

THE Liverpool *Porcupine* mentions that the congregation at St. Catherine's, Abercromby Square, last Sunday morning, did not number twenty! And this within a stone's throw of the palace of the first Lord Bishop of Liverpool.

MR. C. E. FORD, of Brighton, has challenged Mr. Abbott, of the Calvinistic Protestant Society, to a public discussion on the matters in dispute between them, and recently ventilated in the *Sussex Evening Times* under the title of "The Calvin Controversy."

TOBY KING, of Hastings, is happily well again, after being at death's door. His burly form, good-natured face, and Alpine hat are once again on public view, and Toby's large circle of friends rejoice at his restoration to health and activity. The local *Observer* describes him as "well read, able in argument, tolerant of the opinion of others, kind hearted, gentle in manners, courteous to opponents, devoted to friends, a good master, and a sympathetic neighbor." Toby, in fact, would be "an admirable man if it were not for his opinions." Good old Toby, how he must smile! Fancy a man's character being injured by his difference in opinion from the *Observer*. It is too rich for anything.

THE *Chicago Tribune* of May 4th contains an article by Mr. B. F. Underwood, adducing testimony that George Washington was a Deist.

ON the 15th, 16th, and 17th of June the conference of the German Free-Religious Union will take place at Magdeburg. The proceedings are likely to be of great interest in consequence of the prosecution of Dr. Voelkel of that city.

BOTH the Newcastle papers edited in the Liberal interest, the *Leader* and *Daily Chronicle*, give attention to the North-Eastern Secular Federation. This is a sign of the times. The old conspiracy of silence is breaking down. We hope the Federation will be supported, morally and financially, by our readers in Durham and Northumberland.

ACCORDING to the report in these journals, "several prominent members of the Council were commissioned to attend the Conference of the National Secular Society in London." We rejoice to hear it, and we trust that this example will be imitated. It is imperatively necessary that



the approaching Conference should be largely attended. Very important business will be discussed, and every Branch which is not represented will be neglecting its duty.

ACCORDING to a recently-taken census, Bolton contains a population of 109,963 persons. It possesses church and chapel accommodation for over forty-five thousand, but the number of attendants at places of worship on a given Sunday morning was 16,839, and in the evening 18,534.

THE Rev. J. F. Grumbine grumbles that "with a population of about 75,000,000 in the United States hardly 20,000,000 are church members. Perhaps I should overstate the truth where I to put the actual number of church members in the United States at 15,000,000, for church reports as given in the year books of all denominations are, above all things, most misleading and unreliable."

THE name of the first native public lectress in India is Dr. Miss Katambai Ardeshir Marlbarvin. She addresses mixed audiences on medical and physiological topics. When the Hindu ladies study science for themselves the medical missionaries who introduce the Salvation soap and blood pills along with their other drugs will find their occupation gone.

### GOD'S LAUGHTER.

ALL good Christians know, or ought to know, from various texts, that God occasionally laughs. Whether his laughter is to be taken as only an anthropomorphic figure of speech, or literally as an actual fact, matters little for my present purpose. The metaphor or the action will equally indicate character. The real disposition of God will be seen in his laughter and in the cause or reason of that laughter.

Now laughter in itself is a most excellent thing, and a most pleasant. Every man of sense knows that it is better than all the physic in the world. The old saying, "Laugh and grow fat," indicates truly its beneficial effect upon the animal economy. Genuine, genial, mirthful laughter, even if the mere "animal spirits" predominate altogether over the intellectual pleasure, is much to be desired and cultivated for its cheering and healthful influence both socially and individually. Is Jehovah, then, of a happy well-balanced disposition, rippling over at times into merry smiles, quaint fatherly jokes, humorously incisive remarks, and hearty bursts of irresistibly contagious laughter? Does Papa God sometimes cheer his children and encourage them in the battle of life with joyous wisdom condensed as wit? Does he amuse them in the oppressive dulness of their weary lives with vivacious sallies and exquisitely funny thoughts and sayings which make men forget their miseries in merriment and in the exaltation of mind over circumstance? Not at all. The laughter of God and of his saints is *never* of a sweet, good-natured, benevolent kind, and it is never even of a salutarily satirizing and reformatively chastening kind. God was manufactured by collective man—evolved, that is, from collective human thought—among dreadfully serious men in dark ages when the comparatively brutal character of the struggle for existence was not favorable to the evolution of wit and humor or the indulgence of mirth and laughter of the modern kind. The joviality of a Father Christmas, or the benignant smile of a Pickwick, or the irresistible wit of Mark Twain, or the pleasantries of Hood and Lamb, or the exhilarating and yet pathetic fun of Don Quixote, would have been as mere childish frivolity amidst the huge game of mutual murder which the great Jehovah is supposed to have organised as his highly moral amusement. No book is more utterly destitute of the sense of humor than the Bible, though its serious stupidities and solemn nonsense render it a ready cause of smiles in those who are free to laugh at it. God and his inspired writers were shockingly deficient in the finer,

