

# THE Freethinker

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*Liberty is the air of the soul, the sunshine of life.*

—INGERSOLL.

## Feelings and Opinions.

IN discussion it is almost inevitable that things will be said which are likely to make supersensitive people wince. An expression thoughtlessly uttered may touch some among one's hearers upon a tender spot, or disturb an idea that one is in the habit of regarding as worthy of a special measure of respect. Or certain associations may have gathered round some special belief, and a brusquely spoken sentence may produce the sudden reaction of an electric shock. Such occurrences are almost inevitable; and it is surprising how anxious the average Christian is to avoid this happening. His concern for these tender associations is such that he never ceases to demand that in discussion beliefs shall be treated with the greatest possible respect. Not a sentence, not a word, must be uttered that is likely to wound the feelings of the most sensitive. If one does not agree with the opinions of one's hearers, nevertheless one must refrain from saying anything that they will consider unpleasant. Sentiments must be respected; feelings must not be lacerated.

I have omitted to say that the sentiments and feelings that are to be so carefully respected and so tenderly treated are the Christian's own. Where the opinions of other people are concerned, he shows no such concern. He does not hesitate to attack the opinions of others with the ferocity of a savage, and the language of a thorough-paced hooligan. He will use ridicule or sarcasm, slander or abuse, just as it suits his case or pleases his humor. If the Freethinker ventures to retort in kind, he will be solemnly reminded that religion is a sacred subject, and he has no right to outrage people's feelings by attacking it. And, apparently, he has a genuine belief to this effect. More, he not only believes it himself, but has somehow managed to make a great many who are intellectually opposed to him believe it also. There are scores of people who seem to have the belief that if a man does not believe in religion or in Christianity, he ought to either keep his opinions to himself, or express them in a very deferential manner. The social opposition to Free-thought rests not so much upon the opinions held by Freethinkers, as upon the fact that some of them are so ill-bred and so inconsiderate as to openly express them. If they would only keep quiet, they might be forgiven. But they *will* speak out, and that appears to embody the undescribed but unforgivable sin against the Holy Ghost.

Now, I am not going to argue that the Freethinker wounds the feelings of Christians as a kind of payment for the Christian having wounded his. Nor am I suggesting that in future discussion should be conducted so that neither party feels his sentiments shocked. That would really mean an end to discussion altogether. Everyone in discussion says things about his opponent's opinions that his opponent would not say about them himself, and I do not see how this is to be avoided so long as conflicting opinions are brought to the point of open

opposition. What I am going to submit is the simple proposition that whether my feelings are hurt or not in the course of a discussion is entirely my own concern—not that of my opponent's. His duty is to say exactly what he believes to be true, and while avoiding all personal abuse, to say it in the manner best calculated to carry conviction to my mind. My duty towards him is of precisely the same kind. If by some means or other I have got it into my head that certain of my own opinions must be treated with a special measure of tenderness or consideration, the responsibility is mine, not my opponent's. The opinions are not his, he does not regard them as either true or valuable; he may even believe them to be false and mischievous, and he is in no way bound to deal with them save in the way that one usually deals with what one regards as false and dangerous things.

It must be observed that this solicitude concerning people's feelings only arises in connection with religion. In politics or in other matters feelings are left to take care of themselves. In the political world members of the Conservative party are not over careful whether or no they wound the feelings of Mr. Lloyd George. And Mr. Lloyd George is certainly not in the habit of treating the feelings of Conservatives with very great consideration. Even within the religious world the same thing obtains. Consider the language of Protestants concerning Roman Catholics, of Churchmen about Nonconformists, and of Nonconformists about Churchmen. The plea is raised not only in connection with religion alone, but solely as concerns the relations of unbelief with religion. The Freethinker is asked to observe towards religion a degree of solicitude and carefulness that no one else is asked to observe towards any opinion whatever. And he is asked to do this on a ground that every Freethinker is bound to challenge—namely, that religious opinions are concerned with things of great and even transcendent value.

Well, I deny this altogether. I deny that religious beliefs—the belief in a God, or a soul, or a future life, or the divinity of Jesus, or similar beliefs—are in themselves of the slightest value to anybody. There are a thousand and one things concerning which our opinions are of infinitely greater consequence. For instance, our opinion about Mr. Churchill's increased armament crusade, or Mr. Lloyd George's land campaign, or the Government Home Rule Bill, are of infinitely greater consequence than opinions concerning God and the soul. (In themselves, that is, because circumstances may arise that would make our opinion of even the habitableness of Mars of very great consequence indeed.) What we believe about militarism and various legislative proposals must profoundly affect the lives of every one of our fellow-citizens. But believing in a God or a soul may leave our relations to our fellows quite unaffected. The varieties and contradictions of religious opinions and doctrines are in themselves evidence of their small value. Were religion really of vital concern to life it could not be set on one side, as it is set on one side by a growing number of people. There is no natural, vital fact that can be ignored as religion is ignored. And this setting on one side of religion proves that the value of religion is purely adventitious. It is something we import



into religion, not something that naturally belongs to it.

There is no more mischievous maxim current than the one that we ought to respect one another's opinions. We ought to do nothing of the kind. Opinion deserves our respect only in proportion as we believe it to be true. In proportion as we believe it to be false, it deserves nothing but contempt and exposure. Whether the opinion be connected with "sacred" or secular subjects makes not the slightest difference. No man has the right to demand that I shall respect his opinion so long as I believe it to be false. What he is entitled to demand is that I shall respect his right to express whatever opinion he believes to be true. There is a clear justification in social utility for this, but there is neither sense nor social utility in respecting opinions merely because they are called religious. Moreover, it is exactly the right to express opinion that the Christian most strenuously resents. His opinion that a Freethinker is a source of moral and "spiritual" corruption may be shouted from the housetop and treated with all deference. My opinion that I am at least as good as a Christian must be expressed with all due regard to the tender feelings of the Christian advocate—if, indeed, I am allowed to express it at all. The feelings of Christians are outraged because picture shows or concert-halls are open on Sunday. They are not forced to attend either; but it is enough they are open, and in the name of their outraged feelings they demand that they be closed. But Freethinkers may be debarred from all sorts of pleasure on Sunday; their "day of rest" may be made hideous by church bells, Salvation Army bands, and street-corner preaching, without their feelings being considered in any way whatever.

It is not because the Freethinker sets a smaller value upon opinion than the Christian, but because he prizes it higher, that he so often "outrages" religious feeling by his speech. He is really moving upon a quite higher moral plane than that upon which the Christian habitually lives. To him opinion is something that counts for too much in the history of progress to be set on one side as of small consequence. Every opinion carries with it certain social responsibilities, and the responsibilities of unbelief are at least as important as those of belief. No Freethinker objects to a Christian preaching his opinions; he would say it was the Christian's duty to do so. But it is not a duty confined to Christians. It is the duty of everyone to proclaim an opinion as false when it is seen to be so. The plea that the time is not ripe for speech is the plea of a coward. If no one spoke the time never would be ripe. "Not ripe" only means not quite safe; nothing more. Really, the proper time to call a lie a lie is when it is seen to be a lie; not to wait until there are enough singers to make a respectable chorus. Truth often suffers more from the timidity of its friends than from the malignity of its enemies.

