

PROSECUTED FOR BLASPHEMY.

THE FREETHINKER.

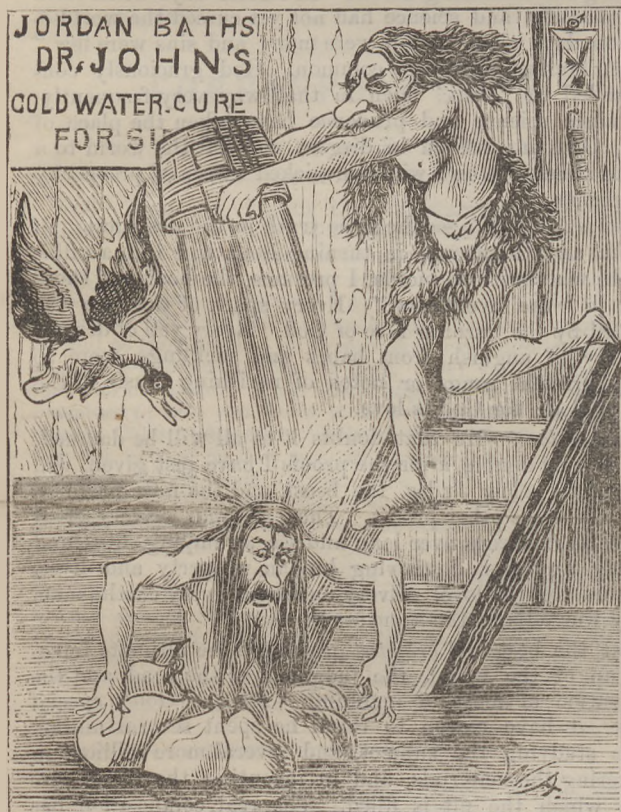
EDITED BY G. W. FOOTE.

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DECEMBER 3, 1882.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]

"COMIC BIBLE" SKETCHES.—XLVIII.



AT THE JORDAN BATHS:

And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptised of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him.—MARK I., 9, 10.

ON RIDICULE.

GOLDSMITH said that there were two classes of people who dread ridicule—priests and fools. They cry out that it is no argument, but they know it is. It has been found the most potent form of argument. Euclid used it in his immortal Geometry; for what else is the *reductio ad absurdum* which he sometimes employs? Elijah used it against the priests of Baal. The Christian Fathers found it effective against the pagan superstitions, and in turn it was adopted as the best weapon of attack on them by Lucian and Celsus. Ridicule has been used by Bruno, Erasmus, Luther, Rabelais, Swift, and Voltaire, by nearly all the great emancipators of the human mind.

All these men used it for a serious purpose. They were not comedians who amused the public for pence. They wielded ridicule as a keen rapier, more swift and fatal than the heaviest battle axe. Terrible as was the levin-brand of their denunciation, it was less dreaded than the Greek fire of their sarcasm. I repeat that they were men of serious aims, and indeed how could they have been otherwise? All true and lasting wit is founded on a basis of seriousness; or else, as Heine said, it is nothing but a sneeze of the

reason. Hood felt the same thing when he proposed for his epitaph: "Here lies one who made more puns, and spat more blood, than any other man of his time."

Buckle well says, in his fine vindication of Voltaire, that he "used ridicule, not as the test of truth, but as the scourge of folly." And he adds:—

"His irony, his wit, his pungent and telling sarcasms, produced more effect than the gravest arguments could have done; and there can be no doubt that he was fully justified in using those great resources with which nature had endowed him, since by their aid he advanced the interests of truth, and relieved men from some of their most inveterate prejudices."

Victor Hugo puts it much better in his grandiose way, when he says of Voltaire that "he was irony incarnate for the salvation of mankind."

Voltaire's opponents, as Buckle points out, had a foolish reverence for antiquity, and they were impervious to reason. To compare great things with small, our opponents are of the same character. Grave argument is lost upon them; it runs off them like water from a duck. When we approach the mysteries of their faith in a spirit of reverence, we yield them half the battle. We must concede them nothing. What they call reverence is simply pig-headed prejudice. It must be stripped away from the subject, and if argument will not remove the veil, ridicule will. Away with the insane notion that absurdity is reverend because it is ancient! If it is thousands of years old, treat it exactly as if it were told for the first time to-day. Science recognises nothing in space and time to invalidate the laws of nature. They prevailed in the past as well as in the present, and in Jerusalem as well as in London. That is how Science regards everything; and at bottom Science and common-sense are one and the same.

Professor Huxley, in his admirable little book on Hume, after pointing out the improbability of centaurs, says that judged by the canons of science all "miracles" are centaurs. He also considers what would happen if he were told by the greatest anatomist of the age that he had seen a centaur. He admits that the weight of such authority would stagger him, but it would scarcely make him believe. "I could get no further," says Huxley, "than a suspension of judgment."

Now I venture to say that if Johannes Müller had told Huxley any such thing, he would have at once concluded that the great anatomist was joking or suffering from hallucination. As a matter of fact trained investigators do not see these incredible monstrosities, and Huxley's hypothetical case goes far beyond every attested miracle. But I do say that if Johannes Müller, or anyone else, alleged that he had seen a centaur, Huxley would never think of investigating the absurdity.

Yet the allegation of a great anatomist on such a matter is infinitely more plausible than any miraculous story of the Christian religion. The "centaurs" of faith were seen centuries ago by superstitious people; and what is more, the relation of them was never made by the witnesses, but always by other people, who generally lived a few generations at least after the time.

What on earth are we to do with people who believe in "centaurs" on such evidence, who make laws to protect their superstition, and appoint priests at the public cost to teach the "centaur" science? The way to answer this question is to ask another. How should we treat people

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who believed that centaurs could be seen now? Why, of course, we should laugh at them. And that is how we should treat people who believe that men-horses ever existed at all.

