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PRICE TWOPENCE

Despite the philosopher who, as a genuine Englishman, tried to bring laughter into bad repute in all thinking minds, I would even allow myself—to rank philosophers according to the quality of their laughing—up to those who are capable of GOLDEN laughter.—NIETZSCHE.

Notes on the "Blasphemy" Case.

PEOPLE ask me what day the Boulter case will be tried at the Central Criminal Court. It is impossible for me or any man to tell them. The Sessions open on Tuesday, February 4. That is all I know at present. * * *

I must be excused from giving any idea of the plans of the defence. Naturally we do not wish to enlighten the prosecution. And there is only one way of keeping a secret, and that is, telling nobody. Suffice it to say that everything is being carefully thought out, with a view to defeating this belated attack on free speech. * * *

This is, in my opinion, the *only* way of defeating the attack. Some enterprising gentlemen are talking of getting up public committees and repealing the Blasphemy Laws. But I have heard that sort of thing for the last twenty-five years, and nothing ever came of it. The only man who ever *did* anything in that way was Charles Bradlaugh. He introduced a Bill in the House of Commons abolishing "blasphemy" altogether as a crime, and pushed it through with his own incomparable address and vigor. He found, however, that those who voted for his Oaths Bill would not support him on this occasion. Only forty-five followed him into the division lobby. Thus the question was hung up until another Bradlaugh came along—and number two is not yet on the horizon. Repealing the Blasphemy Laws is likely to be a slow and tedious business. It may very well take another quarter of a century—or longer. Meanwhile the Blasphemy Laws may be *practically* repealed by rendering "Blasphemy" prosecutions very difficult and costly. When the bigots find that they cannot depend on securing their intended victim, and that the odds are rather against their doing so at all, they will drop the game and seek sport in some other direction. * * *

The idea of getting representative Christians to denounce this "blasphemy" prosecution is—well, I will not call it childish, but amazingly sanguine. Even the most "liberal-minded" Christians have not so much as opened their lips on the subject. Mr. Campbell is just as bad as the rest. Yet he will find his name turning up in the case. He is mentioned in Mr. Boulter's indictment as the author of the statement that the orthodox God is "spiteful and silly." That bit of City Temple "blasphemy" is laid to the charge of the Highbury Corner "infidel." It would have been manly, therefore, if Mr. Campbell had publicly and plainly dissented from the view that Christian ministers who keep their own motor-cars may do with impunity what is an unspeakable crime in "infidel" lecturers who take

their motor-cars in penny instalments. But with him, as with all the rest of the tribe, the word is "Mum!" When you scratch a Christian you catch a Bigot. 'Twas ever thus. * * *

I looked through several Christian papers last week for a reference to the Boulter case, and I looked in vain. They appear to be quite satisfied with the persecution of "blasphemers." It is perfectly right, in their eyes, that English citizens who are not respectful to *their* religion should be treated as criminals. It does not occur to them that the very word "blasphemy" ought to stink in their nostrils. Their own Lord and Savior was accused of that crime when *he* was arrested. This is what we read in Mark xiv. 63-64:—

"Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death."

After that classic instance of the operation of the Blasphemy Laws the Christians ought to be ashamed of the word. It should be wiped out of their dictionary. But the fact is otherwise. They are bent on earning the denunciation of "Woe unto you hypocrites!" * * *

Let there be no misunderstanding. I repeat—and it is highly *necessary* to repeat—that the suggestions of "obscenity" made in the Police Court are not carried forward to the Central Criminal Court. Why? Simply because the trial has to take place in the full light of publicity, and the policy of innuendo is no longer feasible. The Freethought party may take it from me that Mr. Boulter is indicted for absolutely nothing but "blasphemy." There is not an insinuation of anything else. And I, for my part, am not going to let the issue be obscured. It is idle to talk about "coarse" language. That is not a crime. Moreover, it is a matter of personal taste—and *de gustibus non est disputandum*. Some people are terribly shocked by the good old English expression "in the family way," while other people think that employing foreign phrases, such as *enciente*, is the real vulgarity. For the rest, I have no concern with Mr. Boulter's style of oratory; that is his business, not mine; he stands or falls to his own public; I am only concerned with his right to criticise Christianity with the same freedom that Christians exercise in criticising Secularism. And I say that if Christians deny him this right they are contemptible bigots, and must be taught a very necessary lesson in toleration. * * *

Mr. Boulter is prosecuted for pure and simple "blasphemy." To demonstrate this I shall depart from the usual practice and quote from his indictment. It sets forth—

"That Harry Boulter, being an evil disposed person, and disregarding the Laws and Religion of this Realm, and wickedly devising, contriving, and intending to scandalise and vilify the Christian Religion, and to bring the Holy Scriptures and the Christian Religion into disbelief, ridicule, and contempt amongst people of this Realm, and to publicly blaspheme Almighty God and our Lord Jesus Christ," etc., etc.

Half-a-dozen sentences, picked out of three lectures, each occupying more than a hour in delivery, are

cited in proof of this charge, which is obviously a charge of speaking disrespectfully of the Christian Religion. Simply this, and nothing more. And the prosecution, of course, hope to get twelve Christians in the jury box, with the view of obtaining a most just and impartial decision.

Mr. W. J. Ramsey sends me a copy of a resolution passed unanimously by the Political Council of the Borough of Hackney Workmen's Club on Friday evening, January 17, and also passed unanimously the next evening by the Council of the Metropolitan Radical Federation, representing some 40,000 London Radicals:—

"That this Federation views with surprise and indignation the revival by the Police authorities of the infamous Blasphemy Laws, and strongly condemns the action of the Home Secretary in giving his sanction to such proceedings."

Mr. Ramsey suggests that all readers of the *Freethinker* belonging to political clubs or other institutions should bring a similar resolution before their fellow-members, get it carried, and forward it to the Home Secretary and the local member of parliament. Where this cannot be done, it is at least possible for Freethinkers to write to their parliamentary representatives and press this matter upon their attention. Nothing should be left undone that may stir up public opinion against "this abominable prosecution," as Mr. Chesterton calls it.

Writing letters to the newspapers is good policy. Many Freethinkers could do that. Why don't they do it—and do it at once? Even the Socialist press wants looking after; which is all the stranger, because Mr. Boulter preached Socialism before he preached Freethought. I understand that silence is being broken in the *Clarion* this week, by Mr. Blatchford himself. It is the eleventh hour, but better late than never. Last week's *New Age* incidentally mentioned the Boulter case as one "to which we shall refer later." Do they mean when he is "doing time," or what? Or is it merely the settled method of Fabian the Cunctator?

Little good would be done—probably none at all—by troubling the Christian press with communications. Letters would either be burked or rendered unrecognisable by their writers; and this would simply lead to weariness and vexation. Besides, the readers of Christian papers belong to the hopeless classes. It is an historic truth that no Church, and no religion, was ever improved from inside. Progress has always been the result of outside pressure. Nothing could be truer than Ingersoll's remark that Christianity never left off burning people alive from any dislike of the process; it simply left off when there were too many people who objected to being burnt alive.

And now a last word, since it seems necessary, as to the financial aspect of this struggle. Mr. Boulter's prosecution is at the cost of the English taxpayers. His defence is being paid for by the National Secular Society. I have already stated that the Society, having money at command at present, has hypothecated a considerable sum to this object. Should the fight be a long one, and more expensive than was at first contemplated, the amount available may be insufficient. In that case an appeal will have to be made for additional funds. But in the meanwhile the Society is not soliciting any outside assistance. I hope this is distinctly understood. And the better it is understood the more it will be recognised that Charles Bradlaugh was justified in expecting the Society he founded to go on fighting for Freethought when he was in his grave.

G. W. FOOTE.

Christianity as a Moraliser.

THE attitude of the Church to morality has always been more or less ambiguous. Even at the present day it is the boast of many evangelical ministers that they are not ethical teachers or mere lecturers on morals. Their supreme business, they allege, is to preach the gospel of deliverance from the damnation of hell through faith in the finished work of Christ. Morality, as such, or mere morality, as they often call it, is, in their estimation, of little value. A man may lead a highly virtuous life, he may even be all that can be desired of him as a member of society, and yet remain, in the sight of God, a miserable sinner doomed to everlasting perdition. But there is another clerical school, according to which the one mission of Christianity is to moralise the whole of life. The direct result of knowing God in Jesus Christ is to become good citizens. Many of these preachers assure us that Christianity, in its practical expression, means Socialism. But both schools of religious instructors are in complete agreement as regards the assertion that the acceptance of Christianity results in the exaltation, or regeneration, of morality. Whether directly or indirectly, whether as a primary object or as a secondary consequence, faith in Christ, it is affirmed, does make men moral. Now, this assertion we are prepared to challenge, and to justify our challenge from history.

We have already seen that at its highest and best the moral teaching of Paganism was superior to that of Christianity, or that Seneca, for example, was a better ethical guide than St. Paul. But the Christians are perpetually inviting us to consider the vast difference in the moral condition of the world the coming of Jesus has made. Some time ago, when it was the custom to characterise him as nothing but a theological amateur, the Rev. R. J. Campbell once retorted that, whatever he was as a theologian, he claimed to be an expert in the study of history, and that from his expert knowledge of history came the unshakable conviction that the advent of Christ had been an incalculable boon to society. Even the late Dean Church, who had cleansed his mind from many popular prejudices, maintained that with Christianity "a new morality" had entered into the world and largely transformed it. Now, this is a dogmatic statement which must be tested by facts which cannot be denied. It is the easiest thing in the world to eulogise the moral precepts of the New Testament, to quote eloquent passages from the writings of eminent Church Fathers in which the Christian life is praised for its purity, earnestness, and love, or to expatiate on "the high level of morality" enjoined by Christianity, and the moral conduct the Christian societies were intended to promote; and similar claims can be put in on behalf of almost every other great religion. It is the most difficult thing conceivable, however, to demonstrate that Christianity ever produced the morality it enjoined, or that Christian societies ever did promote the moral conduct they were intended to promote.

Let us take the fourth century, when Christianity is declared to have exhibited its very noblest qualities and exercised its greatest moral power. An eminent divine, in his anxiety to support that declaration, says: "You know not how destitute of true and generous action the Roman world was." Probably most theologians would agree with and repeat that oracular utterance. But every unprejudiced historian is fully aware that the Roman world was distinguished for its magnanimity, its justice, its liberty, its care for the weak and unfortunate, and, in general, for its high and beneficent type of civilisation. Consult Gibbon, Lecky, Renan, Dill, and Farrer, and you will see how utterly false the divine's picture of the Roman Empire is. Well, equally extravagant and misleading is the estimate of the primitive Christian Church found in the works of its apologists. Harnack assures us that within the first three centuries Christianity conquered the Roman Empire, and quotes many sub-apostolic Fathers and apologists in

support of its perfect morality and transforming efficacy; but it would be quite as easy to quote from the same writers passages in which the immoralities and crimes of the Christians are severely denounced. Harnack speaks scornfully of "the abominable charges circulated by the Jews against the moral life of Christians which held their own for a long while, and were credited by the common people as well as by many of the educated classes," and avers that anyone who has examined the evidence finds something very different. But this German scholar is radically mistaken. Read Paul's picture of the Christian community at Corinth (1 Cor i., iii, v., vi., xi. 17-22) and you will be obliged to admit that morality was at a very low ebb there. The same state of things, with slight variations, is to be seen in every succeeding generation. The Jewish charges were not all false; Celsus and Porphyry were not deliberate liars; nor can we ignore the fact that many of the Fathers bitterly complained of the numerous shortcomings of the saints. Thus we find Tertullian, somewhere about 208, assailing the lax Catholics and their clergy. It is true that when he made his attack Tertullian had seceded from the Catholic Church; but there is nothing to show that he unduly magnified the sins and corruptions prevalent amongst heaven's chosen people.