In practice the claim that religious feelings must be protected from assault, involves, if necessary, more or less persecution. And it means persecution in its most cowardly form. To say that an opinion is false and shall be suppressed by the simple process of imprisoning or killing those who entertain it, is a straightforward and intelligible proposition. But to grant the right to express that opinion, and yet to say that it shall be expressed in a manner agreeable to the feelings of those who do not agree with it, is persecution plus cowardice. In either case, whether the direct and more courageous plan, or the indirect and more cowardly method is followed, opinion can only be sheltered from attack at the cost of cultivating cowardice and hypocrisy. Conformity is secured by robbing the nation of that which is vital to genuine progress. Error is more firmly established, and religious health becomes the equivalent of social disease. Hypocrisy becomes a marked social characteristic. It is not even the hypocrisy of conscious dissimulation. That is a comparatively healthy form, because it evidences the capacity for seeing the

real thing. The hypocrisy generated is of the kind that, although there is a total divorce between theory and practice, there is a curious unconsciousness that we are all the time living a lie. It is an hypocrisy that is ingrained, organic, and secured by a process of elimination that has been at work for generations. Religious opinion has been protected from attack by a lowering of the intellectual values. And when the history of religion is closed, this may well stand out as its greatest crime against the progress of humanity.

C. COHEN.

### The Holy Ghost.

THE Third Person of the Trinity has played a most conspicuous and tragical part in the history of Christendom. In the Nicene Creed he is defined as "the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who, with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets." Like the Second Person, he is from the First, but in a different way. The Son is *begotten*, while the Spirit *proceedeth*, though both are said to be of the substance of the Father. In the Athanasian Creed we find the following illuminating sentences:—

"The Father is made of none; neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding."

The Arians did not accept that teaching, but they were not to be listened to, being, as the godly Athanasius politely called them, "Devils, Antichrists, maniacs, Jews, Polytheists, Atheists, dogs, wolves, lions, hares, chameleons, hydras, eels, cuttlefish, gnats, beetles, leeches." In the use of such elegant invectives against opponents, theological controversialists have never been surpassed. What was meant by *proceeding* no human being could tell, though we are assured by a twentieth-century divine that "the procession of the Spirit from the Son is not to be understood in precisely the same sense as the procession from the Father." The Eastern Church rejects the doctrine that the Spirit proceeds from the Son, declaring that the procession is from the Father alone. Some theologians have advocated the view that the Holy Ghost is the maternal principle in the Godhead and as such shared with the Father in the generation of the Son, just as Isis shared with Osiris in the generation of Horus.

In the Trinity there are three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, the Father being the fountain-head of the strange union; but the curious thing is that neither Father nor Son is known except through the Holy Ghost. Does it not follow that the Holy Ghost works exclusively through Nature and through man? The Bible furnishes several striking instances of his ceaseless activity. In Joel i. 3, 4, we read thus:—

"Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation. That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten."

In verses 15-20 of the same chapter we find this appalling picture:—

"Alas for the day! for the day of the Lord is at hand, and as destruction from the Lord shall it come. Is not the meat cut off before our eyes, yea, joy and gladness from the house of our God? The seeds rot under their clods; the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down, for the corn is withered. How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate. O Lord, to thee do I cry; for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all the trees of the field. Yea, the beasts of the field pant unto thee; for the water-brooks are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness."



The day of the Lord was thus "a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, as the dawn spread upon the mountains." Then follows a vivid and accurate description of a terrible visitation of locusts:—

"A fire devoureth before them, and behind them a flame burneth, the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and none hath escaped them.....They leap upon the city; they run upon the wall; they climb up into the houses; they enter in at the windows, like a thief. The earth quaketh before them; the heavens tremble; the sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining" (ii. 3-10).

The prophet calls the locusts an army of the Lord, who utters his voice before it, and whose camp is very great. The horrors of such a visitation only show that "the day of the Lord is great and very terrible." The Rev. Dr. Simpson, Canon of St. Paul's, London, tells us, in a sermon upon "The Outpouring of the Spirit," which appears in the *Christian World Pulpit* for December 3, that "the Christian believes that the Divine Spirit operates as certainly in the falling rain, in the succession of the seasons, in the courses of the stars, as in the prayer of the contrite, the mediation of the saint, the redemption of mankind"; but does the Christian believe, like Joel and, apparently, like Dr. Simpson himself, that the same being operates with equal certainty in the devastating earthquake, the devouring locusts, and the all-destroying volcanic eruptions? Does he believe that the Holy Ghost visits the beasts of the field and the birds of the air with famine because he is angry with mankind, or that he gives cleanness of teeth and want of bread to all who forget him, that he withholds the rain from a godless city and grants it to a pious one? Of course, if the rain comes from God, so does the drought; if the thunder is his voice, so is the earthquake his servant.

We maintain that if a spirit operates in all the activities of Nature it would be a horrible lie to call it the Holy Ghost. Nature is heartless, cruel, unmoral, neither rewarding virtue nor punishing vice. In her sight saint and sinner are alike. The Psalmist says that "the Lord is mindful of his own," but Nature shows them no favor whatever. When the earth quakes they perish like the others. No Elijah is fed by ravens when famine haunts the land. No man of God is favored when the ship goes down, or when the red-hot lava overwhelms the city. Many Christian believers now admit this without hesitation, but, at the same time, hold the view that the Holy Ghost is all-powerful in the world of mind. Dr. Simpson expresses himself with great clearness and vehemence on this point. He says:—

"It is a not infrequent charge against the clergy of the modern age that they are exchanging a spiritual for a material Gospel, and proclaiming a social rather than a Divine Christ. Now, I protest from the bottom of my heart that it is the duty of the Christian minister to preach the forgiveness of sins and not the reconstruction of society. Eternal salvation, not economic revolution, is now as it has ever been, the hope of a sinful race. Nothing short of the outpouring of the Spirit in its fullest Pentecostal form is the promise which alone can satisfy the needs and longings of mankind."

That is no doubt orthodox, evangelical teaching; but the reverend gentleman will surely admit that no such outpouring of a supernatural spirit has ever taken place. It has never come to pass, as predicted by Joel, that the Lord has poured out his Spirit upon all flesh. The story of Pentecost in the Acts is plainly a legend. The Holy Ghost has never done a single thing to justify the Church's faith in him. The people who are spoken of as being filled with the Spirit are as fallible and weak as others. Ministers of the Gospel are successes or failures for precisely the same reasons as members of other professions. The power to draw and keep a congregation is entirely human. When an exceptionally clever and powerful discourse has been delivered the remark is generally made that it was a special exhi-

bition of the Holy Spirit's presence. It is never anything of the sort. The effectiveness of a sermon is dependent upon the preacher's ability, intellectual and emotional preparation, the state of his health, and the degree of receptiveness on the part of his hearers. The best oration ever composed falls flat if the human conditions are not favorable. The Church differs in no sense whatever from any other human organisation except in the silly, supernatural claims it makes on its own behalf, not one of which has been established by a single well-attested fact. It prospers or languishes according to the nature and efficient or inefficient working of its machinery. It has never furnished the smallest iota of evidence of the presence within it of a superhuman spirit or power. The Church is, therefore, of necessity a lying institution, with no truth in it. The Holy Ghost, described in the New Testament, has always been conspicuous only by his absence and inactivity; and if there be no Holy Ghost the blessed Trinity disappears, its complete illusoriness being an established fact.

The only conclusion to which we can reasonably come is that the belief in the Holy Ghost is and has always been a great obstacle to human progress. Dependence upon him is fatal to the growth of self-reliance, which is an essential condition of genuine reform. The supernatural must be completely dropped before we can really begin to set the world right; and it is highly comforting to know that it is being abandoned now by ever-growing numbers of our fellow-beings. That is why there are so many prosecutions for blasphemy just now; and even these do their share in accelerating the departure of the Holy Ghost.

J. T. LLOYD.

## "Wait Till You Come to Die."—II.

(Continued from p. 774.)

"Where, among the educated and refined, much less among the masses, do we find any ardent desire for a future life? It is not a subject of drawing-room conversation, and the man whose habit it is to buttonhole his acquaintances and inquire earnestly after their souls is shunned like the Ancient Mariner. Among the clergy it is not thought polite to refer to so delicate a topic except officially from the pulpit. Most ominous of all, as indicating the utter absence of interest on the part of the public, is the silence of the press, in the columns of which are manifested daily the works of the flesh."—PROFESSOR WILLIAM OSLER, *Science and Immortality*, pp. 22-23.

