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PROSECUTED FOR BLASPHEMY.

THE FREETHINKER.

EDITED BY G. W. FOOTE.

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TYLER'S CRUSADE.

MR. GLADSTONE once compared Lord Randolph Churchill to a disgusting little insect that crawls and causes an itch; Sir Henry Tyler, another member of the same clique, may be compared to a noisome insect that hops and bites. His sole occupation is giving annoyance to his betters. In the House of Commons he atones for his inability to make a speech by constantly asking foolish questions. Finding that this conduct does not bring him the fame he desires, he has for some time supplemented it by the most outrageous and cowardly attacks on people who are not present to defend themselves. He never opened his mouth against Mr. Bradlaugh when a reply was possible, but since the junior member for Northampton was excluded from his seat, the gallant Tyler has again and again assailed and slandered him. He has also tried to rob Dr. Aveling of his well-earned fees as a most successful teacher of science; and not content with that, he has put and kept on the notices of the House the vilest imputations on Mrs. Besant and the Misses Bradlaugh, whose only crime is that they devote themselves to the education of ladies and gentlemen who have infinitely greater capacity for honest knowledge than Sir Henry Tyler ever possessed.

Why does not the noble Tyler go "the whole hog"? He evidently hates everybody and everything connected with Mr. Bradlaugh. There are only two achievements left for him—to extinguish the domestic animals at Mr. Bradlaugh's and then to do the same at Mrs. Besant's. But we confidently predict that he will not meddle with the latter. He will not come within leap of that big Saint Bernard who, having got into the papers, may be considered a public character. The fine fellow would infallibly smell the skunk, and then—but we would rather not picture the scene. Those who wanted the fragments that remained might bring twelve baskets for them, and either bury them decently or give them to Spurgeon as materials for a fresh sermon on the resurrection of the body.

Poor Tyler has signally failed to injure the Science Classes in Old Street; on the contrary, he has strengthened an improved them. The students are more numerous and the teaching is more effective than ever. All he has gained is a dreadful snubbing from Mr. Mundella. But as Pope says—

"No creature smarts so little as a fool"

and thick-skinned Tyler comes up again with the same old air of serene silliness.

This despicable thing sets up as the defender of the faith, and we must allow that he is just fit for the business. The qualities required for that office were never more than impudence and stupidity, and Tyler is bountifully blessed with both. His method of defence is peculiar. The Christian edifice is shaky and all its walls are sapped. In this extremity our city knight goes up as a tiler to mend the roof; but finding it beyond repair, he resolves to stop the rain!

Does he, or anyone else, really think that blasphemy prosecutions will arrest the progress of Freethought? They did not a generation ago and they will not now. Our martyr pioneers defied them and triumphed over them, and we shall do the same. There is only one way of suppressing our cause, and even that would be but temporary. Let a holocaust be made of all the Freethinkers living; let every heretical book be burnt on the pile; let the names of all the great heroes of progress be banished from our schools and prohibited in all our writings and speeches; and then the bigots may achieve a real success for a time, until the inextinguishable spirit of freedom

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burst forth anew. But short of that they must certainly fail. Unless they exterminate us every act of persecution will lend us fresh strength; and if one Freethinker goes to gaol, another will take his place, as soldiers step up to fill the breaches caused by the enemy's shot and shell.

Who is afraid? Not we. Rather is that creed infected with fear which finds reason inadequate, and is obliged to resort to force. We shall not lose in the struggle; the loss will be all on the other side. The people will rally to us more and more as our earnestness is proved and our courage tried. They will see that our assailants are the traditional enemies of mankind, that Toryism and Christianity are arrayed against Radicalism and Freethought. They represent the past, while we represent the future; they try to crush us in blind despair, and we fight on with a glorious hope.

Tyler's ignominious crusade will be as futile as others that are damned on the page of history. The great inquisitors who roasted and tortured men for the glory of God are succeeded by petty persecutors who ape their doings for the glory of a moribund faith. Lasting success is no longer possible to such attempts. Civilisation and progress are against them. For our part we despise the brutal Christian creed, and we defy it.

G. W. FOOTE.

PRESS PROSECUTIONS 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 have been his attempts 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 unrepealed 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 misdemeanour 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 lawsleaves 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 on 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 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, 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.

BLASPHEMY AND BLASPHEMERS.

WHAT is blasphemy? To speak against, to revile—that is slander. By the laws of the country it is blasphemy to speak against God, the Bible, etc. But we cannot speak against God; we are Atheists; we have no god, and do not want one. God for us is a name, a myth, a fiction, a nothing. We cannot slander such. No one now can blaspheme Jupiter, Juno, or Minerva; and out of India you cannot blaspheme any of the many gods of that country. Nor is it possible to blaspheme Jehovah—except by a purely artificial construction put upon the words you utter. To the Atheist one god is as real as another; and he no more blasphemes Jehovah by poking fun at him than he does any other old deity—Wodin or Thor, for example. Besides, Jehovah was a foreign deity, and the worst of all of them, who ought never to have been admitted into Britain. And the worst you can say against him is to quote the Bible, his own official biography.

If it is blasphemy to speak of deities in the above fashion, why don't the deities themselves resent it, and not leave their defence to fools, hypocrites, and madmen? Just here an anecdote respecting Abraham falls in very *apropos*. It is said by some Mohammedans that when Abraham, then a youth, was at the court of Nimrod, where his father was in some high office, he ridiculed the gods of the king—and of his court, too, of course. To be sure, he ran great risk of being summarily dealt with for blasphemy. Long and troublesome prosecutions were then unknown. One day Abraham outdid himself. The people were all out in the fields enjoying some great religious festival, in which he could not join. He therefore sauntered into a temple (some say it was his father's idol factory), when he saw, ranged around, a multitude of *real* gods, made of wood, not spiritual nobodies, such as they worship now-a-days. Well, this young iconoclast took an axe and demolished the gods, and turned them into firewood. He was now standing in front of the largest in the place, and just about to lift his sacrilegious weapon against the Most High, and the Most Big, and the Most Bulky, when a happy thought struck him. He took a line, and tied it to the handle of his deicidal axe and hung it round the neck of the biggest and the only survivor of the pantheon. Then he wiped his brows on his sleeve, and stood contemplating, with fiendish satisfaction, the

ghastly and blasphemous deed he had done. Just then in walked his beloved father, who wildly demanded, when horror permitted him to breathe, who had destroyed the gods. Abraham coolly pointed to the Most High with the murderous weapon still in his possession. Terah would not believe that the god had done it, for he was only wood. At this the young blasphemer actually laughed a dreadful laugh, and jeered his pious dad for worshipping gods that *could not defend themselves!* Then he said: "The truth is, my revered parent, an old woman brought in a measure of fine flour as an offering to the gods, and they fell out over it, each one wanting to get the biggest share. At length yon fellow took an axe and destroyed the rest, and ate all the sacrifice himself. There he is, with the axe still in his possession."