According to Dean Church, there occurred in the fourth century a "great restoration of civilisation, due mainly to the impulse and power of Christian morality." Now, what were the outward signs of this alleged "great restoration of civilisation"? In other words, what were the chief products of Christianity in the fourth century? These two—celibacy and asceticism, neither of which was calculated to improve the conditions and relations of social life. Even granting that celibacy was accepted by a small number of the best people, did the family life of the Empire become, in consequence, any purer and nobler? Monks were doubtless very numerous; but of what service were or could they be to the world of struggling men and women? This is how Lecky portrays the monk:—

"A hideous, sordid, and emaciated maniac, without knowledge, without patriotism, without natural affection, passing his life in a long routine of useless and atrocious self-torture, and quailing before the ghostly phantoms of his delirious brain, had become the ideal of the nations that had known the writings of Plato and Cicero and the lives of Socrates and Cato."

There were not less than a hundred thousand monks and virgins; and yet the world was in "a condition of depravity, and especially of degradation, which has seldom been surpassed." You may be told that Lecky was hopelessly prejudiced; but he only echoes what St. Ambrose (340-420) and St. Augustine (354-430) had said before him, and nobody will lay prejudice to their charge. According to these impartial witnesses, the most disgusting licentiousness abounded among the virgins and the monks themselves. If all this was true of the consecrated classes, we can infer what vices must have enervated the bulk of the people.

Now, observe, the Evangelicals are most emphatic in holding that Christianity was at its purest, and achieved its noblest triumphs, during the first three centuries. When it became the religion of the State its glory began to depart, and its power to decline. The Dark Ages were exceptionally licentious ages. The contemptible Valentinian III. wallowed in impurity without let or hindrance in the Eternal City. Pope after Pope rushed into every excess of wickedness, and Pope after Pope denounced the shameless iniquity of the times. Fornication and incest were rife among the clergy everywhere. There was a marked improvement under the reign of Charles the Great, but the roots of the evils were left untouched, with the result that the damming of the waters of impurity caused a terrific flood of sensuality a little later on. The tenth century was the lowest and darkest age in the history of civilisation, often stigmatised as the age of the infamous Pornocracy. The eleventh and the twelfth were not much

better. The thirteenth century was noted for the number of its saints and great preachers. It was now that St. Francis, St. Antony, and St. Dominic startled Europe by their fiery preaching. Did these saintly men work a revolution in morals? By no means. Violence, fraud, and impurity were in full swing. This was the age in which the Pope took the prostitutes of Rome under his special protection, and a ship containing three hundred such women was despatched to the French soldiers who were trying to snatch the Holy Sepulchre from the unspeakable Saracens.

Enough has been said to prove conclusively that Christianity has not succeeded in moralising Europe. The profession of religion was never a barrier against immoral practices, either for clergy or laity. This would be a truism, needing no support, were it not for the persistent and deliberate misrepresentations of Christian writers and speakers, who unscrupulously magnify the evils of Paganism, and not only minimise, but, as a rule, totally ignore, those of Christianity. We have no desire to sing the praises of Paganism, in so far as it was a religion, but as a philosophy of human life on earth it was undoubtedly superior to Christianity, and to stamp it out by force amounted to a crime. To moralise life we must first rationalise it, and Christianity has always been the sworn enemy of every form of rationalism. To moralise life is to bring it under the law of society, or to make each individual life a contribution to the common good, and it is well known that Christianity has invariably allied itself with the classes against the masses. To moralise life is to naturalise it, and this nothing can do but education. Moral conduct signifies conduct under the guidance and control of educated intelligence. He alone is a moral man whose one purpose is to add to the happiness and prosperity of the community in which his lot is cast.

J. T. LLOYD.

Blasphemy.

THE present blasphemy prosecution should have at least one good effect—that of reminding Freethinkers of all kinds that much needs to be done before genuine liberty of thought and speech can be said to exist in this country. For long enough many Freethinkers have excused themselves for their inactivity with the reflection that the fight is now practically over. Orthodox Christianity, they say, is dead; Christian theology is becoming more and more liberal—its harsher features are being smoothed away; there is no longer the need there was for persistent fighting and hard hitting. Such people, as events have shown, are living in a fool's paradise. Christianity will never cease to be dangerous until it is dead. Bad laws will never cease to be a menace to liberty until they are repealed. Christians will not cease to be bigots until they forget the title they bear. It is true that many prominent Christians would now be ashamed to set the Blasphemy Laws in motion; but the less prominent ones are not, and these, in the very nature of things, must form the vast majority. Moreover, the prominent Christians, who could so easily put an end to such legal iniquities, are passively acquiescent. Not a single Non-conformist preacher, of all that army of hypocrites who for years has been shouting that they are the bulwark and preserver of English liberties, have raised a word of protest. Dr. Clifford, with his concern for justice for all citizens, is as silent as Mr. Campbell, the passionate advocate of a new State in which all shall be free and equal. They do not believe in the State patronage of religion, but they do believe in the State suppression of Free-thought in the interests of religion. They lack the courage to come out in the light of day as persecutors of opinion; they are also without the manliness to denounce such persecution as an outrage on civilisation. They are simply mean enough to hope for the

success of the efforts of those they dare not denounce and equally dare not openly support. Christianity as a creed is well matched by the type of character it develops.

Alone of all subjects on the face of the earth, religion is the one thing that must have legal protection against assault. Art, science, literature, political opinion, all are independent of it. You may laugh at science until you're tired; you may speak as disrespectfully of the law of gravitation as you feel inclined; it never enters into the head of a sane individual to drag you before a judge and jury to be punished for your conduct. We know that the facts of nature will be there when laughter has ceased and irreverence has lost its piquancy. Laughter, sarcasm, irreverence, has no ultimate power against a fact. They who laugh at facts have, finally, people laughing at them, not with them; and the jester's weapon is turned against himself. Men laughed at Copernicus, at Darwin, at Lyell, and scores of other scientific leaders; but none of these ever dreamed of appealing to Parliament to protect them against the assaults of unbelievers. Religion alone does this; and, in doing it, confesses openly what a sham and an imposture it is. Christians exclaim, with horror, that the Atheist declares there is no God. Why, it is themselves who say so; the law against blasphemy is a concrete expression of their belief. They admit, by their conduct and by their laws, that their God cannot exist in the face of a determined assault; that he only lives so long as people believe in him. To laugh at God is blasphemy, and all blasphemy is deicide, since it tears away the veil that ignorant solemnity has woven, and discloses the imposture it has concealed.

Who is it that suffers by the offence of blasphemy? Not any human being, so far as we can discover. It is God who is injured, says the believer. Well, then, leave it to God to take action in the matter. Once upon a time, if we may trust the veracious Christian literature with which our predecessors were dosed, God did pay personal attention to those who displeased him. Blasphemers were paralysed, struck by lightning, afflicted with disease, robbed of their speech or of their sight, by the Deity whom they had offended. But that was a long time ago. Now God does nothing—does not even punish those he is offended with. He either does not care or cannot act. Or perhaps, as that Biblical blasphemer Elijah suggested on another occasion, "either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awakened." Anyway, he does nothing; and so others act in his stead. But it is a principle of English law that every injured party must himself carry his wrongs, real or imaginary, before the courts for redress. Why is there any exception made in the case of Deity? Why not wait until the Deity plainly and unmistakably complains of injury, and as plainly asks a policeman, one judge, and twelve jurymen to protect his omnipotence against the assaults of one of his own insignificant creations?

The curious thing is that blasphemy is an almost universal offence. Nearly everybody is guilty of it, either in relation to their own God or to the God of someone else. And their blasphemy, when directed against the Deity of their own time and country, is more often the mark of the triumph of their better nature than an overflow of low passions. Martin Luther, when he looked round at the world, could not forbear speaking of "poor, half-witted God." Mr. R. J. Campbell, whose New Theology is so very old, refers to the God of current Christianity as "Poor God," says that this "God is a fool," he is "a hateful sort of a God," and hopes that "he will soon be dead and buried." And even Herbert Spencer cannot avoid sneering at the current conception of the three Almighty's who are only one Almighty, with one-third dying to satisfy the other two-thirds. Such expressions are really creditable to those who give them utterance. They are so many indications that healthy, critical, human nature is more powerful than the stupid theological

creed with which it is in conflict. Those who think little, and feel less, do not "blaspheme" in this way; they go their way insensitive to the higher human promptings, cowards by nature and hypocrites by custom.

A blasphemy prosecution not only shows real Freethinkers who are their enemies, it also shows them who are their friends. Those who use such question-begging epithets as "vulgar" or "offensive" as an excuse for their inactivity, or who apologise to the enemy by drawing a distinction between a "cultured" and an "uncultured" attack on Christianity, have no right in the Freethought camp. For defeating a blasphemy prosecution is not a question of coarseness or vulgarity, of culture or its absence, but simply whether Christians shall or shall not be encouraged to legally suppress opinions they object to. This cowardly connivance at persecution behind a pretended regard for culture covers no genuine concern for culture, as such. Otherwise it would be recognised that culture is never in such danger as when bigotry is encouraged to regulate the mental life of a nation. One may well question whether such an attitude really indicates the possession of any culture worth talking about. It is far more likely to betoken that fairly large class of people who mistake an affected pronunciation for a cultured instinct, with whom solemnity stands as an equivalent for profundity, and whose whole survey of life is dominated by a superficial smattering of knowledge lazily acquired and badly assimilated. Freethought in England has suffered much from this class—too weak to be Christian, and not strong enough to be Atheist—in the past, and seems likely to suffer from it for some time to come.

Of course, the present prosecution will fail, in its ultimate object, at any rate. A conviction may be gained in this particular case, but that cannot check the growth of Freethought, and it is that which is really aimed at. Whether persecution could really and permanently check the growth of opinion was tried centuries ago, and under conditions most favorable for the experiment. The great Catholic Church, with all its power, could not succeed. The chief Protestant churches, with quite as much of the persecuting spirit as their older rival, also essayed the experiment, and failed quite as signally. And, where these churches failed, it is hardly likely that present-day Christianity, with its uncertainty, its timidity, and with its doctrines riddled by modern science, will succeed. All the old bigotry, and all the old malice may be there; the spirit may be willing, but the flesh is too weak to carry out its behests. The Christian effort to suppress Freethought by force is foredoomed to failure. The stone of bigotry thrown into the stream of progress creates an eddy instead of damming the torrent.

