

PROSECUTED FOR BLASPHEMY.

THE FREETHINKER.

EDITED BY G. W. FOOTE.

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"COMIC BIBLE" SKETCH.—XLV.



FISHING FOR FLATS.

And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.—MARK i., 17.

CHRIST THE BLASPHEMER

It is rather singular that Christianity, whose founder was put to death after being arraigned as a blasphemer, should be so fond of flinging that epithet at every man who dares to expose its dogmas and ridicule its pretensions. One would think that after the charge of the priests, the scene before Pilate, and the crucifixion on Calvary, the Christians would banish the word as an opprobrium. Yet they have employed it more than all the other religionists of the world; they have made the vile principle of persecution involved in it a constitutional law; and although the ferocity of their faith is controlled by the growing spirit of humanity, they still howl "blasphemer" at plain-spoken heretics; just as they did centuries ago, when their power was as unlimited as their brutality, when they burned Freethinkers at this stake, broke them to pieces on the wheel, tore them to shreds with the rack, or boiled them alive in oil, for the benefit of man and the greater glory of God.

However they may shirk the fact, these malignant zealots must be reminded that Jesus Christ was a blasphemer. Let them not say that he was only accused as such without being guilty; for as the crime is impossible, or, if possible, only to be judged by God himself, the accusation is every-

thing. Blasphemy is entirely a matter of opinion; it varies with time and place; but whenever a man is charged with it, we may be sure that he is in open antagonism to the established creed and its professional teachers.

Jesus Christ was in the same position as we are. He was not a learned rabbi, but a man of the people; not a courtly critic, but the sedition of the streets. And his enemies were the same as ours. The Scribes and Pharisees were the orthodox scholars and priests; and Jesus had set them against him by going, as we have, to the masses with ideas dangerous to priestcraft and privilege. It was "the chief priests and all the council" who sought for witness to put him to death, and they astutely fixed on blasphemy as the surest accusation.

—When the high priest got something to lay hold of he rent his clothes, and said there was no need of any further witness.

"Ye have heard the blasphemy; what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death. And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, . . . and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands.—MARK xiv., 64-5."

We all know the rest. These Jewish priests were sharp practitioners. The orthodoxy of Athens let Socrates live to seventy, but they got rid of Jesus Christ at thirty-three.

The Prophet of Nazareth had been called a blasphemer long before the tragic close of his career. We find the Jews saying "thou blasphemest" in John x., 36, and trying to stone him to death. He had evidently a bad reputation in that line. And it is remarkable that whenever the Jews uttered the word "blasphemy" they always wanted to do something vicious. It never expressed their love of God, but their hatred of somebody who differed from them and touched their prejudices to the quick.

It may, of course, be objected that Jesus Christ never ridiculed the priests. Quite true, but he denounced them. His utter incapacity for satire rendered this his only weapon of attack. No character was ever so deficient in humor; he often wept, but we never read that he smiled. It is not surprising, therefore, that he never satirised his enemies; but what he lacked in irony he certainly atoned for in invective. Listen to this fierce diatribe:—

"Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer; therefore ye shall receive greater damnation. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves Ye fools and blind Ye blind guides Ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?—MATTHEW xxiii, 15-33."

There's elegant invective for you! we yield the palm to Jesus in this game. But we rather think we have the advantage of him in sarcasm, and we think we have as much right to use one weapon as he had to use the other. Nay, we claim a right to use them both; and we shall not be frightened from our purpose by the fulminations of the pulpit or the terrors of the law.

We are quite aware that Pilate would not consent to the death of Jesus until the priests accused him of sedition;



blasphemy being a crime unknown to the wise Romans, and any such charge being esteemed by them as only the bitter wrangle of sects. Yet the fact is plain, that the charge of sodition was preferred in the last extremity, so that the victim might not escape. Blasphemy was the original charge, and it led to the death of the Nazarene. Are we not justified, then, in speaking of Christ the blasphemer? Have we not the right to taunt the Christians with hurling at us an epithet that struck Christ on the brow, and drove the nails into his hands and feet? Let them dread the verdict of history, and tremble lest they share the execration meted out to those who murdered the founder of their faith.

G. W. FOOTE.

THE BRIMSTONE BUSINESS.

WHETHER the one factor of fear lies at the foundation of all religion or not, certain it is that Christianity has found a powerful engine in the doctrine of everlasting torments. The fear of hell, as Burns felicitously terms it, is "the hangman's whip to laud the wretch in order." Not that it really does anything of the kind. Its influence, if any, is not upon the crime-hardened wretches for whom it might be supposed to be efficacious, but on tender hearts and timid consciences that, conscious of shortcomings, fear the dreadful day of doom. Few indeed of the preachers of fire and brimstone believe in it—at any rate for themselves; but it is thought to act as a useful bogey for other people, and to save them from the supposed wrath to come is a powerful stimulus to preaching salvation through the atoning blood of Jesus. Could this delusion of a material hell be uprooted the Church would lose one of its most powerful supports, and fanatic revivals, too often resulting in religious mania, would become things of the past. If there is no such hell as the Churches picture, the atonement becomes a futility and the incarnation an absurdity. If the only redemption a man needs is the cultivation of his own nature, God Almighty played but a sorry farce in being born of a virgin and dying to satisfy himself.

That those who refuse to exercise blind faith in unintelligible dogmas should be therefore threatened with eternal misery is sufficient in itself to beget a suspicion of the truth of doctrines so enforced. Surely if there is such a thing as blasphemy it is this: to attribute to God that he has sent *volens-volens* myriads of creatures into a world which to them is only a primrose path to the everlasting bonfire. This is indeed impiety. Bacon said, it is better to have no opinion at all of God than an unworthy one. Atheism, then, must certainly be preferable to the Christian Theism which believes in hell. What man or what monster would place his child in a burning lake of fire and brimstone for one single minute. Yet according to orthodox Christianity this is the doom the merciful ruler of the universe has reserved for the majority of his children. We are told that "many are called but few chosen; straight is the gate and narrow is the way leading to eternal life and few there be that find it, but wide is the gate and broad is the way leading to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. By the works of the law shall no man be justified: for whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." Baxter, in his well-known *Saints Rest*, distinctly asserts that God himself is the author of eternal torments.