"I find that when a Christian loses a friend the tears spring from his eyes as quickly as from the eyes of others. Their tears are as bitter as ours. Why? The echo of the promises spoken eighteen hundred years ago is so low, and the sound of the clods upon the coffin so loud, the promises are so far away, and the dead so near."—COLONEL INGERSOLL, *The Dying Creed*, p. 31.

"The proper study of a wise man is not how to die, but how to live."—SPINOZA, *Ethics*, iv., 67.

It was reserved for Christianity to surround death with supernatural terrors. To the Pagan philosophers these terrors were of the very essence of superstition, the doctrine, says Lecky, "that he who has earnestly, though no doubt imperfectly, tried to do his duty has nothing to fear beyond the grave, had been the consoling faith of all the best minds of antiquity."

To the ancient Greeks, says a competent authority,—

"there are none of the haunting uncertainties of modern religion about the Greek view of life; no dark corners, no likelihood of skeletons in the cupboard. It is a clear air, and in it we are not baffled by mists, which rise and fall, but never lift; and which hold behind them endless possibilities that can never be quite brought to the test."†

"He was waiting for no glory to be revealed," says the same writer, "with which the sufferings of this present time were not worthy to be compared. The glory was already present to his eyes" † in

\* Lecky, *History of Rationalism*, vol. i., p. 379.

† R. W. Livingstone, *The Greek Genius and Its Meaning for Us* (1912), p. 122.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 123.



that splendid civilisation, in some respects so far ahead of our own.

As Goethe observed of the sepulchres of Athens:—

"The wind which blows from the tombs of the ancients comes with gentle breath as over a mound of roses. The reliefs are touching and pathetic, and always represent life. There stand father and mother, their son between them, gazing at one another with unspeakable truth to nature. Here a pair clasp hands. Here a father seems to rest on his couch and wait to be entertained by his family. To me the presence of these scenes was very touching. Their art is of a late period, yet are they simple, natural, and of universal interest. Here there is no knight in harness on his knees awaiting a joyful resurrection. The artist has with more or less skill presented to us only the persons themselves, and so made their existence lasting and perpetual. They fold not their hands, gaze not into heaven; they are on earth, what they were and what they are. They stand side by side, take interest in one another; and that is what is in the stone, even though somewhat unskillfully, yet most pleasingly depicted."\*

As Lessing observes in his essay on this subject:—

"Revelation has made Death the 'King of Terrors,' the awful offspring of sin and the dread way to its punishment; though to the imagination of the ancient heathen world, Greek or Etrurian, he was a youthful genius—the twin brother of Sleep, or a lusty boy with a torch held downwards."†

Among the greatest of the Romans the same opinion prevailed. Says Lecky:—

"Cæsar could assert in the Senate, without scandal and almost without dissent, that death was the end of all things. Pliny, perhaps the greatest of all Roman scholars, adopting the sentiment of all the school of Epicurus, describes the belief in a future life as a form of madness, a puerile and a pernicious illusion..... That the sleep of annihilation is the happiest end of man is a favorite thought of Lucretius."‡

Says the same historian:—

"Panætius, the founder of Roman stoicism, maintained that the soul perished with the body, and his opinion was followed by Epictetus and Cornutus. Seneca contradicted himself on the subject. Marcus Aurelius never rose above a vague and mournful aspiration. Those who believed in a future world believed in it faintly and uncertainly, and even when they accepted it as a fact, they shrank from proposing it as a motive. The whole system of stoical ethics, which carried self-sacrifice to a point that has scarcely been equalled, and exercised an influence which has rarely been surpassed, was evolved without any assistance from the doctrine of a future life."§

The Pagan philosophers taught that death is "a law not a punishment"; while Christianity taught that death was introduced into the world as a punishment inflicted for the sin of Adam:—

"The first taught that death was the end of suffering; they ridiculed as the extreme of folly the notion that physical evils could await those whose bodies had been reduced to ashes, and they dwelt with emphatic eloquence upon the approaching, and, as they believed, final extinction of superstitious terrors. The second taught that death to the vast majority of the human race is but the beginning of endless and excruciating tortures—tortures before which the most ghastly of terrestrial sufferings dwindle into insignificance—tortures which no courage could defy—which none but an immortal being could endure."||

Lecky says:—

"By the philosophers the ascription of anger and vengeance to the Deity, and the apprehension of future torture at His hands, were unanimously repudiated; by the priests the opposite opinion was deemed equally censurable."

And he further observes:—

"The main object of the Pagan philosophers was to dispel the terrors the imagination had cast around death, and by destroying this last cause of fear to secure the liberty of man. The main object of the

Catholic priests has been to make death in itself as revolting and appalling as possible, and by representing escape from its terrors as hopeless, except by complete subjection to their rule, to convert it into an instrument of government. By multiplying the dancing or warning skeletons, and other sepulchral images representing the loathsomeness of death without its repose; by substituting inhumation for incineration, and concentrating the imagination on the ghastliness of decay; above all, by peopling the unseen world with demon phantoms and with excruciating tortures, the Catholic Church succeeded in making death in itself unspeakably terrible, and in thus preparing men for the consolations it could offer."\*

The same historian observes:—

"The Catholic priests resolved to base their power upon the nerves; and as they long exercised an absolute control over education, literature, and art, they succeeded in completely reversing the teaching of ancient philosophy, and in making the terrors of death for centuries the nightmare of the imagination" (p. 211).

So omnipotent did the idea of death become, that the people of the Middle Ages actually began to represent life as a dance of death. Death was represented as a grisly skeleton, armed with a dart or a bow and arrow. In these gruesome illustrations of the dance of death, familiar to all students of those times, death leads his victims to an untimely grave; he plays the fiddle at weddings, he beats the drum for soldiers in battle, he bears the priest's bell when the priest carries the sacrament, he plays the flute for the dancers, he throws the dice for the gamblers. With bow and arrow he is seen hunting the hunter; with dart poised to strike he stands over the miser; he is seen standing beside the scholar, the sculptor, and the painter; he is shown in every conceivable phase of life, beside the baby in the cradle to the man in the decrepitude of old age. Holbein's "Dance of Death" is the best known to our generation. Holbein executed a series of woodcuts for this, which were published in book form, with explanatory verses, in 1538. It became the most famous work of his life, and appeared in many hundred editions in French, Latin, Italian, and German.† And Holbein, it should be recollected, was a Protestant.

Nothing illustrates more vividly the contrast between the Middle Ages—the Ages of Faith—and our own time than the difference in the treatment of death. There is a million-fold more reading matter issued to-day than during those ages; but there are no dances of death published now, except, maybe, a reproduction of some of the old ones as an antiquarian curiosity. The present generation are more intent upon making the best of this world; in striving for better conditions in this life than in concentrating their attention upon a mythical life to come. We are returning, after nearly two thousand years of madness, to the sane and healthy view of death held by the ancient Greeks and Romans.

Martin Luther himself remarked upon the different view taken of death by the ancients, before the advent of Christianity. He says:—

"If it were a light and easy matter for a Christian to overcome death, if he knew it was not God's wrath; that quality makes death bitter to us. But a heathen dies securely; he neither sees nor feels that it is God's wrath, but thinks it is merely the end of nature. The epicurean says: 'Tis but to endure one evil hour.'‡

Lecky said that he knew nothing in the world sadder than this saying of Luther's on the matter.§

"Wait till you come to die." When the Free-thinker hears these words, he knows that he is confronted by a survivor from the Dark Ages. That, in the speaker's mind, is a vision of the infidel stretched on a bed of sickness, thinking despairingly of the wrath to come, of the angry Judge, of the

\* Cited in Percy Gardner's *New Chapters in Greek History*, p. 825.