keener, and most important intellectual and moral faculties whence wise and graceful wit, instructive humor and the pleasantest human laughter are derived. They had no idea of laughter in the best sense. To laugh, with them, was only to "laugh to scorn," or to exult over the destruction or discomfiture of foes and their own escape from disaster. The least serious and least selfish form of laughter was, as in Sarah's case, the light laugh of incredulity.

In more recent times Milton has suggested that God finds amusement in the mistakes of honest inquirers, and that he purposely fosters misconceptions on the part of those who examine the works and laws of his universe in order that he may have the pleasure of laughing at them. Francis Galton, inquiring into the possibly disturbing effects of prayer and divine interference on statistical conclusions, says on this point:

"There is, however, a fifth supposition which I feel somewhat ashamed to record. It is that the caretaker, knowing he was watched, and not liking it, devised plans for defeating the observer. I freely acknowledge that he would easily succeed in misleading him. The homologue would be a God with the attributes of a Devil, who misled humble and earnest inquirers after truth by malicious artifice. I should not have dared to have alluded to such an ignoble supposition had not Milton himself put it forward in *Paradise Lost*, Bk. viii., where he makes Raphael tell Adam that God 'did wisely' not to divulge his secrets to be scanned by those who ought rather to admire, and that if they list to conjecture, he has perhaps left the fabric of the heavens to their disputes to 'move his laughter' at their quaint opinions. I think the passage (which was written before Newton's time) must have jured on the hearts of many readers, and that Milton's supposition of such a character in his God is not likely to be adopted by many persons at the present time. I cannot imagine a more cruel and wicked act, as estimated by the modern instinct of right and wrong, than that which has been so airily suggested by Milton."—*Inquiries into Human Faculty*, p. 275.

But if a reverential inquirer like Mr. Galton has to condemn "Milton's horrible supposition," as he indignantly calls it, what must humane inquirers say to a far more serious indictment which can be brought forward on still higher authority than that of Milton? Turning to the Bible itself, we find that God's laughter, like the laughter of his chosen people, was always of the mocking, jeering, revengeful, inhuman kind. As he roars like a lion (Hosca xi., 10), so he laughs as a tiger or a hyena might. To him "slaughter" and "laughter" are almost identical terms. He says to those who neglect his counsel: "I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you" (Proverbs i., 26, 27). Job says of him: "He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked. If the scourge slay suddenly, he will laugh at the trial of the innocent" (Job ix., 22, 23). The man after his own heart says to him: "But thou, O Lord, shalt laugh at them; thou shalt have all the heathen in derision" (Psalm lix., 8). God's laughter is also paralleled as synonymous with derision in Psalm ii., 4: "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision." God never laughs *with* people in mutual merriment or in subtle intellectual and moral sympathy, but always *at* them, in cruel exultation over their bitter troubles and heart-rending sufferings. His laughter is of a kind to make one shudder. It is too like the triumph of a fiend over torture and destruction, over blood and human agony. He will mock the mother's anguish as she beholds her infants hewn in pieces and her daughters put to shame. He will revel in the miseries of besieged cities, and feast his ears with the groans of the wounded and dying as they lie helpless and forsaken upon the battle-field of nations. The Father of all will laugh over the poor skeleton-like forms and unburied corpses of famished millions of his children. The terror and despair of plague-stricken nations

will be to him a subject of holy mirth and divine derision. It is his own Word that tells us he will laugh at calamity and mock distress and anguish. If he did not mean this he would surely not have said it. If he had meant it of the devil he would have said it of the devil; but the Bible never tells us that Satan laughs at distress. The prerogative of the supreme mockery of misery by laughter is reserved for God and his elect.