The Christian doctrine of eternal hell makes God a fiend as contemptible as he is cruel. His punishments are absolutely purposeless, or designed only out of malevolence and revenge. They can have no remedial effect upon those who thus suffer for ever. God, in fact, owns the supremacy of Satan by making over the most souls to him as his to keep eternally. Christianity is a species of devil-worship. God the Father takes the place of the devils who need bloody sacrifices to propitiate them. For over a thousand years the Christian Church, which adopted the most savage pagan view of hell, held that the ransom of Christ was paid over to Satan in order that the souls of the elect might be remitted.

The Catholic Church taught and still teaches a hell of fire and brimstone, and it is difficult to see how other construction can be placed upon many passages in the New Testament. The author of the nightmare which fitly concludes God's holy revelation, tells in most literal fashion of this lake of fire where the smoke of their torment ascends

for ever. In the parable of Dives and Lazarus, the unfortunate rich man asks that Lazarus may "dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." In the explanation of parable of the tares, Jesus tells his prosaic disciples: The enemy that sowed them is the Devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this world." There we see the simile is used to illustrate hell; not hell used as a simile to illustrate something else. The early Christians undoubtedly believed in a literal Devil, angels, and end of the world, and with equal certainty in a literal hell. "How shall I admire, how laugh," exclaims the Christian Father Tertullian, when I behold so many magistrates who persecuted the name of the Lord, liquefying in fiercer fires than they ever kindled against the Christians."

In the ages of faith and superstition the brimstone business brought plentiful profit to the priests. Many were content to forego the goods of earth to escape the wrath to come. But with the spread of knowledge this trading upon the basest fears is on the decline. The Churches are getting ashamed of their material fire. It shows too well the savage and vindictive character of those who originated their faith. Hell is beginning to be thought not so very hot after all. Its temperature has cooled wonderfully of late. The furnaces are only stoked when the good tidings of damnation is preached to the poor. Satan is superannuated and only trotted out to frighten children and "the lower orders." The brimstone business will in time be as obsolete as candle-making.

And a good job too. The Christian doctrine of hell appeals only to the lowest and most brutal propensities of the human mind. It has a direct tendency to make men barbarous in their punishments, unjust in their judgments, and cruel and unforgiving in their lives. Duty must be founded not on fear but on love and self-respect. It has sufficient sanctions without the hope of heaven or fear of hell. Each man knows that every hour and minute of his life, by every thought, word and work, he is making the true heaven or hell of his own character, the consequences of which will descend not only upon himself, but on his children's children.

J. M. WHEELER.

THE GOSPEL OF THE HOLY GHOST, OR THE TRUE HISTORY OF JESUS, THE SON OF MARY AND ———?

THE following true and faithful history of Jesus has just been handed to me by the Holy Ghost for publication. This is true, as true as the Bible. If any wicked sceptic disbelieves it, I will not send him to hell—I would scorn to do such a mean trick—but I will prove by a miracle that "my record is true." I will even do this: Let a bishop or Tyler drink enough strychnine to kill him; and when he is dead, I will restore him to life. If Christians will not submit to so simple and safe a test, let them doubt as they will; I will not waste time in arguing with such idiotic people. The story I have to relate is so evidently penned by the Holy Ghost, its morals are so pure, its tone so serious and grand, its revelations so far beyond the reach of mere reason, so immensely transcending all that science, or even romance ever wrote, that any person with the least pretence to spiritual insight must at once acknowledge that it could not have been written by a mere man. Therefore, let all who value their credit for intelligence, and who do not wish to be regarded as lunatics, acknowledge at once that the following history is of divine inspiration.

The Holy Ghost told me as he handed over the manuscript that he supposed few would believe it. He had never been very successful since intelligence and science got abroad; but still he thought it his duty to do what he could. "At all events," said he, "Publish it. I give you carte blanche for what you shall give to the world and you may understand the ways of the world better than I, and I am bound to say I am delighted to have you as my editor and literary executor. This is my last work; and I wish you to render it as attractive as you can. A little embellishment, I presume, will not be amiss; and of course, you are at liberty to expand the miracles a little if you do not think them striking enough for popular taste. I am told that sensation is now the

order of the day, especially with the churches; so do not be over scrupulous."

I promised to do my best, and the Holy Ghost left. All this, reader, is *TRUE*!—as true, I am bound to say, as that Moses saw the western side of God; as true as that the walls of Jericho fell at the blast of ramshorns; as true as that Jesus came down from heaven; as true as that Paul was caught up to the third heaven; as true as that Tyler is honest or sensible. And thou knowest, thou sceptical reader, thou! that nothing can be truer than these.

If the wicked infidel wants further proof still that this gospel is true, be it known unto him that I once went up to the sixty-fifth heaven, and saw Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob there, carrying on their old tricks as upon earth. There I saw the beasts full of eyes before and behind; and one of them calved while I was there. In fact, there is a whole menagerie of curious beasts there now; and they are getting so numerous that they wished me to buy up a number for exportation. But it was not in my line. I was told that they made Jacob the head overseer of all the animals, with all the young beasts of a certain color that might be born as his wages. Jacob, true to his character, increased his own share artificially as he did when under Laban (Gen. xxx., 37). When caught he denied it; but truthful Peter gave evidence against him; and "immediately the cock crew." Then they sent Jacob for twenty years to hell; but the Lord was with him.

