

# PROSECUTED FOR BLASPHEMY.

# THE FREETHINKER.

EDITED BY G. W. FOOTE.

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## AT BAY

We appear in a meagre form this week. But the fault is not ours. Our printer refused to print at the last minute when the type was nearly all set up, as he means to plead guilty and cry off. We sought unweariedly for a fresh printer during the brief interval at our command, but unfortunately without success. We trust, however, to be more fortunate by next week, when we hope to reappear in our old form.

Our warmest thanks are due to the staunch Freethinker who placed his resources at our disposal and enabled us to keep our flag flying with honour. The enemy may succeed in laying it low, but we will never furl it ourselves. Our sub-editor also stands by us bravely, and with us bates no jot of heart or hope.

The *Freethinker* must no longer be published at 28, Stonecutter Street to injure Mr. Bradlaugh who has never had any connexion with it. For the present we stand alone to carry on the paper at all hazards. Our readers will, in the circumstances, be ready to pardon all shortcomings. Let them only give us their support, and we pledge ourselves to fight on, whoever else falters and turns aside. The real question at issue is not whether all our views are correct, but whether we have a right to express them. Freethinkers who will not strive to maintain that right are unworthy of the name.

The subscribers to our Defence Fund are desired to wait until next week for an acknowledgement of their remittances. In the meantime we shall be glad to receive all possible aid to defeat the bigots, which is the more necessary, now we are surrounded by fresh difficulties.

Until we can make more definite arrangements, our friends can order as usual of their newsagents. The trade will know where to get supplied.

G. W. FOOTE.

## PRESS PROSECUTION AND THE LAW.

ENGLISH Law is a rare jumble, such as no fellow, not even a lawyer, can ever hope to understand thoroughly. The much, or rather, in view of the magnitude of the matter, the little, that has been done since the days of Brougham in the way of codifying law, and of simplifying procedure, has left a veritable Augean stable to be cleansed, which we fear will tax a greater legal Hercules than Sir James Fitzjames Stephen, praiseworthy as has been his attempt in this direction.

One of the most pressing legal reforms pointed out by Sir James, is that of making a thorough clearance of all those un repealed statutes which are either superseded, obsolete, or no longer in accordance with the spirit of the present age, and which remain in evidence of the tyranny and barbarity of the past.

That, in this much belauded nineteenth century, persons should be subject to imprisonment and to deprivation of all their civil rights to the end of their days, for impugning the Christian mythology, or for making fun of the old Jew God, Jahveh, and this at the instance of any malicious, bigoted, or interested prosecutor, is simply monstrous, and would be incredible were it not true. Be it remembered, too that the laws which apply to the present prosecution of the *Freethinker* go a great deal further. It is, according to law, a misdemeanor to say anything in derogation of or despising the Book of Common Prayer. It is an offence punishable by

imprisonment to speak against the Church as by law established. Such laws, like the lawnsleeves in the Lords, are an anomaly in the present secular age, and bespeak their ecclesiastical origin. So late as 1839, no fewer than ten persons were sent to prison for the offence of staying away from church without excuse, and received for this atrocious crime an average incarceration of 24½ days each. What the law decrees against blasphemy to day it decreed two centuries ago against both blasphemy and witchcraft, and upon the authority of the same book which declares that "whoso entices to new gods shall be stoned" (Deut. xiii), and "thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (Exod. xxii., 18). Judge Hale, who made the celebrated dictum that Christianity is part and parcel of the law of the land, condemned witches to death on the express ground that it was commanded by scripture. Witchcraft and blasphemy were alike punished in the name of this contemptible deity. But just as any other part and parcel of the law of the land may be challenged, altered, and swept away, so may Christianity. The pains and penalties of the law have not sufficed to keep it free from criticism. A succession of noble martyr spirits have suffered pillory and prison for the right of freely expressing their opinions upon this persecuting faith, and to-day if these barbarous laws were fairly put in force against all alike, there is not a high class publisher in the land who would be safe. In Germany, Prince Bismarck let it be distinctly understood that his gagging of the press and platform was not so much on account of what was said, as on account of whom it was said to. And so it is here. The Duke of Somerset, Marquis of Queensberry or Viscount Amberley may attack Christianity as much as they please, without fear of being molested. It is only cheap infidelity that is in danger. Prosecution for opinion is always the resort of the rich and strong against the poor and the defenceless. But the bigots count without their host. They have to deal not only with the little band of avowed freethinkers who stand in the forefront of the battle, and put into direct and forcible language what so many think and beat about the bush in saying, but with all the force of the time, the *zeitgeist* which lies behind them. Every Freethinker in the land owes it to all those who have fought for liberty in the past and to those who are fighting for liberty now, to see that the present is the last prosecution for opinion in England. The time has come to act. Memorials for the abolition of the laws against heresy and blasphemy should at once be drawn up. Funds should be raised, not only for the present defence, but to ensure that there shall be no recurrence of these attacks. Freethinkers have been too apathetic under laws which keep them slaves. It is so long since the sword has been used that we had well nigh forgotten that it hangs over us still. Once aroused we must never rest until every vestige of penalty for opinion is erased from the statute book.