† Note to Coleridge's *Biographia*, cap. xxii.; cited by Lecky, *European Morals*, vol. i., p. 210.

‡ Lecky, *European Morals*, vol. i., p. 182.

§ *Ibid.*, vol. i., p. 184.

|| Lecky, *European Morals*, vol. i., pp. 208-209.

\* Lecky, *European Morals*, vol. i., p. 210.

† Dr Paul Carus, *The Open Court* (January, 1898), p. 44.

‡ *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, p. 319. Hazlitt's translation, Bohn's edition.

§ Lecky, *History of Rationalism*, vol. i., p. 379; note.



devils waiting to bear his soul to the infernal regions. This is what he learned from his grandmother, and does not doubt it, and he cannot understand that anyone else can have the temerity to dismiss these tales of devils and hells as so many old wives' fables, of no more reality than the tales in the *Arabian Nights*. He thinks that the sceptic is not sincere in his disbelief; that his unbelief is a pretence born of bravado, which, in the hour of death will desert him—hence his miserable end. As Colonel Ingersoll has well remarked:—

"For many centuries the theologians have taught that an unbeliever—an infidel—one who spoke or wrote against their creed, could not meet death with composure; that in his last moment God would fill his conscience with the serpents of remorse. For a thousand years the clergy have manufactured the facts to fit this theory—this infamous conception of the deity of man and the justice of God."\*

Mr. Bernard Shaw once remarked that most people believed in God, because they were afraid that if they did not he would strike them dead. The person who tells you to "Wait till you come to die" may be safely classed among this kind of believer.

(To be continued.) W. MANN.

### Christianity and the Mailed Fist.

"If Christians would teach infidels to be just to Christianity, they should themselves be just to infidelity."

—JOHN STUART MILL.

CHRISTIAN apologists are never tired of boasting of the tolerance of the religion they profess. At the present moment, when a Freethinker is in prison because of his Freethought, it is well to attempt to dispel the gross ignorance everywhere displayed as to the persecution of "infidels" by their orthodox opponents. Curiously, although trials for blasphemy have been numerous, the comparatively enlightened nineteenth century holds the record for the number of blasphemy and free speech convictions, and the early years of the present century bid fair to rival the record of its predecessor. The reason is not far to seek. The working classes have woken to intellectual issues, and Church and State have united in an unholy alliance to strangle Freedom.

A hundred years ago Thomas Paine was dead, but his books were alive and were being circulated. This was one of the earliest efforts to rouse the workers with the Freethought evangel, and the Freethinkers suffered terribly for publishing that thunderous engine of revolt, the *Age of Reason*. There were critics of the Bible, it is true, before Paine's day, but they were mainly scholars, whose works were not easily understood by ordinary folk. Paine himself, a man of genius, had sprung from the people, and he spoke their tongue and made their thoughts articulate. But boldly as Paine might write, his books would never have been read at all but for the courage of the Freethinkers. Richard Carlile, the lion-hearted, endured over nine years' imprisonment. The clergy were aroused by so determined a resistance, and hesitated at nothing. They even attacked women, and Carlile's brave wife and sister were dragged to gaol for two years each. His shopmen divided among them about forty years' imprisonment. Think of it! One small circle of Freethinkers serving between them over fifty years in prison for the right of free speech.

The example of Paine was soon emulated. Haslam's *Letters to the Clergy* put the absurdities of Christianity in plain fashion before the people, and this was followed by Clarke's *Critical Life of Jesus*. Robert Cooper's *Holy Scriptures Analysed* was another powerful attack on Bibliolatry. Thoroughly alarmed, Phillpotts, Bishop of Exeter, voiced the terror with no uncertain sound in the House of Lords. Great excitement followed, and the State clergy and Dissenting ministers for the first time joined hands, and

started many new prosecutions against the Freethinkers. John Cleave and Henry Hetherington were both prosecuted and sentenced. The Freethinkers were in a fighting mood, and they tested the law to see if it could reach high-class culprits. A prosecution was commenced against Moxon and other publishers for selling Shelley's *Queen Mab*, for which so many infidels had suffered. The ruse succeeded, and Freethought won a step forward.

The first distinctive Freethought periodical, the *Oracle of Reason*, edited by the brilliant and audacious Charles Southwell, was the next storm-centre. Before many issues had been published the editor was prosecuted, and sentenced to a year's imprisonment and a fine of £100. Holyoake, the second editor of the paper, was the next victim. For a blasphemous remark after a lecture he was sentenced to six months' imprisonment.

Thomas Paterson, the third editor, shared the fate of his predecessors. His defence, published under the caustic title of *God versus Paterson*, was astounding in its audacity, and earned for its author the title of "Balldog." Up in Scotland two Freethinkers, Robinson and Finlay, were sentenced for selling blasphemous works. Then a Freethought heroine, Matilda Roalfe, stepped into the breach, and was sentenced for selling the *Age of Reason*. Her sacrifice was not in vain, and the hydra of clericalism was forced to recoil by the sheer courage of the blasphemers.

There was rest for a few years; but in 1857 a poor Cornish well-sinker was sentenced to nearly two years' imprisonment for chalking blasphemous words on a parson's gate. Happily, this case attracted the attention of two Freethinkers of European reputation, Henry Thomas Buckle and John Stuart Mill, who stirred the intellectual world by denouncing such abominable persecution. The prosecuting counsel was John Duke Coleridge, afterwards Lord Chief Justice, and, by the irony of events, the judge in the memorable blasphemy trial of 1883. It was in that year that the *Freethinker* trials took place, when Mr. G. W. Foote was sentenced to a year's imprisonment, and his two colleagues, Ramsey and Kemp, to nine and three months' respectively. Petitions for release were signed by almost everybody of intellectual eminence in England. An agitation was commenced against the Blasphemy Laws, which Judge Stephen well described as "ferocious," but which yet disgrace the Statute Book of a civilised country. The prosecution of 1883, indeed, elicited such widespread condemnation that for some years the law fell into abeyance; but during the past few years there has been a revival of persecution, directed against isolated and unimportant Freethinkers.

Imprisonment was by no means the only indignity imposed. Daniel Eaton, besides being prosecuted seven times, had the pillory inflicted and £2,500 worth of literature destroyed. The poet Shelley was deprived of the custody of his children, and a similar dishonor was inflicted on Mrs. Besant many years later. A large number of the prosecutions of the unstamped press were simply disguised blasphemy trials. The authorities covered the odiousness of their acts under cover of proceedings against unstamped papers or pamphlets. Bradlaugh had to win his seat at Northampton in the face of awful opposition, and only his alertness prevented his imprisonment for blasphemy. The late Marquis of Queensberry was deprived of his seat in the House of Lords on account of his infidelity. Last, but not least, thousands of pounds bequeathed for Freethought purposes in the past were devoted to other channels; but happily Mr. Foote has stopped this highway robbery. In addition, our leader, in his attempts to free us from our fetters, has been involved in constant lawsuits, personal abuse, and has been the victim of a concerted press boycott.

Never in the whole course of its contest with other religions or ideas has Christianity turned its lying face to be smitten. Not once in the realities of its evolution has it manifested even "goodwill to men"

\* Oration on Voltaire, p. 23.



opposed to its own creed. In the past, the Church of Christ bribed the weak and murdered the strong among her opponents. In the twentieth century she is buying apostates all over the non-Christian world by means of medical missionaries, and in England venting her spleen on unfortunate stragglers and camp followers of the army of Freethought. O Religion of Love! How many crimes have been committed in thy name.

MIMNERMUS.