Thou foolish sceptic, dost thou now believe? If thou believest not me who have been to the sixty-fifth heaven, how canst thou believe Paul, who rose no higher than the third? Wilt thou compel me to boast yet further? Be it so. I will conquer thy unbelief. Once on a time, about three thousand years before I was born (John viii., 58) I was on tramp; and coming to a mountain that stood in my way, I bade it be gone, and it skipped away like a skyrocket, and I saw it no more. Where the mountain stood there remained a hole of immense size. Into that hole ran the river Jordan; and that hole is the Dead Sea; Dost thou now believe that I am inspired by the Holy Ghost? If not, I leave thee to thy hardness of heart. Go thy way. Read this new Gospel. And may it open thine eyes! Amen.

THE GOSPEL.

Now the birth of Jesus was on this wise. His mother Mary had been a nun; and her cousin Elizabeth had been one also. Now Elizabeth was gay, and her husband Zacharias was old and well-stricken in years. And, behold, an angel of the Lord, about twenty-five, who served the Lord day and night as a monk in a convent near her dwelling, came unto her by night, and prophesied that she should have a son.* And in process of time his prophecy was fulfilled.

Now it came to pass that for many days the husband of Elizabeth, even the aged Zacharias, who was not ignorant of the ways of the Lord's angels, was dumb, and spake not unto his wife either good or bad, for he perceived that she was too subtil for him. Nor yet did he open his mouth when her cousin Mary came to commune with her.

Now Mary, being young and well-favored, was betrothed unto a man named Joseph, by trade a carpenter. And, lo, he was good-natured and gentle, one that feared God and his espoused wife, believing all things, hoping all things. But when he perceived that Mary was as became her not, he was perplexed. Although he was aware that Gabriel, another angel of the Lord, who was also a monk, had visited her, saying, "All Hail, *beau ideal* of women! The Lord hath chosen thee to be his friend!" Mary not comprehending the salutation, the angel explained, and went his way.

Now it came to pass as Joseph was sore perplexed and in desperation, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him by night and pleasantly greeted him, and bade him be of good cheer† And the angel said, moreover, forasmuch as thou art poor, behold, the Lord hath sent thee one hundred pieces of silver to cheer thy heart withal. And Joseph was content, and took his espoused wife unto himself.

Now when Jesus was born, there came twenty-five venerable handmaidens of the Lord to commune with the young child and his mother, for he was filled with marvellous

* Using my discretion, I omit a few sentences here from the Holy Ghost's narrative which are scarcely fit for ears polite.

† Here again I am compelled to omit a few sentences from the Holy Ghost's narrative.

wisdom even before he was born, and could even speak "as never man spake" before he could suck; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise." Now the first words that Jesus uttered were these: "Bring hither those mine enemies, and slay them before me!" And Joseph, being astonished at the miracle, even took his axe, and slew fifty-thousand and three-score and ten of the old women, as it is written in the book of Samuel the prophet concerning the men of Beth-Shemesh.* And all that heard thereof were amazed, and gave glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and goodwill towards men. But when the king heard thereof he was wroth, and sought to kill Joseph and Mary and the young child. But Gabriel came to Joseph by night, saying, "Up! Why tarriest thou? Take the baby and his mother, and get thee into the land of Egypt, and dwell there till I send thee word; for the king seeks the young child's life."

Then Joseph arose and took the young child and Mary his mother, and fled to the land of Egypt; and there they remained until the death of the king, which was accelerated by Gabriel, who was even the king's confessor; and he gave unto him the sacrament, and the king was sick, and lay down upon his bed, and gave up the ghost.

Then did Gabriel send to Joseph, saying, "Up, return to thine own land, and bring the young child and his mother with thee, for thine enemy is dead. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

But, behold, or ever the message came Joseph was ready, knowing that the king was dead. For it came to pass that as the king gave up the ghost, even in that self-same moment, Jesus rose in his cradle and cried, "Return to thy own land, for thine enemy is dead!" And immediately he turned his cradle into an ass, ready saddled for the journey! And all that heard it did marvel beyond measure, saying, "Why should a child of so great power and wisdom flee from his enemies?" But all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, "Behold, I will confound the wisdom of the wise; and fools and folly shall be exalted!"

And when Jesus was about fifteen months old he went into the temple, even into the place where the scribes and elders and bishops, and all the Levites were diligently reading the word of the Lord, and religiously quarrelling about the meaning and interpretation thereof. And one said on this wise, and another on that; and there was no wisdom nor agreement amongst them, for the Lord had confounded them by giving a revelation which no man in heaven or earth could understand. And behold they did chide, and foam at the mouth, and gnash with their teeth, and curse every man his fellow because of the multitude of opinions that prevailed. Then Jesus stood in the midst of them and asked them questions, and gave them answers which astounded all those that heard him. And his fame spread abroad throughout the whole region and to every nation which is under heaven, insomuch that the newspapers reported nothing else but the sayings of Jesus for weeks thereafter.

Then did Mary and her husband suddenly rush into the temple, and when they found the child they took him away to their home; and Mary said, "Why hast thou done thus unto us?" Then answered Jesus and said unto her, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? I'll tell the old man of Gabriel's visits, if you don't mind." And Mary kept that saying, and treasured it up in her heart.

After these things Jesus went out to the river Jordan, where his cousin John was conducting Salvation Army work and dipping the people into the river to wash away their sins. And Jesus, feeling his need of cleansing, prevailed upon John to dip him. He stayed in the water too long and caught a violent chill. This brought on a fever and delirium; during which he raved about a spirit († it was not I, certainly) driving him into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil.

J. SYMES.

(To be continued.)

THERE are nearly four hundred deer parks in Britain exempted from taxation. We suggest that if the Egyptian business requires more money, Mr. Gladstone should begin with these haunts of idle luxury. Spare the working man, who already pays more than his fair share, and lay it thick on Lord Tomnoddy.