It is probable, that before the present fight is over, some prominent Christians will be brought to the point of regretting that it ever began. In that case, I venture to prophesy it will be on the ground that it does not pay, not because they dissent from the principle involved. They will say it is a mistake to advertise heretical opinions so publicly, that it is costly because it only creates active enemies of those who were formerly passive, while nerving others to still more energetic attack. But there will be few who will dissent as a matter of principle. Christians—some of them—have grown wiser by experience. They know that persecution has failed in the past, and they feel that it will fail in the present and in the future. But while they deplore persecution as a matter of policy, they look back longingly to the good old days, and shake their heads despondingly over the degeneracy of the times.

The Boulter prosecution is a new year's present from Christian bigots to English Freethought. And the National Secular Society, at least, has no intention of returning the present marked "Wrong Address." It is a call to arms, to which genuine Freethinkers will not be slow in responding. For my own part, I thank them for the gift, for it is a triumphant proof that our attitude all along has

been the right one; and, in asserting that Christianity is to-day in its essence what it always was, we are absolutely right. So long as there exist upon the statute-books laws deliberately aiming at the repression of opinion, liberty can never be complete; and, so long as there remains in our midst people bigoted enough to put such laws in motion, security of freedom and progress can never be assured. Christianity, as a living force, is what it always has been, and always will be, while it is strong enough to exert influence—a menace to civilisation. The only gods that are bearable are dead ones; for while powerless in themselves for evil, they are eloquent witnesses of man's folly in the past, and a warning to him to be well on his guard in the future.

C. COHEN.

Musical Genius and Religion.

"The delusions of Christianity are fatal to genius and originality: they limit thought."—SHELLEY.

MR. ROBERT TURNBULL'S recently-published book, *Musical Genius and Religion*, is one more instance of Heine's dictum that you may hear much common sense from an Englishman on a variety of topics, but you are sure to hear him talk nonsense on religion. Mr. Turnbull is the musical critic of the *Glasgow Evening News* (if I remember rightly), and on more than one occasion I have felt that he is one of the few musical critics of the press whose opinions were worth troubling about. The volume he has just published is the first of his works that I have seen outside of the periodical press, and I am loth to say that it scarcely does him credit.

Our author assures us that he has approached the subject in an inquiring spirit rather than with the intention to formulate theories, and this is what he says:—

"In the following pages I do not propose to discuss the relation of Religion to Art in general. My concern is with Art that deals specifically with Religion. We might narrow down the question and ask if non-religious men have treated successfully religious subjects. In music, does a man's personal relation to religion affect his treatment of sacred themes? The believer in Art for Art's sake may insist that religious art is like any other kind of art, and must be judged simply as art; and he is no doubt right up to a certain point. But if he says that the sceptical artist can produce great religious art, the facts—of musical history at least—will hardly bear him out. The greatest religious music seems always to have behind it the ecstasy of the religious man."

Mr. Turnbull has an idea that the religious artist produces great religious art simply because he deals in things in which he firmly believes (p. 65). But I am afraid that he will find this a very difficult position to maintain. Has he not heard how people wondered that Perugino, "the most spiritual of painters," could have been a Freethinker? Shakespeare scarcely believed in the existence of Ariel or Caliban, nor did Goethe trust to the reality of Faust or Mephistopheles; yet I am not aware that their artistic outlook was in any way endangered by their unbelief. Look at some of the greatest religious art-works in music, the composers of which were sceptics in matters of religion, and most certainly did not believe in the things they dealt with—Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, Berlioz's *Requiem*, and Brahms's *Ein Deutsches Requiem*; all of which are monuments in art, and occupy an equal place with the composers' secular compositions. On the other hand, take Mendelssohn, Liszt, and Dvorák, who approached their art as believers, writing, it would seem, in full view of Heine's words—"the less church music attracts the better," and permitting all æsthetic principle to be dominated by religious devotion. Where, in *Elijah*, is there to be found the

brilliant workmanship which make the composer's *Italian* and *Scotch Symphonies* memorable for all time? Do we recognise the composer of the immortal *Les Préludes* in the pretentious, sentimental *St. Elizabeth*? And again, how tawdry is *St. Ludmila* to the charming *New World Symphony*. I call to mind Mrs. Malaprop's legend that "comparisons is oderous"; but I mention these instances to Mr. Turnbull with full assurance that a man's personal relation to religion does affect his treatment of sacred themes, whether it be the subjective meekness and humility of Mendelssohn and Liszt, in making the music minister humbly to the glory of their theme alone, or the objective religiosity of Dvorák, in catering for an "insatiable oratorio-demanding public."

This is where Mr. Turnbull's primary proposition falls to the ground, and I will quote from two authoritative writers to show that the question of "Art that deals specifically with Religion" must necessarily include "the relation of Religion to Art," at least so far as the Christian religion is concerned; for the conflict between the æsthetic and devotional principles never occurred in antiquity, except in a late period of Greek art. Of the limits of Art that deals specifically with Religion, Mr. Joseph Bennett, the well-known musical critic, says:—

"The Incarnation, the Suffering, the Death, the Resurrection, the Ascension—at the very thought of these things all true Christendom becomes inspired with love, reverence, and awe. Approaching them the composer enters a Holy of Holies, and must be careful how he treads. He had better leave outside every form of æstheticism that cannot be made strictly subordinate to his religious devotion. He may not use his theme as a mere vehicle for his art" (*Musical Times*, Jan. 1884).

And let it be remembered that Mr. Bennett is not dealing with church music, but simply with the religious music of the concert-room. Yet wherein does he differ from the authoritative Catholic writer Jakob, who defines the attitude of Art to Religion?

"No branch of art exists for its own sake alone. Art is a servant, and it either serves God or the world, the eternal or the temporal, the spirit or the flesh. Ecclesiastical art must derive its rule and form from the Church" (*Die Kunst im Dienste der Kirche*).

Our author devotes a chapter each to Bach, Hadyn, Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, and Wagner. Why the latter is included quite astounds me! (*Que diable allait il faire dans cette galère?*) The uncompromising heretic Wagner, who said "I denote the Christian principle as hostile to or incapable of art," might at least have been spared (save for Beethoven!) "the goodly fellowship of the apostles." Why not have included Gounod, and that Philistinian sweetmeat *The Redemption*, with all its "harmless respectability," as Hanslick would say? Another unhappy remark is concerning Berlioz, who, as Mr. Turnbull says, was too much taken up with his instrumentation in the *Requiem*, "that he forgot all about his probable destination when sheep and goats had eventually been sorted out." How "the mighty Hector" would have laughed at this! The Atheist Berlioz, who, as his friend Hiller assures us, "believed neither in a God nor in Bach," troubling over his "probable destination" is ineffably funny.

I do not propose to deal with all of Mr. Turnbull's chapters; the first, on Bach, will serve my purpose for one or two further observations. First of all, let us admit that Bach may have been a religious man: he was a *Capellmeister*, and religion was his business. Thus Bach was for the most part a church composer, from the same force of circumstances that had set Fra Lippo Lippi painting "saints and saints and saints again." Although he did not entirely ignore secular art, and Professor Dickenson sees "many of his most admirable qualities in his secular works," yet there was little scope for its development. Opera—i.e., German opera—was practically non-existent, and the concert platform was almost unknown. There is a story told of Hadyn, which is equally true of the culture conditions of Bach's day. Hadyn was asked why, having written so many beautiful quartetts, he had never composed a quintett

* I use the terms "religious" and "secular" here for the sake of definition. Of course, there is no such thing as sacred music *per se*, no more, as Ruskin points out, than sacred architecture.

or sextett? Hadyn answered that during his long career nobody had ever thought of giving him an order for one. So much for conditions. Now let us look at the artist. Bach was first of all an organist, and look where you will, throughout his vocal or instrumental works, Bach speaks in the language of the organ. It reveals the triumph of the artist instrumentalist over the composer; from which we may conclude that after all the music was the main thing to Bach. Has he not been called "the musician's musician"? That Bach's religion was of secondary importance to his art may be gathered from the fact that he wrote the famous *B Minor Mass* which appertains to Catholic ritual, as well as the *St. Matthew Passion* for the Lutherans.

What is more, the question of the transference of material from his secular to his religious compositions is a most potent argument here. That Handel utilised much of his secular *Italian Duets* in the make-up of the *Messiah* is perhaps common knowledge. Yet few are aware that the great Bach was given over to the same habit. The opening chorus of the *Christmas Oratorio*, where Christians are bidden to rejoice in their salvation, is taken from the composer's *Birthday Ode* for the Queen of Poland; whilst the air for the Virgin, *Schlafe, mein Leibster*, concerning the advent of Christ, originally appeared in the secular cantata, *Hercules auf dem Scheidewege*, where it is sung by Vice when endeavoring to seduce the hero Hercules. Indeed, in some instances the music has suffered in the transfer, as in the case of the *Kyrie* of the *G Minor Mass*, formerly the opening number of the cantata, *Herr, deine Augen sehen nach dem Glauben*, the adaptation of which Dr. Walker considers "a positively atrocious mangling of one of the most perfect choruses in all Bach's works."

And now will Mr. Turnbull kindly point out how "the greatest religious music seems always to have behind it the ecstasy of the religious man?"

H. GEORGE FARMER.

NATURAL MORALITY.

I conclude, from these principles that all the social virtues consist in the performance of actions useful both to society and to the individual:

That they may all be traced to the physical object of the preservation of man:

That nature, having implanted in our bosoms the necessity of this preservation, imposes all the consequences arising from it as law, and prohibits as a crime whatever counteracts the operation of this principle:

That we have within us the germ of all virtue and of all perfection; that we have only to attend to the means of exciting it into action:

That we are happy in exact proportion to the obedience we yield to those laws which nature has established with a view to our preservation:

That all wisdom, all perfection, all law, all virtue, all philosophy, consist in the practice of the following axioms, which are founded upon our natural organisation:

Preserve thyself:

Instruct thyself:

Moderate thyself:

Live for thy fellow-creatures, in order that they may live for thee.—*Volney*.

Undoubtedly the abandonment of the clerical profession by the best men, will have the effect that the ecclesiastical business passing into coarse, immoral hands, will more and more disintegrate, and expose its own falseness and harmfulness. But the result will not be worse, for the disintegration of ecclesiastical establishments is now going on, and is one of the means by which people are being liberated from the fraud in which they are being held. And, therefore, the quicker this emancipation is accomplished, by enlightened and good men abandoning the clerical profession, the better it will be. And so, the greater the number of enlightened and good men who leave the clerical profession, the better.—*Tolstoy*.

IMPOSITION, *n.* The act of blessing or consecrating by the laying on of hands—a ceremony common to many ecclesiastical systems, but performed with the frankest sincerity by the sect known as Thieves.—*Ambrose Bierce*.

Acid Drops.

