

THE FREETHINKER.

REGISTERED FOR]

EDITED BY G. W. FOOTE.

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“COMIC BIBLE” SKETCHES.—X.



ELIJAH'S LITTLE FEAST.

“And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. . . . And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening: and he drank of the brook.”—1 Kings xvii., 2, 3, 6.

IN PRAISE OF RIDICULE.

This week, with the Editor's kind permission, I shall omit my customary sermon, and deliver a brief lecture on the above-mentioned subject.

The Christians seem to have got bile, or something. Did they expect us to touch them gingerly? What have they done to deserve it? On what grounds do they claim our respect? Let them say.

1. Ridicule is a tremendous weapon, and ought not to be employed without the best of reasons, and upon proper subjects. Nor should it be used at the wrong time. To use it too soon would be to court martyrdom—a distinction none but fools covet. But there comes a time in every Reform period when truth has been fairly set before the public and error has been argumentatively and logically defeated, aye! put to utter flight. Still the millions cling to it as undoubted truth, and the few fatten upon the stupidity of the many, and denounce all who expose their imposture. Just then is the time for wholesale and uncompromising ridicule. And that time is now. Of course, certain parties cry shame upon us. Let them. That only heightens our fun. Snobs and shams dread ridicule, for it is their most destructive foe. Only pour enough of it upon them—it is like sulphuric acid upon the skin.

2. Truth has nothing permanently to fear from ridicule. It is only when error is in the ascendant, and when rogues and knaves reign, that truth may for awhile be laughed out

of countenance. But to-day the laughs don't reign; they are poor men who love the poor and hate imposture and consecrated falsehoods, and are resolved that all lawful weapons shall be used to kill the greatest sham and the worst tyranny the world ever saw.

3. They are angry because we laugh. So was Holy Willie enraged with “glib-tongued Aikin.” But the laughter was right. The Bible itself sets us the example of ridiculing error. Elijah “mocked the priests of Baal,” in their bitter extremity too, and then afterwards murdered them. The mockery of Elijah we don't follow. We satirise the Christians, but we never did hurt them, and never shall. Have they never read the Bible satire of Isaiah upon idols (xliv., 9—16)? “Who hath formed a God or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing? . . . The smith with the tongs both worketh in the coals and fashioneth it with hammers, and worketh it with the strength of his arms. . . . The carpenter stretcheth out his rule; he marketh it out with a line; he fitteth it with planes, and marketh it out with the compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house. He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak. . . . He burneth part thereof in the fire . . . and the residue thereof he maketh a God, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it,” etc., etc. Read the whole passage. This satire is good in point, but badly and clumsily expressed. Had the prophet been inspired by *Punch* instead of the Holy Ghost, he would have hit off the idolaters very much better. The intention is good; but the Gods and prophets of the Bible laugh like hyænas and sport like waltzing hippopotami. Where is the Christian that grumbles with Isaiah for so doing? And yet those idols were as dear to their worshippers as Jesus is to any Christian now. All gods are alike to me. Jehovah, Jupiter, Odin, Jesus, Mary, Cybele, Isis, Kali, Krishna, Brahma, Indra, Moloch, Beelzebub, or Satan. I know as much of one as of another. What are they? They are not wood, they are not stone, they are not water, they are not air, they are not gas—they are only names to frighten big babies by.

4. We ridicule Christians (1) Because they boast of truth, but have none to teach. Their whole system is a lie. (2) Because their doctrine is absolute folly. They say their God made and finished the heavens and the earth. The heavens don't exist; the earth never was made and has never been finished. He made a man, and then manufactured a woman out of a rib of his. He told them not to eat a certain fruit, though he gave them an appetite that compelled them to disobey him. He drowned the world and saved only eight persons from destruction. Those eight must have been lousy (pardon me, gentle reader), their beds refuges for fleas and bugs; one of the party must have had trichinosis, another (or the same) the itch, and a third must have been a mere case for the preservation of a tapeworm colony. How many more diseases went into the ark I cannot say. What a blundering god to save people of the above description! He blundered again in destroying Sodom and Gomorrah; for those he saved were as bad as those he destroyed. When did the Christian God not blunder? He became incarnate to save men, and they crucified him as a blasphemer. He was coming again during the lifetime of that generation; but he has never arrived yet.

5. We ridicule Christians because their religion prompts and impels them to such wholesale cruelty and reguery. It impels them to persecute to the utmost of their power. It was Christianity that threatened hell to unbelievers; that slaughtered the Waldenses; that sacked Bezier; that burnt scores of thousands of witches; perpetrated the massacre of St. Bartholomew; drove the Puritans to madness and



death; shed rivers of blood in the Netherlands, and slaughtered the Aborigines of America by millions. It is Christianity that now steals the children of Atheists, that slanders us almost every time it names us, that robs Northampton of its representation and Mr. Bradlaugh of his seat.

Let Christians be true and fair. Let them give up their silly fables. They can place themselves beyond the reach of our shafts by flinging their superstitions to the winds; but in no other way. We don't play with satire, we *fight* with it. There is no venom in it; but we are in earnest. Let our opponents preach truth and we shake hands with them; but with inspired nonsense and Christian malignity we can have no parley, nor shall we show any quarter—nor ask for any.

JOS. SYMES.

WAS JESUS INSANE?—II.

(Continued from p. 10.)

JESUS probably had a delicate constitution, and we imagine him to have been rather effeminate in appearance. Tradition represents him thus, and most artists have so depicted him. This view is further confirmed by the fact of his having been such a favorite with pious ladies. Although he adopted a vagabond life, and pretended that he had not where to lay his head, he does not seem to have suffered very much from poverty; for it is related that rich women ministered unto him of their substance. And these were not the only females attached to him. Crazy women followed him through all his wanderings; they watched his agony on the cross; and they were the first to visit his sepulchre. One of them was clearly mad. Mary Magdalen had seven devils cast out of her; that is, she was or had been a violent maniac.