* 1 Samuel vi., 19.

† Parenthesis by the Holy Ghost.

ACID DROPS.

THE Archbishop of York preached a sermon at Bradford last week, in which he said that men of all schools admitted that Jesus was a faultless character. This is simply untrue. We advise Dr. Thomson to read Professor Newman's "Christianity Without Christ," where he will find some very strong remarks on the blind worship of Jesus. The Archbishop's sermon was full of unktion. Anybody would think he was going to give up his £10,000 a year to the suffering poor. But the proceedings ended in the usual way, with a collection in aid of a branch of the preaching business—the Additional Curates' Aid Society; and the Archbishop still sticks to his screw.

THE Liverpool magistrates have prohibited the performance of stage-plays on Ash Wednesday and during the whole of Passion Week. They evidently want to remind all gay Liverpudlians of the "agony and bloody sweat" of Christ, and they will probably make the poor actors, thrown out of work, undergo one themselves. Pious people have queer notions. They scarcely ever do anything disagreeable to themselves, but they are always devising misery for other people. We expect the next move of the Liverpool magistrates will be to prohibit meat on Fridays. The best move of all would be to prohibit fools from sitting on the magistrates' bench.

THE Rev. Dr. Potter has been holding forth on the High Church Confessional to large and excited audiences at Sheffield. He tells some beautiful and edifying stories of clergymen "examining" young ladies in the vestry with the door closed and the gas out, and instances several cases of priestly seduction and female ruin. The High Church party are mad with anger, and Dr. Potter has received threatening letters from some of them. What a happy family they are! Freethinkers occasionally quarrel, but these Christians are always at sixes and sevens, although they worship the Lamb and adore the God of Peace.

THE *Rock* says in regard to Dr. Potter's lectures, "the Sheffield men are doing their duty right nobly." Referring to the same matter the *Church Review* says: "Despite the fact that many females were present, the coarse suggestiveness and even rank obscenity of many of his remarks would have been such as to deprive the lessee of a metropolitan music-hall of his license."

THE missionaries are very anxious to open up trade in Egypt. Now that their land is strewn with the vulture-picked bones of thousands of slain men, and countless homes are desolate, these benighted Heathen are just in the proper frame of mind to appreciate the sweet Gospel of their invaders.

It appears that the native missionaries out in West Africa did their best to screen the two wretches who have just been sentenced to long terms of penal servitude for deliberately flogging a poor runaway girl raw, rubbing pepper in her wounds, and then roasting her to death in the sun. The whole gang of missionaries in the Onitsha district, if report be true, deserve to be sent straight to the hell they preach and illustrate. They seem in the habit of buying girls at ten and sixpence each, and then treating the poor creatures after the fashion of Abraham, David, and the Levite.

A RECENT work tells us that in Tonga "old persons of both sexes have from time immemorial been revered. Women have always been treated with the greatest respect." As in Fiji, prostitution was simply unknown; and the people loved "honor, justice, patriotism, friendship, meekness, modesty, and parental and filial affection." They were clearly in a very bad way. But Christians have taught them better. They now go in for lying, theft, prostitution, and murder. Who shall now say that savages cannot receive the Gospel light?

OPINIONS have as much to do with suicide as with the price of cast iron. But as half-witted Christians are always trying to make it appear that "infidelity" has a tendency to induce a man to cut his throat, drink poison, or dip his head in too much water, we sometimes note a few cases of the opposite kind. Last week it was foolishly said that Hiram Meakin's head had been turned by "infidel opinions," although he was a member of a Christian body. Well, this week one young woman was caught in the attempt to drown herself from one of the London bridges, and her explanation was that "God told her to do so." A young gentleman also was found dead in bed, with an empty bottle that had held cyanide of potassium by his side, and a pious letter to his sister, in which the name of God occurred no less than three times in six lines. What do the half-witted Christians aforesaid say to these cases? Their plan is to say *nothing*, and "let it slide."

Truth says that "the executioner's tariff in the fourteenth century was lately discovered in the archives of Darmstadt. For boiling a criminal in oil, the executioner received twenty-

four florins; if the wretch was burnt alive, the fee was fourteen florins; and ten for hanging. To break a man on the wheel cost six florins; the fee for the rack was five, and the same sum was charged for branding on the shoulder or forehead, or for cutting off the nose and ears." What a pity it is that Sir Henry Tyler did not live five centuries ago. He might have had infinitely more sport for his money in those good old days.

We sympathise with the ladies who are endeavoring to gain the suffrage for their sex, although there are a good many things of more immediate importance to them; but we can hardly understand why they charge the men who attend their meetings half-a-crown each, and perch them up in the gallery to boot. It strikes us as bad taste and bad policy. Slaves might obtain freedom by fighting for it, but women must persuade men before they can obtain their rights. We advise the ladies to read what Mill says on this matter in his "Subjection of Women."

WINTER is coming; summer's gone;
Fit subject for a dirge on;
And to the south—gay, warm Mentone—
Fly chilly birds and—Spurgeon.

A PIOUS lunatic (there are thousands at large) wrote to Mr. Spurgeon saying that it was revealed to him by God that he should preach from the Tabernacle pulpit. Mr. Spurgeon answered, "When it is revealed to me by God that you should, I will let you." A very sensible answer. But Mr. Spurgeon doesn't see that this is exactly what the Freethinker has been saying for generations. Thomas Paine justly observed that what is revelation to the first man is only hearsay to the second. If God had a message for anybody he would deliver it straight. Why should God tell you what he means for me? Mr. Spurgeon sees this at once, but he fails to perceive that it disposes of the whole question of revelation.