Mrs. Philip Snowden has been lecturing at the City Temple on "The Religion of Socialism," and the *Christian Commonwealth* reports her as saying that some generous-hearted people were deterred from Socialism by the idea "that Socialism is immoral and atheistic, and that you cannot be a Socialist unless you deny your God or run away with somebody else's wife." Of course, the lady assures these generous-hearted people that they are mistaken. In doing so, no doubt, she means well; but she is neither sensible nor well-mannered in this juxtaposition of atheism and immorality. People run away with other people's wives already—and the Divorce Court is busier than ever; but how many of them are Atheists? Mrs. Snowden will perhaps give her mind to the calculation. It would be better intellectual discipline than flattering a City Temple congregation.

"There are people in the Socialist movement who call themselves Agnostics," Mrs. Snowden said, "but I never yet met a Socialist who was an Atheist." What? Not under the rose? "Methinks the lady doth protest too much."

We could introduce Mrs. Snowden to many Socialists who are Atheists. Not one of them, however, would be capable of her eloquent fatuities on the subject. It is evident that even Socialism does not necessarily produce philosophers. Perhaps she will not mind our telling her—at any rate, we must do it—that claiming professed Atheists who live good lives, in private and in public, as true Christians without knowing it, is one of the most foolish, as it is one of the most offensive, methods of swelling the statistics of Christianity.

They have turned on a man in the *Christian Commonwealth* to write Socialist paragraphs weekly—the Rev. F. R. Swan. This gentleman was very eloquent last week on the silly old theme of the "good infidels" who are often the "best Christians." Mr. Swan was loud in praise of the "infidels" and "blasphemers" who created the "purer, healthier, intellectual atmosphere" of to-day. But this does not lead him to say a word in praise of the "infidels" and "blasphemers" who are now fighting the battle of progress. When we read these retrospective tributes we are reminded of a certain passage in the twenty-third of Matthew about the tombs of the prophets. But we shall not apply to Mr. Swan the warm language of the thirty-third verse.

Mr. Swan is a Socialist, but he is also a Christian minister; consequently he does not agree with the Labor Party's policy of Secular Education. He advocates "all-round facilities" for religious instruction. We hope he is not sanguine enough to think he can convert the Labor Party to this fantastic (and unprincipled) idea.

Mr. R. J. Campbell lectured the other day at Edinburgh on "Christianity and Socialism." One of the gentlemen on the platform, at the conclusion of the address, very properly raised a protest against the speaker associating pessimism in relation to social reform with Atheism. We are sorry to learn that Mr. Campbell followed this vulgar method of associating the two, and still more regret that the protest only induced him to repeat his former statement. The protester had cited the names of Charles Bradlaugh and Robert Blatchford as proof that Atheism went along with the most unselfish work for the country's welfare. Mr. Campbell's reply was that these men were not Atheists at all. Now, Mr. Blatchford may call himself what he pleases, those who are familiar with his opinions are aware that he is an Atheist, neither more nor less. But Charles Bradlaugh called himself an Atheist, he wrote and spoke on behalf of Atheism, and it is a piece of pure impertinence for Mr. Campbell, or anyone else, when they can no longer impugn his motives or character, of declaring that he was a kind of Christian in disguise. Mr. Campbell also added that there was a "great difference" between an Atheist and an Agnostic. Well, we invite him to say what the difference is between a rational Agnosticism and Atheism. It is one thing to say there is a "great difference," and quite another to prove it. The truth is, that Mr. Campbell has been for so long in the habit of using words without troubling about their legitimate meanings, that the bad practice is by now nearly incurable.

The Lancashire Catholic Trade Unionists—whoever they may be—have been protesting against the Trades Union movement being exploited by the advocates of Secular Education. They implore the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress not to sow dissension in the

ranks by advocating a policy of Secular Education. Well, bearing in mind the practically unanimous vote of the Congress year after year, the discussion does not promise to be of a very serious character. Besides, the talk of the Trades Union movement being "exploited" is absurd. Substantially the Congress was driven to express an opinion by the logic of events. For many years, we believe, no notice was taken of the question; but when Trade Unionists saw this country falling behind other countries in educational matters, and saw the utter hopelessness of the religious parties ever agreeing in their policy of "exploiting" the public, they took action, and the result was satisfactory to all lovers of justice and fair play. Nor do we believe that the common sense of the Trades Union Congress on this question is likely to be seriously affected by the protests of the "Lancashire Catholic Trade Unionists," which it is safe to assume is only another name for the priests who are behind pulling the strings.

We are pleased to see that the Annual Conference of the National Union of Teachers has two resolutions on its Agenda advocating Secular Education. The two are almost identical, but the first runs as follows: "That this Conference is of opinion that real educational reforms will never be inaugurated until the struggle between the Churches to obtain possession of the children in the public elementary schools ceases; and therefore this Conference heartily welcomes the movement in favor of Secular Education in all publicly supported schools." The N. U. T. is a long while coming up to the mark, and we hope that this year the resolution will be carried. Teachers, as a body, have in the past thought far too little on the subject from the standpoint of principle, and far too much of it from the point of view of how far an expression of opinion would injure their position. Now that Dr. Macnamara is out of the Union there should be room—and it is certainly time—for those who put principle first to get an innings.

The New Theology organ has not yet discovered the "blasphemy" prosecution. Somebody ought to ask Mr. Campbell whether he approves of a Socialist open-air speaker being hunted down by the police for (among other things) quoting a description of the orthodox God from the author of the *New Theology*?

The champions of the New Theology only agree while they are attacking the Old Theology. They agree that Jesus was not God—except in the same sense that other men are God. That is to say, they agree on the first point of Freethought criticism. But beyond that they are in open disagreement. Mr. Campbell, it appears, believes that Jesus renounced a high position in the heavenly world in order to be born in this world and do something to save it. Dr. Warschauer, on the other hand, believes as follows:—

"That our Lord had a conscious, individual existence prior to His birth some nineteen centuries ago, I see no reason for supposing. Having come into the world—with no more control over that event, as I hold, than other infants—and having reached maturity, He voluntarily adopted a certain course of action; but that He had determined upon that course in some previous, heavenly existence, I simply do not believe."

Fortunately, it doesn't matter one way or the other.

The Marylebone Police-court has got a new kissing-block in the form of a New Testament bound in celluloid. This can be washed if necessary—which is considered a distinct advantage from a hygienic point of view. We presume the washing applies to the outside. The time has not arrived yet for dealing with the inside in the same way.

Celluloid may be washed, but it gives rise to another danger. We believe it is a very inflammatory substance, and some witnesses lips are hot enough with perjury to set up a conflagration on the spot.

Amongst the 180 victims of the explosion and fire at the Boyertown Opera House, Pennsylvania, several were found with locked hands held up as if for help. They had died praying. They found the truth of the Scripture text that God is a present help in time of trouble. Also that his tender mercies are over all his works. Three cheers for "Providence"?

An Ohio man has offered to die for Thaw if he should be sentenced to execution. He says he is very much like the prisoner and could easily be substituted for him. The only consideration he wants is three million dollars for his family. A most unselfish man! There are not many like him in Christian countries. But we have read that Chinamen will die for condemned persons on condition that a reason-

able sum of money is paid to their families. Yet cash is begged in England in order to pay for missionaries being sent out to the Heathen Chinese, to teach them all the Christian virtues, including devotion to wife and children.

The way in which religious journals misinform their readers is well shown in a passage in the *Methodist Times* for January 16. In an article dealing with Socialism and Individualism, the writer refers to Herbert Spencer, and throws in, as an aside, "A man to the forming of whose mind Methodism contributed some stimulus." The uninformed reader would naturally imagine that, minus Methodist influences, Spencer would not have been what he was, and probably further imagine that somehow the Synthetic Philosophy was an offshoot of Methodism. The only semblance of truth in the statement is that Spencer's mother and father both attended a Methodist Church—the mother from religious reasons, the father from considerations of a social character. But Herbert Spencer makes it plain that his mother influenced his mental life very little, if at all. The intellectual stimulus came, so far as it was due to family influences, from the father.

In his "Autobiography," Spencer points out that the "Wesleyan Church discipline was repugnant" to his father's nature. When he tried to get books of an instructive, scientific character into the Methodist library, his efforts were defeated. The father's mental nature, as is pointed out by his son, was far removed from being a religious one. In his intercourse with his son, while the latter was a boy, there was "an entire absence of the miraculous." "I do not remember," he says, "my father ever referring to anything as explicable by supernatural agency.....His remarks about the surrounding world gave no sign of any other thought than that of uniform natural law." It is also true that Spencer himself, from the age of ten to thirteen, was in the habit of attending the Methodist chapel, but of this he says, "I do not know that any marked effect on me followed." And in a later portion of his "Autobiography," he points out that by the time he was twenty-eight, his views on religion were definitely formed, and were of the kind described in *First Principles*. One lesson Herbert Spencer received from his father was to make his statements agree with facts. It is a pity the *Methodist Times* writer was not subjected to a similar discipline.

Dr. A. R. Wallace, in his recent article on "Evolution and Character," holds that "our intellectual and moral nature has not advanced in any perceptible degree" since the dawn of human history. He looks to Socialism to produce a new evolution. But if there has been no improvement in myriads of years, what is the use of expecting any from a new nostrum? Wouldn't it be better to wind up the whole earthly business—to put it into liquidation, as Jehovah is said to have done at the time of the Flood? For our part, we don't agree with Dr. Wallace. We hope for progress in the future, because we believe in it in the past. There is no other reasonable ground.

Mark Twain takes down men of God like the late Dr. Talmage, who expected when he got to heaven to "fling his arms round Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and kiss them and weep on them." Mark points out that "as many as sixty thousand people arrive" in heaven every day. "Now mind," he says, "that sixty thousand a day is a pretty heavy contract for those old people. If they were a mind to allow it, they wouldn't ever have anything to do, year in and year out, but stand up and be hugged and wept on thirty-two hours in the twenty-four. They would be tired out and as wet as muskrats all the time. What would heaven be, to them? It would be a mighty good place to get out of."

In some respects England grows sillier and sillier—especially under the influence of religion. The Eccles Education Committee has decided to withdraw Speke's *Discovery of the Source of the Nile* from circulation in all the reading circles in the elementary schools, and Scott's *Ivanhoe* from the Roman Catholic schools. What with puritanism on one side, and religious bigotry on the other, it will soon be impossible for children to read anything but rubbish.

Mrs. Mary Melmore Moore has obtained a divorce from her husband, the Rev. Ernest George John Moore, formerly vicar of Amblecote. The man of God is abroad—all abroad—with a fascinating young widow. It is another case of the sons of God seeing the daughters of men that they are fair. There is no moral. The thing is too common for that.

The Pope is God's vicegerent on earth, but he suffers from the gout just like ordinary mortals, and has just had an acute attack. Some people will think he must have had one before writing the "Modernism" Encyclical.

A new Russian sect, the Johannites, swear by the famous Father John, of Cronstadt. They say he is going to gather 144,000 of the blessed elect together and "leave the earth" with them this year. This is too good to be true.