### The "Blasphemy" Case.

SOME years ago there was a swarm of prosecutions for what may be called "blaspheming" the German Emperor. They were worked down so fine at last that even good monarchists were obliged to lift their eyebrows. One worthy citizen had to do time for suggesting that a musical composition of William's, of which he was very proud just then, was not quite equal to Beethoven; another was imprisoned for suggesting that the Emperor's personal beauty was a shade less than Apollo's; and another suffered for the opinion that the Emperor's sermons on board his yacht were not equal to Luther's. Nobody knew where this defecation of William was going to end. It threatened to go beyond the "Me and God" of the versified satire. So the good sense of the nation cried "Halt!" And the *lèse-majesté* business has been worked more temperately ever since.

Now just as *lèse-majesté* may be called "blaspheming" a sovereign, so may "blasphemy" be called *lèse-majesté* against God. No particular God, but any God that happens to rule the roost at a certain time and place. In England, of course, the matter is rather complicated. There seems to be a syndicate of deities in this country. You have to deal respectfully and tenderly with God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, and even God the Devil, who is quite a respectable character now, and plays the part of leader of the opposition, standing towards the Trinity very much as Mr. Bonar Law stands towards Mr. Asquith. There is also a female Deity worshiped by the Catholics, who stands closely related to the Trinity and in a certain way with their friendly adversary.

You are to deal tenderly and respectfully with these personages, not for their own sake, but for the sake of their worshipers. These people have exquisitely sensitive feelings. You would not think so if you judged by their own language in religious controversy. You have to take their word for it. If you hesitate to do so they are able to provide you with much stronger reasons than logic and sense could supply. They have the argument of prosecution and imprisonment at their command. You had better admit that their feelings are of the very highest sensibility. Contradiction gives them shocking pain. Opposition drives them mad with agony. Even the slightest sign of dissent throws them into a fever.

We understand that Stewart is not a very persuasive speaker, but we cannot ascertain that he said anything worse than the half-dozen sentences we quoted some weeks ago. Lord Coleridge must have been playing to the gallery in declaring that he could conceive of nothing "more coarse, vulgar, or more distasteful." He also showed that there is nothing in heredity to secure that a wise and tolerant father shall have a wise and tolerant son.

It was on this basis that Thomas William Stewart (we will drop the ridiculous "Nikola") was tried for "blasphemy" at the Stafford Assizes, found guilty, and sentenced to four months' imprisonment. Had he spoken of Conservatism, Liberalism, Socialism, Anarchism, or any other "ism" of that kind, he would have committed no crime. His offence was speaking of Christianity in a way that Christians dislike. Just as if any Freethinker had ever been able to speak of Christianity in a way that Christians liked.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be concluded.)

### Acid Drops.

The Bishop of London has been explaining the action of the ecclesiastics concerning metropolitan amusements. "We do not even attack mere vulgarity. All we attack is indecency and suggestiveness." Dr. Ingram should apply the same treatment to his own Book—first of all. And if "vulgarity" is not attacked in London why is it made the ground of a Blasphemy prosecution at Wolverhampton and the Stafford Assizes?

The Bishop of London says that God made the world, and it is a beautiful world. Man himself is the author of all the evil in the world. All the Bishop has to do now is to tell us who made man?

The following lovely cutting is from a leading article in the *Daily Chronicle* on "The Balkan Tangle":—

"It is reported that Serbia and Montenegro have agreed on their new frontier in the Sandjak of Novibazar, but similar reports have before proved premature. Of the misery in the conquered regions, especially those under Servian sway, there is unhappily much evidence. Albania and Bulgaria both swarm with refugees. The Albanians come mostly from the Diskova district, where the notorious Servian regicide, General Popovitch, is in command, and bring terrible tales of extermination and village-burning, men, women, and children perishing without respect to age or sex. Against the Macedonian Bulgars Serbia has enacted what is probably the harshest coercion Act of modern times. Under it any Servian district police officer may proclaim any resident in his district guilty of treason. There is no trial; the officer merely pronounces sentence; the maximum is death, the minimum five years' imprisonment. If a proclaimed man absconds, he becomes at once liable to the maximum penalty, and if anybody harbors him, they share his guilt."

We prefer to add nothing. The cutting tells its own story.

James Murray Bett, in the London Bankruptcy Court, pleaded that his failure was due to the "Act of God," as most of his assets were destroyed by a hurricane. His argument was not refuted, but his discharge was suspended for two years—which is scarcely fair.

*Should a Woman Tell?* is the title of the Rev. A. J. Waldron's playlet. It is a question in which the clergy are developing a serious interest, if we may judge by the recent newspaper reports of clerical misdoings.

We were unable to attend the lecture by Georg Brandes on Nietzsche. We therefore turned to the next morning's newspapers for what we hoped would be a good report. We found the longest in the *Daily Chronicle*. But it was not a report of the lecture, to which only a few lines were devoted. It was mainly a report of the remarks of the chairman, Mr. G. B. Shaw, who introduced the lecturer with one speech and buried him under another. It was a great pity that Shaw acted in this grotesque way. To be always talking, and generally about yourself, is sometimes not an entertainment but an affliction to your audience; especially when it is not your audience at all but another man's. Unfortunately, it is a besetting sin of too many chairmen to mistake themselves for the lecturer. But a man of Mr. Shaw's sagacity ought to have seen that all he was required to do was to welcome M. Brandes, and to keep order if necessary.

It may be, of course, that the *Chronicle* made Mr. Shaw's offence worse than it was. He was not responsible for the unmannerly brevity of the report of M. Brandes' lecture. He is responsible, however, for playing up to the policy of certain newspapers to report clowning rather than philosophy—what is merely amusing instead of what instructs and elevates. And he pays the penalty of this—for many people have long ceased to take him seriously, which is, in its way, a misfortune. At the Essex Hall meeting in favor of the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws, in March last, there were men on the platform who had fought hard for many years for that object, whereas it was about the first meeting of that kind which Mr. Shaw had ever attended. Some of those men represented important sections of the "advanced" community. But they and their object were nothing. The newspaper men were instructed to "report Shaw." Which they did. And the result was that the public were practically informed that the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws was necessary in order that Mr. Shaw might write a play on Mohammed. It was not known, or not remembered, that Voltaire had written a play on that subject, that it had been translated into



English, and put upon the stage in London. The courage required to write another play on Mohammed in the twentieth century, instead of the eighteenth, does not seem quite supernatural. The Blasphemy Laws, at least, are hardly a sufficient deterrent. It is to be hoped, therefore, that Mr. Shaw may yet pluck up courage for the great attempt.

An article in the *Christian World* for December 4 bears the title "Old Testament Medicine," and one would naturally expect that it would deal with the medical knowledge displayed in the Bible. Not a bit of it, however. The article describes the knowledge of drugs and maladies possessed by the ancient Egyptians, Assyrians, and Babylonians. All students are aware that these peoples had a very considerable body of solid knowledge at their disposal, and although in no case had they quite freed themselves from the primitive animistic theory of disease, still many of the things were known to them that the modern world has rediscovered within recent times. The peculiarity of the *Christian World* article, however, is that, having pointed out how much the ancient peoples knew about drugs and disease, it quietly assumes that this was "Old Testament Medicine." This is, of course, wide of the truth. Old Testament "medicine" represents a much lower level of culture than that enjoyed by the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Babylonians, just as the civilisation of the Biblical Jews was upon a much lower level. In the Bible the cure for disease is almost invariably of a supernatural kind, and disease is nearly always supernaturally cured. Recent discoveries concerning the civilisations of remote antiquity only prove that in dealing with the early Biblical Jews we are dealing with a people only a degree removed from savagery.

