

THE FREETHINKER.

REGISTERED FOR]

EDITED BY G. W. FOOTE.

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[PRICE ONE PENNY.

"COMIC BIBLE" SKETCHES.—VII.



SAMSON AND THE FOXES.

"And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails. And when he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks, and also the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives."—Judges xv., 4, 5.

FAMILY PRAYERS.

THERE is no nation like the English for humbug and hypocrisy. I suppose I may add also, there is no nation like the English for humbug and hypocrisy. In nothing does the national vice come out more sadly than in the prayers of the nation. Is there really any honest, thinking man or woman who believes that the prayer for Parliament offered in churches every Sunday during the Session—as if M.P.'s didn't need praying for during the recess—has the faintest influence on the legislature or the legislators? Is there any honest, thinking Englishman who does not regard with a feeling of contempt for the man and shame for his country the black-robed, white-choked anachronism that they call the chaplain of the House of Commons, as he paces demurely behind the Speaker through the lobby of the House on his way to prayers? No other nation, I believe, is so daringly hypocritical as ours. None other commences proceedings of a purely worldly nature, having only to do with the things of this earth, with mock devotions addressed to a mock deity. Certain boards of directors, whom the shareholders probably find rather uncertain, I am told pray bodily before their business meetings commence. Within my own knowledge the Polytechnic public meetings of shareholders "commenced with prayer." This may serve as part reason why the Institution is now closed. If only the

people who pray are once made to understand that the great body of their fellow-countrymen regard their proceedings in this matter with feelings of unmitigated contempt, if only they can be induced to understand that the consciousness that the whole thing is humbug so rife in their own minds has extended itself to those of the onlookers, they may cause the hypocrisy to cease, as a non-paying transaction.

We carry the vices and follies of the nation into the bosom of our families. We have "family prayers." Here I would speak very carefully, for I know no word more sacred than the word "family." Family affections, aspirations—even family gatherings are good and healthful. The assembling together at the beginning of the day of all the inmates of one house—if that house be the home of them all—the reading or speaking of words of comfort and strengthening by its head—the turning of all thoughts for a brief moment, ere the whirl and worry of the individual days commence, to noble things, pure, lovely and of good report: all this is very worthy. I can conceive no better method of commencing the day than the reading of some brief extract from the teachings of Christ or Confucius, or from the writings of Shakspeare, or Milton, or Bacon, or Voltaire to all the household. I call to mind the way in which Mary and Percy Shelley daily ended their waking time. Leigh Hunt tells us that "he ended the day by reading aloud to his wife. Their book was either Homer or Plato, or one of the Greek tragedians, or the Bible."

But when this meeting of the family either at the commencement or at the end of the day takes the stereotyped form of reading parts of the Bible and of the Bible only, and of praying either by book or extempore, I think it must be very harmful. The persistent reading of the one book must narrow the mind terribly. And the direction of the thoughts of the young active minds at the earliest, most active period of the day away from the earth where their duty lies towards the intangible heaven, away from the father and mother, brothers and sisters now by their side to God, this, I think, must be largely answerable for much mischief.

In the first place, the proceeding is in many cases, so dreadfully out of harmony with its surroundings. This applies especially to evening prayers. In the morning, ere the work of the day has commenced, it is quite possible to assemble together and for a few moments think in unison on some great thought, without any sense of incongruity. I think it would be wisdom on the part of Freethinkers who are heads of households to institute some such simple arrangement in the morning-time. But from experience I am sure that a like arrangement at the end of the day is not feasible. The days of everyone in a house begin about the same time, but they end at very different hours. When one is ready for bed, another is just settling down for two or three hours' hard reading. Besides, the fresh minds all anticipatory of the day's toil, have much in common. But the minds jaded with various kinds of labor, occupied with very diverse thoughts are not in good condition for co-operative thinking, still less for co-operative prayer. And the chances of incongruity between the act and preceding events are multiplied.

Some inveterate prayers, for example, keep up the custom no matter what has occurred during the evening. The young folk may have been enjoying themselves with song and dance right merrily, and are all alive with fun. Suddenly enter upon the bright scene, duty-faced domestics who range themselves against a remote wall. The most lugubrious hands a vast Bible or a voluminous prayer-book to the head of the house, who from long habit is in convenient ambush. Edith and Alice cease the harmless, necessary flirtations with the privileged boys who have the run of the house and pull their pretty faces into demure

puckers in which laughter lies hidden. Arthur who has just finished a comic song with great éclat sits down in a dark corner and hums unconsciously "Lum, tum, tiddity" all the time. Algernon, who has been torturing good-natured friends with some of his verses, composes two new lines during the ordeal. And directly it is all over, they are all at their dances, and singing, and flirtations once again.

Perhaps the most curious case I ever witnessed of this extraordinary infatuation, was at a dinner party. The dinner-party was at the house of a very wealthy man, and as far as eating and drinking were concerned, nothing could have been more admirable. When the women, after the barbaric English fashion, vanished, the men, among whom was a well-known Baptist clergyman, drank their extra modicum of wine, quite in the normal way, and the good Baptist parson held his own right manfully. At length we quitted the dining-room for the drawing-room. I noticed as we crossed the hall the face of the Baptist, of my host, and of one or two initiated men undergoing an amount of smoothing and elongation, that I thought was excessive, even when men are about to join the ladies. When we entered the room—to my horror and disgust, Christian though I then was—the Baptist seized a ponderous Bible, the servants who had been cooking and handing us our dinners trooped in, all the guests settled themselves in chairs and we had prayers. It was grotesque enough to see a number of people who had eaten and drunken well sitting solemnly upright, whilst the one who had eaten and drunken more than most of them, was reading a chapter from the New Testament in a tone altogether different from that in which he told his after-dinner anecdotes. But when he closed the book and everybody, as if playing a game at a religious "Family Coach," rose and turned round and knelt down, I nearly laughed outright. The spectacle of a number of men and women in evening dress, on their knees, wrestling with the drawing-room chairs, was one of the most ludicrous I ever saw.