How they love one another! Rev. R. J. Campbell, in the preface to his new book, states that all his Free Church Council engagements have been cancelled by the churches themselves since he published the *New Theology*, and he has been "quietly excluded from an active share in every Non-conformist organisation" with which he was formerly connected, with the single exception of the City Temple itself.

Rev. F. B. Meyer, speaking at Preston, said that whist drives were given to raise funds for churches. He was shocked. But worse things than that have been done to raise the wind for "God."

They are still discovering fresh "sayings" of Christ. Yet there are enough in stock for most people.

Rev. Dr. Horton must be a very simple gentleman. He says that Sir Oliver Lodge told him recently that the fact of telepathic communication had been established by sufficient evidence. Fancy the state of mind of a man who believes this because he has been "told" of it! We suppose it is a natural result of Christian training.

Matthew Joseph O'Keefe, an insurance clerk, aged 23, committed suicide by cutting his throat with a razor at his lodgings in Lloyd's-square, Clerkenwell, London. He was a quiet, reserved, sober young man; his employers testified that his conduct at the office was entirely satisfactory, and his landlady that he was bright and cheerful the night before his death. What then was the cause of his suicide? He was an omniverous reader, so it was thought that it must have been a book he was reading. There was a novel in his room, written from a pantheistic standpoint, containing arguments in favor of suicide. Very likely that did it! There were also books of a Socialist tendency; but, worst of all, apparently, was a book by "Tom Paine"—whether the *Age of Reason* or the *Rights of Man* the report does not state. That *must* have had a lot to do with it. For this reason, perhaps, the coroner said that he saw no evidence of insanity. But the jury, not wanting unnecessary trouble, returned the usual verdict of "suicide while of unsound mind."

Religious people will shake their heads at a man's committing suicide with a book of "Tom Paine's" in his room, even if it was only a political treatise—for there is poison and death in the very name. It will not occur to them that heaps of men and women must have committed suicide with a copy of the Bible in the room.

With regard to the novel said to advocate suicide, the coroner remarked that "it would be unfair to read particular passages without the context." A very sound rule of criticism! Much too sound, apparently, for the prosecutors in the Boulter case.

We have all heard of the soldier's Bible, tucked inside the breast of his coat, which stopped the bullet that would otherwise have reached his heart. We have also heard of the pack of cards that served the same purpose. But we never heard before of the following use of the Holy Scriptures. A widow, named Ann Lippiatt, aged 68, living alone at Almondsbury Hill, near Bristol, resolved to drown herself in a small tank of water in the kitchen; and in order to keep her head down she tied round her neck a family Bible weighing eight pounds. It did her business successfully. Torrey will please note.

Tolstoy has been writing a letter on the "iron heel" policy of the Kaiser in Poland. In the course of it he makes an observation which we have often made in the *Freethinker*. "In Pagan days," he says, "there were virtuous sovereigns," but the "Christian monarchs," in spite of the "panegyrics of an army of servile flatterers, can but excite disgust in the minds of thinkers of to-day." The truth is that Christendom has never produced rulers comparable to the great rulers of antiquity, especially the best of the Roman Emperors. There is something in Christianity which has always proved fatal to the highest

statesmanship. The religion of the Roman Emperors was not Kingdom-Come. It was Rome. That accounts for a good deal of the difference.

Rev. David Morgan, vicar of Higher Crampton, drowned himself in a pond near the vicarage. The poor gentleman had been depressed since the death of his wife. What he had preached to others was not found of much account when he tried it himself.

Rev. Francis Paynter, for thirty-four years rector of Stoke-next-Guildford, has just gone *somewhere*. He was probably the richest clergyman in England. His property in the neighborhood of Regent-street and Piccadilly (oh!) is said to have brought him in £80,000 a year. "Woe unto you rich!" But that's only what J. C. said. His disciples prefer something more up-to-date.

Rev. Prebendary Edward Ffarington Clayton, of the Rectory, Ludlow, Salop, left £42,709. "And their works do follow them"—but not their cash.

What is the Christians' most sensible prayer? "Lighten our darkness."

Mr. G. K. Chesterton on the "Blasphemy" Prosecution.

THAT a man should be tried in secret merely for attacking certain institutions affects me as merely meaningless. A man who attacks, say, the Christian religion in the modern world is not an unheard-of or extraordinary person. The extraordinary person is the person who defends the Christian religion; I (for example) am an extraordinary person—I mean in that respect. If a man violates verbal decency, let the Government prosecute him for violating verbal decency, of which all modern men approve, instead of prosecuting him for violating religious orthodoxy, of which nearly all modern men, except a few of my personal friends, strongly disapprove. Why should they dig up an old Act of Parliament which, taken literally, applies quite as much to Mr. John Morley or to Mr. Lecky, when they might take other ground, or, best of all, leave the matter to a public opinion which can really distinguish between one class of cases and another? One can only explain it by that mysterious and universal law which leads persons in a position of authority to manage to be wrong even when they happen to be right.

As I am myself one of those who do believe in orthodoxy, I may be allowed, perhaps, to say that I am certain that orthodoxy loses, at this moment, even in a worldly sense, every time it uses these legal and official weapons. For the weapons are not merely antiquated weapons; they are such very weak weapons. We cannot give our enemy a gag; we only give him a grievance! Cynically, these powers do us no good. Ideally, they do us harm. It is as if two duellists had to fight with sharp swords, but one was allowed to wear a shirt and not the other. The shirt would be a privilege: but yet not a protection. It would not be enough to give him the victory; but it would be just enough to make his victory unpopular.—*Illustrated London News*.

The Blasphemy Case.

THE case of Mr. Harry Boulter, a secularist lecturer, who has been committed for trial on a charge of blasphemy, is very disconcerting—first, because of the secrecy of the police-court proceedings, and, secondly, because it appears to mark an arbitrary revival of an antiquated law. It is difficult to understand why the authorities have kept the public in ignorance with regard to this case. The precedent established is bad, for a prosecution for the repression of opinion ought to be conducted from beginning to end in the full light of publicity. The only valid excuse for hearing the case in camera is obscenity. But if the case is too obscene to be tried in open court, why is not the accused charged with the offence of obscenity? It is surely wrong in the circumstances to proceed against him for blasphemy.

We know nothing of the merits of the case, for we have not been permitted to know, but we do know that any revival of the practice of persecution for opinion will be indignantly resisted. Nothing but evil can flow from any attempt to penalise the expression of opinion on religion. The freedom of thought and the freedom of speech must be maintained.—*The Star* (London).

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, January 26, "Horns" Assembly Room, Kennington-park: 7.30, "The New Theology and the People: a Reply to the Rev. R. J. Campbell's *Christianity and the Social Order*."

February 9, Woolwich; 16, Glasgow; 23, Birmingham.

To Correspondents.

C. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—January 26, West Stanley. February 2, Woolwich Town Hall; 16, Aberdare; 17, Mountain Ash; 23, Edinburgh. March 8, Glasgow.

J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—January 26, Birmingham.

ENQUIRER.—We were quite right; Dickens' title is ungrammatical. *Mutual* really means reciprocal. There may be mutual affection, but not a mutual friend. The strictly proper expression would be "Our Common Friend"—a friend common to both of us. But that expression is vitiated by the ambiguity of "common," which has a by-meaning of poor and contemptible. It may be that Dickens took the boldest way out of the difficulty, but it was ungrammatical, all the same.

E. OLDHAM.—Thanks for hints and suggestions. They shall all be borne in mind, but our hands are very full at present.

R. J. HENDERSON.—Yes, we saw it, and dealt with it in the *Freethinker* in the press when you wrote.

FREETHINKER.—It is impossible for us to do more than we are doing. We cannot also flood the press with letters on the Boulter case. Besides, we know too much of the press, and cannot waste any time upon it. The most important letter of ours would be refused insertion or doctored out of recognition. We speak from experience, and have long abandoned all idea of effort in that direction. Our settled policy is to appeal to our own public, and let the "glorious free press" stew in the juice of its own imposture.

D. BONVONNI.—Your message has been conveyed to us. Glad you admired our last week's article "immensely." You say Mr. Foote is "in excellent fighting form." He is also tolerably well, though sometimes, as you may guess, a bit weary.

W. J. RAMSEY.—Thanks for the reference. You will see it has been useful.

J. CHAMBERS.—Always glad to receive useful cuttings.

COHEN "SALVATION ARMY" TRACT FUND.—S. Leeson, 5s. 6d.; E. Langridge, 2s. 6d.

H. DAWSON.—We were not able to answer the letter you refer to as desired. The N. S. S. will not ask for subscriptions in the Boulter case unless the bill of costs outruns present calculations.

W. P. BALL.—Thanks for ever-welcome cuttings.

S. LEESON.—Glad you are so "delighted" with what you are good enough to call our "manly and noble action" in the Boulter case. It seems to us that we are merely doing our duty—though we cannot help seeing that many others are less ready to do theirs. The other matter was all right. Thanks for handbill of the Civic Education League, which has our good wishes.

E. OLDHAM.—Thanks for the references.

J. W. F.—No appeal will be made unless it is necessary. You appear to have misunderstood us in some way. We made no complaint of "lack of contributions." Our chief complaint was of the wretched silence of the press.

H. EVETTS.—Will look through it by next week.

G. BRADFIELD.—Pleased to read your enclosure. You say you wish we could defend Mr. Boulter, and wonder it is not possible. Well, it is not so. A man must defend himself or by counsel; there is no other course.

W. MORTIMER.—It shall have attention. We will write you as soon as possible. Meanwhile, thanks for all your good wishes.

J. L. WILLIAMS.—Branch secretaries should not send Lecture Notices in letters, from which they have to be extracted, but simply on the model of the Notices as we print them.

A. G. LYE.—Pleased you have secured Mr. Joseph McCabe for Coventry on February 2, the date Mr. Foote had to cancel. A "Plum" shall appear next week.

G. THACKRAY.—The same thing appeared in the *London Star*.

THE SECULAR SOCIETY, LIMITED, office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.

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LECTURE NOTICES must reach 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

FRIENDS who send us newspapers would enhance the favor by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.

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Sugar Plums.

Mr. Foote concludes this evening (Jan. 26) the course of Sunday Freethought lectures at the "Horns" Assembly Room, Kennington Park. His subject is "Christianity and the People." It will be mainly in reply to the Rev. R. J. Campbell's new book on *Christianity and the Social Order*. Local "saints" should bring as many as possible of their Christian friends along to this meeting. Admission is free to every part of the hall—with the usual collection towards the expenses.

Mr. Foote had grand audiences at Manchester on Sunday. The hall was well filled in the afternoon, and packed at night; and on both occasions Mr. Foote's reception was as enthusiastic as heart could wish. Sunday's meetings eclipsed even the record meetings of his previous visit to Manchester. For the first time since the Secular Hall was opened, we believe, there was a *queue* of people some twenty yards long still waiting to get in only a few minutes before the hour of the evening lecture. The resources of the management were taxed in every way. And cheers and laughter greeted Mr. Foote's remark that Secularism, which its enemies are always reporting as dead, was a particularly lively corpse, at least on Sunday evening in Manchester.