Does anybody ask that I shall seriously discuss whether an old woman with a divining rod can detect hidden treasures; whether Mr. Home floated in the air or Mrs. Guppy sailed from house to house; whether cripples are cured at Lourdes or all manner of diseases at Winifred's Well? Must I patiently reason with a man who tells me that he saw water turned into wine, or a few loaves and fishes turned into a feast for multitudes, or dead men rise up from their graves? Surely not. I do what every sensible man does. I recognise no obligation to reason with such hallucinate mortals; and if they pester me I scare them away with ridicule.

So with the past. Its delusions are no more entitled to respect than those of to-day. Jesus Christ as a miracle-worker is just as absurd as any modern pretender. Whether in the Bible, the Koran, the Arabian Nights, Monte Christo, or Baron Munchausen, a tremendous "walker" is the fit subject of a good laugh. And Freethinkers mean to enjoy their laugh, as some consolation for the wickedness of superstition. The Christian faith is such that it makes us laugh or cry. Are we wrong in preferring to laugh?

There is an old story of a man who was plagued by the Devil. The fiend was always dropping in at inconvenient times, and making the poor fellow's life a hell on earth. He sprinkled holy water on the floor, but by-and-by the "old un" hopped about successfully on the dry spots. He flung things at him, but all in vain. At last he resolved on desperate measures. He plucked up his courage, looked the Devil straight in the face, and laughed at him. That ended the battle. The Devil could not stand laughter. He fled that moment and never returned.

Superstition is the Devil. Treat him to a hearty wholesome laugh. It is the surest exorcism, and you will find laughter medicinal for mind and body too. Ridicule, and again ridicule, and ever ridicule!

G. W. FOOTE.

THE ATHEISTIC PULPIT.

[SECOND SERIES.]

I

GOD IS LOVE.

THIS truth is to be received with reverence, because divinely inspired. God says this about himself. It would be presumption if any one else were to speak so of himself; but God is God, and man is man. And what might be highly improper in man's case might be proper in God's; what might be ridiculous in a man might be the height of propriety and good sense in God; what might show stupid conceit in a man might exhibit the greatest humility in God.

God is love.—His own book, the Bible, shows it on every page, and in every verse, and in every line. When he made man and left him naked, it was out of love. When he permitted the serpent to tempt the first pair, it was love to them that prompted him. When he declined to expose the tempter and warn Adam and Eve not to be deceived by his wiles, it was from pure love to them. When God arranged that all the children of the guilty pair should be "born in sin and shapen in iniquity," it was all in love. When he allowed Cain to kill Abel, love incited him. Had he loved them less, he might have prevented the crime, and thus poor mortals might never have learnt to kill each other! What a horrible thought! What could we have done without warriors and other cut-throats, inquisitors, and hangmen? Learn, my reader, to see the hand of a loving God in that mysterious transaction known as Cain braining Abel!

God is love.—His treatment of the world in Noah's day shows that. In his infinite goodness he drowned all mankind except eight persons; and, out of mercy, spared the progenitors of all beasts of prey, serpents, vermin, parasites, and nuisances generally. He drowned all the land animals, except the few in the Ark; but he drowned no fish or sea mammals, for they had not offended him, it seems. Had they done so, no doubt he would have shown his love by lighting a few volcanoes under the ocean, and so boiled them all in their own brine. At the time of the flood no doubt

many people were thirsty, as many have been since; and thousands of babies were crying for the breast. God, in his infinite love and mercy, gave them more water than they could drink; enough to float them in it, and it is worthy of remark, as showing how thoroughly divine love does its work, that none of those antediluvians have ever been known to complain from that day to this. This shows that God's love is perfectly satisfying.

God is love.—This is shown further in the life of Abraham, who was smitten by a famine and had to migrate to Egypt for food. Indeed, few things more fully show the love of God than famines. It is one of the most amusing scenes in the world to see a few millions of men, women, and children dying in agony, because God has left them without food. Of course he does it for his own amusement; but we must be very hard-hearted not to join him in the fun. I am aware that many sons of Belial, when they know of a famine being on, send money and provisions to those who suffer from it; but such conduct is exceedingly wicked and evil in the sight of God; for it tends to spoil his amusement, to stop the full flow of his superabundant love, and to spoil and pamper those whom he is training for something better. In former days when faith was plentiful and science had not yet cursed the world—in those days when "saints were many and sins were few"—then famines were very common. God graciously condescended to "visit" men in that way very frequently. But since science and prudence have taken the place of faith, God has retired in disgust and left the world to a great extent to its own wild and wicked career of prosperity and plenty.

God is love.—We see the same truth in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, in turning Lot's wife into a pillar of salt, wherewith to pickle, I presume, the bodies of those slain in "the overthrow." Every spark of that fire was kindled by the burning love of God. Every yell of despair and cry of anguish from babes and sucklings, were so many grateful songs or notes of ravishing music in the ears of God; for God is love.

God is love.—He that doubts it at all will be damned. But he who doubts, after the proofs I have just given, will be damned below Judas, the beast, and the false prophet. Still, there are other proofs. They abound. Every great storm, as it sweeps over land and sea, swamping ships, and tearing up trees, destroying human property and lives, tells us God is love. Every epidemic, every earthquake, every war tells us the same story.

But the best and *brightest* proofs are the ultimate burning up of the world, the judgment of the dead, and the damnation of most of mankind. Hell is God's special work. I have reason to think he spent several million years studying the subject, and several more millions in gathering the materials, and in inventing the Greek fire with which the pit is filled. The real composition has never yet been made known. In fact, the world is put on the wrong track by the Bible calling it "brimstone and fire." Our chemists have never yet analysed it. But we may be sure the ingredients are unknown, for the fire is unquenchable, as no other fire is. This is God's crowning workmanship! Unquenchable fire! If we could discover the elements used, we might have no coal bills to pay. But, alas! we must die to know what they are. Never mind! We know that they redound to the glory of God. That is enough. Every flame of fire in Hell flashes, "God is love." Every yell and groan and cry declare the same. And if Hell-fire does not satisfy my readers that God is love, I may as well close my sermon, for I am appealing to hearts of stone. Verily, he that doubteth shall be saved from Christian humiliation; he that believeth shall become a laughing-stock. Amen.

