

PROSECUTED FOR BLASPHEMY.

THE FREETHINKER.

EDITED BY G. W. FOOLE.

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"COMIC BIBLE" SKETCHES.—XLIX.



THE TRANSFIGURATION.

And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them. And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses and they were talking with Jesus.—MARK ix., 2, 4.

THE LAW AND THE QUEEN.

THE London papers have certainly made the most of last Monday's royal performance. It was almost sickening to read their dreary twaddle over the affair. They could hardly have indulged in more slavering flattery if the Queen had been the Mikado of Japan, and they had been her court funkies. A stranger would fancy that a new era of English history had commenced, and that Her Majesty was an angelic messenger from the upper regions come to proclaim the millenium. As a matter of fact, it was nothing but an elderly lady, who went through the terrible ordeal of riding in a comfortable carriage from Paddington to Temple Bar, and then rode back to her town residence, after uttering a few commonplace phrases. And she was simply officiating at one of those little displays which the governing classes find necessary to their craft. The two selected and well trained workmen who took part in the farce, represented the working classes of London just as much as the three tailors of Tooley Street represented the people of England. The real representatives of the London artisans were many miles away, paying their compliments to the President of the French Republic.

One of the Tory journals referred to the Queen's "silver voice" and its "exquisite modulation," which had not been heard in public since her throne was darkened by a great grief. Now that "great grief" was nothing but the loss of her husband; truly a proper cause of sorrow, but unfortunately not confined to royalty. There are thousands of poor widows who mourn the loss of their partners and their children's bread-winners, without any such consolations as the Queen enjoys. They have to face the world somehow, to choke down their grief, and to earn food for the helpless little ones. If they were to indulge in sorrow for any length of time, and excuse themselves on the ground that mourning absorbed all their leisure, they would be treated as lazy and impudent women. Who would think of paying his laundress every week for twenty-two years, if she never brought in any clean linen, simply because she had lost her husband? But if she happened to be rich and titled, the salary would go on all the same, and her conduct would be thought very commendable.

Royalty is all very well in its way, but it is rather an expensive luxury. It is only the figure-head of the ship of state, but it takes a great deal of gilding. We pay five thousand a year to the man at the helm, and more than half a million for decorating the effigy under the bowsprit. Some people call this loyalty; we call it imbecility. And the worst of it is that the figure-head begets other figure-heads, every one of which requires gilding; and nobody can see the end of the costly process. By-and-by we shall be obliged to pitch them overboard or else to leap over ourselves, for the ship is getting too small for all of us on the old terms.

The Lord Chancellor, last Monday, trotted out that old legal fiction about all administration of the law being derived from the sovereign. Practically, everyone knows this is nonsense; but it is part and parcel of the huge fiction of English government, in which the responsible agent always acts in the name of others. The Queen can do no wrong just because she can do nothing. She charges us so much a year for the use of her name; we do all the business and find all the capital, and pay her a heavy share of the profits, without any deduction for bad trade. Why not transact the business in our own name in an honest straightforward way?

The right reverend Fathers in God showed up in force, we believe. One bishop offered up a short prayer. Evidently they wanted a little of his medicine, so as to keep up the popular belief in it, but the less of it the better. Another bishop stood at the foot of the throne; and that position is extremely typical; for the Church is now a mere creature of authority, a sort of spiritual lackey, paid to keep the insolent people from approaching too closely and irreverently to the powers that be.

But what shall we say of the new Palace of Justice, as the papers call it in Gallican style? It may be a Palace of Law, but we doubt whether Justice will for a long time to come have much connexion with the establishment. Our moderate acquaintance with the matter is enough to show us that the main end of law is the maintenance of lawyers. The intricacies of practice are such that technical knowledge is necessary at every step; court fees and stamp duties are levied as blackmail at every turn; and after all the glorious uncertainty of the law baffles every calculation. The truth is that there is in England *one* law for the rich

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and for the poor; that is beyond dispute; but as only the rich can pay for it, the poor might just as well have no law at all. Nay, they would probably be better off without it; for they could usually take care of themselves if all disputes were settled in the primitive fashion by fisticuffs.

Take our own case. We are prosecuted criminally by a private speculator. To get something like fair play, we have our case removed to the Court of Queen's Bench by a writ of *certiorari*. The writ involves the finding of sureties for the prosecutor's costs; and even then many pounds have to be expended in acting for ourselves, without paying a farthing to lawyers. What could a penniless man do in such a case? Why, just lie down, and let the rich man kick him till satisfied. If the defence of all three defendants in our prosecution had been entrusted to solicitors in the ordinary way, it would probably have cost two or three thousand pounds before the end. This is a free country! So it is; and you can get as much of that commodity as you can afford to buy. We could say much more on the subject, but for the present this must suffice. Our view is that common-sense is better than formality, that justice in a backyard is better than injustice in a palace, that legal reform is more needed than legal architecture, and that the remodelling of our law on the principles of liberty and equality would be far more useful than all the silly processions that stop business and allow a few of the upper ten to exhibit themselves at the public expense.

G. W. FOOTIE.

THE EVILS OF SUPERNATURALISM.

THOUSANDS of pulpits resound every week with praises of the good supposed to be wrought by Christianity. If all the praise was deserved there would still, as we shall see, remain a heavy account *per contra*. But so far as the praise is just, it will be found to depend upon the worth of the moral teachings of Christianity; teachings which it possesses in common with Buddhism, Hinduism, Mohammedanism, and other religions. Gautama Buddha preached "Overcome evil by good, hatred by love, the greedy by liberality, the liar by truth," centuries before the mongrel doctrines of Christianity appeared in the world. Confucius and Isocrates taught the much vaunted golden rule; and so with every other element of Christian morality. Not a single moral precept exists in the New Testament which cannot be shown to have existed long ere its romances were composed; which plainly shows that its moral code is not a distinctive feature, but is common to humanity; a growth of earth and not a gift from heaven. Christianity, if it means anything distinct from Platonism, is a supernaturally revealed system of dogmas, and this is what the churches have always maintained, until hard pressed by the wolves of rationalism, when one by one they throw out their darling dogmas in the vain hope of thus effecting their escape.