Questions were allowed, but no discussion, after Mr. Foote's first lecture on "The New 'Blasphemy' Prosecution." Plenty of questions were asked after the evening lecture also, although there was no formal discussion. The last question, about the "uplifting" influence of Christianity on woman, gave opportunity for a specially telling reply, which was cheered again and again.

Since the new "blasphemy" prosecution commenced Mr. Foote has been followed about London by plain-clothes police and shorthand-writers, who are instructed, no doubt, by official persons very anxious to catch him tripping, probably in the way of "contempt of court." But they have not been successful. Mr. Foote is an "old hand" on the platform, and is able to say the same thing in more ways than one. Besides, he has no reason whatever for "prejudicing" the trial of Mr. Harry Boulter at the Central Criminal Court. It is quite impossible to say whether Mr. Boulter is guilty of "blasphemy" or not. "Blasphemy" is a matter of opinion as well as a matter of fact, and nobody can be sure of it until a jury has certified it as the real article.

The fashionable and expensive *Crown, Court, and County Families Gazette* deals with the Boulter case under the heading of "A Regrettable Prosecution." We extract the following passage, which refers to the "damage to the cause of Christianity" by the "vindictive sentences" of 1883:—

"Many eminent Christians feel this so deeply that there is, we understand, considerable prospect of a general union of the principal religious bodies on one common platform, to join in a dignified protest against such prosecutions. It is rumored that the Bishop of London will preside, and that he will be supported on the platform by Father Vaughan, the Rev. R. J. Campbell, the Rev. F. B. Meyer, and possibly Mr. G. W. Foote. Such a procedure and such a combination would be in keeping with the best traditions of Christianity, and the warmest of warm welcomes would, we feel sure, be at once accorded by all lovers of the Christian Faith."

Capital! This writer has his wits about him.

Mr. J. T. Lloyd visits Birmingham to-day (Jan. 26) and delivers two lectures, afternoon and evening, in the Town Hall. This vast building takes a lot of filling, and we hope the local "saints" will do their utmost to secure grand meetings. Admission is free, and there will be orchestral selections before the evening lecture.

The London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner, under the auspices of the N. S. S. Executive, took place on Tuesday evening, January 14, in the large Venetian Room at the Holborn Restaurant, and was a big success. Last year's record number of diners was far exceeded, the number seated at the tables on this occasion amounting to a hundred and ninety. The repast, which was excellent, was opened with a Shakespearian "grace" by the chairman, Mr. G. W.

Foote. At the end of the eating and drinking, a flashlight photograph of the party was taken by a representative of Messrs. Fradelle and Young. The rest of the time, until nearly 12 o'clock, was spent in listening to various items of interest. Mr. Foote delivered "The Chairman's Address," and brief, bright speeches to the toast of "Freethought at Home and Abroad" were delivered by Messrs. Cohen, Lloyd, Davies, and Heaford. Serious and comic songs, etc., were rendered by well-known entertainers, including Madame Alice Lovenez, Mr. Frank Gleeson, Mr. Harry Hudson, and Mr. Will Edwards. Miss Annie Wilson, an amateur, daughter of Mr. E. Wilson, also sang two songs with great acceptance. The company broke up in the usual way with "Auld Lang Syne," and everybody seemed to have spent a delightful evening.

We were glad to see the veteran Mr. Side at the dinner. He is a good deal past eighty, and a little deaf, but still active, lively, and cheerful. Our veteran friend, Mr. G. L. Alward, of Grimsby, was also present. It was the first of these dinners he had attended, and he was surprised at the size and "go" of the gathering.

These annual dinners give the N. S. S. secretary, Miss E. M. Vance, much work and some anxiety, and in one way she is always glad when the function is over. She will now have another year's peace—such peace as the N. S. S. secretary is used to getting.

We have just received a letter from our veteran friend, Captain Otto Thomson, of Stockholm. He wishes us, in his generous and rather quaint language, "a happy and prosperous continuation of the New Year, as well that you may be spared many years yet to benefit the Freethought movement with your admirable skill, able judgment, unquenchable courage, untired perseverance, and rare disinterestedness." Captain Thomson is now seventy-five years of age, and sound and cheerful in mind, but increasingly feeble in body. He is cheered by reading the *Freethinker* and the *New York Truthseeker*. He is "not fearing death at all," but "content to leave when the time comes." We send our brave old friend a hearty hand-grasp. We would rather deliver it in person, but that is impossible.

Mr. George Meredith will be eighty on the twelfth of February, and the Society of Authors is organising a deputation to wait upon him and celebrate the occasion. Whereupon the *Daily News* remarks that "it would have been better if the literary world had rendered its homage to Mr. Meredith not now, but forty years ago." "At that time," our contemporary adds, "he was known only to a small group of admirers, and the great general public hardly realised his existence." All this is true enough, except perhaps for the too limited suggestion in the word "group." Certainly the number of Meredith's admirers was small forty years ago, but they were not all known to each other. Most of them, however, were Freethinkers. Mr. Swinburne paid the first fine tribute to Meredith's verse, and James Thomson to his prose. Thomson's tribute was a fine review of *Beauchamp's Career* in the *Secularist* (1876), conducted by Mr. G. W. Foote. Mr. Foote frequently referred his readers to Meredith's writings. In the *Secularist* of March 4, 1876, he reprinted, under the heading of "Selections," two magnificent passages from *Vittoria*—with the sub-headings of "Portrait of Mazzini" and "Mazzini in Italy." The former of these passages was accompanied by an editorial note which ran as follows:—

"This splendid portrait of Mazzini, in all the highest qualities of imaginative prose absolutely unexcelled, is the work of a great though comparatively unknown genius, like Shelley's poet 'hidden in the light of thought.' It shows the great patriot's spirit through fleshly linements, like a painted portrait by some master-hand in the glorious zenith of Italian art."

Mr. Foote has written and spoken on George Meredith several times since then, but he has always held aloof from the busy people who advertise themselves by worshipping the Master in public places. When the crowd acclaims the Master so vociferously, and the busy people aforesaid play the part of an energetic *claque*, the true worshiper is inclined to shudder and perform his devotions apart. And, after all, it is not so much as a literary man, simply, that George Meredith would probably feel that he had done his highest work. It is something more than mere literary work, valuable as that is, to be the inspirer of other men at their best. Shakespeare had that power supremely. Amazing literary artist as he was, the grandest thing in him was his electric power of flashing suddenly and superbly into the very "soul" of his elect readers. And this power, in a less, but still in a splendid, degree belongs to Meredith.

Perhaps an illustration will best explain our meaning. In the *Freethinker* of August, 1881 (the paper started as a monthly) Mr. Foote wrote a long descriptive report of one of Bradlaugh's great days at the old Court of Queen's Bench—the day when he put Newdigate into the witness-box, and thus, by a master-stroke, brought about the beginning of the end of that infamous Christian conspiracy against the "infidel." Here is a snap-shot of Bradlaugh:—

"He was the very picture of suppressed fire, of rampant energies held in leash; the nerves of the face playing like the ripple on water, the whole frame quivering, and the eyes ablaze. How he managed to keep his judgment steady and his intellect alert is a wonder. But it is no wonder that six hours of such dreadful work knocked him up. Before he left the Court I saw bodeful blood-rims under his eyes.....Mr. Bradlaugh is a wonderfully strong man, but the Tories and the bigots are doing their best to kill him, and if this sort of thing is to continue very much longer they may succeed."

They *did* succeed. But it took ten years to kill the Titan. Which, however, is not our point. The jury found *against* Bradlaugh. It was a way they had. But there were moves left in the great game, and Bradlaugh went on undaunted. As he left the Court his friends cheered him to the echo. The *Times* sneered that they "applauded as lustily as though their champion had won." Yes, but they had not come there to applaud success; they came there to applaud a hero fighting a battle against tremendous odds; moreover, they knew that the end was not yet. They cheered the lion, not yet free, but breaking through the toils. Even if he never broke through, he was still a lion, not one of a meaner brood. And at the sight of Bradlaugh so sneered at by malicious enemies, and so cheered by loyal friends, Mr. Foote recalled that glorious passage which looks almost strange in the romantic and even fantastic *Farina*, in which George Meredith spoke to the "souls" who could comprehend him:—

"For all may admire and delight in fair blossoming dales under the blue dome of peace; but 'tis the rare lofty heart alone comprehendeth, and is heightened by, terrific splendors of tempest, when cloud meets cloud in skies black as the sepulchre, and Glory sits like a flame on the helm of Ruin."

That is what the literary people call prose-poetry. It is something better. It is the golden voice of a great spirit delivering a message of deathless valor to the fighters in the war of the liberation of humanity. "Glory sits like a flame on the helm of Ruin." Never was defeated heroism so magnificently vindicated.

Lord Avebury, succeeding Mr. Andrew Carnegie as Rector of St. Andrew's University, in his address to the students talked a good deal of secular common sense, and concluded as follows:—

"They lived in an exciting, busy, and beautiful and delightful world, full of interest and promise. Beyond and all around in the far distance lay a vast and shadowy region, awful and mysterious, and to which they can imagine no limits. But as long as they kept the mind active, the heart pure, and the home bright and happy with confidence and love, the mystery of the universe will have no terrors, and the spirit of peace will dwell with them.

Quite a little Freethought sermon.

Mr. Bernard Shaw has our admiration for the way in which he contemns the average religionist's belief in personal immortality, declaring it to be no more than a selfish longing to live for ever in spite of the nature of things. We are glad to note the following utterance of his, quoted by Dr. Archibald Henderson in *Munsey's Magazine*:—

"I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community, and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatsoever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle for me. It is a sort of splendid torch, which I have got hold of for the moment; and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations."

Those who have heard Mr. Foote lecture will be more or less familiar with the sentiment.

Several further subscriptions have been received in response to the appeal, which appeared in our last issue, on behalf of the President's Honorarium Fund, but owing to Mr. Foote's journey to Manchester throwing his other work into arrear the acknowledgments are postponed until next week, when extracts will also be given from subscribers' letters. In the meantime, we venture to suggest that intending subscribers should communicate as promptly as possible with the President or the Trustees, whose addresses were printed at the end of the appeal.

Christianity Conceived in Bigotry.

WHEN Jesus Christ had disappeared from this world, in what manner it is beside our purpose to discuss, the Jewish sect he had founded continued to assemble at Jerusalem. The infant Church was under the leadership of Simon Peter, and it observed the communistic maxims which Jesus had enjoined. Every member sold his property and paid the proceeds into the common exchequer.

One married couple, however, named Ananias and Sapphira, retained a portion of the price of their estate for their private use. This having come to the knowledge of Peter, he taxed them in succession with their offence, and each fell down dead in his presence. Their corpses were immediately buried by the godly young men who were waiting in the chamber of execution. No investigation into the affair appears to have been made by the authorities, but had such a thing occurred in an age of coroner's inquests, it is possible that Peter would have met another fate than leaving the world with his head downwards.