EDWARD B. AVELING, D.Sc.

(To be continued.)

CHURCH-GOING SCOTLAND.

OUT of Germany, perhaps, there is no country in Europe in which the custom of church-going among the people is so popular as in Scotland. In both countries ecclesiastical systems dominate; and the people in the bulk follow the lead of the priesthood with a general, if not always commendable, fidelity. A cold, hard, theological creed, dependent for its acceptance upon its grotesque supernaturalism, throws its chilling shadow athwart the civilisations of the countries, suppressing their intellectual aspirations, and imparting a gloomy tone to the national life. The diffusion of rational and secular thought has done much of recent years for the liberation of mind and morals from the overpowering sway of a bigoted sacerdotalism; but even the most optimistic Freethinker must see that there is yet much work to do before the people as a whole can be restored to their rightful freedom of thought and liberty of action. Signs are not wanting, however, to show that the controlling forces which have kept the religious thought of the people in subjection for many centuries, like a belt of thick-ribbed ice, are undergoing a steady process of upheaval. The signs are numerous and apparent everywhere. Thus, the cry for the abolition of a State-protected Church in Scotland is waxing louder and more strong; and it is certain that many years will not pass over the heads of the people before the question is fought out and won on the floor of the House of Commons.

A religious census has recently been taken of several important manufacturing towns in the north-east of Scotland. Like those which have been published with respect to several towns in England, it shows a result far from conducive to the peace of the clerical mind. On Sunday, December 6th, a census of church attendance was taken at Dundee. This town, which is the largest and wealthiest in the district, has a population of 142,000 persons, the bulk of whom are attached to the manufacturing and shipping industries of the place. The census, it is stated, was taken with great care, every precaution being taken to ensure the strictest accuracy. The result is to show that while church accommodation is provided for 43 per cent. of the population only 22 per cent. attended the church services

on the forenoon of that day. The weather in this instance is recorded to have been "fine"—a gratifying element in the case, seeing that it prevents the ever-ready apologists in such matters from throwing the blame of the paucity of attendance upon the atmospherical conditions which existed at that particular time. They must go farther afield in order to find the real preventive cause. The next important town is Perth, having, according to the latest census, a population of 28,940 persons. In this case, while the percentage of church accommodation to the population is 65 per cent., there was but 27 per cent. of the population in attendance at the religious service. The weather at this town (the census in this and the following instances being taken the succeeding Sunday to that at Dundee) is stated to have been cold, though fine. Arbroath, with a population of 21,750, has, like Perth, church accommodation for 65 per cent. of the population, but the percentage of persons that actually attended was but 28. The weather here was unfavorable, sleet falling just as the congregations in the churches were beginning to assemble. At Montrose, with a population of 14,970 persons, the percentage of church accommodation to the population is 60 per cent., the percentage that actually attended worship being 30, the weather in this case being similar to the latter. Forfar, with a population of 12,810 persons, and possessing church accommodation for 46 per cent. thereof, reached a percentage of 22; while Brechin, with 9,030 persons, and church accommodation for 70 per cent., attained a percentage on the day the census was taken of 38. Blairgowrie has accommodation for 70 per cent. of the population, but only 32 per cent. attended church; Kinmuir, 67 per cent., 27 per cent. being present; Coupar-Angus, 98 per cent., 32 per cent. putting in an appearance; St. Andrews, 87 per cent., 28 per cent. being present; Cupar-Fife, 110 per cent., 38 per cent. being present; Broughty Ferry, 73 per cent., 40 per cent. being present; Newport, 62 per cent., 30 per cent. being present; and Burntisland, with a population of 4,096, had a church attendance of only 25 per cent., or exactly one-fourth of the population.

The figures would seem to speak eloquently for themselves; but what is the inference to be drawn from the wide discrepancy in the amount of church accommodation and the percentage of the population that attends church? Why, surely, that there is a very large proportion of the population in our larger, wealthier, and more intelligent towns that does not go to church at all; to whom clerical homilies, however sweetly discoursed, offer no attraction; and upon whom ministerial prosings, bumptious and arrogant, upon matters of which they know nothing, and which can never be known, lacking all healthy human interest, and practical relation to the day that is passing over them, have not the slightest effect. That the clergy feel that they are losing their hold upon the intelligent artisans of our towns is shown by various symptoms. Thus, in Edinburgh the other day a meeting of those interested in mission work in the city was held in order to consult with Moody and Sankey "as to measures proposed to be taken to reach the non-church-going classes of the community." A clergyman at the meeting mentioned that there were from 40,000 to 60,000 persons in Edinburgh who did not attend church; and in order to reach these it was proposed to distribute tickets for Moody and Sankey's meetings. Again at a meeting of the Glasgow Presbytery a few days ago a well-meaning clergyman, imbued with the truly Christian spirit, made a motion protesting "against lectures on merely Secular topics on the Lord's Day as not only in the circumstances evil in themselves, but inevitably leading to further desecration of the holy Sabbath, and therefore affectionately exhorts professing Christians to discountenance such meetings, and to spend the hours of the Sabbath in a manner fitted to subserve the great designs of its institution." There were some clergymen, however, on this occasion who protested against such an intolerant resolution as this; but upon a division it was carried by a large majority, the reverend gentleman who moved it summing up the discussion to the effect, "that the lectures of the Sunday Society were subversive of the Lord's Day, and that one of the meanest things in connection with the Society was the collection in silver at the door."