The chief good which supernaturalism can be argued to have done is by its having sometimes repressed evil through terrorism. The idea of the supernatural necessitates fear. But this in itself is a curse. Though a child may be kept from taking sugar by being terrified with bogey, the time will come, unless his nerves are quite deranged by fears, when he will despise the threats and possibly take the sugar despite them. The Christian doctrine of Hell; that individuals are forced willy-nilly into such an existence that the majority of them will sin and go on for ever in eternal misery and supernatural tortures, is a bogey so horrible that if people really believed it they would cease from breeding, or go mad with distraction at the thought of its coming to any one they loved. Terrorism engenders brutality. A savage chief thinks nothing of slaughtering hundreds to appease his angry God. Supernaturalism gave rise to both human and animal sacrifices. The Jews, believing themselves under the direction of Jahveh, relentlessly slaughtered all followers of other gods. Even good men have burnt each other, well persuaded that all the apostles would have done as they did. For what is the burning of a finite body which is endangering the salvation of eternal souls? Happily the race is growing out of its infancy and beginning to laugh at these supernatural bogeys; whereupon the obscurantist old wives and clergy cry out that a great deal of sugar is sure to be stolen. Suicides, lunatic asylums, and miserable lives

through religious fear, however, still show how large an abatement must be made from the exorbitant claims put forward on behalf of Christianity.

The future rewards and punishments of Christianity are too distant and uncertain to be of much direct efficacy in promoting good or restraining evil, but they have a vicious effect in misdirecting the whole aims of life. How can we be surprised at selfishness when the main teaching of religion is that one shall make his own salvation sure; when for every joy resigned in this life the religionist is promised and expects a hundred-fold hereafter? Instead of being taught that the day of judgment is ever present, that we are with every thought, word, and work, making our characters and taking the consequences of them, we are told the all-atoning blood of Jesus wipes off all scores if we only believe. A more immoral doctrine it would be difficult to put forward. It certainly exalts Jesus, but it is at the expense of his Father, who is made a carnivorous deity only to be appeased by the blood of an innocent victim. Are you a liar, so was Abraham; a cheat, so was Jacob; a murderer, so was Moses; an adulterer, so was David; a sensualist, so was Solomon; a coward, so was Peter; but the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sins.

In noticing the set-off which has to be made against the claims on behalf of supernaturalism, we should not forget the factitious antipathies and divided households it has made. The spiritual pride which deems it knows the will of God is sure to attempt to usurp authority over others. The proclivity of pious people to compound for sins they are inclined to by damning those they have no mind to, is also well known. Much, too, might be said of their making the day of rest a day of gloom instead of gladness. Nor should we omit from the reckoning the number of parasitic priests and parsons, those black caterpillars of the commonwealth, who, thanks to the credulity of their followers, live on the fat of the land, consuming without producing.

But the list, *per contra*, would be too large to be dealt with in one paper. A heavy indictment lies against supernaturalism for its myriads of murders warranted by the text, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (Exod. xxii., 18). For fifteen centuries the progress of the race was hindered by the superstitions of the Christian Church. It placed its chains on knowledge. It did its worst to stamp out Freethought. Dungeon, rack, stake, and gibbet were remorselessly employed. Though its venom is gone it still gnashes its teeth. From the murder of Hypatia to the Dragonnades of Louis XIV., its hands are stained with blood. It cannot wash out the stains: rather would they the multitudinous seas incarnadine, making the green one red.

J. M. WHEELER.

THE ATHEISTIC PULPIT.

[SECOND SERIES.]

II.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS.

Jews and Christians pretend to be very proud of the Decalogue, as divines often call it; though it is to be feared they break its rules as often as most. "I am Jehovah, Thy God," says the deity. The very language implies that he was not alone their God, though he wished to be. An only son would never say to his father, "I am your son John." "I am your son" would be quite enough. An only God would never have said, "I am your God Jehovah." "I am your God" would have fully met the requirements of the case.

1. *Thou shalt have no other Gods before me.*—Why not? In religion, as in health, people should be left to choose their own gods as they do their own doctors. Jehovah evidently feared competition. He forbids his customers to trade with the fellow over the way; to have anything to do with the doctor down the road. This God is only Moses in disguise.

2. He forbids graven images and likenesses. What would he do to day with all our photographs and the painted windows in churches where priests and laymen go to flout and disobey him? It is well for Jehovah that he went the way of all the earth and was gathered to his fathers before these abominations were invented. If he lived now he would go mad.

For I am a jealous God.—Oh, Moses! You barbarian, to put this silly language into the mouth of your God! Your God jealous! After conquering Pharaoh, too! Phew! Worship a God that is jealous! I had as soon worship Ford who made a donkey of himself through jealousy of his wife. (See *Merry Wives of Windsor*).

Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation, etc.—I know your God was a barbarian, Moses. And this is the ruler of the universe, you say! He is jealous of his creation, his subject, of "the small dust of the balance!" He will punish a man for what his great grandfather's father did. And this is the fountain of justice. No wonder Christians are so spiteful and malicious. Their poor uncivilised God sets them the example. They can never be just to Freethinkers as long as they worship this contemptible God.