Of course Terah did not believe what his son told him. And he was taken to court, tried for blasphemy, condemned, and executed—as far as his foes could do that. They made a great fire for him, and by means of a catapult (which, by-the-way, the Devil taught them how to make) they flung him into the midst of the fire. But before he fairly fell the whole scene was changed into a smiling, fragrant meadow for him. Thus the persecutors were baffled and their gods discredited. A higher power preserved the blasphemer, and gave the gods over to destruction.

This is the history of blasphemy and its prosecution in a nutshell. What is blasphemy? It is truth, enlightenment, advancement, courage. What is its prosecution? Falsehood, dense ignorance (when it is not cunning and hypocrisy), retrogression, and cowardice. Blasphemers often suffer; blasphemy never does. It advances, though its friends may be checked, hurt, killed. The fires which religion prepared for blasphemers is turned by a higher power—viz., human progress, as the ages roll on, into smiling meadows for the welfare and happiness of mankind. Blasphemy! It is the life of the world. It is the test of truth, the detector of shams. That which cannot stand the full blaze of the sun is a falsehood; what cannot endure a joke must be a sham! Touchy people should emigrate to the New Jerusalem; and those who have sickly gods, and consumptive devils, and dying angels, should keep them in, or take them to the seaside for change of air. Ah! me. I pity the poor Christian Gods. Sometimes I feel it is half cowardly to strike them—they are so weak and contemptible. No wonder their patrons feel so touchy about them; they have never been able to take their own part.

Blasphemy! What is that? It is a crime and a blunder. What is it? It is opposition to Freethought. It is Toryism. It is tyranny. It is a crime against man, not against any god. Who are the blasphemers? They who imprison, burn, slander the brave and the good, who prefer human welfare to personal pleasure, and unpopular and dangerous truth to consecrated lies and pious shams. Persecutors are the same in every age—the produce of the lowest slime of human nature, maggots which never develop into anything better. There is no instance on record where truth persecuted or honor spat venom on one whom logic and reason could not conquer. There never will be such a case.

But happily the night is nearly gone. Persecutors are almost an extinct race. The world does not now sympathise with them. God-defenders are going where the gods have all gone—to the blackness of darkness, to utter oblivion for ever. They are as bitter and malicious as ever—their piety is the "gall of bitterness," their power lies wholly in "the bonds of iniquity." But Truth and Freethought are out of their reach every way. They do not understand them; they can only oppose them as Mrs. Partington did the Atlantic waves!

J. SYMES.

NINETEENTH CENTURY PHARISEES, HYPOCRITES.

THE creature most despised at a public school is the bully, and the most despicable character in adult life is the creature who carries the bullying propensities he has developed among boys into his relationships with grown men. The bully eats and drinks too much. He is very largely given over to that which schoolboys call "show-off." An unreasoning animal, he attacks everything and everybody that he does not like, and even where he does not actually dislike, he attacks out of the very delight in giving pain.

Brute force is his sole weapon. At school it takes the form of the application of a cricket-stump, for example. In the world it takes the form of the application of statutes that everyone, save indecent folk, would prefer to forget as part of the necessary barbarities committed by a people struggling in the direction of civilisation.

Lord George Hamilton has declared himself on the side of the bullies, and is in one sense worse than his fellows. They have some pretence of law, obsolete and anachronistic as it may be, on their side. But he has declared his readiness to break the law in order that he may prevent those who differ from him, on speculative matters, from earning a livelihood by the scientific instruction of their fellow-citizens. Mr. Newdegate and Sir Henry Tyler are, nevertheless, his superiors in the art of injuring their fellows. Mr. Newdegate has hitherto been the chief offender, but Sir Henry Tyler now bids fair—if I may be pardoned for using such an adverb in connexion with such a name—to run him close in the race for degradation. It must never be forgotten that the knight was the one member of the House of Commons sufficiently steeped in ill-breeding to drag into the discussions of that House, the name of a woman. But your bully is always “bad form.”

These, then, are the three most recent champions of the faith (*pace* Dr. McCann). Lord George Hamilton, Sir Henry Tyler, Mr. Newdegate—three Conservatives. One needs the eloquence of Mr. Arthur O'Connor to describe them accurately. These are posing as the Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites of the nineteenth century. Scribe is not altogether an appropriate name for them, for of literary pretensions not one can boast. Is it not very noticeable that these persecutions do not come from the skilled writers, the able speakers, the great statesmen, the scientific luminaries of our country? They come from the obscure men. Their greater fellows look on them with a smile, half of pain, half of contempt.

Am I using too harsh words when I name such persecutors as these Pharisees, hypocrites? They are doing evil to be seen of men. Unable to earn a reputation for goodness, they resolve to gain notoriety for vindictive persecution. They are hypocrites, for in their heart of hearts they know that all honest men despise them. Nay, they despise themselves, and it is difficult to imagine a greater depth of degradation than that. They know, limited as are their powers of perception, that the majority of the people that affect to sympathise with them would not do the dirty work they have undertaken on any consideration.

If these persecutions are in the name of religion, why does not the Archbishop of Canterbury take up the cudgels instead of these dubious members of his church? If they are in the name of morality, surely men whose reputations are unstained could be found to make the attacks.