All this points to the inevitable conclusion that the intelligence of the working-classes, by the diffusion of sound political and Secular literature, has out-grown the narrow, impracticable creed of the Church. They are weary of the

endless controversies about creed subscription, which are a scandal to the community at large. They perceive that if heaven is to be attained it is not to be granted to those who can accept the largest number of fabulous myths as unquestioned truth, but that steady moral action directed to a high aim will ensure it if anything will. The pastor no longer leads, but, like the pilgrim with the unboiled peas in his shoes, labors painfully behind the intelligence of the age; his cries for succour meeting with no response but that of derision. Church reform is needed, and the clergy know it; but any one who sets about the cleaning of this Augean stable is immediately hunted out of the fold as a heretic. This is not wise for Churchmen, but while it continues Secularists can afford to regard the whole procedure as supremely ludicrous, being assured that the intelligence and moral worth of the time is, if not actually, at least potentially on their side.

A. J. R.

EARLY OPPONENTS OF CHRISTIANITY.

No. II.—CELSUS.

(Concluded from p. 156.)

CELSUS WAS in a position to know, what has since become evident to modern investigators, that Christianity was an offshoot of Judaism upon which various heathen doctrines had been engrafted. He accordingly assailed its historical or rather unhistorical narratives from the standpoint of a Jew; and examined its doctrinal features in his own character as a Greek philosopher. The Christians he regarded as apostates from Judaism mainly differentiated from that seditious and intractable people by believing their expected deliverer had already come once and would appear again. They had taken on many heathen elements, as in making a god of Jesus, a similar apotheosis to that of Hercules. "The Christians," said he, "deride the worship of Jupiter because his tomb is shown by the Cretans, nevertheless they themselves worship a man who died and was buried, and whose resurrection from the dead is a mere fable." Nor are the Christian doctrines original. All that is good in them the Greeks had in a nobler and better form. An instance is given in their saying it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. This, says Celsus is taken from Plato, who says "to be very good and very rich is impossible," and spoilt in the taking. And so with their other doctrines. Their *Logos* is borrowed from Plato; whom Celsus considered a vastly superior philosopher to Jesus. Indeed he says Christianity is a doctrine for boobies. Men of science and culture do not go to the Christians who address themselves to the ignorant, the silly and fanatical—slaves, women, and children—and warn them against being deceived by philosophers and men of learning, just as ignorant quacks promise their patients they will recover, but caution them not to consult properly qualified physicians lest their own want of skill shall be exposed. Whereas the Greek philosophers appeal to reason, the Christian teachers cry "believe," whereas other religions invite all of pure hands and enlightened mind, to partake of their rites, the Christians invite whoever is vile, wretched, unwise, and unworthy. And why should God appear in human form for these wretches? God must be esteemed unchangeable, therefore he would never take a human body. Is he not able to do as god all he is supposed to do as man-god? Christianity is marked by a gross anthropomorphism and materialism, with its God coming down to be killed in that corner of the world, and working only for a few. Was he indifferent to all who had lived before? Did he wake from his sleep, or had he changed his mind since revealing himself to Moses? How low the conceptions of the Christians were he illustrates by their belief in the resurrection of the body. What soul of a man would desire a putrefied corpse? They should leave these debasing conceptions and rise to higher spiritual thoughts, following Plato and the great sages, poets and philosophers of the past. The Christians are wrong in supposing the world made solely for man: other animals have their place and purpose likewise.

But the concluding and predominant argument of Celsus against Christianity is its exclusive pretensions and intolerance of other religions, although broken into many sects and heresies itself. By standing apart, striving for the supremacy of their faith, instead of performing their duties

as good citizens, the Christians were endangering the empire, and really allies of the barbarians who were threatening the integrity of the empire, and with it civilisation.

The foregoing sketch of the arguments of Celsus is necessarily a very imperfect one. They have had to be picked out bit by bit from the reply of his opponent Origen, and there is no means of checking misrepresentation. Of the value of the arguments used by this early and certainly able opponent readers may be left to judge for themselves. There is one conclusion which a review of the controversy has confirmed in my own mind, viz., that the Christians had by no means a monopoly of reason and logic on their side. Christianity triumphed and deserved to triumph. But it was not by its superior logic or learning. Polytheistic Paganism was "played out" and bound to fall by its own inherent weakness: Christianity succeeded not so much by its superior explanation of the universe as by its superior inspiration and regulation of human life and conduct. Its hopes were more animating, its discipline more effective, than those of Paganism. By appealing to the emotions it overbore all arguments addressed solely to the intellect; a fact which is worth remembering by later opponents of Christianity who consider man a rational animal and forget what elements of irrationality remain in his constitution.

J. M. W.

ATHEISTIC SONNETS.

By John Rowell Waller, F.R.H.S., Author of "Unstrung Links," "Wayside Flowers," "Rambles and Musings," "Men we Meet," etc.

XV.—ABRAHAM.

'Twas Father Abraham who laughed at God,
When told of dear old Sarah's coming gift;
The thought that he should be at such a shift
As spanking Isaac with a hazel rod,
And walking up and down at three A.M.,
With gin and milk to hush the brat to sleep,
While Mrs. Abraham from bed would peep,
And in her sleeve would slyly laugh at them,—
Well might they laugh, Abe, Sarah and the Lord,
For when the great Jehovah made the joke,
Old Abraham gave his godship's ribs a poke,
First Sarah giggled, then the trio roared;
'Twas dry indeed, more so that it was *truth*;
For Sal was old and Abe was not a youth.

ACID DROPS.

WE are pestered by anonymous correspondents who supply us sometimes with advice, but more often with abuse. Our general rule is to throw their letters into the waste-paper basket, and we warn all these gentry that such will be the almost certain fate of their missives. Occasionally, however, we make an exception. A few days ago we received a long rigmarole from a person who describes himself as one of the "Plymouth Secular members." But as he signs himself "A Sacularest" we disbelieve his statement. He certainly would spell "Secularist" properly if he were one.