3. *God's name is not to be taken in vain.*—Very well, who wants to name him at all? I know none but believers who take his name in vain. And they do it every time they use it—Nay! Nay! What a blunder I have committed! The name of God is a mint of money to them. Whenever they make an unjust war, as they did in Egypt the other day, they shelter themselves under this empty name. When they rob the poor to enrich princes; when princes who don't fight get the honor due to those who do, the name of God covers the rascality. When an honest man is robbed of his seat in Parliament, God's name sanctifies the robbery. When members of Parliament tell lies, they shelter themselves under this name. When fools and bigots persecute their betters, *God* protects the villains. Nay! Nay! Christians do not use his name in vain. They have filled Europe with blood, confusion, and poverty for more than a thousand years; and it has all been done in the name of their God. Capital name, that, to conjure by, or to cover rascality! There never was a better. All great rogues use his name.

4. *Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.*—Yes, certainly. But, 1st. Which day is it? Are the Jews right or the Christians? I fear to keep *any* day till I know the right one. It may damn me. I'll keep the right when I know it—and how I am to keep it. 2. This latter point is difficult. What *is* keeping holy the Sabbath? I won't begin till I know; for I may blunder here too. Besides, the Lord told Isaiah that he could not away with their "new moons and Sabbaths" (Isaiah i., 13), showing that by that time he did not care whether they were kept or not—that he would much rather not, in fact. The clergy are just like him there—they break the Sabbath to their heart's content now. Many of them neither work the six days nor rest the seventh.

For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, etc.—Very well. That is no reason why I should work six days and rest one. I have no heaven and earth to make, never made any. Why should I rest on the seventh day? If the Lord was tired, he did well to rest; if he was not tired, he could not rest. Besides, he has not told us how long his days were. Did he go in for the nine hours movement? Did he get paid for overtime? Did his week's wage amount to enough to keep himself and wife and family and properly educate them? If not, why did he rest the whole Sunday? And what is a fellow to do who cannot earn enough in six days to live upon? Must he rest and starve, rather than work on the seventh day? Come, come, Moses, this story of yours, and your miserable logic, won't do, I can tell you. Did the Lord rest during the night? Come, yes or no. If so, that is as good as forbidding night-work among men, is it not? And so your commandments are *absurdum*. Remember to go to bed every night and sleep twelve hours, thou and all thine, for in six days the Lord made, etc., and rested every night and hallowed it by going to bed. There, Moses, that is as good as yours, any way. And the Lord put that into my head just as much as he put the other part into yours.

Besides, you miserable joker, you, you give quite another reason for observing the Sabbath in another book of yours. Turn up Deuteronomy (v. 15). You there tell the Israelites to keep it because God delivered them out of Egypt, and therefore commanded them so to do! Now, just tell the truth for once, will you, and acknowledge that you borrowed the Sabbath from the Chaldeans or Assyrians, and palmed it off upon your tribe as a God-given institution. "Yes," you say. Well, that is worth something. It is no small favor to get truth from you, Moses. Thank you.

5. *Honor thy father and thy mother.*—Very good, indeed. Though, if parents are what they ought to be, I do not think their children need any other incentive to honor them. Besides, when we are told that our days shall be long if we do, there is something amiss. It is not true that filial pity insures long life. But turn to Exodus (chapter xxi., 17), and there you have the explanation. Parents had the power to put their children to death for cursing them, in those days. That must have been a very nice state of things, certainly. And we see in the command a broad hint that death would follow its violation! That is just like the Bible. It always appeals, either directly or indirectly, to man's slavish fear; and those ten commandments are all directed that way. They suit a state of slavery. Freedom and justice ignore them.

JOS. SYMRS.

(To be continued.)

GOD WORSHIPPERS.

What answer cometh to your praise and prayer?
The naked savage roaming in the wild,
His heart a tiger, and his head a child,
Beheld a God in ocean, earth and air.

He heard his voice when thunder rent the sky,
And when disease and death spread o'er the land,
He saw the mighty working of his hand,
And pierced the gloom with terror stricken cry.

Oh Christian worshipper on bended knee!
Brave Science spoke, and Nature told her tale,
And praise and prayer became of no avail,
And no avail the search for Deity.

You worship but a God yourselves have made;
Then marvel not at those who pass you by
With head erect, and with a fearless eye:
They breathe a purer air, their God is dead.

A brighter future for mankind they see,
Because the night of God is left behind.
The morn of man is breaking on the mind
And light of Love, and dawn of Liberty.

With ignorance and poverty abroad,
And all the misery these evils breed,
Build houses for your Deity in need,
And full of faith fall down and worship God!

Then worship God if you no better can;
From out that degradation suffered long,
A race is rising with the noble song
The glory, and the majesty of Man!

L. J. NICHOLSON.

ACID DROPS.

THE Roman Catholic Bishop of Nottingham has hurled his petty anathema at the University College, the High School, and the Board Schools, all of which his flock are warned to avoid. The poor prelate nearly foams at the mouth over "infidel and blasphemous literature," and altogether Free-thought seems to have frightened him badly. We hope soon to hear of his recovery.

CARDINAL MANNING does the same sort of thing in the *Nineteenth Century*. He says that the people don't want godless education, but good sound religious teaching by the regular doctors. Well, London has just spoken out, and it doesn't seem to care a straw for Manning's objurgations.

THE Rev. G. R. Pennington, vicar of Coton, Nuneaton, died in his own church last Sunday night. Of course these accidents will happen; but if a Secular lecturer were to die suddenly on the platform all the religious papers would call it a judgment, and it would serve as a frightful warning against infidelity for two or three generations.