The naturally delicate constitution of Jesus was doubtless still more weakened by long and frequent fasts. That form of religious discipline was then commonly practised, and is still affected in oriental countries. Jesus recommended it to his disciples; and he plainly told them that certain virtues, especially the power of healing disease, only came through fasting and prayer. On one occasion, immediately after his baptism by John, he is said to have fasted for forty days; and without crediting the exaggeration of time, we may justly believe that the story was founded on fact.

The fourth Gospel does not mention this incident. Luke and Matthew narrate it in very much the same way. Both their accounts are doubtless derived from Mark, who as usual relates briefly. His words are extremely significant:

"And immediately the spirit driveth him into the wilderness. And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him."

Mark, it will be observed, says nothing about fasting; but as the desert eremites universally practised it, he perhaps thought it "went without saying."

But the important point is that Mark, who gives the germ of the developed story of Matthew and Luke, uses language which exactly describes the conduct of a religious fanatic carried far beyond the bounds of sanity. The spirit *driveth* him into the wilderness; and like Nebuchadnezzar, when madness seized him, he was *with the wild beasts*. Only in one circumstance does his case differ from that of the mad king of Babylon. He had simply to do a little grazing to make the parallel complete.

During this period of lunacy Jesus had an interview with the Devil. Nothing could be more natural. Prolonged fasting often produces visions, and in the Levant it was commonly resorted to for that very reason. So ardent an enthusiast as Jesus would not miss the coveted reward. We elsewhere find that he was prone to hallucination. In the eighteenth verse of the tenth chapter of Luke, he informs his disciples that he saw Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. Other instances might be cited, but to the intelligent reader this will suffice.

A special characteristic of the malady from which M. Soury holds that Jesus suffered is a curious mixture of passion and caution. When the prophet of Nazareth was badgered by his enemies, or "cornered" by his opponents, he manifested a great deal of 'cuteness. Some of his equivocations with those who asked him embarrassing questions are very remarkable; and everyone will remember his cunning reply to the Jewish priests who tried, by a few

childlike and bland queries as to a piece of money, to trick him into a seditious avowal against Cæsar.

On the other hand, Jesus was plainly subject to fits of anger, especially against those who rejected or doubted his pretensions. When leaving his native Galilee, never to return, he shook off the dust of his sandals against it, and reviled its sceptical towns in the following amiable language:—

"Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell; for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained unto this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee."

This is the language of a madman, the bitter denunciation of a rejected prophet. Jesus had evidently by this time announced himself as the Messiah, and these sceptical Galileans had laughed him to scorn. His "mighty works" made no impression on them. But whose fault was that? Surely not theirs. If the works had been mighty *enough* they would have been *compelled* to believe; and as Jesus had the power to heighten his wonders to any extent, all the blame of their scepticism must rest on him. To revile people for unbelief is the act of a madman or a fool.

Let it be further noticed that the prophet of Nazareth did not denounce these people for crime or immorality, or even for heresy as to the Jewish faith. His quarrel with them was personal: they had rejected *him*. And that offence was in his estimation worse than all the hideous sin of Sodom and Gomorrah! Such monstrous vanity and morose temper are evidences of insanity. If it be urged that Jesus was under the delusion of his Messiahship, and that rejection of him seemed a rejection of God, we answer that this plea only shows him to have been crazed in another way. In either case he was mad.

On another occasion Jesus cursed a fig-tree for having no fruit although "the time of figs was not yet." What should we think of a man who went into an orchard in January, and cursed and swore because he found no apples on the trees? Should we not think him fit for an asylum? This same Jesus, too, who declared that any man who called his brother a fool was in danger of hell-fire, in a fit of passion turned on Peter and stigmatised him with the most opprobrious epithet. "Get thee behind me, Satan!" were his words. Peter was only acting after his kind. His name, in the Latin (*Petrus*), signifies a rock, and his skull was as hard as his name. Jesus knew him well, and his surprising anger at Peter's conduct bespeaks something more than ignorance.

Our last and greatest instance of the insane anger of Jesus is taken from the account of his doings in Jerusalem before his death. The Scribes and Pharisees, who were the orthodox leaders, would not acknowledge him as the Messiah; on the contrary, they shrugged their shoulders and said that he was possessed by Beelzebub. This dreadful crime excited his wrath to a white heat. He denounced them as "blind guides," "fools," "hypocrites," "vipers," and "children of hell." This foolish and abominable language can only be pardoned on the ground of insanity. Christian apologists defend it by appealing to the crimes which Jesus alleges against the doctors and priests. But his allegation is not sufficient. They were his enemies, and he naturally said the worst of them he could. The fact is, they were gaining and he was losing; the people were rallying to their old leaders, and his riotous mob of followers was fast melting away. Those laughed who won. The victorious priests treated him with derision, and he cursed and reviled them with the vehemence of despair. He had lost all control over himself, and the result was that he fell an easy victim to a fate which the slightest prudence might have averted. His madness hurried him to his doom.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be concluded.)

SECTS.—If variety of religious sects were any test of the earnestness of a nation's religious life, nineteenth century England might be esteemed in an enviable condition. The total number of separate denominations having one or more certified places of worship exceeds one hundred and thirty.—*T. H. S. Escott*, in his "England, its People, etc." 1880.

UPON THE MEANNESS OF PARSONS.

YOUR waiter is a great observer of manners. For the matter of fact, all servants are, and I suppose nobody over the age of twelve doubts that everything that is said or done, and almost everything that is thought, in a house is made the subject of study and of conversation by the domestics in it. But the waiter has an advantage in the acquisition of worldly wisdom, for he has not always to study the same types of character, and to this the family servant is to some extent doomed. An unending flow of various folk passes before his eyes, always supposing he is connected with an establishment in a flourishing condition. And the waiters in the London restaurants, more perhaps than any other men, have manifold opportunities for the study of character. Hence many of them are characters, as they have characters, good, bad, and indifferent.