However, our duty is clear. It is so clear to all Freethinkers that to say one word on the matter would be wholly unnecessary, were it not that many eyes that are not those of Freethinkers will read this page. It is for readers who do not understand our love for our creed, our firm belief in its righteousness, our resolve to defend it that I write, when I say now that there will be no flinching in the ranks of Atheism. The earlier Christians were persecuted, and now it is our turn. In the barbaric ages eighteen centuries ago the persecutors took lives. Now they do their worst to blast reputations. They will find a sturdy resistance. No amount of persecution will make us give up our faith, or cease to proclaim it abroad that all men may hear. Nothing can rob us of the hope that is in us: nothing close our mouths when we feel that evil, even though it be a worn-out creed, must be condemned. We appeal confidently to the better judgment of the better natures, and, above all, to that just judge, the future.

It is in respect to the judgment of that future that we have an advantage over our unscrupulous foes. It is true that they have one advantage that we have not, in that they are incapable of perceiving when disgrace falls upon them. As to the future and all that it hides in it of contempt for the persecutors of this age, of this they are as ignorant as they are of the past history and the present feeling of their own country. But as to the verdict that our descendants will pass upon us and our pursuers we have probably less of doubt than had Christ when the Tylers and the Newdegates of his day crucified him.

If anything more were wanting to show the animus that runs through all the shameful proceedings, the attempt to connect Mr. Bradlaugh with a paper in which he has nor

part nor lot in any way, would supply the want. Attacked in his person and in that of those actually connected with this paper, the forces of Freethought gather themselves together. Let our weapons be, as of old, argument, ridicule where ridicule is needed, above all, truth, and the appeal to the instinct of liberty and of justice that are the possession of all Englishmen not of the type of our persecutors. There is no need to create a public opinion. All that is necessary is to rouse it. Let that be the work of each freethinking man and woman.

EDWARD B. AVELING, D.Sc.

A GAELIC DESCRIPTION OF ETERNAL PUNISHMENT.

A RECENT visitor to Ross-shire writes to the *Scotsman* as follows: “A week last Sunday I dropped into a church not a dozen miles from Dingwall, and the minister happened to be lecturing his congregation, in Gaelic, on the evil tendencies of Mr. Macrae’s teaching. In the outset of his remarks he treated his hearers to a materialistic description of heaven, depicting it as an immense city whose streets, etc., were paved with gold. He evidently was determined, however, to have a fling at poor Macrae, and without any hesitation, characterised his speech at the Synod as a tissue of lies and a production of the Devil. He then proceeded to state his own views on the question. He believed there was a hell in which men and women who did not repent were eternally damned and tormented. It was located about the centre of the earth. His description as told in Gaelic was most revolting. He represented it as a large subterranean cavern, studded over with innumerable large cauldrons, which, he said, resembled a lime-kiln in form, but was a thousand times larger. Over each of these pits a number of Satanic angels presided, who, again, had a number of men under them that were engaged continually, with their coats off and shirt-sleeves pulled up, shovelling in brimstone. Into these cauldrons were cast all the wicked, and made to undergo indescribable agony. During the delivery of the sermon this mediæval preacher worked himself into such a state of frenzy and warmth, that the foam which spurted from his mouth, fell on some of the congregation, who were sitting over five yards from the pulpit. The result of this infatuated nonsense was that several old women had to be carried out of church in an unconscious condition, and I have reason to believe that one of them has not yet completely recovered.”

ACID DROPS.

No less than three correspondents have sent us the following conundrum during the past week. Why is the Athanasian Creed like a Bengal tiger? Because of its damnation clause. We regret to find such profane levity while blasphemy prosecutions are in the air. May the Devil, when he draws off the brimstone for these three lost ones, draw it mild.

THE *Sunday Times* thinks Sir Henry Tyler’s political trick against Mr. Bradlaugh is worthy to be ranked with the famous egg-trick of Columbus. The same wise journal, in another paragraph, speaks of the “Mohammedan race.” We always thought Mohammedanism was a religion that included several races, but it is no doubt blasphemy to differ from the *Sunday Times*.

WHAT a dreadful let-down it would be if the high and mighty writers in our anonymous press had to sign their names. It would then be seen that many a scribbler has long been enlightening the public on subjects of which he is profoundly ignorant, and posing as a wise man in public while in private all his acquaintance thought him an incurable fool.

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 the 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 heathenish, 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.

Is it not written in the book of Jasher that upon one occasion the sun stayed in its course, without any such consequences as an undevout astronomer might have expected? The whole machinery of the solar system did not go to eternal smash, but the Jews went on fighting. So with the *Freethinker*. It has only stayed in its course that the battle may go on more briskly and effectively. We have taken precautions that the fight shall be continued in its light subject to no more interruptions. We do not intend, like the sun in Hezekiah's time, to go back ten degrees for the sake of curing a boil.

Those kindly Christian contemporaries who deign to notice the attempted suppression of the freedom of the press, scarcely attempt to conceal their satisfaction. The *Rock* says that although it cannot concur in the wisdom of prosecuting the conductors of infidel and blasphemous publications when they are comparatively unknown, yet now these proceedings have been taken "we cannot but hope they may succeed." The *Rock* quite naively states the reason for the hope that is in it. The imprisonment of Mr. Bradlaugh for a publication with which he has never had any connexion, would prove a much more satisfactory disposal of his claim" (as thrice-elected M.P. for Northampton) "then the present anomalous condition of things seem to promise."

THE *Church Review* is quite militant. It says: "Quite a host of these publications flourish, and as they circulate for the most part among the lowest classes, they are calculated to undermine the social welfare of the people. Bradlaughism cum Benthamite Epicureanism has too long been on the ascendency to be further tolerated. If we are to be consistent Christians let us consistently uproot everything which tends to irreligion." It will evidently be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for those who disagree with the *Church Review*.

SOME critics talk about the very small influence of the *Freethinker*. What do they mean? This journal is read every week in every part of the world. Its circulation steadily increases, and bids fair to out-distance every other in the field. Let the critics talk. The proof of the pudding is in the eating.

THE Bishop of Manchester has had his little say on our prosecution. He admits that Christianity has its difficulties, but to point them out is to disseminate moral poison. His lordship approves the prosecution, but doesn't like to say so plainly. Poor bishop! Our circulation will increase threefold in his own diocese, and what will he do then?

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 Freethought journal. We are thus worse off than before.

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.

WE can imagine a nice little scene between the chaplain and our editor.