THE Sultan of Turkey, poor man, is three-parts crazed. The comet is thought to be largely responsible for his condition. What a horrible thing it is that the lives and liberties of millions should depend on the vagaries of one man demented with astrology. Kingcraft and superstition are bad enough apart; together they are the most noxious influence in the world.

On the first of next month a Shrewsbury gentleman is going to publish a magazine entitled *Cosmos*. It will be devoted to a discussion of the conflict between modern Astronomy and the Bible. The conductor apparently is one of those antediluvians who believe that the world is flat and has ends, because the Bible speaks of them. This is what he says in his prospectus: "The infidel, the sceptic, and freethinker may well snap their fingers at the Christian journalism of the present day. Not only must the Bible contain more fallacies and falsehoods than any other book that is published, but all religion must be a hypocritical farce if modern science is demonstrably true. If the Christian's world is the 'Globe' the pulpits and religious press acknowledge it to be and teach their children that it is, then we say and affirm that the infidel and the freethinker are the only honest and consistent and intelligent people we have. But, if the very reverse of this is the truth, our Christian professors are either the most ignorant of dupes or the most pernicious and misleading of guides." We wish the gentleman all success in his unintentional work of bringing the Jew-book into discredit.

If we thought it worth our while to assail any other religion than Christianity, we could do so in the coarsest fashion without incurring any charge of blasphemy. Christian missionaries and others frequently avail themselves of this privilege. Last week the Baptist *Freeman* reviewing Edwin Arnold's "Light of Asia," called Buddhism "that degrading superstition," and ridiculed the idea of Christianity being in any way indebted to "the filthy cesspool of an Indian legend."

CHRISTIANITY, we suppose, is sufficiently indebted to the filthy cesspools of Jewish legends. There is, however, much reason to suppose it has borrowed many of its doctrines and practices from the Buddhists as well as from the Egyptians. It is well known that Buddhist missionaries were sent out into all parts of the world, under Asoka, above 200 years before Christ. Dean Milman, Dean Mansel, Hilgenfeld, and others, have remarked on the Buddhist notions found among the Essenes and Therapeuts, from whom Christianity probably sprang. The whole system of Catholic worship is strikingly similar to that of the Buddhists. Many details, such as using lights before altars, are sensible enough in the night worship of Buddhism, but quite unmeaning in the day worship of Catholics.

THE anecdote, in our last number, concerning the pious shopkeeper who when the Gospel was quoted to him, replied, "We don't want none of your Shakespeare here," reminds a correspondent that he once heard a clergyman give Pope's lines, saying, "As the holy scriptures beautifully express it, 'An honest man is the noblest work of God.'"

THIS is by no means the only good saying by man that has been credited to God. Robert Hall once planned a sermon on the text, "In the midst of life we are in death," which is frequently quoted as scripture. It is taken from the Church of England burial service, and comes from an old funeral hymn by Notker, a monk of St. Gall in the tenth century—"Media vita in morte sumus." In the House of Representatives, Mr. Talmar, member of Congress from Mississippi, replying to Mr. Clark, of New York, said, "I would commend to my friend from New York that passage of the Bible. 'Know thyself.' Many proverbs such as 'a word to the wise is sufficient,' 'spare the rod and spoil the child,' 'God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb,' etc., have been put to the account of the Holy Ghost, and so has Shakespeare's 'Undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns.'"

ONE of the best quotations of the kind was that by the Methodist minister who battled his way through stormy weather to the love-feast, where he stated that he received great encouragement from the passage of Holy Writ coming to his mind which says, "Faint heart never won fair lady."

THE *Spectator* calls Dr. Aveling a Bradlaughite, and says that his election to the London School Board is "a serious misfortune." So we hope it is, to the clerical party, and all who want to give children the chaff of theology instead of the good wheat of knowledge.

THERE is an elderly lady out in Hungary who has poisoned two of her own husbands for sport, and a number of other persons for money. She is condemned to death now, and she spends most of her time in confessing to priests and singing hymns. She is supposed to be pretty sure of a front seat in glory.

THE *Christian Commonwealth* says the old books, in answer to Paine, are useless now. We will take its word for this, but the "Age of Reason" survives, and every year commands an extensive sale. This Christian contemporary is awfully funny. It says the true answer to the "Age of Reason" is to be found in the Bible. Possibly it alludes to the text "He that believeth not shall be damned."

THE *C. C.* declares that "the remedy for our social, political, and religious confusion is to preach the word." Anyone who knows the history of Christianity knows that it is this very preaching that has led to all the religious confusion, but since the parsons live by it "there's nothing like leather."

DR. SINCLAIR PATERSON has been lecturing at Exeter Hall on "Christ and Criticism." He stated that Christianity is founded on facts, and is a belief to which nothing had been added since the first century of our era, but he failed to give the slightest evidence. We challenge him to show that the Gospels were written, or that the doctrines of the Trinity, the Miraculous Conception, and the Material Resurrection of Jesus were known within the first one hundred and fifty years of our era.

DR. PATERSON asserted that the Lord's Supper carried us back to the night before the Crucifixion. He might have said a great deal earlier, for the religious taking of bread and wine were ancient symbols of sun worship used in the Mysteries of Mithra, as testified to by the early Christian Father, Justin Martyr. Yet Christians believe it was founded by a person who, seated at a table, was idiot enough to offer bread to others and say, "Take eat, this is my body." The tale is a myth on the face of it, and would be set down as such if it occurred in the sacred books of any other religion.

SOME one has sent us a Wesleyan-Methodist tract, containing the story of "Isaac Marsden's Conversion." This worthy person appears to have flourished a long time ago. How is it that the Wesleyan-Methodists cannot convert any infidels now? We convert plenty of their people. Mr. Joseph Symes was a Methodist minister, and he a good deal more than balances Isaac Marsden, who seems to have been very poor cheese after all.