JOS. SYMES.

RECENTLY an old darkey was overheard praying over a bag of corn he had just stolen in this wise: "Oh, Lordy God, I'se jes' been and stole a bushel of corn from dat mean man, John Williams' Patch, d— him, an' I axes your pardon. He's got a plenty, an' so has I, but he won't pay me for my work, so good Lord overlook dis little transgress and keep dem from finding it out, for I wants to steal some more, and when I goes to steal help me to get something nice, like you did dem children of Israhim, when you stole them from de bondage of Egyptium, and I'll be mighty glad. And, oh, Lordy God, if dey find out dat I stole dis corn help me to prove dat Tom Connally, dat black rascal, stole it to me, for Christ's sake. Amen."

DR. AVELING'S RETURN.

THE London School Board elections have left things pretty much as before. One regrettable circumstance is that only a fourth of the electors took the trouble to vote. But there is one cause of satisfaction to Freethinkers. Dr. E. B. Aveling has been returned for Westminster. We congratulate him on his great public success, which is a victory for our general cause. It is true that he was not elected *because* he is Atheist, but he was elected *in spite* of his being an Atheist. His return is a plain answer to Sir Henry Tyler; and let us hope that twelve jurymen at Westminster will by-and-by give another answer as plain to this modern crusader. Dr. Aveling is eminently qualified to sit on the London School Board, and we believe he will achieve distinction there. When the next elections come, we must run a candidate in every division. Freethinking Radicals are a real force now, and instead of giving their strength to other parties, they should run their own men. Even if they are not too lucky at the outset, Dr. Aveling's return for such a Tory division as Westminster shows that they will win some successes; and if they persevere they will find that victory comes to those who know how to work and wait.

G. W. POOTE.

CORRESPONDENCE.

"THE PROMISE OF MAY."
TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR.—With you, I think that the Marquis of Queensberry has bungled in this little Queensberry Tennysonian episode; we only differ in regard to the manner in which he has bungled. Can I convert you to my way of thinking? Now, although a bird is in some instances a knowing, cunning kind of being, no bird is what we call a moral being. Tennyson knows this, as well as the fact that no Freethinker ever pointed to a bird as a *guide* in moral actions for man. Ah! you exclaim, what then can he mean? Well, now I hope you will not consider it blasphemy; but you know it is written, that a certain man named Christ once said, "Behold the fowls of the air, they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not then much better than they." Obviously, this man Christ intended that those he addressed should be impressed with the idea that they were not morally bound to make provision for their own sustenance. Tennyson, knowing this, and knowing its immorality, I think originally intended to parody it in the following manner; but subsequently determined to do it secretly, in the figure of Edgar, viz:—"Behold the fowls of the air, they mate, they do not marry, yet your heavenly Father, *who is the source of morality,* condemneth them not: why then should you marry?" Kindly say if you are converted. Yours truly.

JOHN BAINBRIDGE.

"FREETHINKER" DEFENCE FUND.—A. Iszatt, 6d; W. Malcom, 1s; G. Sawyer, 1s; Found in Hyde Park, 1s.; — Roberts, 2s.; W. Harrison, 6d.; W. Braddock, 1s. Per T. Bates, *New Harbro'*: C. B. Barnsley, 1s.; F. Styles, 6d.; C. Kilsby, 3d.; W. Spriggs, 1s.; J. Clark, 3d.; H. Barnsley, 6d.; H. Knighton, 6d.; F. Charlton, 3d.; F. Limson, 6d.; G. Hartsonne, 6d.; G. Hodson, 6d.

MAHMOOD THE IMAGE-BREAKER.

OLD events have modern meanings; only that survives
Of past history which finds kindred in all hearts and lives.

Mahmood once, the idol-breaker, spreader of the Faith,
Was at Sumnat tempted sorely, as the legend saith.

In the great pagoda's centre, monstrous and abhorred,
Granite on a throne of granite, sat the temple's lord.

Mahmood paused a moment, silenced by the silent face
That, with eyes of stone unwavering, awed the ancient place.

Then the Brahmins knelt before him, by his doubt made bold,
Pledging for their idol's ransom countless gems and gold.

Gold was yellow dirt to Mahmood, but of precious use,
Since from it the roots of power suck a potent juice.

"Were you stone alone in question, this would please me
well,"

Mahmood said: "but, with the block there, I my truth must
sell.

"Wealth and rule slip down with fortune, as her wheel turns
round;

He who keeps his faith, he only cannot be discrowned.

"Little were a change of station, loss of life or crown,
But the wreck were past retrieving if the Man fell down."

So his iron mace he lifted, smote with might and main,
And the idol, on the pavement tumbling, burst in twain.

Luck obeys the downright striker; from the hollow core,
Fifty times the Brahmins' offer deluged all the floor.

[James Russell Lowell.]

ACID DROPS.

THE Constitutional Press Association is being liquidated. It was started with the object of providing the people with Conservative reading, and from the outset it seems to have been run by a few shady Democrats. Its one purchase appears to have been the *Evening News*, a halfpenny paper which is notorious for scurrilous attacks on every Liberal politician and squabbles in the editorial office.

ONE of the most amusing features of this halfpenny organ of wealth and blue blood is its "Paris letter," which is always behind date in its news, and might easily be written by anybody in London who reads the French papers. One evening last week it told the British public that Paris was very much interested in the revival of Victor Hugo's "Le Roi s'Amuse," and it indulged in some enigmatical remarks on the probable fate of the play. Well, the *morning* papers of the *very same day* contained a full account of the production and reception of the piece at the Theatre Francais. The Conservatives were always a little slow.