THE *Nineteenth Century* contains a defence of "Modern Miracles" from the pen of R. F. Clarke, of the society of Jesus. He claims that no Catholic miracles are authorised by the Pope as such without close investigation, but he forgets to mention that the canonisation of saints and the investigation into their miracles are usually made long after they are dead, and when, as with the alleged gospel miracles, there is no opportunity of cross-examining the witnesses. Mr. Clarke specially deals with the alleged miracles at Lourdes, and certainly relates some extraordinary cures there, which he believes were wrought through the agency of "God's Immaculate Mother" (the phrase is his own). Certainly the evidence of such modern miracles is vastly superior to that with which Protestants are satisfied for Bible miracles. This Jesuit advocate says: "Our witnesses are not the uneducated and unlearned, but skilled witnesses; we do not dig up our testimony from the records of an uncritical age, but we bring them out in the full light of this nineteenth century and we challenge our opponents to adduce any reasonable hypothesis which they can pretend, with any show of truth to substitute for our explanation of the phenomena." We doubt, however, if there is a single orthodox Protestant living who will think it worth his while to make a pilgrimage to Lourdes to satisfy himself whether God's Immaculate Mother has been out-doing the surgeon or not.

A RELIGIOUS census has been taken in Victoria. Those who return themselves as members of the Church of England number 299,542. There are 197,157 Roman Catholics. The Presbyterians muster 100,000, and the Methodists nearly as many. The Baptists are only 20,000, and the Independents 66. No less than 11,000 return themselves as Pagans, and 20 as of "no church or creed at present." Among the vast variety of sects, three return themselves as "L. S. D.," and we dare say they are the three honestest Trinitarians in Victoria.

THE servants of the Lord are always in trouble. Twelve months' imprisonment with hard labor has been awarded to Thomas Joshua Darkin, a Salvation Army officer at Colchester, for showing Mrs. Emily Thomas over the Army barracks. Mr. Darkin took the lady in the inner room and sought to initiate her into the mysteries of salvation grace. An unbelieving jury found him guilty of assault with intent. Who says the Army is not persecuted?

MAJOR CADMAN is said to be the boss hatchet-thrower of the Salvation Army. In a recent report he tells of a dumb person who praised God for the gifts of speech and Salvation. Here is another item from the same report:—So great was the slaughter at Sheffield, that a lot of men fell in heaps at the gates of mercy. In all, forty-eight were reckoned, and over forty for Sanctification. The Treasurer was carried up into the third heaven, and the Captain so filled with joy that, when in the ante-room, he stood upon his head, and his watch fell out of his pocket; but, on picking it up, it was going like a clock.—It is to be hoped the Treasurer came back from the third heaven and brought the cash safe in his pocket.

SPECIAL NOTICE.

MR. FOOTE lectures three times to-day (Sunday, Nov. 12th), in the Camden Hall, Camden Street, Liverpool:—Morning, at 11, "England's Fourfold Curse;" afternoon, at 3, "Buddha before Christ;" evening, at 7, "God and his Friends."

MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

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

December 3rd, Huddersfield; 10th, Bradford; and 17th, Grimsby; 31st, Sheffield.

January 7th (1883), Claremont Hall, London; 14th, Manchester; 21st, Hall of Science, London; 28th, Claremont Hall, London.

February 4th, Leeds.

March 18th and 25th, Hall of Science, London.

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RECEIVED WITH THANKS.—A. Clayton, Henry J. Hopkins, W. D., *Bible Plates* (South Shields), C. W., "The Langham Hall Pulpit."

N. TOWNSEND.—Your "original joke" is a friend of our childhood's days. We are always glad to receive good jokes either old or original. The unparalleled glory of appearing in prosecuted print should be sufficient reward.

J. RAYMOND.—The text of Pappus who, in his Synodicon to the Council of Nice, asserts that the inspired books jumped up on the altar while the spurious ones remained underneath, is found in the notes to W. Macc's Greek and English New Testament, p. 874; 1719. Pappus is too late to be an authority. His story, however, shows the superstition of his time.

E. P. informs J. Brotherton that the *Freethinker* is taken at the City News Rooms, 4 Ludgate Circus, E.C.

H. D.—We are pleased to hear that a "good Liberal" is selected as a candidate in opposition to pious Newdegate at the next election. Thanks for your good wishes in the struggle. We hope to win.

F. SUMMERSGILL.—Cuttings are always welcome, and every reader can help to make the *Freethinker* more interesting and useful by sending them. This journal has made many converts, and several of them show their gratitude, as you do, by taking several copies weekly to distribute among their friends. As for your defective education, the only cure is study. Persevere, and you will find it is better late than never.

E. NUNNLEY.—We have already sunk a good deal of money in our own Tracts and cannot for the present do anything further in that direction.

H. HOPKINS writes that his letter to the Rev. E. N. Willson was never answered at all. The reverend gentleman is evidently a queer fisher of men.

W. COSFORD.—We do not expect anybody to agree with us "on all points." It is enough that our general policy is approved. You may still fancy yourself a Christian, but you are evidently on the road to Freethought. In any case be true to yourself, and the issue is sure to be safe.

ANONYMOUS correspondents are once more warned that their missives go into the waste-paper basket unread.

D. GRIFFITH will be glad to meet Freethinkers at his residence, 226 Graham Road, Hackney, at 7 p.m., November 12th, to organise a Freethought society.

E. KEMP.—We remember you quite well, and are glad to hear that you are pushing the *Freethinker* about in Hastings. You may rely on *Progress* being as good as the *Liberal*; we intend to make it better. Thanks for all your good wishes.

W. SKINNER.—We are not aware of any lecturer at Claremont Hall who has recently been converted by the pious showman at the Grecian. Perhaps Mr. Cooper, the corresponding secretary of the North London Society, will answer your questions.

G. BROOKES.—We are obliged to decline your verses, although the sentiment is very good, as we have already a large overstock waiting insertion.