Chaplain.—Good morning, 432.

Our Editor.—I beg pardon; are you addressing me?

Chaplain.—Yes.

Our Editor.—Then why don't you call me by my right name?

Chaplain.—Ah, my poor brother!

Our Editor.—Come now, a little less of that. I am poor, that's plain enough; this isn't a very fine suit—it might have cost ten shillings new, and twenty blackguards have worn it threadbare; nor is this skilly a very sumptuous repast. But I don't see where the brother comes in. You are well paid for your opinions, and I'm in prison for mine. I can't call you brother, or anybody of your cloth; although I would bend a little if you brought Henry Varley or the Bishop of Manchester into the next cell for "outraging the feelings" of Freethinkers.

Chaplain.—What a dreadful idea! Such good Christians in gaol! Surely you are beside yourself.

Our Editor.—My dear sir, I'm quite right in the upper storey—too right, or I shouldn't be here. And let me remind you that the early Christians were pretty well acquainted with gaol. Jesus Christ and nearly all the apostles were laid by the heels. Paul and Peter got out by a miracle. I wish the Lord would work one for me.

Chaplain.—I really cannot listen to such shocking blasphemy.

Our Editor.—Then why talk to a blasphemer? But don't let us quarrel. You can't furnish me with better victuals and clothes, but you can give something to read. Pray oblige me with a book.

Chaplain.—Gladly, my dear brother. Here is the best book in the world. Read it, and you will become a new man.

Our Editor.—Oh, the Bible I see. Read that! Why, I've read it scores of times through, which is probably more than can be said of anybody else in this parish. Come now, I'll cap you verses if you like. You decline? I thought so. But seriously, can't you give me something else?

Chaplain.—Do read this blessed book, do read it. You will never regret it.

Our Editor.—Blessed book! I say so too, but in another sense. That blessed book gives you the right to doctor the souls of poor devils whose minds have been neglected. It gives you the right to address me as 432. It also gives me this noble suit, this splendid skilly, these magnificent apartments, and that glorious view through those charming bars. It is indeed a blessed book. But really it is too good for me. Haven't you something a trifle more suitable for a sinner. Have you a volume of Voltaire now, even the "Pucelle?" Every clergyman has a copy of that. Or a Rabelais, a Swift, a Sterne, a Shelley, a Byron, or, best of all, a Shakespeare?

Chaplain.—We do not allow such profane works within these holy precincts; they would corrupt the morals of the worst criminal. Yet, if you scorn the sacred volume, I can offer you others. Here are some beautiful tracts—The Dying Infidel, The Blasphemer's Remorse, Plucked from the Brink, and several more. I have also some good sermons—six volumes of them, all my own.

Our Editor.—No, thank you. The tracts are only useful for what Coleridge called post-culinary purposes. And as for the sermons—well, there are very few worth reading. Yet there are some good old ones. Give me a volume of South, or Taylor, or Barrow; I'll make a shift with that.

Chaplain.—Those old writers are too much imbued with the carnal spirit. We keep nothing but what is purely evangelical.

Our Editor.—For God's sake spare me, for I shall surely blaspheme if you give me any such trash. Let me have the Bible, after all. It's the best book in your collection. I'm so used to books that I must have something. Thanks. I shall read it carefully, you may depend, very carefully, and meditate a few more "Bible Romances," to complete the series when I get out. *Au revoir*

JUSTICE AND THE GODS.—Are there any marks of a distributive justice in the world? If you answer in the affirmative, I conclude that, since justice here exerts itself, it is satisfied. If you reply in the negative, I conclude that you have no reason to ascribe justice, in our sense, to the gods. If you hold a medium between affirmation and negation, by saying that the justice of the gods, at present, exerts itself in part, but not in its full extent, I answer that you have no reason to give it any particular extent, but only as far as you see it at present exert itself.—*David Hume*, "Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding," sec. xi., p. 116, vol. iv. "Philosophical Works; 1875.

SUPERSTITION.—It is idle to attribute the destruction of superstition to the Reformation. Protestants were as superstitious as Catholics—*Henry Thomas Buckle*, "Miscellaneous Works," vol. i., p. 419.

IRELAND.—Superstition is the curse of Ireland. To the rival churches of that country may be traced all the oppressions suffered by its people, who never can be permanently improved till purged of their faith in priests. When that salutary work shall be accomplished, Ireland will indeed be "a nation" in the secure enjoyment of political liberty. The priest-ridden may talk of freedom but can never secure it.—*Charles Southwell*, "Superstition Unveiled," p. 6; 1864.

SPECIAL NOTICE.

Mr. Foote lectures three times to-day (Sunday, July 30th) in the Camden Hall, Camden Street, Liverpool: Morning, at 11, "The Bible and its Defenders;" afternoon, at 3, "Conflicts and Conquests of Freethought;" evening, at 7, "Blasphemy, Priestcraft, and Persecution."

MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

August 6th, Burnley; 13th, Rochdale; 20th, West Hartlepool; 21st to 25th, Durham District; 27th, Stockton-on-Tees.

September 3rd, Claremont Hall, London; 10th, Hall of Science, London; 17th, Hall of Science, London; 24th, Nottingham.

October 1st, Claremont Hall, London; 8th, Leeds; 15th, Halifax; 22nd, Manchester.

November 19th, Hall of Science, London; 26th, Claremont Hall, London.

CORRESPONDENTS.

ALL business communications to be addressed to the Publisher, 15, Harp Alley, Farringdon Street, E.C.

LITERARY communications to the Editor, Mr. G. W. Foote, No. 9, South Crescent, Bedford Square, London, W.C.

J. HENSON.—Thanks for your good wishes. We shall probably live to make the bigots repent.

J. H. BARKER.—Your case is typical, and the relief of mind you experience in leaving Christianity for Freethought is common to thousands.

H. L. B.—The pamphlet will doubtless prove useful. We shall show as much discretion as is consistent with courage.

J. HOLT.—Collecting lists sent. Thanks for the paper.

S. R.—Thanks for the cuttings. You may depend on our fighting hard for our personal and public liberty. Our defence shall be such that, whatever happens, Freethought shall not be shamed.