MATTHEW ARNOLD says that "the Protestant idea of heaven is that of a glorified unending tea-meeting."

WILL some of our Birmingham readers make inquiries about the white-haired old infidel who recently blubbered at one of R. T. Booth's meetings in Curzon Hall, and publicly confessed to having burnt all his sceptical books? The same story has been told in lots of places, and that old man seems to travel in the business.

THE *Pittsburg Post* says: "Mrs. Joseph Best, whose nervous system was shattered by the religious excitement of the Salvation Army agitation, is now lying in a serious condition with brain fever. Her husband threatens to sue the officers of the band if they again approach him or his wife. There is considerable criticism of the evangelists, owing to the way they are alleged to have influenced the woman to give them money."

THE *New York Truthseeker* says, the "Passion Play," representing scenes in the life and crucifixion of Christ, is to be brought out in this city on or before Christmas. As the play will be presented under pious auspices, it is not expected that it will be interfered with by the authorities, as was the case when an ordinary worldly manager attempted to put it on the stage.

THE *Detroit Free Press* knows a clergyman so eloquent that he can hold a man with the nose-bleed through a sermon lasting forty minutes. A man who will sit with the nose-bleed and listen to a sermon three-quarters of an hour long ought to be given the freedom of heaven without a very prolonged cross-examination, but he should have some consideration for the sexton.

ACCORDING to that veracious print, the *War Cry*, at a recent country Crucifixion meeting a converted cockle man gave as his testimony, "I have been so happy, that instead of crying 'Cockles and muscles all alive oh, I found myself saying, 'Jesus all alive, oh.' We suppose converted walnut sellers will soon be crying out, 'Jesus and the apostles, thirteen a penny—all cracked.'"

THIS is how the *Church Review* speaks of the Bishop of Liverpool: "The most charitable thing we can hope for the man is that he will be shortly required either to quit his present post, or be put under restraint as one *non compos mentis*." Yet, as a High Church organ, the *C. R.* is bound to believe that Bishop Ryle is of the true apostolical succession, and that he has received the Holy Ghost.

A SCOTCH minister was expounding the overthrow of Pharaoh in the Red Sea as follows:—"Many people, me brethren, think that Pharaoh and his charret were overwhelmed in one great whaave; but I, me brethren, am inclined to tak a mair practical view of the accident, and a'mn of the opening that whilst the attention of the coachman was temporarily engaged, some mischievous laddie pulled out the linchpin."

SPECIAL NOTICE.

MR. FOOTE lectures three times to-day (Sunday, Dec. 10th) in the Oddfellows Hall, Thornton Road, Bradford; morning, at 11, "Bible Blunders;" afternoon, at 3, "England's Four-fold Curse;" evening, at 6.30, "God and His Friends."

MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

December 17th, Grimsby; 19th, Walworth; 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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RECEIVED WITH THANKS.—H. H., C. B. B., Zeeky, T. W. B., Excel, R. H., J. Smith, Veritas.

BURTON-ON-TRENT.—You forgot to send your name. An Agnostic is one who does not know whether there is a God; an Atheist is one who does not believe there is a God. The distinction is very fine. In plain language, an Agnostic is a timid Atheist, and an Atheist is a brave Agnostic.

G. A. GASKELL.—We did not insert any of the letters from correspondents who were "down on you," and therefore there is no need for you to reply to them by anticipation. Every person whose letter we do not insert thinks we are afraid. It's a way they have. Well, we were not afraid to insert your first note, although it contained so many strong epithets against one of our staff. You made your protest, and Mr. Symes answered it. What more do you want? When correspondents begin discussing their *amour propre* it is time to close the discussion. You may have plenty more to say on the subject, but we have to consider our readers, and we have decided to let the matter rest where it is. Mr. Symes has absolutely nothing to do with this decision; he has not even seen the letter which you suppose he cannot answer. The full responsibility rests with us.

J. SOWDON.—We really cannot tell you whether Mr. Spurgeon can preach a sermon on cats. You had better send him on a few, and ask him personally.

LAZARUS.—Thanks for the cuttings. They are always welcome.

R. B. C.—Spurgeon, and his brethren of the broad cloth, don't understand the principle of liberty. They want freedom for themselves as against the Established Church, but they see no necessity for freedom for those who go farther.

E. BURNS.—Thanks. We are a little surprised at the coolness of "Constructive Secularists" when liberty is attacked. However, it is some consolation to know that when we are disposed of their turn will soon come.

F. HOLLAND.—There is a branch of the N. S. S in Portsmouth. The secretary is Mr. J. Brumage, 43 Sydenham Terrace, Fratton. We are unable to answer your other question.

H. UNDERDOWN.—Petition sheets received with thanks.

P. E. MAFFIOLA.—Thanks for your report and good wishes.

THOS. R. POLKINGTON.—Many thanks. We cannot forecast the results of the trial, but we believe it will in any case serve the interest of Freethought. To that end our best efforts will be directed.

J. INGLISS.—It will be brutal to remind the new Archbishop of the difficulty of the rich entering heaven.

G. TURNER.—(1) Anthony Collins was a very acute Freethought writer of last century. The party who wrote over that name in the *Investigator* was named William Henry Johnson. (2) Mr. H. Dunckley uses the signature "Verax."

VINERO.—"The Man of the Future," by Alex. Calder, published by Trübner, might suit you. For mental philosophy read the works of Mill, Bain and Spencer.

ALICIA.—We are obliged, but it is hardly worth while reopening the subject.

T. T.—We meant no offence. Our space is limited, and we cannot give long answers.

B. BRIGGS.—Persevere. Our publisher will send you the literature.

ESCUBINADOR.—Many Thanks. No doubt the Christmas Number will be the treat you expect.