The atrociously malicious character of God's laughter appears to influence the ideas of Christians to such an extent that they usually cannot conceive the possibility, in religious matters, of any kind of hostile laughter except the spiteful and demoniacal laughter of which their deity sets the example. The pleasant intellectual shock of mingled congruity and incongruity, the appeal to the sense of the comic or absurd or ludicrous, the inspiration of ridicule and satire that tests and demolishes the weaker columns of the temple of thought, the mirthful and sometimes highly useful employment of caricature and contrast, appear to these narrowed and jaundiced minds identical with the inquisitor's glee over a racked victim, or a murderer's exultation over a strangled foe. These bigoted ones, I am afraid, are incurable and practically unteachable, but they die out by degrees, and each generation as it arises in a world of increasing mental freedom will be able to see more and more clearly that our laughter is human if God's is not. We attack evil with all our might and with all fair weapons; we do not exult over suffering or death like God and his saints. We cannot laugh like fiends over the horrors of starvation and pestilence and war, as God does. We laugh at hell for the natural and wholesome pleasure of laughing, and for the deeper and more earnest pleasure of demolishing the remains of an abominable falsehood which has caused, and is still causing, an intolerable amount of pain and mischief. We would rather die than be capable of rejoicing like God and his redeemed over the grim reality of everlasting torments. Our floods of ridicule are to extinguish the lurid fires of pandemonium and to sweep away the terror and suspense from men's minds for ever, not to intensify or mock the awful sufferings of living souls. From such heartless gibes and hellish jeers as seem to form God's ideal of humor and merriment we recoil with an indignation which no pious threats or penalties shall cause us to disguise. God's laughter as portrayed by himself in the Bible is to us a manifestation of the most hateful and contemptible malevolence. A God who is capable of such ferociously malignant rejoicings cannot be worthy of our reverence and adoration. If he existed he would have to be despised and rejected by all save those who cringe to evil power. Happily he is only a phantom, a nightmare, from which humanity shall be relieved.

W. P. BALL.

#### HOW TO HELP US.

- (1) Get your newsagent to exhibit the *Freethinker* in his window.
- (2) Get your newsagent to take a few copies of the *Freethinker* and try to sell them, guaranteeing to take the copies that may remain unsold.
- (3) Take an extra copy (or more), and circulate it among your acquaintances.
- (4) Display, or get displayed, one of our permanent placards, which are of a convenient size for the purpose. Mr. Forder will send them on application.
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- (7) Do one of the above, or all of them if you can.

#### Mr. J. ADDISON, M.P., ON BLASPHEMY.

Mr. FOOTE lectured recently at the Liberal Club, Stalybridge, on the Blasphemy Debate, replying especially to Mr. J. Addison, the member for the neighboring borough of Ashton, who moved the rejection of Mr. Bradlaugh's bill. Since then the following letters have appeared in the *Evening Reporter*, which is published at Ashton and Stalybridge.

MR. ADDISON, M.P., REPLIES TO MR. FOOTE.

To the Editor of the "Reporter,"

Sir,—Mr. Foote claims the right to insult religious feeling by open exhibition and publication of caricatures and taunts upon the Holy Scriptures. As I do not admit this right he calls me "a bigot." His argument seems to be that "religion," if true, can take care of itself. Upon this principle every sort of indecent literature and pamphlet ought to be allowed, for "decency" is true, and so needs no protection.

It is misleading to state that 46 members voted in favor of Mr. Bradlaugh's bill for abolishing blasphemy. I explained to the House that its effect would be not merely to abolish some obsolete statutes (which nobody cares to retain), but also to legalise such publications as Mr. Foote's *Freethinker*. Mr. Sam Smith (a Liberal, who seconded my motion) gave extracts from this paper. They raised a murmur of indignation, and not one word was subsequently spoken in favor of the bill as it stood. On the contrary, those who spoke in support of the second reading said they could only do so on condition that Mr. Bradlaugh would, in committee, accept an amendment introducing a provision similar to that of the Indian Code, which inflicts severe penalties upon those who outrage the religious sentiments of others. So that Mr. Bradlaugh only secured his minority by throwing Mr. Foote and his principles over, and leaving him to be convicted under a new Act, expressly passed to cover such offences as his. This Mr. Foote finds "encouraging." We, of the majority, thought this compromise amounted to a new bill, which was not before us, and so rejected the bill altogether, rather than seem to sanction its original principle.

Mr. Channing, one of the Liberal minority who voted for the Bill, shortly afterwards explained his vote in a letter to the *Daily News*. From this letter I will make a short extract, which well represents the general feeling, and sums up my argument. "No sensible man can wish to keep on the statute book enactments which make it possible to inflict degrading punishments and absurd disabilities for matters of opinion. But equally, no sensible man can wish to sanction odious forms of insult to the religious sentiments, or beliefs, or observances of any class in the community. Such insults are, in fact, only one more form of religious persecution. The fault of Mr. Bradlaugh's Bill was that it met the former evil, without providing for the latter." The free expression of opinion, religious or anti-religious, is not in dispute. The right to insult us is (as Mr. Channing says) a form of persecution, and to this insult we "Tories" will not submit. We are not in the least moved by the imprisonment which Mr. Foote's breaches of the law brought upon him, and we do not mind being called "bigots," and, although I do not desire to give the least offence, I must add that no expressions in regard to myself affect me in the least, coming from a man who could speak of the Almighty in the terms you report Mr. Foote to have used in the Liberal Club at Stalybridge.