THE "Paris correspondent" of the *Evening News* is wroth with the Paris Radicals who "while they object to kings, make gods of their own, before whom they bow down in the most servile manner." That is, while they refuse to venerate a man because of the accident of his birth, they actually venerate a man for his genius and character. How absurd to be sure!

THE *Christian World* of last week had a rather gushing article on the review of the troops by the Queen. The writer had evidently been delighted with the spectacle, and was trying to rein in his pen, as it would not do for the *Christian World* to beat the *Telegraph* in that line of business. Immediately after this article came "Dean Bradley on Job," which would have been more in keeping if it had been "Dean Bradley on the Job."

THE Christian Evidence Society has lost a good friend in the Earl of Harrowby. Its gradually diminishing exchequer can ill afford to lose his big subscription. The C. E. S. must raise the wind somehow, or it will soon have a couple of starving secretaries.

THE Jewish rabbis in Germany have petitioned the government to let them use the prefix of "reverend." We believe in free trade in these matters. Let every man style himself reverend, worshipful, God-Almightyish, or anything else, according to his choice.

WHAT an awful quantity of humbug Spurgeon does put into his letters! He's got the gout bad, and whenever an acute attack lays him up, he shuffles off to Mentone. He's there now, and we don't blame him. But why does he write to his congregation in this canting fashion?—"God has been very merciful to me on my journey hither. I have for some time felt jaded and worn, but here I have laid aside all care, and I feel that the refreshment is bringing me back tone and voice." Spurgeon knows very well that the change in his health is entirely due to natural causes. If not, why go to Mentone? If the Lord works the change, he can do it as easily in England as in France. We suspect that Spurgeon, who is an excellent business man, puts "shop" into his letters in order to keep the pot boiling.

By the way, gout isn't a poor man's disease. Jesus Christ and all the apostles never had a twinge between them. We'll bet Spurgeon ten to one on that.

THE religious journals are parading the statement that in the envelope containing Garibaldi's will there was the motto in English, "Overcome evil with good." These words were spoken by Buddha five hundred years before Jesus Christ was born.

WE referred the other day to the opening of Bethshan Hospital for the treatment of disease on the faith system. This week we find some wonderful cures recorded. One is the case of a deaf man who got "better in one instant." That's quick, if you like. But how was it done? That's the question. Our readers will see in our "Christmas Number" how J. C. cured the deaf. It's worth seeing.

THEY have invented a few new diseases at the Bethshan establishment. For instance, one of the announcements runs "Asthma, Bronchitis and Infidelity cured." We shall hear next of "Measles, Croup and Methodism," "Typhus, Small-Pox and Socinianism," "Scarletina, Wooden Legs, and Romanism," and so on, according to the sweet charitable Protestant style.

"WHAT a country heaven is!" says Talmage. We'll subscribe any day towards the expenses of his passage.

BAXTER, of the *Christian Herald*, isn't going to let Booth have all the game. He's running a Blue Ribbon Gospel Army, and invites donations to keep it going at the rate of £200 a week. He evidently thinks it best to have a heap of girls as officers, and advertises for them at fourteen shillings a week wholesale. It's a paying game, no doubt. Baxter's father was a bit cracked, but he had a keen eye for the main chance; and the son seems to take after the old man.

THE New-Yorkers blew up Hell-Gate some years ago, and Spurgeon now calls on the British to "cannonade the gate of Heaven." They won't leave a blessed bit of theological furniture if they go on in this way.

AT one of the recent Glasgow meetings the Rev. Jas. Scott spoke of "the open-mouthed sceptics he met so often in America." No wonder Jemmy Scott always saw them in that condition; for people generally open their mouths as well as their eyes wide when they are astonished; and what is more astonishing than a talking jackass?

TALKING about open mouths, we saw a fine specimen opposite the Hall of Science last Sunday week. There was the usual howling crowd at the corner singing "O Jehovah." The leader reserved himself especially for that catchword, which the reader will find on trial requires a considerable distension of the jaws; and when the earnest fellow got his mouth well open it beat all we ever saw. It couldn't have been less than nine inches by six.

REFERRING to the "Crimes of Preachers" mentioned in our last week's issue, a contributor to the Halifax *Mayflower* naively says: "For my part, I cannot understand how a parson need ever be caught. He can always make pastoral calls, without the object of his visits being questioned; and yet here is the melancholy fact that in a few of the states 917 parsons were convicted, the last three years, of adultery, rape, seduction, and even nameless crimes."

LORD SHAFESBURY has been easing his mind again on the subject of the Salvation Army. He says that the very name is a "downright blasphemy." We agree with him, if there is any such thing as blasphemy at all. But we differ from his statement that the ways of the Army are "not at all in harmony with the earliest ages of the Church." We maintain that the early Christians under Simon Peter were just a counterpart of the Salvationists under General Booth; and the "Acts of the Apostles" is our authority.

ONE would think that when God's lightning is flying about one of his own houses should be the safest shelter. But it isn't. Last week the Roman Catholic chapel of Mangherow, in county Sligo, was struck while the worshippers were inside. Several people were injured, and one man was killed. God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform.

ON Wednesday the Wakefield magistrates made an order on the Rev. J. C. Boyce for the maintenance of his son and daughter in Wadsley Lunatic Asylum. For the defence it was pleaded that Mr. Boyce was utterly prostrated in health and fairly down-trodden by debt. It was shown, however, that he had received £150 a year pension as the ex-chaplain to the West Riding Asylum at Wakefield, £100 a year as domestic chaplain to Lord Borthwick, and £10 a year from a certain charity. The magistrates in making the order asked for, remarked that if defendant made a mess and muddle of his income they could not help it.