V. J. ROGERS.—Thanks.

J. L. McMAHON.—Blasphemy petitions to hand. There is a larger public for *Progress* than you seem to think. Mr. Foote will be happy to lecture for the Republican League when he visits Edinburgh again.

O. S.—We understand that Mr. Tomnyson's play has already undergone considerable modifications. Thanks for the reference.

S. WATTS, Freethought newsagent, 43 Charles Street, Manchester, says that he is making good progress with the sale of our literature. He began a few weeks ago with 6 copies of the *Freethinker*, and his weekly sale is now 51.

'PROGRESS.'

THE first number of *Progress* will be ready on December 18th, and the readers of the *Freethinker* will see from the advertisement that the new magazine starts with a varied and interesting list of contents. I intend to make it, as far as I can, a worthy exponent of advanced ideas; and while the treatment of all questions will be candid and outspoken, attention will be paid to the legitimate demands of style. I ask the readers of the *Freethinker* to buy and peruse the first number; that will give them a better notion of its character than anything I can say here.

G. W. FOOTE.

SUGAR PLUMS.

OUR CHRISTMAS NUMBER is now ready. The proverb says, See Rome and die. We say, See our CHRISTMAS NUMBER and live. It is calculated to add years to every reader's life, and the Insurance Companies are negotiating with us for its yearly issue under any circumstances.

SERIOUSLY (if the case admits of it) our CHRISTMAS NUMBER is the warmest budget of blasphemy ever published. That is our answer to Sir Henry Tyler and his persecuting crew.

A NEW Freethought Paper, the *Liberal Age*, reaches us from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It is ably edited by T. W. Williams and goes in for the complete Secularisation of politics. The number before us contains a letter from Mr. W. H. Herndon, who was the law-partner of Abraham Lincoln from 1842 to 1860, and who knew his inner life and character better than any other man. He denies that President Lincoln was a Christian.

HAWARDEN, the seat of the Premier, has been stirred up by a lecture, at its Public Institute, by Dr. Burlingham, on Mr. Bradlaugh's right to sit in the Commons. Dr. Burlingham skillfully defended that right, and was ably supported by Mr. Kelly. After a warm discussion a resolution in favor of Mr. Bradlaugh was passed by a majority of at least five to one.

CREMATION has established a firm foothold in Italy. At a convention just held in Modena there were representatives of twenty-seven cremation societies established in different cities.

THE *Hulme Gazette* says that "there are many thousands of men in the professions, and tradesmen, and also servants in public offices, who are Atheists, but dare not avow it. Many of them readily admit their cowardice, but as they need bread and butter they are compelled to submit." This outspoken journal points out, however, that as these unavowed Atheists are obliged to think of the bread and butter of wife and children as well as their own, their meanness is not so great as that of the "mean and wicked system" which persecutes all dissent from itself.

THE same paper, in an article on Mr. Bradlaugh's rights, urges that "it is our business to see justice done, and let every man's god look after himself."

MR. THOMAS SHORE, of 33 Newington Green Road, will be glad to hear at once from any Freethinkers who are prepared to assist in the purchase of suitable premises for a Secular Club in North London. The total purchase-money is £1300, and of this £130 must be raised by December 11th. The shares are £1 each, 1s. payable on application, 1s. on allotment, and the rest in monthly instalments. Mr. Bradlaugh, Mrs. Besant, and Mr. Foote have promised support, and it is hoped that the London Freethinkers will immediately respond to the appeal of Mr. Shore and his enterprising friends. The opportunity is too good to be lost.

A PUBLIC meeting will be held in the Hall of Science on Wednesday, December 13th, 1882, at 8.30 precisely, to discuss the advisability of holding a Great National Demonstration in London in February next, in favor of Northampton's right to the voice and speech of its two lawful members. All London clubs are respectfully invited to send delegates.

CONSIDERABLE sensation was created in Rome yesterday afternoon by what is already called a "Bradlaugh incident" in the Italian Chamber. The Socialist Deputy Falleroni not only refused to take the oath, but insisted on remaining. "The people had sent him there, and he intended to stay." After he had several times replied to the President's requests

to leave the Chamber that he would only yield to force, the President told the questors, Signors Borromeo and de Riseis, to remove him, and after some further protestations he left the Chamber between them.

MESSERS. WILLIAMS AND NORGATE have just published a work on the "Life of Buddha," by Herman Oldenburg, the great Pali scholar and translator of Buddhist books. This work and all the recent literature upon Buddhism will be reviewed by Mr. Wheeler in the first number of *Progress*.

THE *Nineteenth Century* for this month contains a very appreciative account of Walt Whitman, from the pen of G. C. Macaulay. He styles Whitman, "a poet inferior to few, if any, of our time in the strength of native genius, however he may fall behind many in artistic perception," and says, "In religion, if he is to be labelled anything it must be perhaps 'Pantheist;' he is an exponent of 'Cosmic Emotion.'"

ON Wednesday evening, Nov. 29th, the Council of the National Secular Society (Mr. Bradlaugh in the chair) resolved, on Mr. Foot's motion, to subscribe £5 towards the expenses of Arabi Pasha's defence. A short protest against the treatment of our prisoner of war was also sent to the London papers, but they maintained their usual conspiracy of silence.

WE are always pleased to hear something new. A writer, who skulks under the signature of "Eldrudo," writes in the *Peterboro' Express* that Thomas Paine partook of the Lord's Supper to qualify him for office. There is an ingenuousness about this charge which disarms criticism. Eldrudo's friends should look after him.