THIS anonymous scribbler complains of our reviewing the Bradlaugh-McCann debate, because of the editor's being a friend of one of the disputants. That fact is quite accidental, and we beg to say that this paper is conducted on grounds of principle. We claim, and shall exercise, the right to criticise any public lectures or discussions, whoever may be concerned in them.

THE next complaint is that the style of the *Freethinker* offends Secularists, who therefore cease to buy it. Our answer is, first that our circulation increases every week, and secondly, that our irate correspondent diligently studies each number as it appears.

THIS nameless and homeless person asks us, if we have any pluck, to show his letter to all the leaders of the Free-thought party. It isn't worth it, and we have too much respect for their time. His own pluck is shown in his concealment of his name and address.

LASTLY, we are told that when Mr. Foote visits Plymouth again he will be "hissed." Our illogical correspondent, how-

ever, says that he and others who dislike the *Freethinker* won't attend it's editor's lectures. Then who is to do the hissing? Mr. Foote has no fear as to his reception when he next visits Plymouth, and he defies all the geese in the town to hiss their worst.

A RELIGIOUS editor says that the best single treatise for a young man beginning business is the New Testament. We think so too. "Take no thought for the morrow," "Give to everyone that asks," and "Lay not up for yourself treasures on earth," are business maxims which could hardly be equalled. Any young merchant who consistently carried them out would be a millionaire in twelve months.

THE *Christian Herald* goes in for prophecy, and whenever we want to know what's going to happen we just refer to its pages. The latest "tip" is that the world is coming to an end in 1893. Gambetta is to be the forerunner of Antichrist. He is to "confederate the Latin nations—Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Austria, etc." The editor's ethnology is somewhat loose. Britain and Austria are hardly Latin nations. However, a trifle like that isn't worth dwelling on. Antichrist is to be Prince Jerome, who will first become King of Syria and afterwards the boss of the world. Christ will come and slay him in 1893. Our readers will now be thoroughly up in the foreign policy of Europe during the next twelve years. The *Christian Herald* derives its prophecies from God's word, and they are as true as Gospel.

THE *Torch of Liberty* (America) says:—"The assassin now on trial for the highest crime known to man claims that the deed was that of God, he being only the instrument. He says, 'My defence here is that it is the deity's act, not mine; and I expect he can take care of it. He has taken care of it pretty well so far.' This looks like good Bible doctrine, and we don't see exactly who is going to dispute the wretch and at the same time hold to the doctrine of 'the divine interposition of providence.' Arthur is on the side of Guiteau. He says, 'It hath pleased the Almighty in his inscrutable providence,' etc. There have been two unsuccessful attempts made to kill the assassin, but he has escaped with hardly a scratch upon his worthless body, so that his 'He has taken care of it pretty well so far,' is not a grim joke, but a veritable reality. If Guiteau is the chosen instrument of God, then all efforts to punish him will fail, and, according to the doctrine of divine interposition, God will protect his chosen servant against the world, even to the shutting of lions' mouths, the turning back of seas, the stopping of the sun and moon, and many more improbable things. For one, we are heartily tired of this nonsense. We don't believe in Guiteau and his God, and we think, even if he is a servant of the meek and lowly, the sooner he is jerked to Jesus the better."

ACCORDING to Swift a nice man is one with nasty ideas. Talmage is a nice man. His style of preaching against the vices of New York shows that he is intimately acquainted with them. No doubt he has made many a round of the haunts of dissipation to freshen up his knowledge. Any other purpose is of course out of the question. Some years ago there was a great uproar in Glasgow about the "can-can" which was being danced nightly at a music-hall by some young ladies in remarkably short dresses; and the result was that before the dance was suppressed half the officials of the city went to see it in the interest of public morality. Talmage goes the midnight round for the same reason.

His last "nice" sermon is against "impure literature," and shows a pretty good acquaintance with erotic publications. Not satisfied with exhibiting his extensive erudition in that line, he goes out of his way to malign Mr. D. M. Bennett, editor of the *Truthseeker*, who was sent to prison in America, just as Mr. Truelove was in London, for selling a pamphlet on the population question. Talmage alludes to him as "a filthy creature," and classes him with the vendors of obscene books. These Christian libellers don't care how much mud they fling; they have any quantity of it in stock.

WE tell Talmage that his holy book, the Bible, is filthier than any publication ever sold by a Freethinker, and we make him a present of the following story. The great Goethe was present at a meeting of the Dutch clergy, when it was proposed to establish a censorship for the expurgation of improper books. He expressed his admiration of the

plan, and recommended them to begin with the Bible. Whereupon the king of Holland said to him, "My dear Goethe, pray hold your tongue. Of course you are quite right, but it won't do to say so."

TALMAGE thinks Freethought quite as bad as indecency. "What are you reading?" he asks. "Bolingbroke? Theodore Parker? Andrew Jackson Davis's Tracts? Swedenborg's Dreams? Tyndall's Glasgow University Address? *Drop them and run.*" But the oracle of the Brooklyn Tabernacle doesn't stop there. He runs amuck against Homer's "Iliad" and all the warlike epics of the world, because they foster a taste for blood. But how about the bloodiest epic ever written, the Bible story of the Jewish wars? Begin at home, Talmage, begin at home. Homer's "Iliad" doesn't claim to be inspired, and your Bible does. Purge the vile-ness from that before you go abroad. And don't imagine that mankind will ever be so silly as to banish the masterpieces of heroic literature and feed their minds on the weak washy everlasting flood of your sermons.

Two of the Christian Evidence Society's lecturers, Messrs. Barnard and Goodship, have applied for and received a copy each of our Christmas Number as "paupers." We commiserate these poor gentlemen, and regret that the Society, which has a very good income, should neglect its lecturers in this way.