J. H. WHITHAM.—They may imprison us but they will not put down the *Freethinker*. We are glad to find the Freethought party rallying so well to the point of danger.

E. WILKS.—We may publish Mr. Waller's last article as a tract by and by, but for the present we must content ourselves with the eight *Freethinker* Tracts already on sale. As to our circulation, it has always gone on steadily increasing, and we have no doubt it will continue to do so. Your tract is well worth reading. We hope it will be extensively circulated.

FREETHINKER.—Thanks. Kindly send on the Guitau cartoon at once.

NOAH CLARK.—We are perfectly acquainted with Carlyle's works and don't need little sermons copied out from them for our spiritual improvement. Devote your paper and stamps to the nearest parson. We have plenty to do just now without acting as a receptacle for pious advice.

J. ROBINS.—Your "answer" is no answer at all. It is easy to reply to sceptical objections by alleging that the Bible never means what it says.

J. H. C.—We regret that we cannot suggest anything except the distribution of our tracts and conversation on the subject with as many people as possible.

C. C.—The policy of the "liberal" Christian papers is to burke the case. The *Christian World*, for instance, is utterly silent.

G. SHORS.—Every official of the kind looks for palm oil. We cannot help it.

G. H. WARBURTON.—Cuttings are always useful. Tyler will catch it hot in our next.

A. BLACK, in answer to Mr. Garner's criticism, informs us that the paragraph from Paine's "Age of Reason" was wrongly punctuated by the printer of the *Champion of the Faith*. In Mr. Black's opinion the passage is obscure as it appears in most editions, but, since writing his paper, he has discovered that in the original edition the insertion of another clause indicates the meaning. Mr. Black has pointed this out to Dr. McCann, and must be exonerated from any charge of misrepresentation.

F. M.—You are a little mistaken. Mr. Bradlaugh has never tried to exercise any control over the *Freethinker*, nor are we prone to brook interference with our work. Although the paper is removed from Stonecutter Street, Mr. Bradlaugh's relation so it is unaffected, for the simple reason that he never had any such relation. The *Freethinker* has been, is, and will be, absolutely under our editorial direction. We give praise and support were we think them due, not otherwise.

TO OUR READERS.

THE *Freethinker* did not appear last week, in consequence of the sudden break-down of our printing arrangements. We made almost superhuman exertions to retrieve the disaster, but without avail, although we got so far as to prevent the actual discontinuance of the paper by pulling enough copies for a legal issue. We have been obliged to

take a shop and to set up a printing-office of our own, in order to carry on our enterprise and keep our flag flying. All this has been done in a week, and in the face of tremendous obstacles. The counsel for the prosecution said in Court last week that the *Freethinker* was dead. Nothing of the sort. Like the founder of Christianity, it disappeared late one week and reappeared early the next.

SUGAR PLUMS.

WE have no illustration this week, but if our readers will only wait a little they will see all our old features recovered. It is impossible to restore everything at once, and as the *Freethinker* has to pass through many hands before it reaches the public, we are obliged for the moment to temper our valor with some discretion. We pledge ourselves, however, to defeat the bigots on every point, and we regard difficulties as only made to be overcome.

A STOKER on board one of her Majesty's ships of war tells us that he has been pushing the *Freethinker* about among his shipmates. They have a nice reading party on the fore-castle, and enjoy themselves in fine style.

EVEN in so fashionable a place as Cheltenham the attendance at churches and chapels is 56 per cent. less than it should be. Amen!

WE are very pleased to see the cause defended in the local press by friends at Poole. The clergy there, as elsewhere, want taking down a peg or two. They fancy themselves giants because they walk on stilts.

THE *Daily News*, in reference to our prosecution, says that "on the policy of such prosecutions there is scarcely any difference among sensible men." It also urges that "a religion which cannot maintain itself without the aid of the Secular arm is, in the opinion of those who invoke such assistance, founded on a rather uncertain basis."

THE North London Radical Reform Association has passed a resolution condemning Sir Henry Tyler's conduct, and calling on the Government to repeal the blasphemy laws.

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." 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 *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 *Scarborough Evening News* says that, whatever Sir Henry Tyler's motives may be, "there can be little question as to their character as viewed from the standpoint of honesty and gallantry."

THE *Times* of July 19th had a splendid article on our prosecution. It likened Sir Henry Tyler to "a child taking down an old blunderbuss which has long hung over the fire." It said that most people "have long ceased to believe that it is

right to punish men for their convictions." And of blasphemy prosecutions in general it declared that "they have on the whole done so little good hitherto that every new proceeding of the kind must be a cause of anxiety to thoughtful men."

ONE of the subscribers to our Defence Fund says that eighteen months ago he would have been afraid to touch the *Freethinker*, but now, entirely through that paper and Mr. Foote's "Bible Romances," he is a thorough convert to the Gospel of Free-thought, and is proud to add his mite to the fund.

HETERODOX NUTS FOR ORTHODOX TEETH.

No. V.—THE ATONEMENT.

1. THE Bible says "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins." Is it not blasphemy to teach that God can only be reconciled to us through the murder of his own son? Does it not seem strange that Christians should thank God that Jesus was murdered some 1800 years ago? Can any system be right which is based on such a gigantic wrong?

2. Is it not the most horrible blasphemy to teach that our Heavenly Father would only be reconciled to his erring children by or through the agonies of a crucified man? Would a human father be justified in punishing by a cruel death his innocent son for the faults of his brothers and sisters? If not, why do Christians ascribe such abominable conduct to the Almighty?

3. Is not the Christian atonement a grossly immoral one,—1st, because it glories in Jesus having (if their theory is true) deliberately courted murder at the hands of his countrymen; 2nd, because it exults in the treachery of Judas and the murder of Christ by the Jews, and their consequent eternal damnation; 3rd, because it exults in the *certain* damnation of Judas Iscariot and the Jews, and offers in return only a *possible* salvation?

4. If Jesus, by his death, paid the debt due from Adam's sin, what has our petty belief or disbelief to do with it? Besides, as we sinned in Adam whether we believe or not, ought we not in common fairness be saved whether we believe or not?

5. Why should God re-demand payment because we are unable to believe the atonement? What should we think of an earthly creditor who re-exacted payment because the debtor refused to believe that the debt had been paid for him by another?