To Mr. Bradlaugh's ability and industry I have always done justice, as well as to the tact which leads him to avoid in our every day discussions matters calculated to offend. If, unhappily for our country, the party of Mr. Gladstone should ever come into power, the Tories will look to Mr. Bradlaugh to exercise upon his colleagues in the Radical Cabinet his influence to restrain and moderate some of those views by which they have lately alarmed the lovers of constitutional, orderly, and free government.—Yours truly,

JOHN ADDISON.

House of Commons, May 13, 1889.

#### MR. ADDISON'S DEFENCE.

To the Editor of the "Reporter."

Sir,—Mr. Addison's reply to my lecture, and defence of his vote against Mr. Bradlaugh's bill has been forwarded to me by a friend, and I crave a little of your space for my rejoinder.

Mr. Addison resents being called a bigot, though he is "not in the least moved" by my imprisonment, and thus

proves that his self-piety exceeds his humanity. I called him a bigot for a very simple reason which he chooses to ignore. He maintains a law which punishes Freethinkers for "insulting" Christians while proposing no law to punish Christians for insulting Freethinkers. If this is not bigotry, the word should be erased from our vocabulary. It is certainly the grossest unfairness, and any candid mind will recognise it as persecution in disguise.

As a matter of fact, the blasphemy laws did not come into existence to protect people's "feelings." Their object was to punish heresy and unbelief. Any denial of the Trinity was blasphemy, denial of the doctrine of Providence was blasphemy, denying the inspiration of the Scripture was blasphemy. However mistaken, the promoters of these laws thought they were doing God a service. Mr. Addison wishes to retain them in order to do himself and his friends a service, and he changes the *venue* from the truth of the doctrine to the "taste" of the attack; though even then he shifts about from one position to the other.

Does Mr. Addison deny that truth can take care of herself in a free and open encounter? If so, he is not up to the level of John Milton. If not, why does he say that "On this principle every sort of indecent picture and pamphlet ought to be equally allowed?" And having indulged in this flirt at John Milton's doctrine, why does he say that "the free expression of religious opinion is not in dispute?"

Mr. Addison does not appear to understand "decency." He says it is "true." But decency and truth, though both valuable, have no connection with each other. Nor does Mr. Addison appear to understand the law of "indecentcy," though he mentions it in order to raise a confusion of ideas at my expense. Indecent literature is indictable, not because it is untrue or in bad taste, but because it deliberately inflames evil passions, and thus incites to immorality and crime. Perhaps Mr. Addison will tell me who was ever incited to crime by reading the *Freethinker*?

I am sorry to add that Mr. Addison, though a lawyer, does not understand the clause from the Indian penal code. Dr. Hunter, the member for Aberdeen, who is better acquainted with Indian jurisprudence than any other member of the House of Commons, is my authority for saying that, under the clause in question, there could be no prosecution of the *Freethinker*. Those who sell or display it might, however, be struck at; and for that reason I oppose it, as I think it infamous to punish obscure persons while allowing the notorious "offenders" to go scot free. Better the blasphemy laws as they stand, under which the leaders of Freethought bear the brunt of prosecution.

Defective as his knowledge is on this subject, Mr. Addison is, if possible, still more ignorant of the history of his own creed. He wishes to exact "decency" from Freethinkers, but he will find that his own side has been the most virulent in controversy. Christian disputants have exhausted every epithet in the dictionary of abuse. There are sentences and whole passages in Martin Luther, which could not be printed to-day in the vernacular. Not that I profoundly object to this, for I hold with Rénan that truth is superior to politeness. I can even respect the early Christians, who boldly, and at the risk of their lives, ridiculed and reviled the gods of Paganism. They did not care much for reason, says Mr. Froude; they "walked up to the idol in the presence of its votaries. They threw stones at it, spat upon it, insulted it. 'See,' they said, 'I do this to your God. If he is a God let him avenge himself.'" That is how Christianity triumphed, and, although I object to throwing stones and spitting, I affirm that the same spirit is necessary wherever a man thinks he is fighting for truth against a brazen, prosperous, and unscrupulous lie.