THE Bishop of Manchester, at the consecration of St. George's Church, at Mossley, on Thursday, said that at the present time there was cause for anxiety for the preservation of unity in the Church. There were fightings without and fightings within, but the fighting was not so much without as within. There seemed a temporary lull in the attacks from their opponents, who doubtless believed that the Churchmen were themselves doing the work. Unless a truce of pacification were arranged, he feared that the days of the Church as a national institution were numbered.

THE Rev. W. Yates, vicar of Worleston, Cheshire, has the true priestly spirit. Mr. Humphreys, the station master of Worleston, having sent a respectful letter to the schoolmaster of the parish school asking that his son should on no account be sent to Church, this reverend tyrant stepped into the

school and publicly expelled the boy. He, moreover, got the manager at Chester to remove Mr. Humphreys from his employment, which so seriously affected his wife that she is still in bed suffering from the shock. Happily, some gentleman have taken the matter up and Mr. Humphreys has been re-instated.

TALKING of Tyler, that worthy gentleman directs the Anglo-American Brush Light Company, among many others. He is also as pious as a Glasgow Bank director, would not read a Sunday paper which cost less than fourpence for worlds, and cannot conceal his horror of Mr. Bradlaugh's morality. All the same, if you go down Mansfield Street, Borough Road, any Sunday afternoon, you may find his shop working full swing. For a good sound hypocrite, commend me to a Sabbatarian Tory director. However, Sir Henry will probably have to refund some of his British gains before long, and will be lucky if he gets out of it for the loss of the booty.—*Weekly Dispatch*.

A FUNNY instance of misquotation is reported from the Huddersfield county court. The defendant, in one of the cases, turned to the plaintiff and said "To him that hath much shall be given.—Shakespeare."

THERE is a much funnier story told of a West-end tradesman who built up one of the biggest millinery establishments in existence. He was very pious, very stingy, and very unscrupulous; and it is even said that he often discharged his shopmen on Saturday night, and took them on again on Monday morning, to save the expense of keeping them on Sunday. One day he observed a young shopman fail to sell anything to a customer, and he at once told him to go to the office and get his money. The poor fellow, who had been out of work for a long time and had only just got employment, knew that his master had a reputation for piety, and so he tried to work upon his feelings in that direction. After telling a piteous tale, he said something about the foxes having holes and the birds nests, but the son of man had not where to lay his head. "Confound you," roared the old boss, "none of your darned Shakespeare here! Go to the office and get your money."

ANOTHER good story. An extremely pious Scotch ironmaster, who built several churches and finally left nearly half a million to the Kirk, was one day playing a game of cards with an equally pious old friend. "I say Tom," remarked the latter, "what a joke it is, you pretending to be pious! I'll bet you can't say the Lord's Prayer."—"Will you?" replied the great ironmaster; "I'll bet you a hundred I can."—"Done," said the other.—The money was staked, and the pious boss began—

"The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want."
"By God, Tom," burst out the other pious boss, "here's the money. Hanged if I thought you knew it!"

A SHEFFIELD confectioner advertises that "By God's help he does four things"—buy well, sell well, give full weight, and make what is fit to eat. Will he kindly tell us *what* God he refers to. A deity who helps a man to do honest work is a great rarity. We haven't come across one yet, and we are anxious for further information.

A FOREIGN gentleman sends us a very naive account of his adventures among the Blue-Ribbonites. "I was asked," he says, "if I accepted Christ, and I told them I was an Atheist only come to watch, and I was answered that I should remember this night in hell, and was chucked out." Short and sweet.

THE authorities of St. Clement's Danes in the Strand know how to serve God and Mammon. They have fitted up the churchyard with a grand stand, where well-off people can see the Queen's procession to open the New Law Courts, at half a guinea per head. Doubtless their loyalty and godliness will bring great gain.

AT the Central Criminal Court last Monday, Justice Hawkins, who had several bad cases of robbery with violence to deal with, remarked, that in no instance had such cases been taken up by the Public Prosecutor. This functionary, however, had instituted a prosecution against four boys who, for a lark had set fire to some gunpowder, although no injury had been effected. This state of facts as it appeared to him, tended to make it very doubtful whether a public officer of this description was necessary. G. B. Maule, the functionary in question, who upon the application of Sir Henry Tyler, immediately gave a fiat to prosecute anybody in connection with the *Freethinker*, takes from the country £2,500 a year, and has a staff of well-paid assistants to help him.

THE *Sporting Times* asks "how is it that when a churchwarden stands drinks on a Monday, he always pays with threepenny bits."

SPECIAL NOTICE.

MR. FOOTE lectures three times to-day (Sunday, Dec. 3rd), in the Secular Institute, East Parade, Huddersfield:—Morning, at 11, "Poverty, Priestcraft and Privilege;" afternoon, at 3, "The Salvation Craze;" evening, at 6.30, "God and His Friends."

MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

December 10th, Bradford; 12th, Walworth; 17th, Grimsby; 24th, Milton Hall, London; 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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LITERARY communications to the Editor, Mr. G. W. FOOTE, No. 9 South Crescent, Bedford Square, London, W.C.

RECEIVED WITH THANKS.—F. Gibbon, Taphos, Excel, Freethinker, J. L. Spitafields, J. Wadmore.

INQUIRER.—Among the names of distinguished Freethinkers may be mentioned Spinoza, Rousseau, Voltaire, Diderot, D'Alembert, Hume, Gibbon, Shelley, Byron, Paine, Bentham, Lessing, Goethe, Heine, the two Mills, Buckle, Martineau, Parker, Comte, Strauss, and Darwin. Froude gives words of Carlyle to the effect that it is a mathematical certainty that no such things as the Christian miracles ever happened. Burns' view may be judged from his "Holy Willie's Prayer," without entering upon the question of his authorship of a satire on the Bible. Freethinkers, however, hold their opinions upon the ground of reason not upon authority. Mohammedanism and Buddhism have produced great men as well as Christianity.