THE Rev. Bryan O'Malley, vicar of Fritcham, Norfolk, whose wife recently obtained a judicial separation from him on the ground of his cruelty, has applied to the Court for the custody of his two eldest children, who are boys. He was anxious, he said, about their education; and as he belonged to the Church of England he objected to their associating with the children of farm laborers. Sir James Hannen caustically observed that that wouldn't hurt them. Then Mr. O'Malley said that he wanted to prepare them for the university; but the judge ordered the case to stand over until the wife, who was too ill to appear, could answer in person. Meanwhile, as the eldest boy was only nine, he thought that his university training might wait a bit. If the father obtains possession of the lads he will no doubt make them parsons—like himself. In that case, we are bound to hope that the mother will be allowed to keep them.

AMONG the petitioners for the release of the bribers were 1,113 clergymen. One of them has said that bribery was not a moral offence at all. Yet they wonder why people don't respect parsons.

WHAT IS MY RELIGION?

WHAT is my religion? Is it but to doubt and cavil?

But to tear another's fancies; but to quarrel with a creed?

Is it idle declamation, tangled webs the more to ravel?

But to make a hopeful bosom for a hollow fancy bleed?

Nay! I claim a field of labor where the flowers are the brightest,
Where the perfumes are the sweetest that the world has ever known,

Where the hearts with hope and freedom are the warmest and the lightest,

This I claim for my religion, and my conscience is my own.

What is my religion? 'Tis a hope that never alters;

'Tis the essence of the pure, the true, the noble and the good;

And its glory never darkens, and its firmness never falters,

And it stands to-day more pure than with another creed it stood;

To be honest, to be truthful, making every man a brother,

Living for a noble purpose, though the fight be fierce and long;

Teaching men to seek the comfort and the welfare of each other,

This I claim for my religion though the world may do me wrong.

What is my religion? 'Tis a thing by priest untainted,

Pure and wholesome as the dewdrop on the newly opened rose;

Fairer than the fairest object ever sculptur'd, sung or painted,
And it brings a peace far sweeter than that olden creed's repose;

'Tis a thing that does not pander to the madness of fanatics,

But it grasps at life's realities and wrestles with the wrong,

And the heart that lives for truth alone can feel its mute ecstasies,

And betray its joyous rapture in the most enchanting song.

JOHN ROWELL WALLER.

SPECIAL NOTICE.

MR. FOOTE will lecture to-day (Sunday, January 1st) at the Kilburn Baths Lecture Hall. Subject, "Christianity Immoral and Absurd." Chair taken at 8 o'clock.

MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

January 1st, Kilburn; 5th, 12th, 19th, 26th, and 29th Hall of Science, London; 8th, Bradford; 10th, Walworth; 15th, Rochdale; 22nd, Halifax.

February 12th, Grimsby; 19th, Manchester; 26th, Liverpool.

March 5th, Claremont Hall, London; 12th, Edinburgh; 19th, Glasgow.

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A FREETHINKER.—Received.

BIRMINGHAM FRIEND.—Thanks. But some of the cuttings are from Mr. Foote's previous publications.

S. RAWLINSON.—We were unable to report more than the first night of the Bradlaugh-McCann debate.

J. BROTHERTON.—We thank you and reciprocate your good wishes.

We regret to state that Mr. Symes is confined to his bed with a very severe cold. Our readers will miss his usual Sermon this week.

W. H. SPIVEY.—We have inserted the notice as an advertisement, as we do not wish to commit ourselves in any way.

S. CARRUTHERS.—Our Christmas Number is still on sale.

W. LLOYD.—Read Gibbon and Milman.

R. SMITH.—Huxley's "Lay Sermons" contains the article you require.

L. J.—We are really unable to oblige a tithe of the versifiers who wish their productions inserted in the *Freethinker*. Your verses are readable, but why put in verse what can be far better expressed in prose?

W. ROGERS.—Your wish has been anticipated. Mr. Foote has revised the articles on "The God Christians Swear By" and reprinted them in pamphlet form, price Twopence. One of them disgusted the Bishop of Manchester, and that should recommend it for circulation among the orthodox.

PATROCUS.—Please communicate. There is a line short in one of your stanzas.

INQUIRER.—We do not answer legal questions. As to Ingersoll's rumoured visit to England, we are unable to say when it will take place. We believe the gallant colonel has heaps of work on his hands in America.

C. A. CLARKE and ALTER BROWN.—Received.

S. FIRTH.—It is held by some American writers that Thomas Paine was "Junius," but we can hardly believe it. You can see the evidence for yourself in "Junius Unmasked" and "Thomas Paine was Junius," by W. H. Burr, of Washington. Mr. Foote intends to bring out a "Life of Paine," as complete as the most assiduous research can make it. It will be published, in all probability, early next winter.

OUR NEW YEAR'S ADDRESS.

THE *Freethinker* has now existed for eight months, and its success is beyond question. It is the only paper (we believe) ever started in our movement without the aid of shares or subscriptions. From the first it has paid its way commercially, and now its circulation justifies our making improvements which will doubtless afford satisfaction to our readers.

When, in the beginning of September, the *Freethinker* was changed from a monthly to a weekly journal, we felt that we were running considerable risk. But, at the same time, we thoroughly believed in our ultimate success; and that belief has been more than fulfilled. Steadily, week by week, our circulation has increased; and this, after all, is the best answer to the question of whether we supply a real and permanent want.