The *Christian World* writer also refers to "the medical world of the New Testament, which owed its success to the advances of the Greek practitioners." This is a quite gratuitous piece of "bluff." There is not the slightest trace in the New Testament of any influence of Greek medical science. Comparing Galen or Hippocrates with the New Testament theory of diseases is exactly on a level with comparing our own medical science with African fetish worship. Faith and prayer are the stock-in-trade of the New Testament healer. Disease is caused by demons and cured by religious incantation. If there is one thing clear to demonstration, it is that in the sphere of disease and its treatment the New Testament represents a reversion from a fairly advanced state of knowledge to a condition of primitive savagery. And, more than anything else, the New Testament was responsible for the eclipse of ancient medical learning and the long sway of curing disease by prayer, by relics, and by the casting out of demons. These things are so obvious and so easily demonstrated that one would have thought Christians would at least have had the sense to be silent on the subject. But pious impudence seems without bounds, and pious credulity to be without limits.

"I heard a clergyman tell a rather good story the other day. Two spiders met in a church. 'Hullo,' said one to the other, 'I hope you've got comfortable quarters?' 'No,' was the reply; 'I haven't. I'm in the churchwarden's pew, and he's always jumping up and bobbing in and out and disturbing me.' 'Oh,' said the spider who had made the inquiry, 'I'm much better off. I've been here three months and I haven't been disturbed once. I'm in the Poor Box.'"  
*Referee.*

Clerical jobs go begging in Shakespeare's county. Canon F. R. Evans, rector of Bedworth, Warwickshire, has advertised six weeks for a curate without getting a single answer. All we can suggest is raising the salary.

What humbug there is in English religion,—which is supposed, we understand, to be a species of Christianity. God is said to be no respecter of persons. That is the pious theory, but it is very different in practice. A deputation to the Dean of Exeter persuaded him to add the name of a very well-known "person" to one of the set prayers in the Church service. "God" was asked to pity "all those who are in any way afflicted or distressed in mind, body, or estate"—and "especially Emilino Pankhurst." Why especially to her? Would her name have been introduced to the Almighty in that fashion if she had been a distressed washerwoman? The explanation of the Dean's action is to be found in the thousands of pounds subscribed to the Pankhurst organisation on Sunday evening. It is not the lower orders who can give two subscriptions of £1,000 each on one evening—to say nothing of five hundreds, two hundreds, and one hundred. Evidently all you want to command the clergy is plenty of cash. They'll arrange with God for all you want for a sufficient consideration.

More floods in Texas. Many persons have perished through the rising of the Brazos River. No doubt their relatives are bursting to cry "Three cheers for Providence!"

Dr. C. E. Jefferson has a lengthy article in the *Constructive Quarterly* on "The Church and World Brotherhood." He says that the two principal problems before the world are "How to federate the nations, and how to federate the Churches." We quite agree in the importance of the first, but the second is neither important, desirable, nor possible. It is not important, because the doctrines of the Churches play a steadily decreasing part in the life of the world. It is not desirable, because, were it possible, it would mean the creation of a power operating with the single regard to the welfare of its own organisation. A federation of Churches would mean, for aggressive purposes, the recreation of a universal Catholic Church, and what that meant the history of Europe tells plainly enough. The welfare of the world has been negatively dependent upon the fact that a universal Church did not exist except in name. And, on a smaller area, the welfare of that country has been most assured where the divisions among Churches have been the most numerous. Where the Churches can unite, the result is disaster. Fortunately, such a union is not possible. The doctrines of the Churches are too discordant, and their aims too conflicting. And if they drop the doctrines, forgo their aims, and unite in preaching the doctrine of "social service," they are helping to strengthen the very cause that is largely responsible for the contempt in which they are now held.

Dr. Jefferson does, in fact, fall back upon this last line. He says, "It is a striking fact that men will work together long before they are willing to worship together." This is quite true, as we have often pointed out, and its truth arises from the fact that while social life is an essentially unifying force, religion is a naturally disruptive one. Place a number of men together in any kind of social life, and sooner or later they will establish some sort of a working agreement. They will learn to maximise their agreements and minimise their disagreements. Put a number of men together in a religious relationship and the reverse will happen. Differences, slight at first, will gradually assume mountainous proportions. The whole history of religion is a history of disunion. Religion begins everywhere in agreement and ends in disagreement. It is only the compelling force of social life that secures the measure of agreement that actually exists.

Dr. Jefferson sees this—in a way—in the sentence above quoted, but he adds, "The modern emphasis on social service is a mighty forwarder of Christian union," and his advice to the Churches is to utilise this in their own interests. The advice was not needed. The Churches have always done this, and are doing it still. The exploitation of the social side of human nature in the interests of supernaturalism is one of the most important facts in European history, even in human history. But why should this phase of human nature be utilised to advance the welfare of the Churches? Social effort is an end in itself—or, at least, it is directed towards its own specific object. To use this in order to advance the welfare of the Churches is to divert it from its proper purpose, to stunt the development of social life, and to foster the growth of vested interests and unscientific beliefs. If the Churches have anything vital in them they should be able to live without attaching themselves, parasite-like, to something outside themselves. If they cannot do this, the sensible course is to sweep them out of the road.

In the Berlin districts covered by the (State) Church Synod there are sixty-eight State churches, with accommodation for 86,000 persons. A church census was taken on a recent Sunday, and it was found that 11,252 were present. A great many reasons are given for this abstention of so large a number of people, but none of them hit the mark. Comparing these figures with those supplied by the church census taken in various parts of England, they are not very dissimilar, and so general a result argues an equally general cause. And when all other reasons have been examined, only one remains of any value—that is, the general decline of religious belief all over the civilised world. People cease to attend church because they are ceasing to believe in Christianity. That is the only theory that covers the facts. And against this decay of belief the Churches, singly or collectively, are powerless. It is possible for a powerful organisation to fight and crush an individual; but against the slow, but steady, development of the race the most powerful organisation is ultimately powerless.

A wonderful old man is Mr. Moses, a retired barrister, of Slough, who sings in public at the age of eighty-four. A



still more wonderful man was the Mr. Moses mentioned in the Bible, who wrote an account of his own funeral.

Mr. A. G. Hales has written to the *Daily Sketch* suggesting that music-hall artistes should hold an inquiry into the morals of the clergy, in view of the large number of cases in which vicars and curates have been before the courts. He adds, "I consider it much safer to send my children to a music-hall than to church."

The Dean of Durham has been condemning the miserable rule of compulsory celibacy which still binds so many Christian priests. Alas! so many "sons of God" give the glad eye to the daughters of men.

Dr. Marie C. Stopes, who has been appointed Professor of Palæobotany at London University, says that until she studied, it had never dawned upon her that Noah's Ark only contained animals and that the plants would have been destroyed. The realisation that science leads to questioning the truth of the Christian superstition accounts for the undying hostility of the clergy against ordered knowledge. "There is no darkness but ignorance."

"Our knowledge merely helps us to die a more painful death than the animals that know nothing," says M. Maurice Maeterlinck. Priestly lies have turned death into the King of Terrors for believers.

When the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope get their copies of *Old Moore's Almanac*, they will suffer from "cold feet," as our American friends express it, for the prophet forecasts "religious scandals" for 1914 on a larger scale than usual. These distinguished ecclesiastics ought to be used to such troubles by this time.

The Tango dance has found a eulogistic patron in the Rev. Thomas Hannan, rector of St. Peter's Episcopal church, Musselburgh, near Edinburgh. It was danced at a concert in aid of the church funds. The reverend gentleman said it was graceful and dignified. King David's performance takes a back seat.

Mr. Lloyd George's notions of "religious equality" are strictly limited to Christians. Paradise exists as long as no Christian denomination has any advantage over any other Christian denomination. This kind of equality is not extended to Freethinkers. Whether they are in prison or out of it does not trouble Mr. Lloyd George in the slightest degree. This is shown clearly enough in his letter to the Liberal candidate at the Wick by-election. Nonconformists and Episcopalians are all he recognises as having any practical interest in what is rather facetiously called "toleration." He is comparatively a young man yet, though, and he may live to find that he will have to say "Yes" or "No" to the Freethinkers' demand for "religious equality" as against the Christian sects who monopolise it at present.