Paul's treatment of dissentients was very similar. He smote Elymas with blindness as "a child of the Devil," and charitably "delivered" Hymenæus and Alexander "unto Satan," perhaps with the opinion that only the Grand Inquisitor of the Universe could adequately punish them for blasphemy and backsliding.

The other apostles were imbued with the same amiable spirit. Even in the lifetime of their Master they continually disputed who should be greatest, and were only pacified by his informing them that they should all occupy twelve equal thrones of judgment over Israel.

After the Master's death their differences grew more acrimonious. John, in his Revelation, scowls at Paul and his Gentile following, who "say they are Jews and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan." He denounces the doctrines of Nicolas, one of the seven first deacons of the Church, as hateful; and he expresses his detestation of the Laodiceans by saying that the Almighty would spue them out of his mouth. Paul returns the compliment by "withstanding" Peter for his "dissimulation," and sneering at James and John as seeming to be pillars, the former of whom retorts that Paul is a "vain man." Paul vehemently tells the Galatians: "If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." Even "the beloved disciple," in his second Epistle, manifests the same persecuting spirit:—

"If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds."

In the very first century, Christianity was split into many petty sects, each denouncing the other as teaching false doctrine. The early Nazarenes, who adhered to the Jewish law, were called Ebionites, or contemptible people. The Ebionites denounced the Paulinists, and declared that Paul was an impostor, who became a Christian because he was not allowed to marry a Jewish woman. In an epistle of Peter to James, prefixed to the Clementine Recognitions, and as genuine as any other portion of the writings ascribed to Peter, Paul is alluded to as "the enemy," and the author of lawless and foolish teachings. Of the Recognitions itself, a work ascribed to Clement, alluded to in Philippians, and undoubtedly belonging to the first era of Christian history, the author of *Supernatural Religion* says:—

"There cannot be a doubt that the Apostle Paul is attacked in this religious romance as the great enemy of the true faith, under the hated name of Simon the Magician, whom Peter follows everywhere for the purpose of unmasking and confuting him. He is robbed of his title of 'Apostle of the Gentiles,' which, together with the honor of founding the Church of Antioch, of Laodiceæ, and of Rome, is ascribed to Peter. All that opposition to Paul which is implied in the Epistle to the

Galatians and elsewhere (1 Cor. i. 11, 12; 2 Cor. xi. 13-20; Philip. i. 15, 16) is here realised and exaggerated, and the personal difference with Peter to which Paul refers is widened into the most bitter animosity."

Irenæus, in the second century, in his work against Heretics, stigmatises them with the most abusive epithets, and accuses them of the most abominable crimes. He calls them "thieves and robbers," "slippery serpents," "miserable little foxes," and so forth, and declares that they practise lewdness in their assemblies.

Tertullian, in the third century, displays a full measure of bigotry, with an added sense of exultation over the sufferings in reserve for his Pagan opponents.

"What a city in the New Jerusalem! For it will not be without its games; it will have the final and eternal day of judgment, which the Gentiles now treat with unbelief and scorn, when so vast a series of ages, with all their productions, will be hurled into one absorbing fire. How magnificent the scale of *that game*! With what admiration, what laughter, what glee, what triumph shall I perceive so many mighty monarchs, who had been given out as received into the skies, even Jove himself and his votaries, moaning in unfathomable gloom. The governors too, persecutors of the Christian name, cast into fiercer torments than they had devised against the faithful, and liquefying amid shooting spires of flame! and those sage philosophers, who had deprived the Deity of his offices, and questioned the existence of a soul, or denied its future union with the body, meeting again with their disciples only to blush before them in those ruddy fires! not to forget the poets, trembling, not before the tribunal of Rhadamanthus or Minos, but at the unexpected bar of Christ! Then is the time to hear tragedians, doubly pathetic now that they bewail their own agonies; to observe the actors, released by the fierce elements from all restraint upon their gestures; to admire the charioteer, glowing all over on the car of torture; to watch the wrestlers, thrust into the struggles, not of the gymnasium, but of the flames."

The pious Father adds that, by the imaginative power of faith, he enjoys a foretaste of this moving spectacle, and flatters himself that such scenes "will be more grateful than the circus, the stadium, or the stage-box itself." This exultant rhetorician expressed the general feeling of the Christian world, in which he enjoyed a superlative reputation.

Jerome, in the next century, exhibits a still more execrable spirit than Tertullian, exhorting the Christians to direct their bigotry against their dearest relations:—

"If thy father lies down across thy threshold, if thy mother uncovers to thine eyes the bosom which suckled thee, trample on thy father's lifeless body, trample on thy mother's bosom, and, with eyes unmoistened and dry, fly to the Lord, who calleth thee."

Unfortunately this detestable advice did not flow from Jerome's natural moroseness; it was the logical result of his Savior's command to the disciples to leave all and follow him.

The scope of our work does not permit a larger array of illustrations. We have, however, given enough to show that the hateful spirit of bigotry and persecution animated the Christian Church from the beginning. It gathered strength with the progress of time, and it was sufficiently developed, when Constantine and Theodosius sought the destruction of Paganism, to assist and applaud them in executing their design.

Our contention in this respect is powerfully supported by the following passage from Lecky:—

"All that fierce hatred which, during the Arian and Donatist controversies, convulsed the Empire, and which in later times has deluged the world with blood, may be traced in the Church long before the conversion of Constantine. Already, in the second century, it was the rule that the orthodox Christian should hold no conversation, should interchange none of the ordinary courtesies of life with the excommunicated or the heretic."

Long before Constantine, the Christian Church had employed all its resources against heretics. It possessed no power of punishing them by fines, torture, or death, but it threatened them with hell in the next world and excommunicated them in this. "Heretics," says Dr. Gieseler, "were universally

hated as men wholly corrupt and lost," and the Church pronounced against them her sharpest penalties. These were indeed merely spiritual, but they were transformed into temporal punishments as soon as Christianity was able to effect the change.

A hasty glance at the cruel and sanguinary laws which Constantine introduced into the Roman code will prove that, however zealous for religion, the first Christian emperor showed a scandalous contempt for humanity.

Constantine made a law against the gladiatorial shows, which, however, continued until Honorius suppressed them in A.D. 403. We may well suspect his sincerity in enacting this law when we remember that during his administration in Gaul, after a signal victory over the Franks, he exposed several of their princes to the wild beasts in the amphitheatre of Treves. He also abolished the cruel punishment of breaking the legs of criminals and branding their faces; and he prohibited crucifixions, probably out of deference to the sentiment of his Christian subjects. But he ordered informers' tongues to be cut out, and molten lead to be poured down the throats of those who connived at the abduction of virgins, the principal offenders being cast to the beasts or burnt alive. "He appointed *this* punishment," says Jortin, "for various offences. To burn men alive became thenceforward a very common punishment, to the disgrace of Christianity. At last it was thought too cruel for traitors, murderers, poisoners, parricides, etc., and only fit for *heretics*."

Never before, in the history of civilised peoples, had this devilish punishment been inflicted judicially. Tradition or legend affirmed that Phalaris roasted men in a brazen bull, but this was the act of a ferocious tyrant, who tortured men for his sport. It was reserved for the first Christian emperor to deliberately insert this cruelty in the Roman code. The Church in subsequent ages took ample advantage of the opportunity which Constantine created, and remorselessly burnt heretics at the stake for the glory and honor of God.

It is a signal illustration of the persecuting spirit which is inherent in all theologies, that the Christian clergy, who had only a few years before bitterly complained of their proscription, joyously assisted Constantine in his suppression of Paganism. Their almost incredible arrogance is proved by the fact that Paganism was still the religion of the vast majority of their fellow-subjects. Gibbon's estimate of the number of Christians at this time has never been seriously disputed, and it is passed over in silence by his two Christian editors, Dean Milman and Dr. Smith.

"According to the irreproachable testimony of Origen, the proportion of the faithful was very inconsiderable when compared with the multitude of an unbelieving world; but, as we are left without any distinct information, it is impossible to determine, and it is difficult even to conjecture, the real numbers of the primitive Christians. The most favorable calculation, however, that can be deduced from the examples of Antioch and of Rome will not permit us to imagine that more than a twentieth part of the subjects of the empire had enlisted themselves under the banner of the Cross before the important conversion of Constantine."

What an edifying spectacle to the philosopher! Behold the religion of the meek and lowly Jesus, whose yoke was easy and his burden light, forced by its professors down the throats of their Pagan neighbors, who outnumbered them by nearly twenty to one!

Let us also reflect that Christianity introduced the *systematic* persecution of heresy and unbelief. Such a principle was utterly foreign to Paganism. The Roman law tolerated every form of religion and every system of philosophy. Its impartiality was so absolute that the Pantheon of the eternal city afforded niches to all the gods of the empire; yet when Tiberius was asked to allow the prosecution of a Roman citizen for blaspheming the deities, he replied: "No, let the gods defend their own honor." We do not deny that the Christians were persecuted, although we challenge their exaggerated account of

their sufferings. But their partial and occasional persecutions were prompted by political motives. They were regarded as members of a secret society, at once offensive to their Pagan neighbors and dangerous to the State; and although they were sometimes punished, their doctrines were never proscribed. The principle of persecution was first infused into the Roman law by Constantine. According to Renan:—

"We may search in vain the whole Roman law before Constantine for a single passage against freedom of thought, and the history of the imperial government furnishes no instance of a prosecution for entertaining an abstract doctrine."

Christianity inaugurated a new era of mental slavery. By forcibly suppressing dissent and establishing an Inquisition for detecting heretics, she carried tyranny into the secret recesses of the mind. "She thus," as Draper says, "took a course which determined her whole future career, and she became a stumbling-block in the intellectual advancement of Europe for more than a thousand years."

G. W. FOOTE.

Reprinted from "*Crimes of Christianity*."

Shelley on Blasphemy.

[Daniel Isaac Eaton, on March 6, 1812, was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment in Newgate for publishing Paine's *Age of Reason*. He was also to stand for two hours in the pillory. Shelley was then but eighteen years old, yet he wrote the following powerful letter to the judge who presided at the trial.]

A LETTER TO LORD ELLENBOROUGH.

My Lord,—

As the station to which you have been called by your country is important, so much the more awful is your responsibility, so much the more does it become you to watch lest you inadvertently punish the virtuous and reward the vicious.

You preside over a court which is instituted for the suppression of crime, and to whose authority the people submit on no other conditions than that its decrees should be conformable to justice.

If it should be demonstrated that a judge had condemned an innocent man, the bare existence of laws in conformity to which the accused is punished would but little extenuate his offence. The inquisitor, when he burns an obstinate heretic, may set up a similar plea, yet few are sufficiently blinded by intolerance to acknowledge its validity. It will less avail such a judge to assert the policy of punishing one who has committed no crime. Policy and morality ought to be deemed synonymous in a court of justice, and he whose conduct has been regulated by the latter principle is not justly amenable to any penal law for a supposed violation of the former. It is true, my Lord, laws exist which suffice to screen you from the animadversions of any constituted power, in consequence of the unmerited sentence which you have passed upon Mr. Eaton; but there are no laws which screen you from the reproof of a nation's disgust, none which ward off the just judgment of posterity, if that posterity will deign to recollect you.