MR. FOOTE was unfortunately obliged to cancel his Heckmondwike and York engagements by telegram, in consequence of the legal proceedings on Monday in the Court of Queen's Bench. Mr. Foote very much regrets the mishap, and he trusts to see his friends in both places before long, unless the gaol doors stand in the way.

A. ANDREWS.—The Salvation Army are only doing in Folkestone what they do everywhere else. We sometimes think of joining them, so as to blaspheme to our heart's content without any danger.

J. GRAFF (Baltimore).—We have carried on your subscription to the end of 1883, and for the balance send you *Progress* for six months.

W. H. WOOD.—The *Freethinker* is complete without No. 30.

V. WARREN.—You may rely on our going ahead until we are stopped, and that will require something more than threats.

H. B.—Hardly suitable.

W. SNOWDEN asks us to announce that the recently formed Battersea Branch of the N. S. S., which already numbers twenty members, meets every Sunday evening at 7.30, at the "General Havelock," Battersea Park Road.

R. S. JOHNSON writes that there is a fine opening for a good Freethought lecturer at Northampton. A hall for Sunday lectures will probably be built soon.

SCRUTATOR.—Your last paragraph appeared in the *Freethinker* several months ago, and is curiously one of the passages included in our Indictment.

SUGAR PLUMS.

We have just had made a number of boards, with the name of the *Freethinker* at the top, and a space underneath for the weekly contents-sheet. Any newsagent can have one, for use outside his shop, by applying at our office, 28 Stonecutter Street.

OUR "Christmas Number" is making good progress. We hope to advertise its contents by the end of the month. It will probably be the best bit of fun in the market this year; an inexhaustible source of laughter; a certain antidote to too much beef and pudding; a bold defier of dyspepsia and all its terrors. It will set thousands of sides rolling, brighten up hundreds of dull faces, and travel round the world like a beam of light to all our foreign subscribers.

THE *Christian World* is coming out strong. In one of its leaders last week it says that "it is little short of madness, in an advocate of revelation in the present day, to stake his belief in Christianity upon the historical nature of what we call the inspired allegory of Eden. Had it occurred in any book except the Bible, it would have been acknowledged as allegorical at a glance, for talking animals belong, in all languages, to such literature."

THE *C. W.* evidently wants to retire from Eden without any damage to the faith, and it is certainly dexterous in its movements. "Inspired idiot" is a good phrase, but "inspired allegory" is almost better. There is only one difficulty in the phrase. What does it mean?

THE Rev. Francis Maude spoke rather plainly on the position of ministers of the Gospel last week. He said if he began life again he would certainly not be a parson. His bread would be better buttered as a butcher, or baker, or anything else. This scarcely applies to those who hold high offices in the State Established Church, but Mr. Maude gave a sufficient reason why clergyman, those who are affected by the law of supply and the demand, should be ill-paid. He remarked of some of his colleagues that they have good hearts but very little brains. That's it. Any fool does for a parson. The other professions increasingly draw off the intelligent and honest, leaving the signing of the thirty-nine Articles to those too feeble in intellect to perceive their absurdities, or too fraudulent to care what articles they sign.

A COPY of Mr. Foote's "Blasphemy No Crime" has been sent to every newspaper in England, and during the next week a copy will be sent to every newspaper in Scotland and Ireland. Our object is to furnish the press with information on the subject, together with reasons why the public should assist us in the coming struggle. We shall esteem it as a favor if our readers will send us any press notices of the pamphlet they may see. Many have already reached us. One of the most outspoken of these is the *Sheffield Look Out*. After saying that "to deny that the book is very logical and convincing would be mere affectation," it adds: "Rightly or wrongly, a number of citizens assert their right to speak as freely of Jehovah and Jesus as of the gods belonging to other religions; this class is large enough and good enough to deserve representation, and it cannot be truly represented by a legislature that opposes the freedom which it claims."

THE *Western Morning News* devotes a long paragraph to the pamphlet, in which it very dexterously presents some of the chief points without committing itself to an opinion. It does, however, say that Mr. Foote is "very angry." This is scarcely true; for while we are naturally fervent in pleading for freedom against persecution, we have no room for anger, as we are filled with the calmness of contempt.

"SALADIN" (of the *Secular Review*) reviewed "Blasphemy No Crime," last week, in a three-column article. His advice to everybody is "Buy it."

OUR readers can hardly aid our defence better than by circulating the pamphlet as widely as possible. One of our subscribers, a member of the North-West London Branch of the N. S. S., thinks that the best way of circulating it is to sell it in the street at a penny; and he offers to send £1 to defray the loss on 150 copies if a special wrapper is affixed for that edition. Probably the best plan would be for those of our

readers who can afford it, to purchase a number of copies for distribution, and as soon as the present edition is exhausted we might publish a cheaper edition in smaller type at a penny.

OUR readers should not forget the Petition for the Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. Sheets for obtaining signatures can be had of Mr. R. Forder, 35 Alderney Road, London, E., or at the *Freethinker* Office. We desire to let the authorities see that there is a wide public dissatisfaction with the latest attempt against freedom of speech.

THE *St. James's Gazette*, reviewing Dr. J. Martineau's "Study of Spinoza," says of the "great Freethinker": "An ordinary man would have been embittered for life by the harshness with which he was disowned by his kinsfolk and friends for daring to seek for truth in his own way; but Spinoza maintained to the last this serene and genial temper. Although his circumstances compelled him to live with the utmost frugality there is not a petulant word in his correspondence; and he declined the offer of a position that would have made him comparatively well off, because he feared that it might in some way limit his right to the free expression of his ideas."

AT THE QUEEN'S BENCH.