To one who lives a nomadic sort of life, wandering from place to place, even within the limits of the same city, and whose food has to be taken generally *extra foras*, waiters become well-known. They are a necessity of one's life. Would that one could always make a virtue of them! Some are very excellent, and by their geniality of manner make you think you are dining with an old friend. Others are irremediably bad, and are as skeletons at the banquet.

There is one waiter with whom I come into frequent contact, from whom I have derived not a little information as to men and things. He is at a large admirably conducted restaurant in the west part of London, that is called, let us say, the "Mareglove." A jovial, burly, pleasant-faced man, with broad shoulders that seem almost out of place in a dining room. But when one knows that he is sometimes a nurse in those delicate cases in which well-to-do gentlemen become skaky about the hands and uncertain about the eyes, and are not clear as to how many living things are in the room with them, and are fascinated by the gleam of razor-steel, and speculate how well it would look with red life-blood streaming over it, even if it came pulsating from one's own throat, then the eternal fitness of things, so evident in this admirably designed and managed universe, once again comes out. John has queer stories to tell of the people whom he has nursed through the attacks of delirium tremens or seen pass into stillness. But of late he has been unburdening himself to me on the score of farmers and parsons. Not so long ago it was cattle-show week, and the "Mareglove" was thronged, when I went to lunch, with stout bucolic men redolent of the shires. I confess this was rather a trouble to me. For they talked so horridly loudly and the conversation was usually made up of such remarks as "We played Nap till three in the morning," or "You would not mind being beaten by a dog like that, would you?" They drank wild wines also in the middle of the day, and worshipped the excellent proprietor of the "Mareglove," when he discussed with them questions of vintage on which they were as ignorant as he was skilled.

But I consoled me with the thought that these men—English farmers, hearty, if noisy, would be a boon to the waiters. The race was probably generous, and John and his companions would reap a rich harvest during the week of the cattle-show. To solace me in the discomfort resulting from the bucolic invasion, I broached this theory to John. For once he regarded me with the eye of pity. "Worst lot out, sir, except the parsons; we always reckon farmers and parsons bad specs. Why, at this table I had four cattle-show men and two white-ties one morning. The four farmers finished first, and the captain of them, weighing about eighteen stone, after paying the exact money, sir—not a farthing more—shook hands with me and said he should see me again next year. 'Thank you, sir,' I says; 'I'll know you again if you give me something to remember you by.' But eighteen stone was on the way out! I had nothing from the four of them."

"How about the two parsons?" I asked. I always take an interest in parsons.

"Well, sir, these were a trifle better than the farmers. But I'd got into despair over the last lot, and so I sold my chance with the white ties to the man working the next table."

"Sold your chance?" I faltered. I did not like John to know how ignorant I was; but I felt that this phrase was a crucial one.

"Why, you see, sir, we like a little speculation, and often when a stranger comes in, the man to whose table he goes

will sell his chance of what the gentleman gives him for himself to another waiter. It keeps up a little excitement. We never sell our chance of any regular customer. If we know he's a good one, why then we won't lose him; and, if he's a bad one, all the other waiters know that as well as us, and no one will buy him. Well, sir, I sold my two clergymen for 2d. When the two came to square up, they left me 1d. between them, a halfpenny each. My mate offered up a short prayer for them."

"On the whole, you do not find clergymen generous?"

"Oh dear no, sir; the very worst set of people that ever come here. Whenever a parson comes into the dining-room, a joke goes round: 'I'll not take a penny for him.' Why, the other day a white-choker came in and had the biggest dinner I ever saw eaten outside the Zoological Gardens. First he had some soup, and then he had some cod, and then he had a plate of beef and potatoes and greens, and then he had another plate of beef and potatoes and greens, and then he had a college pudding, and then he had some cheese and some celery, and he drank a bottle of claret; and I thought of the prophet Ezekiel: 'And thy meat which thou shalt eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a-day; from time to time thou shalt eat it. Thou shalt drink also water by measure, the sixth part of a hin; from time to time shalt thou drink.' (Ezekiel iv., 10, 11.) In order to get through his voluminous meal, he put on a black cap, for all the world like a judge going to condemn to death any number of waiters who expected coin. I could have sold him, sir, for 3d. at one time. When he had that second plate of beef, and his white tie began to get a little crooked and his face to glisten, a young waiter offered 2½d. for him, and he would have given another halfpenny under pressure. Well, sir, he paid his bill, and did not even give me a halfpenny. Ah! they're a bad lot! I don't go only by the little or the nothing they give us, though they must know, if they're men of the world (and they are that with all their pretensions about another one), that we've got to get our living, and often the living of a family out of what is given us. But their faces are so wicked, sir, or so weak. Always it is either the one or the other. Sometimes it is a washed-out, small-chinned, small-eyed face, that seems conscious of secret, shameful sin. Sometimes it's a bad, hard, animal face that makes one shudder. But it is always one or the other. There may be some good ones among 'em. But, if so, I think they dine at home! I know they never look you straight in the face, and lor', when one thinks of the burden of the lies that their profession has told to man, and how there must be a sort of professional hereditary transmission of shame and wickedness, and when we think how they know all honest men despise 'em, no wonder they are always shifty-eyed. Ah! I could tell you some queer things about their goings-on. One of them came here once and asked me, with his mouth full of meat and potatoes, if I went to church; and I told him, 'No, never.' And he said he was sorry, and hoped I would; and I said I would never go until I was dead, and then I hoped they would not take me there, and he tried converting me, and said he was anxious about my soul. He came two or three times, and once he said the Lord had sent him to bring me to his feet! I said 'The Lord had made a mistake, then, as I'd my work to do, and was not coming to his feet!' Of course, I never got a penny out of my converter. He was mighty anxious about my soul, but cared very little about my body, or the bodies of my children. But the best, or the worst, is to come. One night, late, a man came in here drunk. He was just sober enough to get to his place without attracting attention, or our manager would never have let him stay. But when he was settled down, anyone could see he was tight. He was dressed in a tweed suit and had a loud tie on, and with him was a fast woman—one about as fast as they make them late at night in Oxford Street. They came to my table. When I went across to them the man looked up, and the drunken, vague eyes caught mine, and for a moment were half sober. It was that damned parson, so drunk he did not know where he'd come to, and he was trying to look straight at me, the man he'd wanted to convert."