Mrs. Florence L. Barclay, the authoress of several sentimental novels, including *The Broken Halo*, contributed a column headed "Scripture and Life" to Monday's *Daily Chronicle*. We never read greater trash on the subject, but we dare say it was highly relished by the bulk of the lady's readers. She indulged in one of the cheapest tricks of Christian controversy; a trick that requires no brains, but only a large supply of impudence. It consists in quoting Christian testimony to the matchless beauty and benign influence of the Bible. Even this is done with the maximum of unfairness by Mrs. Barclay. The use she makes of Ruskin shows inexcusable ignorance or reckless untruthfulness. She entirely misrepresents what Ruskin really says about his mother's making him read the Bible with her when he was a child. It was not reading the Bible as the Bible, but reading it closely and carefully under his mother's keen supervision, that gave Ruskin (as he says) his chief skill in the weight and value of words.

Mrs. Barclay appears to think that Abraham Lincoln and George Eliot were Christians. It is a pity that her education on these matters has been so sadly neglected. She makes a great deal of Sir Walter Scott's calling for the Bible to read on his death-bed. She might also have mentioned if she knew it—that Tennyson did not call for the Bible. He called for Shakespeare. And he died with his finger in the pages of "Cymbeline." Moreover that volume was placed in his coffin and buried with him in Westminster Abbey. We don't recollect hearing of any explosion in consequence.

Two or three weeks ago it was announced that Lord Headley had been converted to Mohammedanism. It is now stated that several other people of note have followed his example. It is very much like the case of the man who gave up the errors of the Church of Rome in order to embrace those of the Church of England, but if Mohammedans were to carry on a really active propaganda in England we see no reason why they should not gain converts. In Africa, Mohammedanism can beat Christianity easily, and there are plenty of people in this country on the look out for a new religious sensation.

Bishop Gailor says the negro needs something "that will make religion and morality identical." The *New York World* suggests that if the negro ever finds it he should pass it along to the whites.

Rev. Hurnett Mason, of 6 Brookside, Cambridge, left £18,880. He might be forgiven, on the ground that he had been for fifty years Hebrew Lecturer at St. John's College.

We take the following from the *Daily Mirror* (Dec. 5):—

"Mr. George Lansbury, who is off to America, is, unlike many of his Socialist colleagues, a devout High Churchman. Formerly a Freethinker, he attended, some years ago, a mission service in the East End which was conducted by the Rev. Basil W. Maturin. Before he left the mission he was converted."

We should like to see a few more details of that sudden conversion; although, it must be admitted it is a good deal like Mr. Lansbury. We should also like to hear from anyone who ever knew Mr. Lansbury when he was a Freethinker as alleged. Not that we dispute the allegation. Oh dear no! But we are fond of certitude in these matters—which the Christians never are. Anything that pleases them satisfies them. They are so plentifully supplied with "the will to believe."

More "Providence." Canon Ross-Lewin, vicar of Benfieldside, after addressing a missionary meeting at Consett, Durham, dropped dead upon the platform. We are told that not a sparrow falls without God's permission. Is it the same with clergymen?

We wonder how many of our readers could say straight off if the word *India* occurs in the Bible, and if so, whether they could quote chapter and verse where it is mentioned. To save them time in solving the problem, we annex the passage:—

"Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus [this is Ahasuerus which reigned, from India even unto Ethiopia, over one hundred and seven and twenty provinces] that in those days....." (Esther i. 1).

A similar passage occurs in Esther viii. 9. Cruden, with the delightful vagueness dear to ignorance, describes India as "A considerable country in the East." Shakespeare did better than that: "Her bed is India, there she lies a pearl."

Some of our special "saints" hardly realise the power and privileges their position carries with it; so, for their benefit, the scriptural authority for it is annexed:—

"Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the *saints*? Do ye not know that the *saints* shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that ye shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?" (1 Cor. v. 1-3).

Thus spake the Apostle Paul, and our "saints" should ever bear in mind the responsibilities attaching to their high office, for shall not even the angels stand up before them for judgment?

Sir Charles H. Hawtrey cites Moses against the clergy in the Church and Theatre controversy:—"Ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi."

The Jews were taught to honor their fathers and mothers. Jesus Christ, being a Jew himself, improved on that. He taught that no man could be his disciple who did not hate his father and mother. On this basis we must hold that Evan Roberts is a very good Christian. He refuses to see his parents. He tells them plainly, "Your own sins have separated you from me." When he condescends to particulars it appears that their "sin" consists in "unbelief" in him. He has the impudence to call unbelief "persecution." He calls himself "a man of God" and he dogmatizes—like all the rest of them. One has only to look at his portrait to see that his chief disease is personal vanity.



### Mr. Foote's Engagements

Sunday, December 14, Queen's (Minor) Hall, London, W.; at 7.30, "Shaw Among the Prophets."

### To Correspondents.

PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND, 1913.—Previously acknowledged, £261 14s. 1d. Received since:—W. P. Adamson, £1 1s.; J. de B. and Wife (S. Africa), £10; T. W. Wickes, 5s.; "Starshine," 10s.; J. Pendlebury, £1.

DISGUSTED (Newcastle).—You or anybody can answer the question as well as we can. Many of the clergy are more orthodox in the pulpit than they are outside it.

E. B.—Much obliged for the budget.

W. P. BALL.—Your cuttings are always very welcome.

J. DE B. (S. Africa) sends a generous subscription for himself and wife for the President's Honorarium Fund. They have increased the amount this year on account of the insufficient response to the appeal for this Fund, which, however, has progressed rather more rapidly during the last few weeks. "We were much concerned," our correspondents write, "to hear of Mr. Foote's illness, but hope that he has quite recovered." They add "best wishes for the *Freethinker*."

G. E. FRANCIS.—See paragraph. Thanks.

L. GENTLE.—We had seen it. Thanks all the same. We wanted a longer report of Lord Coleridge's speech.

W. GREGORY.—We don't feel sure of the point. All we can say is that we are sorry the two dates clashed, but ours had long been announced, and a little respect to the Queen's Hall meetings might not have been out of place.

T. M. MASLEY.—Mr. Cohen's book on Determinism deserves all your praises. We agree with most of what you say about the other.

J. JORTMAN.—You can't expect military and clerical men at Conservative meetings to take an interest in the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws, or any other kind of justice to Freethinkers. We should also like to see some propaganda at Oxford.

J. PENDLEBURY.—Thanks for letter as well as cheque.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY.—Miss Vance, general secretary, acknowledges; M. Morris, 10s. 6d.

SOME correspondence stands over unavoidably till next week.

WHEN the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the secretary, Miss E. M. Vance.

LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.

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.

ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Shop Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2 Newcastle-street Farringdon-street, E.C., and not to the Editor.

The *Freethinker* will be forwarded direct from the publishing office to any part of the world, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months 2s. 8d.

### Sugar Plums.

There was a capital audience at Queen's (Minor) Hall on Sunday evening, including a goodly number of ladies, and Mr. Foote's lecture on "Shakespeare's Humanism in the *Merchant of Venice*" was followed with the keenest attention and greatly applauded. Mr. A. B. Moss was, of course, an excellent chairman. Several questions were asked and answered, and the meeting then dispersed with every mark of satisfaction.