Our ill-wishers (what journal has none?) have been of two kinds. In the first place, the Christians, disgusted with our "blasphemy," predicted a speedy failure. The wish was father to the thought. These latter-day prophets were just as false as their predecessors. Now that they witness our indisputable success, they shake their heads, look at us askance, mutter something like curses, and pray the Lord to turn us from our evil ways. One or two bigots, more than ordinarily foolish, have threatened to suppress us with the strong arm of the law. We defy them to do their worst. We have no wish to play the martyr, but we should not object to take a part in dragging the monster of perse-

cution into the light of day, even at the cost of some bites and scratches. As the *Freethinker* was intended to be a fighting organ, the savage hostility of the enemy is its best praise. We mean to incur their hatred more and more. The war with superstition should be ruthless; we ask no quarter and we shall give none.

Secondly, we have had to encounter the dislike of mealy-mouthed Freethinkers, who want omelettes without breaking of eggs and revolutions without shedding of blood. They object to ridiculing people who say that twice two are five. They even resent a dogmatic statement that twice two are four. Perhaps they think four and a half a very fair compromise. Now this is recreancy to truth, and therefore to progress. No great cause was ever won by the half-hearted. Let us be faithful to our convictions and shun paltering in a double sense. Truth, as Renan says, can dispense with politeness; and while we shall never stoop to personal slander or innuendo, we shall assail error without tenderness or mercy. And if, as we believe, ridicule is the most potent weapon against superstition, we shall not scruple to use it. Priests and fools, says Goldsmith, *fear* being laughed at, and for that very reason they should be treated with irony sarcasm.

We thank the many correspondents who have sent us newspapers and cuttings, or independent items of information, and we trust that they will continue their good service. We also thank those who have exerted themselves to advertise the *Freethinker* by distributing circulars, posting copies of the paper to Christians, or ordering extra copies from their newsagents for possible sale.

Up to the present, the editor of this journal has had too much mechanical drudgery in connexion with it. Fortunately, that will henceforth be greatly lessened. A sub-editor has been engaged, and this arrangement will give the editor more time to make the paper livelier, more interesting and more useful. The sub-editor has been a contributor from the beginning. He is "heart and soul" in the cause; he has a most extensive and intimate acquaintanceship with the history of our movement; he is very widely and deeply read, and he wields a fluent and incisive pen.

Turning to our other contributors, we must particularly thank Mr. Symes for his regular and valuable contributions, for which he has received no payment except the gratitude of his readers. Mr. Symes will continue on our "staff"; and up to March, at least, Dr. E. B. Aveling will be a frequent if not a regular contributor. It would be impertinent to praise these writers, but we may nevertheless express our belief that the readers of the *Freethinker* are likely to get excellent value for their money.

We cannot close without thanking the editors of the *National Reformer* for their continued and unvaried generosity. While we were struggling up the hill, they did not kick down stones on us, as is the general practice of those in advance; on the contrary, they lent us a helping hand, and afforded us, through their journal, a publicity which we could not else have obtained except at a very great expense.

In conclusion, we wish all our readers a Happy New Year, as we are sure they all wish us. When the next new year's greeting has to be penned, may we be able to report that the *Freethinker* has doubled its circulation, and may our readers acknowledge that we have tried to deserve it.

SUGAR PLUMS.

A BRISTOL correspondent writes:—"There died last week under the shadow of one of our most renowned city churches two doctors, in two adjoining houses, within a few hours of each other. The one a very orthodox churchman and notorious drunkard; the other an Atheist, much respected; his speculative opinions not being generally known, although he made no pretence of religious belief, and in his last illness steadfastly refused his friends' solicitations to receive a visit from his clergyman. He knew perfectly well that his death was imminent several weeks before it took place. They were both taken to the same church, and buried in the same sure and certain hope. The Atheist could not escape that mockery; but I think that he did secure himself against being made a lay figure, on which to hang another lying story of an Atheist's death-bed conversion; and I congratulate him even on that achievement just now and here."

At the close of the debate with Dr. McCann, Mr. Bradlaugh, in returning thanks to the presidents on the three evenings, expressed a hope that one of them, Mr. Barnard, of the Christian Evidence Society, would be a trifle less vile in his attacks on Freethinkers. The culprit grinned a miserable grin. He tried to look happy, but it was a sickly attempt.

WE are happy to inform our readers that the week of prayer is just beginning. The Christians everywhere will join in supplications to God. At the end of the week everybody will be happy and the world will be a paradise. No more theatres will be burnt down, no more coal pits will explode, no more volcanoes or earthquakes will destroy wholesale, disease will be banished, crime will be unknown, and even Christians will act like gentlemen.

THERE are one hundred and fifty thousand Freethinkers in Canada who have votes. There are more Unitarians or Voltairists who have votes; there are Spiritualists in Canada who have votes, and all of these are opposed to the claims of Christianity as the revealed and inspired creed of a supreme being.—*Halifax May Flower.*

THE Hall of Science students will have their annual supper at Fowler's Essex Hotel on Monday evening.

INFIDELITY AND ATHEISM OF THE BIBLE.

It is a noteworthy fact that there runs throughout certain parts of the Bible an undercurrent of scepticism, of an unobtrusive though subtle character. Whether the Holy Ghost introduced those parts with the edifying view of elsewhere exposing and refuting Infidelity, or from certain Atheistic qualms of conscience, we are unable to determine. The carnal mind cannot unriddle the higgledy-piggledy things of God. Whatever the explanation of the mysterious anomaly may be, the fact remains that the Bible contains a number of texts pregnant with unbelief, and suggestive of insurmountable difficulties against the reasonable acceptance of the Christian and Theistic hypotheses. In corroboration of this statement, we propose, in this article, to call attention to such texts of Holy Writ as are of an Atheistic character, reserving to some future occasion the task of dealing with other features of Biblical scepticism.