EDWARD B. AVELING, D.Sc.

AN old man was fishing one Sunday morning, just before church time, when the curate saw him and inquired in dulcet tones, "My man, don't you hear those heavenly chimes?" "Eh?" "Don't you hear those heavenly chimes calling you?" "Beg pardon, sir; but I really can't hear what you say for those infernal bells."

ACID DROPS.

DURING one of the "Salvation Riots" at Reading an "Evangelist" was nearly kicked to death. We regret to hear of such brutality, but at the same time we deny the right of these religious maniacs to turn the street into a bear-garden with their foolish processions. The street belongs to the public, not to a faction; and we believe this doctrine would speedily be enforced if the processionists were Sceptics instead of Christians.

THE humbug of modern Christianity! At one end we see Mr. Bradlaugh persecuted for not believing in the Bible God, and at the other end we see men sent to prison for obeying this God's commands. John Morby, one of the very Peculiar People, stands committed for trial on the charge of manslaughter. He allowed his little boy, Abraham, eight years old, to die of small-pox without any medical assistance. Although he quoted Scripture to justify his neglect of doctors and reliance on prayer, the jury treated his plea with the utmost contempt. Yet we dare say that more than half of these "twelve good men and true" would think it a crime to question the inspiration of the Bible. The only peculiarity of the Peculiar People is that they actually practise what other people merely profess.

THOMAS HINES, the elder, who gave evidence at the inquest, appealed to the well-known verses of St. James and other Scripture texts. He had laid his hands on the sick child and prayed for his recovery, but he did not advise medical aid, as he considered it superfluous while they had faith." Quite right. If the affair is in God's hands, either he will save the patient or he won't. If he will, the doctor's aid isn't wanted; if he won't the doctor's aid is no good. Q. E. D.

THE Coroner asked Thomas Hines whether a surgeon would not be necessary in the case of a broken leg, and the Peculiar elder answered "Yes." He evidently thinks that bones are too hard for the Lord. But he had a saving clause. Accidents, he said, did not befall the faithful, for God had promised that "not a bone of the righteous should be broken." That is the funniest bit of literal interpretation we have met for a long time.

NOTE how selfish their creed makes these people! The mother admitted that during all the time three of her children, including son Abraham, were lying ill of the small-pox, her husband and nephew had gone in and out as usual. They felt safe themselves, having the Lord to protect them, and didn't care a straw for the health of other people.

AT Upminster parish the rector, following a usage quite customary in country districts, charges ten guineas for permission to erect a gravestone in the churchyard. When will people see that it is the superstitious desire of being buried in consecrated ground that is the cause of such extortion? Attack the root of superstition and all the branches will fall of themselves.

THOS. MYERS, a negro living at Rantowlos, S.C., conceived that it was his duty to offer up a human sacrifice to God. Nobody could reason the idea out of his head, though on other subjects he was rational. He choose his son, aged thirteen, as the victim. The boy followed him into the woods unsuspectingly when ordered to do so, and was killed by a shot. Myers glories in the deed, and believes that it makes his salvation sure. This negro lives a little too late. Had he lived 2,000 years ago, and been called Abraham, he might have sailed down the ages as a glorious example of pious faith. As it is he may have a dance upon nothing, unless he can employ doctors to convince a jury of the insanity of following Biblical example.

The *Jewish World* points out that Herr Stoecker, the Court preacher at Berlin, has used the great influence attached to his position as Court Chaplain to hound on the persecution of the Jews. Christian ministers are usually forward in this kind of work, as the Jewish world has often experienced.

Christian Opinion and Revisionist is profiting by our example of giving "Freethought Gleanings," and intends to provide its readers with weekly extracts on the Christian evidences. Its present supply are weakly in the extreme. The opening quotation is from Archbishop Thomson, and commences, "The Bible has a self-perpetuating and multiplying power. Infidels have written books; where are they? Where is Porphyry?" This is specially rich, when the Christian Emperor Theodosius ordered every copy of Porphyry's work against Christianity to be destroyed. If Archbishop Thomson was aware of this fact he probably thought his readers were not. It reminds us of the Jews asking Jesus why he didn't come down from the cross when they had got him fast nailed thereto.

THE *Church Times* advertises a "Special Holy Communion Wine recommended by several Bishops." We wonder what are its peculiar virtues. Does it contain an extra quantity of the blood of Christ, and will it drive out the Devil quicker than a blue pill?

THE Guild of St. Matthew has been trying hard for a long time to convert Secularists to the Church of England, but we haven't heard of a single success yet. It is said that at the last members' meeting several were heard groaning, "How long, O Lord, how long?"

MORE than four million sermons are preached in England every year. No wonder the asylums are overcrowded.

THE Jolly Nash delights the refined *habitués* of the Oxford Music Hall with topical songs, in one of which he introduces Mr. Bradlaugh, whose name is greeted with a howl of execration. Jingoism and piety go together, and Mr. Bradlaugh is hated by both. They pay him a high compliment.

THE rector of Falmouth is distraining again for Church rates. Carry neither script nor purse, said Jesus, and this Cornish parson obeys his master by opening a big bag to receive sixteen pence in the pound from all the ratepayers. The right to exact this amount was given by Charles the First. That pious monarch's head was cut off, and a few other people would not get more than their deserts if they were served in the same way.