THE attraction of the Belt libel case, which was going on in the Exchequer Court, next door, apparently served little to diminish the number of persons who crowded the court in Westminster Hall on Monday morning to hear Mr. Bradlaugh plead, before Justices Field and Stephen, on a motion to quash the indictment for blasphemous libel against the *Freethinker*. Among the audience in court we noticed Moncure D. Conway, Esq., Mrs. Besant, and a number of persons well known for the interest they take in Freethought. Mr. Bradlaugh, who required the accommodation of a table of some size for the large array of law-books which he had brought with him, and which he supplemented with various volumes from the library of the court, spoke for about two hours. His argument necessarily involved many legal points, all of which the Justices concurred he was fully justified in raising, and in regard to each of which a number of authorities had to be cited.

The case has been fairly reported in the newspapers, and our readers will not desire us to enter into its legal technicalities. Sufficient to say that Mr. Bradlaugh sought to quash the indictment, or various counts thereof, under six points, affecting the indictment not being in the terms of the statute 9 and 10 William III., cap. 35: The paper being inaccurately described; the fiat being equivalent to a general warrant levelled at anybody; certain counts being added to the indictment which had been formally abandoned; and, the offences being separate, the desirability of separate indictments that he might have an opportunity of calling his co-defendants as witnesses for his defence. Upon all these points, except the last but one, the Court refused to rule. Justice Field, in giving judgment, laid it down that the statute of William III. was not an abrogation or limitation of the common law against blasphemy, but certain persons were struck at by it on account of certain particular denials. Blasphemy was against the peace as well as against the statute, and the indictment was good in common law. He held that a fiat was not of the nature of a warrant needing a name or names to be attached. The public prosecutor having only an *ex parte* statement, could only be bound to ascertain if it was proper to authorise a prosecution. Upon the point that certain counts withdrawn from before the magistrate had been re-added behind the defendants' back, he would grant the rule. Upon the last point, the right of Mr. Bradlaugh to call his co-defendants, the learned judge held that the offence of blasphemy being one that might be proved against all three of the defendants that was a matter to go to trial.

Justice Stephen remarked that in consequence of the great importance of the case, he would state his opinion instead of simply acquiescing with his learned brother. The laws relating to the punishment of blasphemy were very ancient. In the time of Edward IV. it was dealt with by a writ *de heretico comburendo*, an authority to punish by burning, which was only worked in 1677. In the time of Henry VIII. it was dealt with in the well known Act of the Six Articles, and still more clearly defined in the reign of Elizabeth. The earliest case under the common law was in the reign of Charles II. In the latter part of the 17th century, attempts were made to further make blasphemy and profaneness the subject of legislation, but failed until the 9th and 10th William III. By this statute certain things were not to be denied. The Trinity, either by saying each of the persons was not God, or that there were more gods than one—this part was repealed in the reign of George III. There remained that it was forbidden to deny that the Christian religion to be true, or that the Holy Scriptures were of divine authority. It was incredible that this should be taken as a statutory definition of blasphemy. In that case the profession of Atheism would not be within the terms of the Act. In point of fact, there had been no case in which the statute had ever been put in

force at all. Every indictment for blasphemy had been taken under the common law, and the only judgments were those falling in the course of common law. In regard to the other matters, his lordship expressed his concurrence with Justice Field. A rule *nisi* would be granted on the point in regard to the addition of counts.

The effect of this decision will probably be that after the matter of the additional counts has been argued the case will go before the Jury.

AT THE CHURCH.

ALL is true that you say of the building—
A great poem carven in stone,
Though I wish there were less idle gilding,
And that moderns would let well alone;
The music sounds weirdly and solemn,
There are dreams in the over-arched gloom,
There is marvellous grace in each column
Wreathed round with perpetual bloom;
But enough of each low bowing bonnet
And gleaming bald heads in a row,—
I am weary of looking upon it,
And the stars are without: let us go.

One may pay far too much for æsthetic,
And the sound of the priest's monotone
Is to me more than weird and pathetic
As the dark arches echo and moan.
I would rather be here, when the sunlight
Sheds glories on column and tomb,
Or alone when the cold drifts of moonlight
Awaken the life of the gloom.
But the breath from the hills here is sweeter,
More gentle and tender the light,
As we leave the epistle of Peter
To drink in the gospel of night.

Lo, there is the gleam of the city,
And here is the river below,
And the night drops its mantle of pity
O'er the foulness of each and the woe;
While the stars march so stately and slowly,
And the gold ebbs away in the west:—
Was the glare we have left half so holy,
Half so merciful to the oppressed?
Let them worship, each bowed man and woman,
All the pomp may be helpful and fine;
But for me the dear touch of the human,
The love that makes all things divine.

M.

"FREETHINKER" DEFENCE FUND.

A. F. S., £1; Veritas, 1s.; Freethinker, 2s.; E. Nobbs, 1s.; R. S. Johnson, 1s. London: H. H., 1s.; Pat, 6d.; W. H. N., 6d.; W. A. H., 6d.; Geef, 6d.; T. B., 6d.; S. S. B., 6d.; O. K., 6d.; No. 9, 6d.; No. 10, 6d.; E. Crouch, 1s. Mrs. Mensbier, 10s.; S. Bennett (Blaydon), 10s.; W. Cosford (2nd donation), 3d.; E. Leheup, 2s.; R. Leheup, 2s.; R. Hawe, 2s.; J. J. T., 2s.

GENERAL BOOTH sends to the *Christian* another urgent appeal for funds. He says his hands are tied by the financial straits into which his success has carried him. No doubt the gulls will shell out and relieve his embarrassment.

In his judgment relieving the Rev. Mr. Green from prison, Lord Penzance remarked: "It is no doubt a public misfortune that an educated man of stainless character should be cast into prison; but the law must be obeyed, and it would still be a greater public misfortune if the lawful orders of those who administered the law could be derided and set at nought with impunity." Some of these words are applicable to another case than that before Lord Penzance.