R. WRIGHT.—You are wrong in calling the Christian superstition "utterly useless." If you buy our Christmas Number you will see that immense fun can be got out of it.

C. BACON.—Circulating the *Freethinker* tracts is a good way of making the paper known. Thanks.

J. BROWN.—Unsuitable. There is an old edition of the Bible in which the word *not* is omitted from the Seventh Commandment. This is probably the version used by the rev. scoundrel.

J. SAUNDERS, Reading.—We are glad to hear of the Society in your ancient town. Thanks.

R. NICHOLLS.—We thank you for your good wishes and services in procuring signatures to the petition.

G. A. points out the influence of superstition in inducing the perpetrators of the Maamtrasna tragedy to commit their crimes.

R. W. HOLLOWAY.—Thanks. 1. No. 2. Beauchamp is pronounced Beecham. 3. No. 4. We expect our trial early next year. 5. Our scale of charges will be found in our advertising columns.

G. A. GASKELL.—Your letter is really too long for insertion; it would fill more than a column of small type. Our correspondents must be brief as our space is so limited. We observe that you "do not charge Mr. Symes with lying," but only with penning a "false narrative" for ridicule. This withdraws the sting of your epithet "mendacious." For the rest your letter applies to the general policy of the *Freethinker*, and we cannot devote our columns to a discussion of *that*. Those who object to our policy are free to follow their own. You have made your protest, and that must suffice.

LAZARUS.—Thanks for cuttings. No danger. Fire away.

G. BRODIE.—The best known reply to "Cobbett's History of the Protestant Reformation," is by Chas. Hastings Collette.

G. SHORE.—We have already in type more than enough verse for our Christmas Number. Thanks for good wishes for *Progress*.

J. BARRON.—The Christmas Number will be threepence and well worth the money.

J. WILSON.—Petition received with thanks. We shall be glad of the rest as soon as possible.

T. SHORE.—See "Sugar Plums."

DONO.—Our readers cannot help us better than by keeping us apprised of what goes on in their districts. Cuttings are always welcome, and any matter we can use for a paragraph.

A. ISZATT.—We are really too busy to answer our correspondents through the post. The tract you enclose requires no answer. It simply states what the Bible says on Resurrection without trying to prove it. We see no reason to molest harmless lunatics.

W. LA FREILLE.—We do not know of any Secular hall at Lewisham.

R. H.—Thanks.

W. MALCOM.—Getting newsagents to keep the *Freethinker* on sale, and undertaking to relieve them of unsold copies, is one of the best ways to promote its circulation. Blasphemy petitions to hand. Our reply to Mr. Gaskell must close the question; so many correspondents are down on him that we are forced to cry "hold, enough."

OUR CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

WE shall publish next week the second CHRISTMAS NUMBER of the *Freethinker*, which will of course be distinct from the ordinary number. We have spared neither labor nor expense to make it a real Christmas treat. Our readers will find a list of contents in the advertisement on our last page. We say, without the least hesitation, that we have prepared the most extraordinary threepennyworth ever issued from a Freethought house; and we venture to think that the artistic drawings, the specially designed cover, the finely toned paper, and the good printing, will make our CHRISTMAS NUMBER compare favorably with the most renowned illustrated periodicals of the season. Our last had a very large sale, but we expect a tremendous rush for this one directly it is seen. Our only fear is that it will half starve the doctors by putting the public in such good spirits.

SUGAR PLUMS.

THE *Christian World* describes the doctrine of eternal punishment as "that Dark and awful product of the human imagination." Quite true, and we are glad to see it admitted in such a quarter. But how about heaven? Surely it is as much a creation of imagination as hell. You can't pick and choose. In the long run you'll have to give up both or keep both.

ON Sunday evening last the following resolution was unanimously passed at the Hammersmith Working Men's Club on the conclusion of a lecture by Mr. Henry Saveriaux, Secretary to the National Sunday League: "That this meeting condemns the action of Mr. Broadhurst in having presumed to speak in the name of the working classes in his recent speech on the Sunday opening of museums, and considers that his declarations are contrary to the convictions and wishes of the working-men of London."

THE North West London Branch of the National Secular Society has engaged the Milton Hall, Hawley Crescent, Kentish Town, for Sunday evening lectures. It was opened last Sunday by Mr. Haslem. Mr. W. Job, the Secretary, lectures this evening, and several prominent lecturers, including Mr. Foote, have engaged to lecture there during the winter season. We wish the society all success in its plucky enterprise. The hall is a very large one, and will accommodate all comers.

THE North London Branch, at Claremont Hall, maintains its good reputation. Mrs. Besant has recently been lecturing there to very large audiences, and last Sunday evening Mr. Foote was welcomed by a crowded and enthusiastic house.

STILL another Branch in the North of London. Last Sunday afternoon a meeting was held at Newington Green Road, for the purpose of forming a Branch of the N. S. S. in the Balls Pond, Mildmay Park, and Canonbury district. Considerable pecuniary support was guaranteed, and another meeting will be held this afternoon at 3.30, when final arrangements will be made. All Freethinkers are invited. The Secretary, *pro tem.*, is Mr. Thomas Shore, 33 Newington Green Road, N.

MR. JOHN ROWELL WALLER, whose name is familiar to our readers, proposes to bring out a new volume of verse. Subscribers will be supplied at 3s. a copy. Mr. Waller will be pleased to receive their names. His address is, 2 South Terrace, Wallsend-on-Tyne.

IN Dr. Andrew Wilson's new "Chapters on Evolution," he puts the issue with those who believe in the special creation of man very plainly. He says: "There is no law of Evolution for one group and of special creation for another. There can be logically postulated no Evolution for the lower races, and some process of creation for the higher forms of animal life or for man himself. Uniformity and sequence exist wholly or not at all."