THE Bishop of Salford (Catholic) preached a sermon last Sunday against secular education. He stated that the great battle now raging was over the question whether Jesus Christ should be excluded from the school or allowed to teach. Dr. Vaughan really meaps—priests or schoolmasters? When Jesus Christ personally applies for leave to teach the case will doubtless be considered on its merits.

AN enterprising burglar caught a-burgling a few days ago remarked "Well, God made us all, some for policemen and some for thieves." This gentleman has in a few words given an excellent summary of the only true faith. God made the shark and the sailor's legs, the lion and the sheep, the policeman and the thief, and just fitted them for each other. All his works do praise him, and even the burglar joins in the chorus.

THE Rev. W. Page Roberts, in his zeal for the persecuted Jews, has given utterance to the most astounding sentiments. Preaching last Sunday at St. Peter's, Vere Street, he said that we owed more to the Jews than any other people, and that Greece and Rome were nothing to Jerusalem. Greater rubbish was never spoken even in a pulpit. What are Horace and Cicero, he asked, to Isaiah and Paul? just as if Horace and Cicero were the two greatest writers of pagan antiquity! How about Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Æschylus, Lucretius? What are Isaiah and Paul beside these? What is the monotonous imagery of the Bible writers compared with the varied and exuberant imagination of the great poets of the outer world?

GOD.—The seemingly incurable ambiguity in the mode of applying this word is at the root of all our religious differences and difficulties. For science, God is simply the stream of tendency by which all things fulfil the law of their being.—*Matthew Arnold*, "Literature and Dogmas," chap. i.

SPECIAL NOTICE.

MR. FOOTE will lecture three times to-day (Sunday, January 22nd) in the Oddfellows' Hall, St. James's Road, Halifax. Morning at 11, "Mr. Bradlaugh's Struggle, and how will it end?" afternoon at 2.45, "Great Christ is Dead!" evening at 6.30, "Infidel Death Beds." Thursday evening, the 26th, Hall of Science, London, on "Byron as Poet and Man."

MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

January 25, Claremont Debating Society.
February 9th, Southwark Radical Club; 12th, Grimsby; 14th, Walworth; 19th, Manchester; 26th, Liverpool.
March 5th, Claremont Hall, London; 12th, Edinburgh; 19th, Glasgow.
April 19th, Hackney Workmen's Club.

CORRESPONDENCE.

- ALL business communications to be addressed to Mr. W. J. RAMSEY, 28, Stonecutter Street, London, E.C.
- LITERARY communications to the Editor, Mr. G. W. FOOTE, No. 9, South Crescent, Bedford Square, London, W.C.
- J. BUTTERWORTH asks us how many words have been altered in the Revised Version, what chapter has had the most words altered, and the number of words in the same chapter? Good heavens! Why didn't he ask us how many hairs are on the editor's head, and how many on each of the staff's? We have heard that several thousand alterations have been made in the sacred text, and from our own notes we are inclined to believe it. But as for the actual number, we can't undertake to reckon it up. "Bradshaw's Guide" is quite enough torture; a little more would send us to Colney Hatch.
- C. C. CARDOCK.—Thanks. Send cuttings at any time. We are always glad of them.
- LETTERS to the Editor should have "Freethinker" written on the envelope.
- ORDERS for literature must be sent to the Publisher, as the Editor doesn't keep a shop or a boy to do up parcels for nothing.
- H. F.—We cannot pay for any articles except those by our staff. It is something for a journal like the *Freethinker* to be able to do that.
- W. VENTON.—Circulars sent. Can you get a contents-sheet exhibited? Thanks for your efforts to promote our circulation. We are going up every week again, now the holidays are over.
- MAC.—The Joke appeared in the *Freethinker* months ago. We cannot take any more verse for a long while.
- J. HASSELL complains that we have deceived our readers as to the nature of blasphemy, and sends us the dictionary meaning of the word. Our correspondent has no sense of humor. Bless his heart! We have a dictionary and two eyes as well as he. He further complains of the "senseless and offensive matter" in our pages. We reply that he has an easy remedy. There is no Act of Parliament to compel him to read what he doesn't like. He further says that if we pursued a different policy we should gain the respect of our opponents. But we can do without it. We have lots of good friends to cheer us on our way, and we shall simply go on with our work without caring a straw about anybody's opinion. Lastly, he says: "I must request you to insert this letter in your next issue." We've too much respect for our readers' time and our own space. J. H. writes as though he were the person blasphemed. When the Lord sends us a protest we shall pardon his using the word *must*, but in J. H. it is simple impertinence.
- J. WALLIS.—Received. One of the two numbers, however, is in no special demand.
- J. F. S.—Anonymous letters go you know where. We are unable to use the article.
- J. EYRE, Newsagent, 35, Park Street, Derby, supplies the *Freethinker* and other Secular literature.
- J. HOLMES.—Contents-sheet and circulars shall be forwarded. Thanks for your attention.
- J. MORTON.—Unfortunately there is nothing to meet your requirements.
- W. COX.—Pamphlet sent, although you forgot to enclose stamp for postage.
- P. WATSON.—A similar joke appeared in our Christmas number.
- W. F. S.—Yes, Gambetta is a Freethinker. He has publicly professed himself a disciple of Voltaire, and stated that in his opinion Comte was the greatest thinker of this century. He presided, three months ago, at Paul Bert's atheistical lecture and led the applause.
- T. G. MOSS desires us to state that a meeting of the Freethinkers of Balham and the neighborhood will be held at 52, Zenner Road, Balham, on February 15th, for the purpose of considering a scheme for building a lecture hall.
- J. A. BRADLEY, one of Charles Southwell's converts, writes: "A word of encouragement from an old Freethinker, 78 years of age. 'Verily, verily I say unto thee,' 'Lay on Macduff.'"
- WM. ANDERSON.—Your cheering letter and hearty praise of our Christmas number gave us sincere pleasure. Thanks for the anecdotes, the best of which will appear in due course.
- MR. BLACK.—Bishop Warburton ("Divine Legation of Moses," book ii., sec. 6), calls the passage in Josephus "a rank forgery and a very stupid one too."
- R. B.—We can forward you the number of the "Liberal" containing the article in question upon the receipt of six stamps.
- W. HOPKINS.—We are over-crowded with verse at present.