1. In Exodus V. God sends Moses to Pharaoh in order to induce the latter, through acceding to a lying request, to let the Jews slip through his fingers. Pharaoh, however, like a true king, full of scorn and dignity, thus replies: "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice, to let Israel go? I know not the Lord" (v. 2). The Egyptian monarch here takes up, in apt words, the Atheistic position. He virtually makes the famous statement of the elder Grimaldi, viz., that in his house there is no religion (*i.e.*, superstition) at all. To Pharaoh the Lord was a complete outsider, and, like a genuine sceptic, he refused to let his conduct or the affairs of his nation be influenced by any considerations of a "godly" character. The consequence was that instead of attempting by sound reasoning the conversion of this grand, old, defiant Atheist, God hardens his heart, so as to gain a pretext for cruelly persecuting him and his unoffending people. The only proofs of God's existence vouchsafed to Pharaoh were of a brutal and sanguinary nature—like all the arguments of gods and priests. Seeing they have none better to give let us be thankful for small mercies.

2. Job (xxi., 15) puts the following sensible query in the mouth of the "wicked." "What is the almighty that we should serve him? and what profit shall we have if we pray to him?" Here again, as above, we have the uncharitable charge of wickedness against unbelievers, regardless of the fact that the greatest vagabonds in the universe have been gods, priests, and holy men. The Bible nowhere offers a satisfactory reply to the question above quoted. Its God is disreputable, utterly unworthy and unheading of prayer. Again, in Job xxii., 2, Eliphaz, one of Job's comforters, puts a pertinent question which admirably illustrates the Atheistic enquiry above quoted. He sensibly asks:—"Can man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself?" A better motto than this for Secularism could not be conceived. Taking our stand on these questions we submit that the Lord is a being as purely imaginary as

Jupiter or Mumbo-Jumbo; that, as Lucretius said, the Gods need none of our help, being quite able to shift for themselves; that prayer is a fruitless frittering away of valuable time in vain chattering to a deaf or defunct God; and that, as Eliphaz tells us, a wise man can confer on himself more good than he can on a God, even if one exists. We thank the Bible for teaching us these weighty truths.

3. Isaiah (xlv., 15) truly exclaims: "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, God of Israel!" Nevertheless the children of men, blind seekers of a phantom God, go groping about in the dark in search of the Deity, who clothes himself with the robe of impenetrable mystery, in order, presumably, to elude the search of his admirers. When will men appreciate the truth that "the proper study of mankind is man?" Well may the bewildered sceptic exclaim, "Where is God my maker?" (Job xxxv., 10). When, therefore, it is asked, "Can man by searching find out God" (Job xi., 7), the truth compels the confession of Elihu (xxxvii., 23): "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out." Our unbelief does not arise, because "the immensity of God, his omnipresent wonders, baffle the mind in the attempt to grasp or comprehend them." All this we regard as the gushings of the insipid torrent of a fallacious faith. The reason for our Atheism is that we are unable to look on any point in the universe, and find there the faintest scintilla of evidence of the existence of a supernatural power. We do not say with the "fool" of the Psalmist (xiv., 1), "there is no God," though we are inclined to regard the affirmation of God's existence as a more foolhardy proceeding than the denial of the same. It is well to remind our Theistic friends that "no man hath seen God at any time" (1 John iv., 12); in other words, God has never been the object of man's physical or intellectual vision. True it is that Moses is reported to have seen the "back parts" of God (Exod. xxxiii., 23), but it is incredible that any God, having any sense of decency, would care to make such an indelicate exhibition of himself. On the other hand, it must not be forgotten that good morals were as scarce with Jehovah as with Jove.

WILLIAM HEAFORD.

(To be concluded.)

FREETHOUGHT GLEANINGS.

THE CRUSADES.—The principle of the crusades was a savage fanaticism, and the most important effects were analogous to the cause. Each pilgrim was ambitious to return with his sacred spoils, the relics of Greece and Palestine; and each relic was preceded and followed by a train of miracles and visions. The belief of the Catholics was corrupted by new legends, their practice by new superstitions; and the establishment of the inquisition, the mendicant order of monks and friars, the last abuse of indulgences, and the final progress of idolatry, flowed from the baneful fountain of the holy war.—*Gibbon*, "On the Crusades." (Murray's Reprints, p. 128)

CHRISTIANITY.—It is clear, however, that a Christianity which never was received as a scheme of salvation—which never was regarded as essential to salvation—which might be treated in respect to its records at the will and pleasure of each believer—which is next declared to be independent of its external evidences, because those evidences are found to be untenable—and which is finally subjected in its doctrines, as in its letter, to the interpretation of each individual—must cease to be a faith, and become a matter of speculation, of spiritual convenience, and of intellectual and moral taste, till it declines to the rank of a mere fact in the history of mankind.—*H. Martineau's Autobiography.*

THERE IS BUT ONE RELIGION.—We read of many ancient and modern religions, of Gods many, and Lords many, all of them surrounded with fables and symbols, and at first sight it seems amazing that the human mind could invent so many. But when they come to be sifted by Comparative Mythology, we are astonished to find there are so few. The myths of the New Testament are repetitions of those of the Old Testament mingled with those of Greece; and the mythology of Greece is mainly a modification of that of Egypt. But most of these again had previously done duty in Chaldea, Arabia, and Persia. There is but one religion, as there is but one animal. Superstition has an old stock of sacred legends, and thus Zoroaster, Gautama, Jesus, have

been successively dressed from the same wardrobe, until now, when they are threadbare, we can trace every shred of them back to the first crude speculations with which man looked out upon the mystery above and around him. And yet notwithstanding this is so palpable to any intelligent and unprejudiced inquirer, it is saddening to think how almost universally these old fables and fallacies are Sunday after Sunday still dished up as food for hungry souls and thirsty minds.

BLASTS FROM THE NORTH.

"And a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind."
—1 Kings xix., 11.