6. As Jesus is said to have been "without sin," was it not unworthy the character of an all-loving Father to punish him for others' sins? Even supposing Jesus to have been willing to have suffered, how does this make a wrong into a right?

7. If A murder B, would it be just or proper to punish C for A's crime? Would it not be committing a second murder? How, then, can we believe that an all-good God punished Jesus for crimes he never committed?

8. If mankind can only be saved through belief in Jesus, what is to become of all those who lived before him? If they were or will be saved without belief, why cannot we? And why, on this theory, did Jesus come at all? Could he not have spared himself all his agonies, and thus have saved the souls of those Jews who were damned to secure our salvation?

9. Is not the Christian scheme of the atonement also unjust to myriads who now live who never will nor ever can hear of Christ's atonement? If all such can be saved without belief in Jesus, why cannot we?

10. If the heathen will be saved without belief in Jesus, do not missions to them do more harm than good by placing damnation in their way?

11. If Jesus really wished to convince and save the Jewish nation (and through it the world) why did he not appear *openly* after his alleged resurrection, and thus have removed all possibility of doubt as to his messiahship and godhead?

12. If Jesus came to save all, how is it that the large majority of mankind will be damned? Is the Devil so very powerful that he can defeat God's own plan for man's salvation? If the Deity is more powerful than the Devil, will he not overcome him in the end? How, then, can the doctrine of Eternal Torments be true?

13. Ought we not, on the Christian theory of the Atonement, be very much obliged both to the Devil and to Judas Iscariot for murdering Jesus Christ? If the Devil had not prompted

Judas, how could Judas have betrayed Jesus? And if the Jews had not murdered him, how would the atonement have been made? Do we not, then, really owe our salvation to the Devil, to Judas, and to the murder of Jesus by the Jews?

14. But ought we not rather pity than condemn Judas Iscariot for having lost his own soul in saving those of others? How could he help it? Was it not prophecied centuries beforehand that he should do so? If he had not done so, should we have had an atonement made for us? Why, then, was he damned? Besides, if Jesus knew Judas would betray him, why did he select him for a disciple? And why did he not try to dissuade him from such a shocking crime, by pointing out to him the awful nature of his intended crime?

15. But who was it that the Jews really murdered? Was it a God or a man? If it were God, as many Christian hymns assert, may we not fairly ask if God can die? Is it not blasphemy to talk of the "blood of God," as the authorised version in Acts xx., 28, does?

16. If it were a man whom the Jews murdered for our salvation, may we ask whether one man can possibly atone for the sins of a world? If no, where is the atonement? And if yes, why could not each man have atoned for his own sins, and thus have prevented the brutal murder of Jesus by the Jews?

17. When Jesus on the cross prayed to have his enemies forgiven, were they forgiven? Could a father refuse so simple a request of his dying son whom he had himself punished for others' faults? If his father did not forgive the enemies of his son, how can he expect us to forgive ours?

18. Is baptism a necessary adjunct to the atonement? If so, may we ask what possible connexion can exist between a drop of pump-water and man's eternal salvation or damnation? And what is to become of the myriads who never have been and never will be baptized?

19. What real benefit has Christ's death produced? Is not Satan still as powerful? Are not his followers more numerous than ever? Is not the road to heaven still narrow, and the people who tread it still few? Is not the road to hell still broad, and the people who follow it still many? In short, is not sin and wickedness still abundant? What, then, has been the practical value of Christ's atonement?

20. If belief in the atonement is necessary to salvation, what is to become of idiots and others who have not intellect sufficient to apprehend the scheme, much less believe in it? Would it be just to damn *them*? If they are saved without, does not this show that idiots are better off than sane men. If so, ought we not all go down on our knees and pray the Almighty to drive us stark staring mad in this world so that we may make sure of enjoying eternal bliss in the next?

J. E. GARNER.

THE SUPPRESSED SPEECH.

[In defiance of the statute, the Lord Mayor refused to hear Mr. Foote's protest against Tyler's prosecution. We print it in the *Freethinker*, so that it may reach a wider audience]:—

I reserve my defence, but I wish to offer a few observations on the prosecution.

Blasphemy Laws are of very ancient origin. They all sprang from ecclesiasticism, from the desire of the clergy to regulate the theology of the people. They were once numerous and minute. Lord Stanhope said, in 1789, that he had "undergone the drudgery of going through the whole statute-book, and found that there were no less than three hundred Acts in it upon religion." Most of these are unrepealed, and might be enforced by any judge who possessed sufficient inhumanity to rescue them from neglect.

The last trial for Blasphemy in England occurred at Bodmin in 1857, when a poor man, named Thomas Pooley, was sentenced to twenty-one months' imprisonment for chalking some silly words on a gate. But even then public opinion was outraged by such a cruel act and, chiefly through the efforts of a powerful committee in London, the miserable victim of bigotry was released after five months' incarceration in jail. John Stuart Mill denounced this instance of persecution in his *Essay on Liberty*, and Henry

Thomas Buckle, the great historian of Civilisation, stigmatised the prosecutors for having severely enforced a law "which had fallen into disuse, and was contrary to the spirit of the age."

Twenty-five years have elapsed, and now we witness a recrudescence of bigotry. I stand here charged with blasphemy. And at whose instigation? Sir Henry Tyler's—a gentleman who has long been a director of companies, and now sets up as a director of conscience. Incapable of winning an honorable renown, he seeks to gain a cheap notoriety by rekindling the waning spirit of persecution. I prophesy that he will not achieve success. He has already failed to suppress the Science Classes conducted by Dr. Aveling, Mrs. Besant, and the Misses Bradlaugh; and he will probably fail in his new effort, despite the aid of his Tea-Room Committee in the House of Commons.

If Blasphemy is an offence at all, except against Deity, who can easily avenge himself, it must be against Society. In that case the Government should take defensive or punitive action, and not leave the machinery of law to be set in motion by a common informer, who may be actuated by the meanest motives of vanity, avarice, or malice.