J. M. WHEELER.

CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION. At the end of the sixteenth century the simple proposition that men for holding or declaring heterodox opinions in religion should not be burned alive or otherwise put to death, was itself little else than a sort of heterodoxy; and though many privately must have been persuaded of its truth, the Protestant Churches were as far from acknowledging it as that of Rome.—Henry Hallam, *F.R.A.S.*, "Introduction to the Literature of Europe," vol. i., p. 559, 1854.



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THE PROSECUTION AND THE DEFENSE

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EDITED BY E. M. BOOLE

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## ACID DROPS.

THE proceedings at the Mansion House on Monday were of a lively but protracted description. The prosecution made but little progress, and many objections were raised by Mr. Bradlaugh which may prove fatal to the indictments. Exigencies of space prevent our giving a report of the case which has been extensively reported in the daily press.

POOR Mr. Maloney the counsel for the prosecution, got an awful dressing last Monday. Mr. Lickfold thrust him through and through, and Mr. Bradlaugh knocked him down a dozen times. The Irish barrister went home at three o'clock a mangled victim. Several doctors were called in, and his mother had to nurse him up for the next set-to on Friday.

MR. MALONEY has two settled ideas. One is, that when he has no doubt about a thing, the Lord Mayor ought to accept it as proved, without evidence; and the other, that it is the duty of the defendants to facilitate the prosecution. His innocent conviction on these two points is really touching. Once or twice he was almost in tears at the obstinacy of Bradlaugh, Foe, Ramsey and Whittle, in obstructing Sir Henry Tyler's amiable intentions. Nothing but respect for the Court prevented us from handing him a second dry handkerchief.

MR. MALONEY may induce the Lord Mayor to commit the defendants for trial, but it will not be owing to the brilliance with which he has conducted his case. As for his honesty, the less said the better; but it may be observed that he constantly tried to introduce rejected matter by subterfuge, and on one occasion wrongly quoted some words in the last number of the *Freethinker* for the express purpose of creating a prejudice and misleading the Court. How he did get punished for his impudence though! We quite pitied him.

LAST week a butcher named William Cook, an inmate of Bethel House Asylum, Bethnal Green Road, was brutally murdered by a fellow-inmate named Albert Barrett. Barrett it appears is afflicted with religious mania of the Guiteau type. Questioned by the coroner, he said "Thank God, I killed him to end his miserable life, my friend." The Word says, "Simply to thy cross I cling; nothing in my hand I bring." "I killed him because it is written that it should be so."

A FRIEND recently questioned a lady connected with the Burntwood Asylum about the paper supplied there. She said that the most sensible patients are given the *Graphic*, the *Illustrated London News*, etc.; but the worst idiots are supplied with the *Christian Herald* and the *Rock*. Small wonder they seldom recover.

SOME Chinamen had to give evidence in a London Court a few days ago. They swore on a saucer which they smashed, hoping that their hearts and souls might be smashed in the same fashion if they did not tell the truth. This form of oath ought not to be tolerated in a Christian and commercial country. It is decidedly heathenism, and involves a sad waste of good crockery.

THE sum of £26,760 was spent on the last little party given to a Royal Prince at the Guildhall. No wonder they want to put down the *Freethinker*.

LAST Sunday morning a cat got inside the organ at St. Matthew's, Sheffield, and played the devil with the music. A foretaste of hell, in the shape of a lighted match applied to its tail, compelled pussy to quit, but before it did so the discord was ravishing, and suggested what might be heard in heaven from all the menagerie of the apocalypse.

DURING the week one clergyman committed suicide, another was committed for trial on a charge of fraud, and a "Captain in the Salvation Army was sent to gaol for three months for theft. They are a merry family from Archie Tait to Booth.

A MANCHESTER friend noticing that the shelves of a second-hand bookseller groaned under the weight of dusty unread sermons, Bibles, and theological works, asked if the brisk demand was the occasion of having so large a stock? He was politely informed that religious literature was the deadest stock in the market, and that last week the bookseller cleared out a hundred-weight and a half for the sum of 3/6.

HENRY HETHERINGTON, when he was imprisoned for blasphemy, retorted by prosecuting Moxon, the publisher of Shelley's poems, and obtained a verdict, notwithstanding Talfourd's great speech for the defence. It would be a good thing to start a few prosecutions now. General Booth is certainly guilty of bringing the Christian religion into contempt in the *War Cry*, and Matthew Arnold is no less guilty when he compares the most blessed Trinity to three Lord Shaftesburys, in "Literature and Dogma." But, as the law now stands, nothing can be done without the fiat of the Public Prosecutor, who is pretty sure not to grant it against anybody but the editor or publisher of a Free-thought journal. We are thus worse off than before.