THE *Jewish World* is getting awfully heretical. It defines God as "an abstraction of Justice and Truth"—and says: "It is surely much more possible to love a definite and comprehensible ideal of Justice and Truth than 'a spiritual personality' of whom we know nothing. Indeed, on one occasion the question was debated by the Rabbins, who, admitting the impossibility of 'loving' such a Being, recommended its transmutation into 'loving one's fellow man.'" We go no further.

MR. R. GARNETT, of the British Museum, has just brought out his volume of "Select Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley."

Here is an extract from a letter to Horace Smith which will interest our readers: "You know Moore, pray assure him that I have not the smallest influence over Lord Byron, and if I had I should certainly employ it to eradicate from his great mind the delusions of Christianity, which, in spite of his reason, seems perpetually to recur, and to lay in ambush for the hours of sickness and distress. I differ with Moore in thinking Christianity useful to the world; no man of sense can think it true; and the alliance of the monstrous superstitions of the popular worship with the pure doctrines of the theism of such men as Moore, turns to the profit of the former, and but makes the latter the foundation of its own pollution. I agree with him that the doctrines of the French and material philosophy are as false as they are pernicious; but still they are better than Christianity, inasmuch as anarchy is better than despotism; for this reason that the former is for a season, and that the latter is eternal" (pp. 211-12).

DIVINE REVELATION.

EVERY religionist claims the sacred books of his religion as divinely inspired by God. Each alleges the fact, but adduces no proofs. God, whose evidence would if producible be considered conclusive on all hands, is hardly ever consulted, and when appealed to, makes no response. The deity, apparently, is deaf, or indifferent, or defunct; perhaps the latter, for the divine oracles are dumb, that were wont, 'tis said, to utter those mystic mumblings which an interested priesthood palmed off upon an ignorant people as saving truths. Left in the lurch by the Lord, the rival priests are only able to prove their pretensions to the possession of the divine oracles by dint of unblushing assertions and mutual recriminations. In this edifying contest for shadowy honors, each party is supported by an army of superstitious followers, who are kept in mental servitude by a pack of arrogant priests. These latter claim to monopolise the Lord to their own exclusive benefit, and only deign to impart the divine blessings for the carnal considerations of pound, shillings, and pence. The earth is the Lord's, the Lord's is the priest's; and thus, to all intents and purposes, the priest is God and Lord over all. "No man cometh to the Father, except by me"; that is, by the priest. "I alone have the oracles of God; no other edition of God's word is genuine but mine; if you don't believe me, you may go to the Devil and be damned." Such is, in truth, the threatening and insulting language of the fire-brands of priestcraft all the world over, and these are the only arguments which, in the last resort, they are able to bring forward in support of their preposterous claim as guardians of the peace of God, the bearers and interpreters of his supposed message to mankind.

To the unprejudiced the Koran is quite as divinely inspired as the Bible; and Mahomet as credible as Jesus. The world at large is obliged either to believe the Koran and the Bible, or be damned by the Koran and the Bible. For if we prefer to believe the Koran, the Bible damns us, because thereby we damn the Bible; whilst, if we believe the Bible, the Koran in like manner goes through the formula of damning us, in retaliation of our virtual damning of it. No man can serve Mahomet and Jesus. He must either love the one and hate the other (and be damned for the preference) or hold to the one and hate the other (damnation number two). Whichever way he turns hell stares him in the face. Who, then, shall decide between the Arab and the Nazarene? Revelation? Which Revelation? "Mine," says the Christian, and, "Mine," says the Mahometan; and, in the hubbub and confusion of the contest, nothing certain can be heard but curses, threats, and blows. "Shall Reason decide?" suggests a bystander; to which the response from both disputants is an angry "No," accompanied with loud anathemas and liberal donations of fire and brimstone. Now, the only interpretation which sane men can put upon the indisputable fact that all shades and hues of priests detest reason, and love to ply their mystifying arts in the dark where the light of criticism cannot penetrate, is that, despite their pious pretensions, fraud and folly, lies and imposture, form their principal stock-in-trade. Nor can it be denied that, if their wares would bear inspection, the Priests would not hide them under a bushel, but let their light so shine before men that they might see, taste and smell—and behold they were very good. But honesty with priestcraft is not the best policy, and for that reason, deception, mystery, and humbug, have ever characterised their black art.

Where shall we go for the evidences of divine revelation? The bare *ipse dixit* of interested priests and prejudiced partisans cannot be accepted as valid testimony to the genuineness of any book or collection of books purporting or alleged to be written by God's inspiration. If such assertions, albeit sincere, were to be regarded as tantamount to proofs, then the Rig Veda, the Zendavesta, the Koran, the Book of Mormon, and other productions of superstition, would share equally with the Bible, the honors of divine inspiration. The antiquity of the book, the veneration in which it is regarded, the willingness of martyrs to seal with death their testimony to its genuineness, even the sublimity of its moral teaching, are considerations which afford us no assistance towards determining the fact whether the book in question be the revelation of God to man. How then may we ascertain that fact? Clearly not by the claims put forth by the book, nor by the dogmatic assertions of devotees on behalf of the book; but by an impartial appeal to the facts of history, with a view to discover by their aid on what basis—whether of truth or falsehood—those claims and assertions rest.

Nor can the partisans of the rival Revelations shrink from putting their sacred books through such an ordeal unless they are all alike conscious, that the religions based on these books are maintained by force and fraud, and able to exist by no other means.

Where shall we find in independent history satisfactory testimony in support of the claim for inspiration set up by the sacred books of the world, or even in support of any one of those books? Except the *ex parte*, and therefore suspicious allegations of the books themselves, or of believers on behalf of those books, what evidence can the special pleaders for revelation present for our consideration? Not even the most audacious apologist and inveterate evidence-monger can pretend that evidence more weighty can anywhere be found. And against this evidence, such as it is, there is the fatal objection, which we have already urged, that it is inconclusive inasmuch as it fails to prove anything in favor of one revelation to the exclusion of the others. Hence, we are again driven outside the domain of assertion in quest of proofs which for ever elude our search.