By what right do you punish Mr. Eaton? What but antiquated precedents, gathered from times of priestly and tyrannical domination, can be adduced in palliation of an outrage so insulting to humanity and justice? Whom has he injured? What crime has he committed? Wherefore may he not walk abroad like other men and follow his accustomed pursuits? What end is proposed in confining this man, charged with the commission of no dishonorable action? Wherefore did his aggressor avail himself of popular prejudice, and return no answer but one of commonplace contempt to a defence of plain and simple sincerity? Lastly, when the prejudices of the jury, as Christians, were strongly and unfairly inflamed against this injured man as a Deist, wherefore did not you, my Lord, check such unconstitutional pleading, and desire the jury to pronounce the accused innocent or criminal without reference to the particular faith which he professed?

In the name of justice, what answer is there to these questions? The answer which Heathen Athens made to Socrates is the same with which Christian England must attempt to silence the advocates of this injured man—"He has questioned established opinions." Alas! the crime of inquiry is one which religion never has forgiven. Implicit faith and fearless inquiry have in all ages been irreconcilable enemies. Unrestrained philosophy has in every age

opposed itself to the reveries of credulity and fanaticism. The truths of astronomy, demonstrated by Newton, have superseded astrology; since the modern discoveries in chemistry, the philosopher's stone has no longer been deemed attainable. Miracles of every kind have become rare, in proportion to the hidden principles which those who study nature have developed. That which is false will ultimately be controverted by its own falsehood. That which is true needs but publicity to be acknowledged. It is ever a proof that the falsehood of a proposition is felt by those who use power and coercion, not reasoning and persuasion, to procure its admission. Falsehood skulks in holes and corners; "it lets I dare not wait upon I would, like the poor cat in the adage," except when it has power, and then, as it was a coward, it is a tyrant; but the eagle-eye of truth darts through the undazzling sunbeam of the immutable and just, gathering thence wherewith to vivify and illuminate a universe!

Wherefore, I repeat, is Mr. Eaton punished? Because he is a Deist? And what are you, my Lord? A Christian. Ha, then! the mask is fallen off: you persecute him because his faith differs from yours. You copy the persecutors of Christianity in your actions, and are an additional proof that your religion is as bloody, barbarous, and intolerant as theirs. If some deistical bigot in power (supposing such a character for the sake of illustration) should, in dark and barbarous ages, have enacted a statute making the profession of Christianity criminal; if you, my Lord, were a Christian bookseller and Mr. Eaton a judge, those arguments, which you consider adequate to justify yourself for the sentence which you have passed, must likewise suffice, in this suppositional case, to justify Mr. Eaton in sentencing you to Newgate and the pillory for being a Christian. Whence is any right derived but that which power confers for persecution? Do you think to convert Mr. Eaton to your religion by embittering his existence? You might force him by torture to profess your tenets, but he could not believe them, except you should make them credible, which, perhaps, exceeds your power. Do you think to please the God you worship by this exhibition of your zeal? If so, the Demon to whom some nations offer human hecatombs is less barbarous than the Deity of civilised society.

You consider man as an accountable being; but he can only be accountable for those actions which are influenced by his will.

Belief and disbelief are utterly distinct from, and unconnected with, volition. They are the apprehension of the agreement or disagreement of the ideas which compose any proposition. Belief is an involuntary operation of the mind, and, like other passions, its intensity is precisely proportionate to the degrees of excitement. Volition is essential to merit or demerit. How, then, can merit or demerit be attached to what is distinct from that faculty of the mind whose presence is essential to their being? I am aware that religion is founded on the voluntariness of belief, as it makes it a subject of reward and punishment; but, before we extinguish the steady ray of reason and common sense, is it fit that we should discover, which we cannot do without their assistance, whether or no there be any other which may suffice to guide us through the labyrinth of life.

If the law "*de heretico comburendo*" has not been formally repealed, I conceive that, from the promise held out by your Lordship's zeal, we need not despair of beholding the flames of persecution rekindled in Smithfield. Even now, the lash that drove Descartes and Voltaire from their native country, the chains which bound Galileo, the flames which burnt Vanini, again resound. And where? In a nation that presumptuously calls itself the sanctuary of freedom. Under a government which, while it infringes the very right of thought and speech, boasts of permitting the liberty of the press; in a civilised and enlightened country a man is pilloried and imprisoned because he is a Deist, and no one raises his voice in the indignation of outraged humanity. Does the Christian God, whom his followers eulogise as the Deity of humility and peace,—he, the regenerator of the world, the meek reformer, authorise one man to rise against another, and, because lictors are at his back, to chain and torture him as an Infidel?

When the Apostles went abroad to convert the nations, were they enjoined to stab and poison all who disbelieved the divinity of Christ's mission, assuredly they would have been no more justifiable in this case than he is at present who puts into execution the law which inflicts pillory and imprisonment on the Deist.

Has not Mr. Eaton an equal right to call your Lordship an Infidel as you have to imprison him for promulgating a different doctrine from that which you profess? What do I say! Has he not even a stronger plea? The word *Infidel* can only mean anything when applied to a person who professes that which he disbelieves. The test of truth is an undivided reliance on its inclusive powers; the test of conscious falsehood is the variety of the forms under which it

presents itself, and its tendency towards employing whatever coercive means may be within its command, in order to procure the admission of what is unsusceptible of support from reason or persuasion. A dispassionate observer would feel himself more powerfully interested in favor of a man who, depending on the truth of his opinions, simply stated his reasons for entertaining them, than in that of his aggressor, who, daringly avowing his unwillingness to answer them by argument, proceeded to repress the activity and break the spirit of their promulgator, by that torture and imprisonment whose infliction he could command.

I hesitate not to affirm that the opinions which Mr. Eaton sustained when undergoing that mockery of a trial at which your Lordship presided, appear to me more true and good than those of his accuser; but were they false as the visions of a Calvinist, it still would be the duty of those who love liberty and virtue to raise their voice indignantly against a reviving system of persecution, against the coercively repressing any opinion, which, if false, needs but the opposition of truth; which, if true, in spite of force, must ultimately prevail.

Mr. Eaton asserted that the Scriptures were, from beginning to end, a fable and imposture, that the apostles were liars and deceivers. He denied the miracles, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. He did so, and the Attorney-General denied the propositions which he asserted, and asserted those which he denied. What singular conclusion is deducible from this fact? None, but that the Attorney-General and Mr. Eaton sustained two opposite opinions. The Attorney-General puts some obsolete and tyrannical laws in force against Mr. Eaton, because he publishes a book tending to prove that certain supernatural events, which are supposed to have taken place eighteen centuries ago, in a remote corner of the world, did not actually take place. But how are the truth or falsehood of the facts in dispute relevant to the merit or demerit attachable to the advocates of the two opinions? No man is accountable for his belief, because no man is capable of directing it. Mr. Eaton is therefore totally blameless. What are we to think of the justice of a sentence which punishes an individual against whom it is not even attempted to attach the slightest stain of criminality?

(To be concluded.)

"For a day it was believed by some, though we held our acceptance in suspense, that a Presbyterian minister of Pennsylvania had refused to receive from his congregation a gift of \$100 in new gold pieces because the coins did not bear the motto 'In God We Trust.' Then came the denial by the Rev. W. A. Jones of the Knoxville church: 'The report that I refused \$100 in gold because it had no motto "In God we trust" is absolutely untrue in every way. The congregation did not offer me any gold, nor did I refuse any.' Scepticism again triumphs. The verdict is: 'No miracle.'"
—*Truthseeker* (New York).

Drive a wedge between the floor-boards of a granary, and no matter how much grain you may pour into the granary, it will not stay there. Just so a head into which the wedge has been driven of a Trinity, or of a God who became man and redeemed the human race by his sufferings and then flew up into the sky, can no longer grasp any reasonable or firm understanding of life.—*Tolstoy*.

HEARSAY RELIGION.

There is no religion in the world that has any other than hearsay evidence. Revelation is hearsay evidence; that the Scriptures are the word of God we have only the testimony of men long dead whose identity is not clearly established and who are not known to have been sworn in any sense. Under the rules of evidence as they now exist in this country, no single assertion in the Bible has its support in any evidence admissible in a court of law.—*Ambrose Bierce*.

Christianity is utterly useless in the midst of class antagonisms. It cannot control the rich, and it cannot assist the poor. Its chief idea is to stand between the two, not as an ambassador of justice, but as a dispenser of charity. And this charity, instead of really helping the people, only serves to obscure the problems to be solved, and to perpetuate the evils it affects to relieve.—*G. W. Foote*.

FEAST, *n.* A Festival. A religious celebration signalled by gluttony and drunkenness, frequently in honor of some holy person distinguished for abstemiousness. In the Roman Catholic Church feasts are "movable" and "immovable," but the celebrants are uniformly immovable until they are full.—*Ambrose Bierce* ("Dod Grile").

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, etc.

Notices of Lectures, etc., must reach us by first post on Tuesday and be marked "Lecture Notice," if not sent on postcard.

LONDON.

HORNS ASSEMBLY ROOM (corner of Kennington and Kennington Park roads, opposite Park Gates): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "The New Theology and the People."

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (North Camberwell Hall, New Church-road): 3.15, Freethought Parliament—A Lecture.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Workman's Hall, Romford-road, Stratford): 7.30, W. J. Ramsey, "The Gospel of Freethought." Selections by the Band before Lecture.

COUNTRY.

ABERDARE BRANCH N. S. S. (Pugsley's Coffee Tavern): 6, B. Evans, "Secularism and its Relationship to Socialism."

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Town Hall): J. T. Lloyd, 3, "Religion and the Joy of Life"; 7, "Theology Discredited." Tea at Town Hall at 5.

BRISTOL BRANCH N. S. S. (I. L. P. Hall, 21 King-square-avenue): Thursday, Jan. 30, at 8, Rev. J. C. West, M.A., "The Being of God."

EDINBURGH BRANCH N. S. S. (Hall, 84 Leith-street): 6.30, A Lecture.

FAILSWORTH (Secular Sunday School, Pole-lane): 6.30, "The School, the Workshop, and the Home—Present and Future"; Concert by J. Shufflebotham and Oldham Clarion Vocal Union.

GLASGOW (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): Mrs. H. Bradlaugh Bonner, 12 noon, "Militarism in India"; 6.30, "The Evolution of the Idea of Hell." With lantern illustrations.

LEEDS BRANCH N. S. S. (Miners' Institute, York-road and Accommodation-road): Friday, Jan. 24, at 8, S. H. Wishart, "Atheism and Social Progress: I.—The Protestant Christian Obstacle."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road): 6.30, George Mason, "Iconoclastic Politics."

SOUTH SHIELDS (above Tram Hotel, Market-place): 7.30, Business meeting.

WEST STANLEY BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Theatre): 3 and 7, C. Cohen.

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