A WELL reported sermon by the Rev. E. White, has raised an interesting little question in the papers. The momentous matter is no less than this. "Did God die when Christ died?" On the one hand it is clearly blasphemy to assert that the Almighty could die, and on the other it is against Christian doctrine to suppose that any other than a God could make an atonement for sin, and this atonement necessitated the suffering and death on the cross. It's a very pretty little controversy as it stands, and we don't care a toss which way it is settled.

W A N T S.

Wanted, a Deity, kind and benevolent,
One who would rule with beneficent sway;
Not the old Bible God, vicious, malevolent,
Damning his creatures for ever and aye.

Wanted, a Savior; must be most respectable
(No crucifixion or wearing of thorns),
One who will right every wrong that's detectable,
Grasping them all like a bull by the horns.

Wanted, a Heaven; there'll be no admission to
Murderers, miscreants, Moses and Co.;
Joshua, David will ne'er get permission to
Enter. *Their* place is the region below.

Wanted, a Hell (but oh! not an eternal one)
Where their *just* punishment all may receive;
No sneaking out, like the ancient infernal one—
Just by affirming on oath you believe.

Wanted, a New Comprehensible History,
'Stead of the Holy Book: fountain of lies.
One without any pretension to mystery;
Solely a record of *facts* to comprise.

Wanted, a Creed, to convince all the sceptical,
Bringing them all to one orthodox fold;
Soothing the spirits of parsons dyspeptical;
Filling their pockets and coffers with gold.

Wanted at once, for the old ones are ricketty,
Doctrines and dogmas on which they can stand.
Science, advancing with urbane ubiquity,
Scarce leaves a rag of the old in their hand.

Wanted, Excuses with which they can vindicate
Wars of aggression for glutting their greed;
Also a glass that can faithfully indicate
Number of souls that are saved by their creed.

Wanted, some arguments—sound, irrefutable—
Showing the good that is wrought by the Church,
Placing the fact in domains indisputable;
Must be had quick or they're left in the lurch.

Wanted, to end the ridiculous scandal; to
Root out the rot so defiant to-day:
A thorough good besom, with long and strong handle, to
Sweep all the priests and their Bibles away.

D. EVANS.

FREETHOUGHT GLEANINGS.

THE GOSPELS.—No modern theologian, who is also a scholar, now considers any of the four gospels to be the work of its pretended author, or in fact to be by an apostle or the colleague of an apostle.—*Dr. D. F. Strauss*, "The Old Faith and the New," pp. 45-6.

SPIRITUALISM AND CHRISTIAN MIRACLES.—It is hard to understand—or would be hard were not flagrant incongruities so common—how the same individual can reject with scorn the statements of spiritualists, yet receive with faith the equally incredible statements which form part of their religious creed. Evidence offered by many witnesses, whose names are known, who have positively seen what they describe, who may be personally questioned, whose untruths, if any, may be detected, they do not even deem worthy of examination. Evidence offered by single witnesses, whose names are unknown or doubtful, who are beyond the reach of all inquiry, whose untruths, if any, there are no means of detecting, they believe even without examination. To assert that a lady floats in the air is ridiculous; to assert that a man walked on the water is quite credible. To believe that spirits return is a sign of folly; to believe that after actual death human beings were restored to life is rational religion.—*Viscount Amberley*, *Fortnightly Review*, January, 1874.

A RELIGION FOR A FEW.—But there is one moral contradiction inseparable from every form of Christianity which no ingenuity can resolve, and no sophistry explain away. It is, that so precious a gift, bestowed on a few, should have been withheld from the many; that countless millions of human beings should have been allowed to live and die, to sin and suffer, without the one thing needful, the divine remedy for sin and suffering, which it would have cost the Divine Giver as little to have vouchsafed to all, as to have bestowed by special grace on a favored minority. Add to this that the divine message, assuming it to be such, has been authenticated by credentials so insufficient, that they fail to convince a large proportion of the strongest and most cultivated minds, and the tendency to disbelieve them appears to grow with the growth of scientific knowledge and critical discrimination. He who can believe

these to be the intentional short-comings of a perfectly good Being, must impose silence on every prompting of the sense of goodness and justice as received among men.—*John Stuart Mill*, "Three Essays on Religion," p. 115; 1874.

PROFANE JOKES.

PARSON: What is a miracle? *Boy*: Dunno. *Parson*: If the sun were to shine in the middle of the night, what would you say it was? *Boy*: The moon. *Parson*: But if you were told it was not the moon, what would you say it was then? *Boy*: A lie. *Parson*: I don't tell lies. Suppose I told you it was the sun, what would you say then? *Boy*: That yer was screwed.

A GENTLEMAN, coming from New York lately, was a fellow-passenger with a Yankee, who never by any chance, except when he was eating or sleeping, had a cigar out of his mouth. "I have seen a good many smokers," said the gentleman to this individual, "but I never saw such an incurable chimney as you are." "Yes," was the reply, "I am fond of my Havana; I can't live without my Havana, and I have left instructions that one is to be put into my coffin when I die." "And," interjected another Yankee of the party, "I guess you won't have to wait long for a light, anyhow."

A REVEREND of a kirk, not 100 miles from the Tron kirk, Edinburgh, was in pursuit of a new hat. He stepped into a local hatter's shop—the hatter a member of his own congregation—not the well-known Freethought hatter in Nicholson Street. After pulling and trying all the hats in the shop the reverend could not get one to fit. Ultimately he expressed his anger and said, "By God! what a hatter's shop; I can't get a hat to fit me." "What!" says the hatter, "A minister o' the Gospel takin' God's name in vain." "Oh!" says the reverend, "If you come to the kirk on Sunday you can hear me repeat that word three times." "If you do," says the hatter, "I will make you a new hat for nothing, and warrant it to fit." The next Sunday the hatter got quietly in the corner of a pew listening to every word. At last the Minister o' the Gospel got his eye on the hatter and began thus: "By God we eat; by God we drink; and by God we live." The hatter shouted in breathless excitement, "And by God I've lost my hat."

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