J. ALLINGTON.—E. Truelove, 256, High Holborn, W.C., can supply you.

A. STEWART, Glasgow Democratic Federation.—We are pleased to hear of your movement, but have no space for guide notices.

"SOCIUS."—"Under which Lord," by Mrs. Linton, published by S. Tinsley & Co. "Pilgrim and the Shrine" and "Higher Law," by Ed. Maitland, same firm.

J. HARRIS.—Thanks. Please write on one side of the paper only in future.

SUGAR PLUMS.

THE missionary societies are always sending round the hat, with or without cause. This year the London Missionary Society can plead sufficient reason. They commence the year with a deficiency of £2,321 7s. 7d. The general contributions for last year are £3,166 lower than the previous one, and during the past ten years the staff of European missionaries has been reduced from 160 to 139. Verily this report must come as tidings of great joy to the heathen, but we fear it will occasion many poor Sunday-school children being worried out of their halfpence to support that all-devouring monster, the missionary box.

FRENCH Protestants are much discomforted about the approaching suppression of the theological faculties at the University of Paris. Hitherto their degrees have had the stamp of the State equally with those of the Roman Catholic faculties. They agree that the latter are useless and should be suppressed, but they wish to retain State sanction for their own teaching. Since the time of Luther the Protestants have not been wanting in cheek, and they are usually impervious to the consideration that "sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander."

THE current number of the *Westminster Review* gives the first place to an instructive paper on "The Early Progress of Christianity." The author surveys the causes predisposing the Roman world to receive a new religion; the features in the history and constitution of the church which specially qualified it to be an effective missionary agent; and the opinions, feelings, and doctrines characteristic of the Christian religion specially adapted to satisfy the religious wants and longings of the time. He concludes that Christianity succeeded, not on account of the truth of its evidences or the superiority of its sanctions, but from its greater adaptability to the wants of that age. As a German historian puts it, "While Judaism was preparing a religion for the world, Paganism was preparing the world for religion." The paper is well worth reading, but scarcely so thorough as one which appeared upon the same subject in the same *Review* just nineteen years ago.

WALT WHITMAN having, by the force of his own original genius, made a public for himself, has been at last taken up by a superfinely respectable Boston publishing firm, Osgood and Co., who announce a complete edition of his poems. What English firm will risk the frowns of Mrs. Grundy, and reprint his "Walt Whitman" and "Children of Adam"?

LORD DERBY is emerging from his retirement to some purpose. He delivered an admirable little speech at the inauguration of Liverpool University College. One of his remarks is worth quoting:—"We live in changing times, but democracy appreciates education, and especially appreciates science, and I think a scientific foundation is pretty sure not to be disendowed, whatever happens."

THE London *Evening News* has apparently changed hands. It is now strongly Conservative, and promises to oppose the efforts of Atheists and Freethinkers in politics. This is a noticeable sign of the progress we are making. The old conspiracy of silence is broken, and our enemies now admit our influence and strength.

PAUL BERT says that "the brain of a hungry child does not grow well, and the open of its head closes many years earlier than in the case of a child that is well nourished and taught. The growth of the brain, which comes from cerebral activity and a good supply of rich blood, keeps the skull open. Poverty, therefore, is a cause of intellectual degeneration. Instruction alone will never emancipate the people. They must have good food with it."

THE Durham miners have protested against a further

grant to Prince Leopold. They say that "the Royal Family is already much too costly." Men who have to work hard for a pound or two a week don't see why a young fellow cannot keep his wife on fifteen thousand a year.

PROFESSOR FAWCETT and Mr. John Holms, the members for Hackney, have both written to say that they will be in their places on February 7th to vote for Mr. Bradlaugh's admission to his seat.

CONFERENCES are the order of the day. Last week we had a successful Anti-tithe Conference, this week a Land Nationalisation Conference, and next week there is a Conference of the Sunday Society for opening museums, &c. All these movements are of importance. The anti-tithe movement has only to extend to the Midland and Northern counties to prepare the way for the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church. The opening of the people's museums, art galleries, and libraries, on the day when they are most needed, cannot much longer be delayed in the face of a growing public opinion. Land nationalisation is more a question of the future, but the labors of such energetic men as Mr. Wallace will ripen the question for solution.

THE experiments of the "United Asbestos Companies" on Saturday, at the Crystal Palace, in testing the efficacy of the fire-proof paint, should be important to all Freethinkers. Even if the "infidel" is flung into hell flames, he need fear no injury; he has merely to get his body or soul, or both, coated with fire-proof paint, and he can laugh the devil in the face and defy a myriad of gods.

ALGERNON C. SWINBURNE, in a note "On the Character of Mary Queen of Scots," in the current number of the *Fortnightly Review*, referring to the assertion of Mr. Froude that Mary left the world with a lie on her lips, energetically observes that the Catholic God of her worship would no more have been offended at this than the God of Dahomey is offended at human sacrifice. "Witness all the leading spirits among his servants, in that age if in no other, from Pope to king, and from king to cut-throat, from Gregory XIII. and Sextus V. to Philip II. and Charles IX., and from Philip II. and Charles IX. to Saulx-Tavannes and Maurevel. To their God and hers a lie was hardly less acceptable service than a murder; Blessed Judas was a servant only less commendable than Saint Cain. Nor, on the whole, would it appear that the lapse of time has brought any perceptible improvement to the moral character of this deity. The *coup d'état* of August 24th, 1572, was not an offering of sweeter savor in his expansive and insatiable nostrils than was the St. Bartholomew of December 2nd, 1571. From the same chair the vicar of the same God bestowed the same approving benediction on Florentine and on Corsican perjurer and murderer."