The impolicy of such prosecutions is obvious, and has frequently been acknowledged by Ministers of the Crown. When Mr. Freshfield, the member for Dover, asked the Home Secretary, in February last, whether any proceedings would be taken against the *Freethinker*, Sir William Harcourt replied in the negative. "I think," he said, "that it has been the view for a great many years of all persons responsible in these matters that more harm than advantage is produced to public morals by Government prosecutions in cases of this kind." And a few days later, in reply to Mr. Redmond, he said: "I stated the other day that I thought it not wise to proceed legally against such publications."

What, indeed, do the prosecutors hope or expect to gain? Freethought is no longer a weak, tentative, apologetic thing; it is strong, bold, and aggressive; and no law could now suppress it except one of extermination. Every breach made in its ranks by imprisonment would be instantly filled; and as punishment is not eternal on this side of death, the imprisoned man would some day return to his old place, fiercer than ever for the fight, and inflamed with an unappeasable hatred of the religion whose guardians prefer punishment to persuasion, and supplement the weakness of argument by the force of brutality.

Blasphemy is a very general offence if we take even the lenient definitions of Sir James Stephen in his "Digest of the Criminal Law." All who publicly advocate the disestablishment of the Church are guilty under one clause, and half the leading writers of our age are guilty under another. It is difficult to find a book by any eminent scientist or thinker which does not contain open or covert attacks on Christianity and Scripture, and the Archbishop of Canterbury has pathetically complained that it is dangerous to introduce high-class magazines to the family circle, because they are nearly sure to contain a large quantity of Scepticism. Why are these propagators of heresy never molested? Because it would be perilous to touch them. Prosecutions are always reserved for those who are unprotected by wealth and position. Heresy in expensive books for the upper classes is safe, but heresy in cheap publications for the people incurs a terrible danger. The one is flattered and conciliated, while the other is liable at any moment to be put on its defence in a criminal court, and is always at the mercy of any man who may choose to indulge his political animosity, his social enmity, or his private spite.

Blasphemy is entirely a matter of opinion. What is blasphemy in one country is piety in another. Progress tends to reduce it from a crime to an affair of taste. To deal with it in the bad spirit of old laws, which are only unrepealed because they have been treated as obsolete, is to outrage the conscience of civilisation, and to violate that liberty of the press which Bentham justly called "the foundation of all other liberties." If opinions are not forced on people's attention, if they are expressed in publications which are sold, which can be patronised or neglected, and which must be deliberately sought before they can be read; then, unless they contain incitements to crime, they are entitled to immunity from molestation, and to interfere with them is the height of gratuitous impertinence.

A NEW COMMENTARY.

A FRIEND recently found in the corner of a railway-carriage a packet of letters, all the envelopes being in the same handwriting, from the editors of various newspapers and journals. They were addressed to Miss Phœbe S—, B— Street, M—, who can have them on application. This young lady had evidently been perplexed with the following passage: "Jacob kissed Rachel, and he lifted up his voice and wept" (Genesis xxix., 11). She had evidently enclosed stamped envelopes for replies; and as one of them purports to be from the editor of the *Freethinker*, Mr. Foote is in a position to say that the correspondence is genuine. Here are samples of the replies:—

"When it was over he remembered he was her uncle, and the Prayer-book forbids such intercourse."—*Church Times*.

"If Rachel was a pretty girl and kept her face clean, we don't see what Jacob had to cry about."—*Daily Telegraph*.

"How do we know but that she slapped his face for taking so great a liberty?"—*Young Ladies' Journal*.

"Jacob wept and well he might."—*Judy*.

"We are under the impression that in hugging Rachel he tried to steal her brooch, but failed; and as he had not sneaked anything that day his feelings overcame him and he fairly blubbered."—*Freethinker*.

"He wept for joy, because it tasted so good."—*British Workwoman*.

"If Jacob had not been a very prudent man we could almost fancy Rachel calling for assistance, and on the appearance of the police, and on their refusal of his half-crown to say nothing about it, Jacob burst into tears."—*Police News*.

"Jacob must have been a big duffer. We feel thankful the army in our day are blest with more pluck. Hallelujah!"—*War Cry*.

"Jacob was a fair type of Moses kissing the girls until he made them cry. Cry for more, of course."—*Punch*.

"When Jacob lifted up his voice he missed his top note, and, like the big booby he was, he wept."—*Musical Times*.

"The fellow wept because the girl did not kiss him."—*Bow Bells*.

"The cause of Jacob's weeping was the refusal of Rachel to allow him to kiss her again."—*Girls' Own Paper*.

"Not yet having fallen in love with Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah, he wept because he had only Rachel to kiss."—*Sunday School Times*.

"Rachel was a heretic, and she endeavored to induce Jacob to remain with her instead of his going to confession. Hence he shed tears."—*United Ireland*.

"We cannot conceive why Jacob cried after kissing Rachel. It is the first instance of the kind we ever heard of. In our experience there is merely a 'shy look' on the part of the chap, followed by an attempt; then 'get away,' 'naughty,' on the part of the girl, a harmless collision of the lips, and all's over! Nothing more."—*The Milliner's Journal*.

"A noise in the edge startled Jacob and a blow on the nose from a fellow who was sweet on Rachel made his eyes water."—*Bell's Life*.

"When Jacob wept he was evidently trying to impose on Rachel's feelings; probably he wanted the loan of five bob"—*Pink 'Un*.

"Jacob wept because there was not time for another, and he regretted the time he had lost. 'Work while it is called day, for the night cometh when no man can work.'"—*Primitive Methodist*.

"Our humble opinion is that Jacob wept because he found that after all it was not half what it was cracked up to be; hence the disappointment."—*Christian Herald*.

"Jacob was under the impression that Rachel's was a natural color, and wept to find the paint come off."—*Fine Art Gazette*.

"We are sure and certain there is no such passage in the Bible."—*Shield of Faith*.

"We think there is a mistake in the translation; it was not his eyes but his lips that watered."—*Young Ladies' Chronicle*.

"Jacob had a good cause to cry, we think, because Rachel told him she'd tell her mamma on the following Sunday afternoon; and as Jacob was invited to tea, he was much afraid."—*Sunday Gazette*.

"He thought of her big brother."—*Sporting Life*.

There are many others; so if you think these of sufficient interest I will transcribe a further batch on another occasion.

R. FORDEE.

A CLERICAL PICTURE OF THE OLDEN TIME.