The Christian denounces all revelations but the Bible as gross impostures, or incredible romances; but what right has he to make this observation? We maintain that the Bible is no better provided with evidences in its favor than any other alleged sacred book. It stands in the same category with them, should be judged by the same standard, and, when weighed in the scales of historical evidence, it fails, like them, as we have already seen, to satisfy the requirements of the judicial mind. Not only is the Christian apologist unable to prove that the books of the Old and New Testament were written by the respective authors to whom they are ascribed, and were composed at the dates severally assigned to them. He knows nothing from independent trustworthy sources of the character and credibility of the alleged writers, so that, even if we admitted them as genuinely historical characters, we should not be justified in accepting the bare statements of writers concerning whom nothing reliable is known. Moreover, pagan history, our only external and independent source of information, is wholly dumb on all the material facts alleged in the Bible. How then can we be assured that these men were really, as they allege, the mouth-pieces through whom God chose to reveal his will to man? The witnesses of the alleged revelation are not forthcoming, and no verification or corroboration of the things revealed is vouchsafed. We are also left entirely in the dark concerning the ways and means, the method and machinery, of which God availed himself in revealing his will. When, therefore, we have regard to the fact that the Bible is written by unknown writers, of unknown date, character, and credibility; that the marvellous fables therein recorded are unknown to the pagan world, whose testimony thereon is so necessary as to be the absolute *sine qua non* of our acceptance thereof; and, further, that the book contains a mass of antecedently incredible stories, the justification of our rejection of the Christian Revelation is ample and complete. It were unreasonable and ridiculous to wilfully accept as a revelation from God a book coming to us under circumstances so suspicious. God, or the priests, must either afford us reasonable grounds whereon to base our belief, or bear the

blame of our unbelief. No wise man will care to make himself a fool, even for the sake of God.

WILLIAM HEAFORD.

THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER.

"Has not where to lay his head." That's one of the mistakes in being born 2000 years ago, and picking up the notion that his Father's work was what he should attend to. We live and learn. Peter dried his nets upon a rock. Leo and Antonelli and Borgia no longer go out to take a small coin from the mouth of a fish. To them the whole world is a fish-pond, and their hook is in every mouth. The old Evangelists thought they did well if their preaching carried conviction to pagan souls. The new think they have done nothing unless they carry forward balances, and die "worth money." Old Dr. Backhaus, of Sandhurst, died recently "worth" over £100,000 in real estate (this world is all a fleeting show—nothing real about it), besides many thousands left to his relatives. To his mother one enthusiast, bent on heavenly work, said: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" Dr. Backhaus is now being requiemed for by the best choristers that money can buy; Dr. Vaughan has just bagged 220 Wagga sovereigns; and only recently in Sydney, a Presbyterian clergyman who, it is presumed, was one of the elect, left £7000 odd. Morley Punshon, the great Wesleyan light, left thousands. The immortal—we need not give his name—of a certain ever-memorable wreck, left to his son £9000, which that youngster ran through in "nap." and dissipation. Then he went to gaol, and then he came out, and death ended his squandering of the accumulated "three-pennies" of the poor. "A' for his glory!" A Church of England cleric left £3000 here lately. We forestall the stereotyped reply, "The laborer is worthy of his hire." Let him, however, say straight out that he *does* work for hire, and not pass away into the tomb with the oily pretence on his lip that he works for eternity. The actual needs of a self-sacrificing clergyman are amply supplied by church provisions. All else is of the world, and Iscariot.—*Sydney Bulletin*.

FREETHOUGHT GLEANINGS.

HERESY MORAL.—The belief that heresy is the result of wilful depravity is dying out. People no longer seriously think that speculative error is bound up with moral iniquity, or that mistaken thinking is either the result or the cause of wicked living. Even the official mouthpieces of established beliefs now usually represent a bad heart as only one possible cause of unbelief. It divides the curse with ignorance, intellectual shallowness, the unfortunate influence of plausible heresiarchs, and other alternative roots of evil. Thus they leave a way of escape, by which the person who does not share their own convictions may still be credited with a good moral character. . . . De Maistro's rather grotesque conviction that infidels always die of horrible diseases with special names, could now only be held among the very dregs of the ecclesiastical world.—*John Morley*, "On Compromise," pp. 123 and 124; 1874.

RELIGIOUS DEPRAVITY.—Not only were houses of prostitution numerous in every city, and sanctioned by formal regulations of a police, to which they were subjected; but we are informed that creditors who had thrown their debtors into confinement were obliged to allow them the company of prostitutes as a necessary indulgence. The same corruption of morals, which was thus authorised in general society, had also penetrated into the retreats of those who had professed to devote themselves to religion, for we are assured by Nicholas de Clemangis, the rector of the University of Paris, that the *Convents had become public brothels*, and Cumaldulensis, who, as abbot of the Order of Cumaldoli, visited several convents in Italy, found the profligacy of their inhabitants so extreme, that he judged it expedient to describe it in the *Greeks rather than in the Latin language*. In Strasburgh licentiousness prevailed to such an excess that prostitutes established themselves *even in the Churches*, so that they received the appellation of the *swallows of the Cathedral*.—*Dr. G. Miller*, "Philosophy of History," vol. ii., p. 441.

PROFANE JOKES.

A YOUNG EVOLUTIONIST.—Tommy (at the window): "Did you say God made me, mamma?" Mamma: "Yes, my darling; he made you and everything in the world." Tommy: "Does God make the elephants?" Mamma: "Yes, my pet." Tommy: "And the flies?" Mamma: "Yes, dear." Tommy (after a long pause): "Isn't it very fiddling work making flies, mamma?"

A BENIGHTED traveller having knocked long and loudly at the door of a Highland cottage, at last lifted the latch and entered,

saying, "Are there no Christians here?" A strong Doric voice answered, "No, we're a' Camerons."

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