MR. CLARABUT, who presided at one of the Dean of Peterborough's recent lectures, referred to the Secular Society established in the town, and warned young men against being drawn into discussion with its members, who had "subtle minds" and thus led people astray. This is a pretty good compliment to our Peterborough friends.

THE TALMAGIAN CATECHISM.

BY ROBERT G. INGERSOLL.

Question.—Do you think that Lot's wife was changed into salt? *Answer.*—Of course she was. A miracle was performed. A few centuries ago the statue of salt, made by changing Lot's wife into that article, was standing. Christian travellers have seen it.

Q.—Why do you think she was changed into salt? A.—For the purpose of keeping the event *fresh* in the minds of men.

Q.—Do you believe that Elijah went to heaven in a chariot of fire, drawn by horses of fire. A.—Of course he did.

Q.—What was this miracle performed for? A.—To convince the people of the power of God.

Q.—Who saw the miracle? A.—Nobody but Elisha.

Q.—Was he convinced before that time? A.—Oh, yes: he was one of God's prophets.

Q.—Suppose that in these days two men should leave a town together, and after a while one of them should come back having on the clothes of the other, and should account for the fact that he had his friend's clothes by saying that while they were going along the road together a chariot of fire came down from heaven, drawn by fiery steeds, and thereupon his friend got into the carriage, threw him his clothes, and departed, would you believe it? A.—Of course things like that don't happen in these days; God does not have to rely on wonders now.

Q.—How do you account for the fact that the heathen were not surprised at the stopping of the sun and moon by Joshua? A.—They were so ignorant that they had not the slightest conception of the phenomenon. Had they known the size of the earth, and the relation it sustained to the other heavenly bodies; had they known the magnitude of the sun, and the motion of the moon, they would, in all probability, have been as greatly astonished as the Jews were; but being densely ignorant of astronomy, it must have produced upon them not the slightest impression. But we must remember that the sun and moon were not stopped for the purpose of converting these people, but to give Joshua more time to kill them. As soon as we see clearly the purpose of Jehovah, we instantly perceive how admirable were the means adopted.

Q.—Do you think that Christ knew the Jews would crucify him? A.—Certainly.

Q.—Do you think that when he chose Judas he knew that he would betray him? A.—Certainly.

Q.—Did he know when Judas went to the chief priest and made the bargain for the delivery of Christ? A.—Certainly.

Q.—Why did he allow himself to be betrayed, if he knew the plot? A.—Infidelity is a very good doctrine to live by, but you should read the last words of Paine and Voltaire.

Q.—If Christ knew that Judas would betray him, why did he choose him? A.—Nothing can exceed the atrocities of the French Revolution—when they carried a woman through the streets and worshipped her as the Goddess of Reason.

Q.—Would not the mission of Christ have been a failure had

no one betrayed him? A.—Thomas Paine was a drunkard, and recanted on his death-bed, and died a blaspheming infidel besides.

Q.—Suppose Judas had understood the divine plan, what ought he to have done? Should he have betrayed Christ, or let somebody else do it; or should he have allowed the world to perish, including his own soul? A.—If you take the Bible away from the world, how would it be possible to have witnesses sworn in courts; how would it be possible to administer justice?

Q.—Is it not wonderful that all the writers of the four gospels do not give an account of the ascension of Jesus Christ? A.—This question has been answered long ago, time and time again.

Q.—Perhaps it has, but would it not be well enough to answer it once more? Some may not have seen the answer. A.—Show me the hospitals that infidels have built; show me the asylums that infidels have founded.

Q.—If Joseph was not the father of Christ, why was his genealogy given to show that Christ was of the blood of David? Why would not the genealogy of any other Jew have done as well? A.—That objection was raised and answered hundreds of years ago.

Q.—If they wanted to show that Christ was of David, why did they not give the genealogy of his mother, if Joseph was not his father? A.—That objection was answered hundreds of years ago.

Q.—How was it answered? A.—When Voltaire was dying he sent for the priest.

Q.—Do you think that Christ was actually God? A.—Of course he was.

Q.—Then why did Luke say that "Jesus increased in favor with God"? A.—I dare you to go into a room by yourself, and read the fourteenth chapter of St. John.

Q.—Did God always know that a Bible was necessary to civilise a country? A.—Certainly he did.

Q.—Why did he not give a Bible to the Egyptians, the Hindus, the Greeks, and the Romans? A.—It is astonishing what perfect fools infidels are.

Q.—Why do you call infidels "fools"? A.—Because I find in the fifth chapter of the gospel according to Matthew the following: "Whosoever shall say 'Thou fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire."

Q.—What do you consider is the strongest argument in favor of the inspiration of the scriptures? A.—The dying words of Christians.

Q.—What do you consider the strongest argument against the truth of infidelity? A.—The dying words of infidels. You know how terrible were the death-bed scenes of Hume, Voltaire, Paine, and Hobbes, as described by hundreds of persons who were not present; while all Christians have died with the utmost serenity, and with their last words have testified to the sustaining power of faith in the goodness of God.

Q.—What were the last words of Jesus Christ? A.—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—*From Ingersoll's New Book.*

REVIEW.

The British Secular Almanack, for 1883. London: 84 Fleet Street, E.C.

WELL worth threepence, but the proper features of an Almanack are somewhat scanty. There are brief articles by Charles Watts, Walter Lewin, Arthur B. Moss, William Maccall, Dr. Kaines, Dr. Lewins, Gegeef, C. C. Cattell, and E. V. Mayer; and poems by Saladin, Lara, and Thomas Mead. There is a curious absence of information about the British Secular Union.

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"ARE churches practical?" asks the *New York Tribune*. Well, they seem to be. They contrive to get money out of tight-fisted old curmudgeons who dodge the tax-collector.