THE Children are to have a party at the Hall of Science next Wednesday evening. About five hundred of them are expected. Tea, bread and butter, buns, jam, apples and oranges, and other nice things will disappear down their little throats, the Lord only knows where. Children's stomachs are a mystery. Like the peace of God, they pass all understanding. Those who wish to see a happy mob of boys and girls, tucking in the provisions, and then having a jolly time around a big Christmas tree before being tucked in themselves by their careful mothers, should look in and get their wrinkles smoothed out. Everybody should send something to help make the little ones happy—money, fruit, knick-knacks, toys—anything that can be eaten or carried away. Big and little children are invited to come and fleet the time merrily as they did in the golden age.

GAMBETTA's New Revision Bill proposes to abolish the article of the French Constitution which provides that the clergy shall pray God to bless the deliberations of the two Chambers.

IS BELIEF THE SAFE SIDE?

OUR weak-kneed Christian brethren never more thoroughly display the paralysing and demoralising effect of their faith than when they contend that at any rate belief is the *safe* side. Superstition, driven back point after point, rests on this as the last card, and continually plays it as if it were

a trump. "If you infidels are right we have nothing to gain and everything to lose, while if we Christians are right we have everything to gain and nothing to lose." A faith founded on truth and manliness would never have given birth to an argument so calculated to make men cowards, indifferent to truth. Apart from the fact that the Biblical denunciations are nearly all against believers who do not act up to their belief, while St. Paul says God had mercy upon him because of his unbelief, these Christians do not reflect that if their God be just, the upright man can have nothing to fear, whatever his opinions; if unjust, no reliance can be placed on his doings. He may punish believers, rather than unbelievers, out of mere caprice. Attributing to him the very human infirmity of desiring praise, they deny him even human superiority to the opinions entertained by his inferiors.

But is it true that the believer has nothing to gain and everything to lose? His hope, his kingdom, his reward, is elsewhere—ours here.

"If Midge will pine and curse its hour away
Because Midge is not everything for aye,
Poor Midge thus loses its one summer-day?
Loses its all—and winneth what, I pray?"*

Is it no gain to be emancipated from the belief in an avenging God, to be quit for ever of the fear of a powerful Devil and an ever-burning hell? Is it no gain that the one leisure day of the toiler shall be to him a day of gladness, not of gloom? Is it no loss to view our fellow-beings as doomed to eternal fire because sceptics; or do kindly fraternal feelings count for nothing in the orthodox estimate of gain and loss? Have there been no loss of lives by Christian persecution? Do the rivers of blood wasted in religious wars count for nought? Is it nothing that progress has so oft been hindered by the bigotry of the faithful? Is it no loss, the time and talent spent in bolstering up the Church, or in trying to solve the insoluble? Are the twenty-five millions or so that go annually from the productive classes of this country to its clergy and their associations, an economic gain to the nation? To ask these questions is to answer them. Blind belief has never been, and is not, the safe side for the progress of this world, and since not for that part of eternity which is here now, we surmise that it is equally unsafe for any other.

J. M. WHEELER.

SOLD UNDER COST PRICE.

(Respectfully dedicated to the Bible Society.)

THESE are inspired words of God
To spread his wondrous love abroad;
To warn the wilful, save the willing,
Sold for something under a shilling.

Oh! careful Christian charity,
Passing in haste the real needs by,
And in its pleasant zeal for giving,
Feeding the dead to starve the living.

"Sold under cost!"—who pays the loss?
Subscribers? Did men see the gloss
The margins of your Bibles bear
You would not sell—you would not dare!

How is that binding cheaply done?
By contract? was its cheapness won?
And ere the contract had been made,
Who asked the wages that were paid?

How would your rich subscribers fare
On the mean miserable share
A woman earns to spread abroad
At "less than cost" the Love of God!

Say, would they keep themselves from stain,
'Mid want and heartache, toil and pain;
And would tired fingers be quite clean.
That fold the tale of Magdalene?

The "Love of God!"—ah Human Love
Look down a little—less above;
Go forth and find without a prayer
Christ with the toilers standing there,

And, pitying not a whit the less
Their want-awakened sinfulness,
Would he not blast with wrathful eye
Your pitiless, righteous charity?

M.

* B. V.,—"Philosophy," "City of Dreadful Night," and other Poems.

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.

ANOTHER "rev." has been before the magistrates charged with assaulting a little boy, a pupil in his school. Perhaps he was walloping the gospel into the brat with pardonable zeal. The columns of the newspapers are ever showing us that the most brutal tyrants in public schools are "men after God's own heart."

The Wesleyans of North Ormsby, near Middlesborough, held a bazaar at Christmas, and while the room was crowded with people the sale was suddenly stopped by some one throwing cayenne pods on the fire, thereby clearing out the whole pious throng. Of course there was a sad wail; it even got into the papers. Was it not disgraceful? By the stoppage of the sale the Lord was robbed of ready cash, and by one of his own servants, too. How slow the Lord is, to be sure! all he had to do was to hurry down and extinguish the cayenne. Perhaps he had been jolly with the other gods, and got "fou" and lain down a spell.

In Sunderland there has been established recently an institution called a Free Associate Church in which all classes meet. Its president is a friend of mine, Mr. William Brockie, a well-known journalist. Mr. Brockie is a Deist and an admirer of the *Freethinker*: a man whom I love and esteem, but I do not like his church. It is the last despairing gasp of dying godism, already minus a god.

"Seek ye first the freedom of man and his honesty."

THE NORTH WIND.