It is probably the experience of most of us that no class of society is so prone to paint the portraits of his fellow-creatures as our modern pulpiteers. They delight to seize upon what they consider the moral obliquities of some among us in order to heighten their illustrations of the saving tendencies of the Gospel. Given a subject which will admit of sufficient breadth of treatment, and freedom of fancy in the disposition of details, it may generally be calculated upon that the result produced transcends expectation. Commend me to your clerical portrait painter. His invariable habit of taking the most charitable view of the weaknesses of human nature is well known. The dark features are never unduly deepened, and the bright side never unnecessarily obscured. All is charitableness and full of the best spirit of humanitarianism—that is, when the object delineated happens to have a stupendous capacity for the absorption of theological fables.

At times, too, they can paint, with a tolerably free hand, "themselves as others see them." This holds good, perhaps, more of the extinct order of the theologian than his refining, conventional, never-inquire-too-curiously representative of to-day. In order to see this, and how clerical human nature is at one with the general ruck, would the docile flocks but open their eyes to it, scan the following extracts dashed off with a racy Rabelaisian vigor worthy of the great master himself:—

In the reign of James I. a book was published in 1602, entitled "A View of the State of the Clergy within the County of Essex, the substance whereof is ready to be proved at the King's Majesty's pleasure." The book first of all contains the names "of the diligent and sufficient preachers (94 in number) with their several livings and value." Then follow the names of "preachers" (21 in number) not further described, and after them of "preachers, some insufficient, some negligent" (48 in number). The next class (75 in number) is that of "ministers which be either non-residents, double-beneficed, or no preachers," to which are added five holders of "united benefices." The last class (106 in number), to which the greatest space is devoted, is that of "ministers which be scandalous, whereof many double-beneficed, many no preachers, and some non-resident." In each case the value of the living is mentioned, and the name of the incumbent in every class except the last. The reason for the omission will be obvious from the nature of the remarks, of which the following may serve as specimens:—One had "been lately a common stealer of deer with grey-hounds, and infamous for drunkenness and incontinency." Many were "notorious usurers, common gamesters, and ale-house haunters," and otherwise "infamous." Many also were "horrible swearers," and two had been indicted for common barratry. One had erected "a common bowling-place, which cost him £50;" another "when sitting as substitute for the archdeacon did enjoin a penance for whoredom, and after, in an ale-house, he and the registrar did discharge the said penance for 40s." A common charge was that the incumbent was a "dumb minister," or a "ridiculous preacher," or that he had been a seminary priest, or had obtained his preferment by simony. Some were said to be "common hunters," and one to "shoot daily in a piece at wild fowl." One was "an usual seller of books in markets, and carried oftentimes as a laborer the barrow in sea-wall works." One was "a common horse-leech and cow-leech, and thereby offensive, a very imperfect reader, and omitteth the hard names in reading, or else readeth them so absurdly that he moveth thereby much laughter." One had been "absent from his charge above a year, and carried a harlot away." A vicar who had not preached in his parish for thirty years did "much trouble a godly preacher hired there at the charge of the parish. His manner is most commonly to sleep in the sermon-time there, being in the view of the people, to the evil example of others. He is a notorious liar, a quarreller, a railer, a fighter, and contentious in law." One of the "ridiculous preachers" had recited these verses as part of his sermon:—

"Those that are so precise
That they will eat no Christmas pies,
It were good that the crows should pick out their eyes."

One of the common gamesters "so delighted therein that for want of company he playeth oftentimes both games himself, and chafes if either game go not to his mind, as if he were playing with another and had lost his money." One was "a haunter of lewd company, full of filthy behavior, a quarreller. He brake open the chest of the poor's evidence, defeating the poor of their rents. He beat his wife, an ancient woman, out of doors in shameful and evil sort, her hair about her ears being all in gore blood, with much other lewd behavior." His next neighbor in the list left "the cure unserved and the dead unburied," and played "the summoner and baillif in serving processes." The character of another is thus painted: "A negligent, railing, and ridiculous preacher, calling honest women in the pulpit whores and drabs, and tells fond tales there of the Devil in a red cap, etc. He is a notorious epicure, and spendeth most part of his time in keeping company and drinking excessively. He is openly infamous, for having together more wives than one, for common whoredom with a pedlar's daughter and a tinker's wife, and

others of a like sort." The vicar in another parish was even in worse repute. He was "a dumb minister, but taketh on him to preach sometimes, which he doth very ridiculously. He is a hinderer of other preachers which come thither, a common and most shameful drunkard, a shameful ribald, a great gamester at dice and other games, alluring others to play; a fearful blasphemer and swearer, a jester, and so is used. For his wicked and horrible vices he is called the Vicar of Hell, to which name he will as readily answer as another man will to his proper name."

It is possible to parallel these extracts with some of contemporary date from the records and discussions of our Church courts. There is no need, however, to enter into particulars, as instances will spring to the recollection of most persons who have been careful students in studying the signs of the times.

A. J. R.

"FREETHINKER" DEFENCE FUND.

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[A long list of subscriptions unavoidably stand over till next week.]

PROFANE JOKES.

A MISERLY PARSON who had amassed a considerable sum, was always in distress for a place to secure it in from thieves. At last he locked it up in a small casket, and then placed it in the church-box, with the superscription: "*The Lord is here*." Unfortunately, a short time after, some thieves broke into the church and ransacked every place, not even sparing the box. One of them, observing the casket, opened it, and finding the contents very much to his liking, took out the money, and wrote underneath the inscription the following words: "*HE is risen, and is here no more.*"

AN honest west country parson, who had rather too much frankness for his profession or his congregation, was asked to pray for rain. "To oblige you all, certainly I will, but its of no use while the wind remains in the same quarter."

WHEN Lord Thurlow was a young man, his brother, afterwards Bishop of Durham, had a small living in a mean village, situated in the most desolate and barren part of England. One day the divine was reading the account from the Bible, of the formation of the world; and when he came to that part which says, "And God saw all was good," Mr. Thurlow stopped him, protesting, if it was so, the Almighty must have had his thumb upon the part of the globe where they were then situated, and consequently did not see it, else he would not have made such an assertion.

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