DR. WORDSWORTH, Bishop of Lincoln, writing to the Mayor of Grimsby, on the temperance question, says "the temperance pledge is not Scriptural." This is very true, but we don't know that it is any the worse on that account. He goes on to say that "it undermines the Godhead of Christ," and we wonder how the melchisedek that is done. We have read that Christ was known as a wine bibber. But the old book says "wine cheereth both God and man." Was it as God or as man that he turned so many firkins of water into wine for guests well drunk? In the name of Noah, first planter of the vine, how can the temperance pledge undermine the Godhead? The reverend Father in God ought to know since he declares that it is "a deadly sin to sign it." We have sent the bishop a copy of the *Freethinker* tract upon the subject.

FREETHOUGHT leaders are at a greater disadvantage now than in the bad old times. Richard Carlile, Robert Taylor, and other blasphemers edited their journals from prison. That is no longer possible. First-class misdemeanants are abolished; and any Freethinker sent to jail for his opinions would have to herd with criminals, to do without pen and ink, and to content himself in the way of literature with the wretched old book which is responsible for all his sufferings.

THE *Christian Commonwealth* denounces the growing practice of newspaper reading on Sunday; its eyes and ears are offended by the hawking and sale of the Sunday editions of the weekly press. Belgravia and Mayfair it declares to be as bad in this case as the habitations of the lower orders. Curiously enough the C. C. overlooks the fact that the Monday Morning dailies so relished by those who object to Sunday papers are being composed while they are sleeping off the effect of the Holy Spirit which they have imbibed on the Lord's day.

OUR dear Christian contemporary the *Rock* objects to the employment of female captains in the Salvation Army. It says that the Apostle Paul speaking of young women, says in Titus ii., 5—that they ought to be "keepers at home, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed," and in I-Timothy ii., 12—"I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." This is Scriptural discipline, eminently useful in the present day, but absolutely ignored by the females of the "Army." Paul it seems thought the better sex would be eminently given to blasphemy, whatever that may be.

## SUGAR PLUMS.

A Newsagent sends us a most cheering letter from a little town in Oxfordshire. Since the *Freethinker* started he has disposed of over two hundred dozen copies, and about forty dozen of "*Bible Romances*." Last week he distributed a thousand Freethinker's Tracts. If this can be done in such a small place, what might not be done in large towns and cities?

OUR New Tracts, we are glad to observe have had an unprecedented sale already. We have, however, a large supply still, and we trust that our readers will remember that this is just the time to circulate them to the best advantage.

THE *New York Christian Advocate* says, that Ralph Waldo Emerson began his public career as a Unitarian minister, but left that loose jointed body on an issue concerning the administration of the Lord's Supper, he maintaining that such a celebration gave an undue prominence to one among many good men. From that time, till his death, he made no sign that he believed in Jesus Christ as a teacher come from God in any other sense than he held Ralph Waldo Emerson himself to be such a teacher. Nor can a word be got from his whole career whether from speech or pen, which justifies the assertion that he believed in the Jehovah of the Old Testament, or in Jesus Christ as "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever," or in the inspiration of the Holy Scripture in any sense which makes them the rule of faith and practice, in any sense which distinguishes them as to their origin from the sacred books of the Hindus.

THE *Daily News* of Tuesday last, had a leader upon our prosecution which it says will not approve itself to the common sense of many persons besides Sir Henry Tyler. It points out the uncertainty of the common law, and how much the result of any indictment depends upon the discretion of the judge presiding at the trial, and mentions the statute of William III, making it a misdemeanor for any person who has been educated in the Christian faith to deny the truth of Christianity, or the divine authority of the scriptures. It thinks that few people will be found to argue that blasphemy, considered in its religious aspect, should continue to be treated as a legal offence. "Truth can stand the test of ridicule as well as of argument, and the state is only justified in interfering where public decency is plainly violated."

THE *Presbyterian Outlook*, says, "Sensationalism is debilitating the churches, we hear on all sides, not so much a complaint as a lamentation, that congregations are becoming more and more shifting and capricious. They can no longer be satisfied with nourishing doctrine and orderly reverent services such as a former generation would have valued. It appears as though the length to which the special service system has been carried, and the injudicious encouragement given to rhapsodical preaching and religious hubbub, were pushing quiet, modest piety out of existence."

THE papers report that 645 members of the Sunday Society visited the Grosvenor Gallery last Sunday. We are glad to hear it, but if the law were enforced they might be clapped in gaol for not going to church.

LAST Sunday's Municipal Elections in Rome resulted in the return of sixteen liberal candidates, and the utter defeat of the clerical party.

THE Lord Mayor appeared rather sick of the proceedings last Monday, but he behaved like a perfect gentleman. The Clerk of the Court too was punctiliously fair.