FREETHOUGHT GLEANINGS.

WORK AND PRAYER.—He who sows the ground diligently acquires more religious merit than he who repeats ten thousand prayers.—*Zoroaster*.

HOW THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE WAS FORMED.—If the doctrine of any writing met with the approval of the early Church it was accepted with unhesitating faith, and its pretensions to Apostolic origin was admitted as a natural consequence; but if, on the other hand, the doctrine of the writing was not clearly that of the community, it was rejected without further examination. It is an undeniable fact that not a single trace exists of the application of historical criticism to any book of the New Testament in the early ages of Christianity.—"Supernatural Religion," Vol. II., p. 394.

AN ORTHODOX ADMISSION.—The evidence of the earliest Christian writers is not only uncritical and casual, but is also fragmentary. A few letters of consolation and warning, two or three apologies addressed to heathen, a controversy with a Jew, a vision, and a scanty gleaning of fragments of lost works, comprise all Christian literature up to the middle of the second century. And the Fathers of the next age were little fitted by their work to collect the records of their times.—*B. F. Westcott, D.D.*, "On the Canon of the New Testament," Introduction, p. 11.

THE GUILT OF ERROR.—When a man believes that those who adopt an erroneous position will be consigned to perdition, when he not only believes, this but realises it as a living and operative truth, and when he perceives that it is possible either by direct falsehood or by the suppression or distortion of truth to strengthen the evidence of his faith, he usually finds the temptation irresistible.—*W. E. H. Lecky*, "History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe," Vol. I., p. 433.

BUDDHISM has been the creed for more than 2,000 years of half the human race.—*Froude*.

PROFANE JOKES.

AN apprentice boy who had not pleased his employer, one day came in for a chastisement, during the administration of which his master exclaimed, "How long will you serve the devil?" The boy replied, whimpering, "You know best, sir. I believe my indenture will be out in three months."

A NORTHERN English rector used to think it polite not to begin the service before the arrival of the Squire. Once he forgot his manners, and began, "When the wicked man"—"Stop, sir," cried the clerk, "he ain't come yet."

The late Rev. Norman McLeod, who was very tall and stout, was travelling in the Highlands with another reverend gentleman of much less stature. They had occasion to cross a loch in a

ferry, the ferry being well filled with passengers and sheep. During the passage across the loch a stiff breeze, amounting almost to a gale, sprang up, against which the boatman made little headway. This alarmed some of the passengers, and at length one of them suggested that, as there were two ministers on board, one should offer a prayer up for their safety. "Weel, weel," said the boatman, "the wee ane may pray if he likes, but the big ane maun tak an oar."

A CLERGYMAN, remarkable for the simplicity and force of his style, was one day discoursing on the text, "Unless ye repent, ye shall all perish." Anxious to impress upon his hearers the importance of the solemn truth conveyed by this passage, he made use of a very striking figure. "Yes, my friends," he emphatically urged, "unless ye repent, ye shall as surely perish (placing one of his fingers on the wing of a large fly which alighted on his Bible, and having his right hand uplifted), just as surely, my friends, as I shall kill this blue fly." Before the blow was struck, the fly got away. Upon which the minister, at the top of his voice, exclaimed, "There's a chance for you yet, my friends!"

A RUSTIC in the West of England was, some years ago, asked on his death-bed if he were not afraid to meet God. "No," he said; "I am not afraid to meet he. It's that 'ere old black 'un I'm afraid to meet!"

REVIEW.

Constantine the Great (The Home Library). By the Rev. E. L. Cutts, B.A., 1881.

THE Emperor Constantine did so much for Christianity that there is no wonder good Christians deem it their duty to do a little for Constantine. Whitewash is cheap, and Mr. Cutts applies it liberally to his hero. Not sufficiently however to hide the damning fact that the man who made the Church a power in the State was a murderer both of his wife and of his son. Mr Cutts' critical competence may be judged by his solely following Lactantius, Eusebius, and other orthodox authorities, upon whose testimony he is constrained to believe that Constantine saw the appearance of a cross in the sky. The book is one we cannot recommend. It may be esteemed by readers of the Home Library, but students of history will turn to the more accurate, but less flattering, picture of Constantine found in the pages of Gibbon.

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NATIONAL SUNDAY LEAGUE.—The Council begs to announce to the Members, Friends, and the Public that the Annual SOIREE, CONCERT and BALL, will be held at Cannon Street Hotel, Cannon Street, City, on MONDAY, JANUARY 30th, 1882, commencing at Nine o'clock.—A Promenade Concert supported by the leading Artists of the "Sunday Evenings for the People," who have kindly given their valuable services: Madame Alice Barth, Miss Jessie Bond (by permission of R. D'Oyley Carte, Esq.), Mr. H. Walsham, Mr. T. Impett, Mr. Franklin Clive and Mr. George Arnold, Conductor; Madame Bernhardt, Miss Gerald Payne, Miss Gertrude Barton, Mr. M. Ryan, Mr. Robert Emslie, Mr. J. Sims and Dr. J. W. Bernhardt, Conductor. Edward B. Aveling, Esq., D.Sc., F.L.S., has kindly consented to give a Recitation during the evening. The Piano lent for the occasion by Messrs. Monington & Weston, 3, Holborn Viaduct, E.C. Microscopes and other Scientific Instruments kindly lent by J. Browning, Esq., F.R.A.S., will be on view. Two Quadrille Bands. Dancing in the Grand Hall and in the Pillar Hall from 9.30 till 3.30. Bandmaster, Mr. Hiram Honton (late 1st Life Guards). M.C., Mr. Lorenzo Burri; assisted by Messrs. Stenlake, Trevillion and Ramsey. Tickets, 2s. 6d. each, of all Members of the Council; at the Office, 15, Bloomsbury Street, W.C.; and at the Hotel on the evening.—Henry Saveraux, Secretary.

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