THE following anecdote is taken from a French religious book:—An old woman, being very ill in bed, was visited by a charitable lady who, on seeing that the patient had only a few more days to live, discoursed pious words to her, urging her to think of Jesus Christ who had suffered and died for her. "What," cried the old woman, "Jesus Christ died for me! How kind it was of him to be sure! Why! I did not even know the poor fellow had been ill! But the fact of the matter is, kind lady, I had no means of knowing anything about it, for we live so far from the town that no news ever reach us in this lonely place."

FREETHOUGHT GLEANINGS.

THE VIRGIN AND CHILD.—The Babylonians in their popular religion supremely worshipped a Goddess Mother and a Son, who was represented in pictures and in images as an infant or child in his mother's arms. From Babylon the worship of the Mother and the Child spread to the ends of the earth.—*Rev. Alex. Hislop, "The Two Babylons,"* p. 32; 1871.

RELIGION AND IMPURITY.—It is an interesting and singular fact that the special indulgence in religious exercises undermines the fabric of morality. Moderate use of the various instincts and faculties is right and healthful, and the religious instinct is as much entitled to healthy exercise as other instincts, but I wish to make you believe that its over-exercise, or exclusive exercise, is productive of sexual immorality. Those men and women who in all ages of the world have been set apart for religious purposes have been notoriously impure. The same thing is true to day. Priests, monks, nuns, saints, media, ecstasies and devotees, are famous for their impurities. But scientific pursuits tend in another direction by liberating the intellect, enlarging the affections, and cooling the temper, they encourage and foster calmness and purity. Geologists, botanists, doctors and chemists, are, on the average, healthier and purer people.—*Dr. F. R. Morvin, "The Pathology and Treatment of Mediomania,"* p. 62; New York, 1874.

EARLY CHRISTIANS AND FORGED WRITINGS.—Exaggerating beyond measure the value of the written title, if we may so express it, they forgot the spirit in the letter, and were far less concerned to base their belief upon a rational interpretation of the canonical scriptures than to add to their number. When the name of an apostle had been attached to any doctrine whatsoever, even were it in flagrant opposition to the New Testament, they considered the point established beyond appeal. Such at least was the vulgar opinion. Hence false teachers were under strong temptation to put in circulation a host of apocryphal scriptures. They would not have done so if such endeavors had been rendered futile by a true conception of Christian authority, which would have attached importance to the general scope of the revelation, rather than to isolated texts, or the invocation of some honored name. When once the production of an apostolic signature is accepted as decisive, there is every inducement to fabricate false documents.—*Rev. E. de Pressensé D.D., "The Early Years of Christianity,"* vol. iii., p. 191; 1879.

THE GOSPELS.—A wide gap intervenes between eye-witnesses of the apostles or apostolic men that wrote the sacred books, and the earliest fathers who assert such authorship. The traditional bridge between them is a precarious one. As the chasm cannot be filled by adequate external evidence, we are thrown back on the internal character of the works themselves. One thing appears from the early corruption of the sacred records spoken of by Irenæus, Origen and others, that they were not regarded with the veneration necessarily attaching to infallible documents. Their being freely handled excluded the idea of rigid canonisation. The men who first canonised them had no certain knowledge of their authors.—*Dr. S. Davidson, I.J.D., "The Canon of the Bible,"* pp. 161, 162; 1880.

PROFANE JOKES.

LITTLE girl (aged five) reading the Bible (twenty-first chapter of Genesis) with her mamma. Mamma reads the eighth verse—“And the child grew and was weaned.” Little Girl: “What does that mean, mamma?” adding immediately, “Oh, I know, they gave Isaac the bottle!”

BISHOP AMES tells a story of a slave-master in Missouri, in the olden time of negro vassalage, who said to his chattel: “Pompey, I hear you are a great preacher.” “Yes, massa, de Lord do help me powerful sometimes.” “Well, Pompey, don't you think the negroes steal little things on the plantation?” “Ese mighty 'fraid they does, massa.” “Then, Pompey, I want you to preach a sermon to the negroes against stealing.” After a brief reflection Pompey replied: “You see, massa, dat wouldn't never do, cause 'twould trow such a col'ness over the meetin'.”

At a recent performance of Handel's “Messiah,” the player of the cello was overheard to remark, during the singing of the refrain, “Who is the King of Glory? who is the King of Glory?” “Hand us over the rosin, Bill, and we'll jolly soon show them who the King of Glory is.”

A REVEREND gentleman took two of his nieces out for a row on the sea upon a certain memorable occasion that he is not likely to forget. Approaching a cave, he commenced to dilate upon the reverberation incidental thereto, and proceeded to give a practical demonstration in the shape of a loud “Halloa there!” Echo responded, “Halloa there,” in an equally emphatic tone. The girls exclaimed, “Wonderful! Never heard such an echo before.” Encouraged by the success of the example, he tries again: “What are you doing there?” Something went wrong with the echo then: it changed hands possibly: for a stentorian

voice replied, “What has that got to do with you?” Our reverend friend has never done anything since in this line.

MADE HIM HONEST.—A short time back a man in the coffee business was lead to believe that he was a sinner, and was induced to come out and array himself on the side of religion. The morning after he had taken this step he reached his warehouse and found business suspended, and upon asking an explanation, his son replied:—“Well father, I didn't know what to do. I didn't suppose after what you said last night that you would mix any more beans with the coffee. I presume it will make a difference.” “Yes, it will make just a little difference,” calmly observed the old man. “We have been mixing one barrel of beans to four of coffee, haven't we?” “Yes.” “Well, then, take out a few of the beans—*about two quarts, I guess, will do.*”

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Edited by

G. W. Foote.

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