Before concluding, I would ask Mr. Addison to justify his statement that "insulting us," that is, Christians, "is a form of persecution." Have I chalked "liar" or "scoundrel" on Mr. Addison's front door? How can he be so deeply "insulted" in a paper which he is under no obligation to read, and in which, until now, he has never been mentioned? What he means is that Freethought should be advocated in a manner which satisfies him. Does he then, I would ask, advocate Conservatism so as to please Radicals? Does he propose to punish the *Times* for "insulting" Mr. Parnell, or *Punch* for caricaturing Mr. Bradlaugh, or *Moonshine* for depicting Mr. Gladstone as No. 1, that is, as a dynamiter and murderer? Mr. Addison's party did these things of old. They sent Radicals to gaol for sedition, or, in other words, for attacking abuses in a spirit of "unbridled license." They cannot do so now because they have lost the power, but they

gratify their bigotry by persecuting Freethinkers who are not yet numerous enough to protect themselves.

There is one fact which proves the hollowness of Mr. Addison's argument. He voted against a law which would have abolished infamous old Acts, and given Freethinkers the common rights of citizenship, because he would not "legalise such publications as the *Freethinker*." But, whether legalised or not, the *Freethinker* exists, and has been edited for five years since my release exactly as it was before my imprisonment. What humbug it is to maintain a law you cannot or dare not carry out! What nonsense to wail over "blasphemy," which you neither legalise nor attempt to suppress! Mr. Addison's superiors have tried it and failed. Is he ambitious to eclipse their efforts?—Yours obediently,  
14 Clerkenwell Green, G. W. FOOTE.  
London, E.C.

#### BLASPHEMY PROSECUTION IN GERMANY.

DR. VOELKEL, the editor of the *Neues Freireligiöses Sonntags-Blatt*, of Magdeburg, who was last year tried and acquitted for blasphemy and abuse of the Bible in a tale entitled *Der Unglückliche Erbprinz* (translated in the Christmas number of the *Freethinker*), has again been indicted for blasphemy spoken at Erfurt. The blasphemy consists in having said that even the sort of death of Jesus is uncertain, some speaking of his hanging on the tree. If this is blasphemy, certainly Saint Peter ought to have been run in as a blasphemer, for he four times affirms that Jesus was hanged on a tree (see Acts v. 30, x. 39, xiii. 39, 1 Pet. ii. 24). Paul, too, is guilty of the same "blasphemy" in Gal. iii. 13.

Dr. Voelkel is further prosecuted for injuring the Christian Church. We should have thought the Christian Church ought to be able to take care of itself without calling in the aid of the German government. Such prosecutions are a strange commentary on the boasted enlightenment of Germany, and are indeed a scandal to the government which institutes and the people which tolerates them.

#### PIETY AND BUSINESS IN WALL STREET.

A New York correspondent of the *Manchester Examiner* alludes to the strange combination of piety and business on Wall street, and refers to the well known stockbroker Trout, who until the time of his failure a month ago had the picture of the Saviour engraved on his bank cheques. Another illustration of this not altogether pleasant phase of American character was given last week, when Mr. Davidson, one of the leading auctioneers of New York, inaugurated the public sale of the Woolsey estate in the following manner. Mounting the rostrum he addressed the land agents present in the following words: "I always give voice to a prayer before beginning a new sale. I therefore pray that the Almighty God bless this, the Woolsey estate, and all parties concerned therein. Heavenly Father, dictate my tongue, and may my life always be guided by good judgment, common sense, reason, and strict justice—Amen." The band then struck up the patriotic air of "Hail Columbia," and the sale was begun.

#### PROFANE JOKES.

Mr. Johnson: "Speakin' ob de 'complishments ob eddycated people, what am de use ob learnin' de dead langwidges?" Church Elder: "Use? Use nuf! What am you goin' to do when you am called to de judgmen' bar ob de Lor'? Got to speak de dead langwidges shua."

Minister to candidate for church membership: "Of course Dugald, you have read the Confession of Faith?" Dugald: "No, intect, serr, I offer do reat ta last dying speeches of condemt creeminals, naffer intect; and I do hope you do not think me so depased as to reat ta wan you hev shust mentioned."

"Bobby," cautioned his mother, "the bishop is to dine with us to-day, and you must be very quiet at table. I want him to think that you are a good little boy." Very much impressed Bobby ate his dinner in silence until his plate needed replenishing. "Pa," he said devoutly, "will you give me some more beans, for of such is the kindom of heaven?"

Village parson (entering country editor's office): You promised to publish my sermon on Monday, but I do not find it in the latest issue of your paper. Editor: I sent it up. It surely went in. What was the name of it? Parson: "Feed my lambs." Editor: (after searching through paber): Ah—yes—um—Here it is. You see, we've got a new foreman; he has put it in under the head of "Agricultural Notes," as "Hints on the Care of Sheep."

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