THE Methodists in North Durham are making elaborate resolves at night meetings to dedicate themselves afresh to the Hebrew God and begin the coming year in renewed piety of heart. Most of the poor creatures, I find, are deeply sensible of the rapid spread of infidelity in their midst, and they are filled with holy concern in consequence. May the Lord pour out his spirit abundantly during the next year and convert the entire Atheistic camp, especially that young man Waller, whose dreadful scepticism is actually being allowed in the public journals in Tyne, Wear and Tees. The pious, I learn, have written to him, button-hold him, prayed for him, prayed at him in public, but it won't do. The deluded young scamp!

MOODY AND SANKEY are falling dreadfully flat in the North. Like ginger pop, they lose their gas after being once uncorked. One thing is certain, they've swamped Richard Weaver's little trade; but the heavenly Richard bears it all with a lamb-like spirit. Oh! the Lord will make it up to him, never fear; he'll get a nice cosy, cushioned seat near the throne in the bright and better land, and there'll be no abandoned girls to trouble him there.

AN insurance agent had his laughing organs tickled in Houghton-le-Spring a short time since. He went into the co-operative store and asked a mild young man to take out a policy. "No, sir!" said the mild young man, "I am insured already." "Indeed!" said the agent, "with what company?" "I am insured in the lamb's book of life," said the mild one. The agent went into a shop further on, and remarked in very strong terms on the milk-and-water darling. Oh! it was a double-barrelled joke.

A HAPPY New Year to all, friends and foes alike. Let us be up and doing with the first stroke of 1882. We have a great work to do, and a coming generation to smooth the way for. Let us attack the adders and snakes in the path, and fight earnestly and manfully until the sun goes down; shoulder to shoulder let us stand, Bibleless and Godless; true men and true women, working for the common weal, and let each carry aloft the banner, not "blood and fire," but "truth and freedom."

"As for me and my house, we will fight against gods."

THE NORTH WIND

PROFANE JOKES.

MUTTON AGAIN!—A certain family, in a village not far from Heaton, were recently subjected for nearly a week to a daily dinner of mutton. As a result of this, the father of the family grew tired of the mutton, but dared not protest against it to his better half. On Sunday, the family having sat down to dinner, the father said grace—"Lord meyk us truly thankful for whaat we're aboot to receive." Opening his eyes, and seeing the contents of the dish from which his wife had removed the cover, he exclaimed, apparently as a postscript to his prayer, "Confoond it, mutton ageyn!"

IRISH OATHS.—The oaths of the Irish are very whimsical, such as "By the seven pipers that played before Moses the night he was born, and that's musical;" "By thy father's beard, and that is a hairy oath," and a variety of others; but of all the odd oaths ever taken, that of a witness before a committee of the House of Commons was the most singular. Being interrogated rather strongly by the opposing counsel as to his veracity, he roared out: "It's the sacred truth I'm spaking, by the sowl of Daniel O'Connell, which is big, and yer own sowl, which is very little, my lord."

A CHICAGO congregation pricked up its ears when the minister said, "I have land to sell," but dropped off again to sleep, when he added, "the beautiful land on high."

A WASHERWOMAN, a regular and attentive listener at church, was commended by her parson. "Yes," she said, "after my hard week's work is done, I git so rested to come to church and sit and think about nothin'!"

MARK Twain, speaking of a new mosquito netting, writes: "The day is coming when we shall sit under our nets in church and slumber peacefully, while the discomfited flies club together and take it out of the minister."

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Wordsworth and Coleridge.—(1) Personal Characteristics: Both unsatisfactory as *Men*, Wordsworth hard and Coleridge flabby. (2) Their dramatic failures. (3) Wordsworth's fame, its causes and its results. (4) His lack of Passion. (5) The secret of his poetry and its abiding value. Tennyson on this: Ruskin's criticism true. (6) Coleridge's immense gifts of intellect and imagination; how frustrated. (7) His Lyrical richness. (8) His style. (9) Wordsworth and Coleridge in relation to their age and ours.

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In re W. R. CROFT v. D. WOFFENDEN.

In consequence of the recent decision in the above case in the County Court, a number of friends beg to announce to the public that they have engaged the services of Mr. Gilbert Eaton (of Manchester), to deliver two Dramatic Recitals from memory, in the Secular Institute, East Parade, on Sunday, January 8th, 1881, the proceeds of which will be devoted towards defraying the costs incurred by Mr. Woffenden in the above case. Mr. Eaton will recite on the above date, in the afternoon at 2.30, Kotzebue's great play of the "Stranger;" and in the evening at 6.30 Shakespeare's sublime tragedy of "Othello." Collections. A Tea will be provided. Any friend wishing to subscribe towards the above object can do so by applying to Mr. J. Kenny, No. 3, Manchester Road, Huddersfield.

SUNDAY EVENINGS FOR THE PEOPLE.—

South Place Institute, South Place, Finsbury (close to Moorgate Street Station and Tramway Termini).—Last Night but one of the Series. SUNDAY, JANUARY 1st, at Seven o'clock, a LECTURE will be delivered by EDWARD B. AVELING, on "THOMAS HOOD." Followed by Selections from the "MESSIAH." Madame Ernst, Madame Florence Winn, Mr. T. Impett and Mr. Franklin Clive. Full Band and Chorus. Conductor, Dr. J. W. Bernhard. Tickets at the doors, 6d. and 1s. January 15th, Last Night of the Series, Lecture followed by the "Stabat Mater." The Annual Soiree Concert and Ball will be held at Cannon Street Hotel, on Monday, January 30th. N.B.—Petition Sheets in favor of Opening the National Museums and Galleries on Sunday Afternoons can be had of the Secretary.—National Sunday League; Office, 15, Bloomsbury Street, W.C. Henry Saveriaux, Secretary.

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