"Shaw Among the Prophets" is the title of Mr. Foote's second (and, for the present, last) lecture at Queen's Hall this evening (Dec. 14). The Shaw is our only Shaw, the great "G. B. S.," who declared himself a "mystic" at the Bradlaugh Dinner and a believer in some sort of a God. Mr. Shaw's religious developments during the past eight or nine years are amusing as well as instructive—as we think the audience will find; and a good many people, besides avowed Freethinkers, should be interested in what Mr. Foote has to say upon the subject.

Arley Lane, of the *Birmingham Weekly Mercury*, devotes two columns to Mr. Cohen's recent lecture at the King's Hall, Corporation-street, on "The Challenge of Unbelief." He complains of the paucity of ladies in the audience, but he says that they always prefer emotion to intellect—which, if

not altogether true, may account for some of them practising arson as a policy of social progress. Arley Lane hints, of course, that if Mr. Cohen wants to fill the King's Hall with ladies he will have to take a leaf from the book of Jim Larkin, Gipsy Smith, or Evan Roberts. Which is very likely true, only Mr. Cohen isn't likely to take the "tip." The size of his audience is not the sole consideration in his propaganda. With regard to the opposition after Mr. Cohen's lecture, Arley Lane remarks that the man who undertook the job was not fit for it. "To deal adequately," he says, "with trained and educated speakers of Mr. Cohen's ability, specially trained Christian workers are needed." Of course they are. But one is obliged to smile at Arley Lane's suggestion that the Bishop of Birmingham should raise "an army of able volunteers." Birmingham isn't Belfast.

We don't want to be mistaken. In the reference to the size of Mr. Cohen's audience we don't mean that it was a small one. We have already reported that it was a large one.

We hope our readers keep an eye on the *English Review*. It is one of the very best of the monthlies, and its energies are not overlaid with any cowardly worship of the respectabilities—which is so common in latter-day English literature. The December number only lacks one thing: an article on something very special and specially well written, standing out above the crowd. Mr. John Masefield opens with a poem called "The River," which, in our opinion, contains more vigor than poetry. One thinks of what Crabbe might have made of such a theme. Mr. Wells starts a new prophetic sketch of "The World Set Free," depicting a state of society that is going to be highly interesting if we ever reach it; but who knows whether it will be any happier than what we are used to? Mr. Frank Harris contributes a powerful short story called "The Yellow Ticket," dealing with some strange aspects of Russian life. Mr. L. March Phillips writes agreeably and ably on "Modern Thought and the Renaissance." There is food for thought in Mr. Holbrook Jackson's "The Creation of Taste"—in spite of his endorsement of the hackneyed praise of the Bible as literature. The other contents include a good article by Mr. E. S. Haynes on "The Taboos of the British Museum Library"—a subject which really demands attention. The editor's monthly notes are on "Albert Hall Revolutions." He does not consider them dangerous. His comments on them are vividly written.

Mr. Foote will probably contribute again to the *English Review* in the new year. He received a flattering invitation to do so after his Meredith article in the March number. But he found, after all, that it would be more prudent to act on medical advice for the rest of the year by going more slowly, doing only what had to be done, and letting the rest slide. The year is now nearly out, and Mr. Foote's pen, at least, will be wielded more actively when the Christmas holidays are over.

Raymond A. Coulson's article in the *Sunday Chronicle* will do good, inasmuch as it will set many readers of that journal thinking. But why does he deal with Atheism without trying to understand it? He fancies that the Atheist is a person who "sets up another dogma" in place of the dogmas of Theism or Christianity. Probably he has heard that Atheism says "there is no God." He is mistaken. We advise him to study the subject a little further.

The *Westminster Gazette* is responsible for the following paragraph on the latest "blasphemy" case:—

"The recent imprisonment of a man in Staffordshire for breaking the Blasphemy Laws has raised once again the whole question of whether at this time of day these laws ought to be allowed to remain on the Statute-book. As a fact there are a good many Acts still on the Statute-book which are by this time obsolete or out of date. It does not always follow that they should be repealed without anything being put in their place, but in this matter of the Blasphemy Laws we certainly support any movement which aims at making it impossible to punish a man for his opinions. That he should remain under an obligation to express his opinions in such a way as not to lead to disorder is reasonable enough. We hope that the Government will look into the matter, and in this matter of the Blasphemy Laws, as a start at any rate, set to work to make the Statute-book more consonant with present day ideas."

We are afraid that our contemporary doesn't see that the mere retention of the word "blasphemy"—which is inseparably connected with religion—would make the alteration of the law it suggests impossible. Persecution still remains while it is only Freethinkers who are prosecutable and punishable for using "undesirable" language in religious discussion.



## Austrian Bigotry at Prague.

At the recent International Freethought Congress at Lisbon the choice was made of Prague as the seat of the next International Congress, which is fixed for the autumn of 1915. The Bohemian Freethinkers have for a long time been actively preparing the ground for this important event by an intensive cultivation of Freethought, and during the last few weeks the Clericalist Government at Vienna took alarm and wreaked cowardly revenge upon the organisers of the phenomenally successful movement of Freethought which has its seat at Prague. As this outbreak synchronises with the incarceration of a blasphemer in free England for speaking disrespectfully of "the Deity," and with the race hatred against the Jews in Russia, it may be taken as symptomatic of a general wave of reaction which, in France as in Spain, in Italy as in the Balkans, is visibly threatening the cardinal principles of civic progress and intellectual liberty throughout the world. In these matters the Freethinkers of one country cannot afford to isolate themselves within a ring fence of selfish indifference to the problems of propaganda and persecution affecting their fellow-workers and intellectual congeners in other lands. The hand that throttles the Freethinkers at Prague represents the same constrictive force of bigotry which murdered Hypatia and Bruno and Ferrer, and which only sentences Stewart to hard labor because the thumbscrew is unknown to modern English legislation.

On November 18 of this year all the journals at Prague connected with the Czech Freethought movement were seized by the police. The offices of the various Rationalist societies were closed and placed under official seals. The property of the two Freethought societies—the "Demosthenes" Society and the "Krematorium" Society—has also been confiscated. Veritable ghouls for the glory of God, the police have not even deigned to spare the funeral urns in which were deposited the ashes of the deceased members of the Cremation Society! In addition, the fortune of the editors of the Czech Rationalist societies has been sequestrated. As my friend Dr. Otto Karmin\* very properly remarks, this arbitrary act of bigotry and theft is the answer of the clericals to the progress made by the Rationalist movement in Bohemia, and, particularly, to the legacy of 100,000 crowns which a Czech citizen of Vienna, M. Lustig, bequeathed to the Austrian Freethought societies. The gentle reader who may be curious to know more about the character and achievements of the Freethought movement in Bohemia, which is now the victim of these abominable outrages, is referred to my article in the *Freethinker* of January 7, 1912.

The police authorities in Prague have been careful to seize the lists of the members composing the German and Czech Freethought societies in Bohemia. Their object is quite obvious—to harass the members by vexatious prosecutions and to tear up the organisations by fines, imprisonment, and the wholesale terrorisation or ruin of the university professors, schoolmasters, and public functionaries of all kinds connected with the movement.

This prosecution is the third outbreak of the kind to which the cause in Bohemia has been subjected. Some rather full details of the two earlier prosecutions were given in my above-mentioned *Freethinker* article. In 1909, the Augustus Smetana Society—a philosophic society founded by a Catholic priest who left the Church—having been dissolved on the pretext that in protesting against the murder of Ferrer it had entered upon the domain of politics, a new society was formed bearing the title of "The Political Freethought Club." In May, 1911, the Minister of the Interior having interdicted the formation of this group, the high tribunal of the Empire declared that this interdict constituted a violation of the

right of association as recognised by the Constitution. The bigots have accordingly renewed the charge, with all the forces of law, religion, and order at their disposal, for the purpose of crushing out of existence all liberty of thought and speech in that anachronistic Papal fief, the clericalist Austrian Empire. An international protest is being organised at Brussels against these high-handed proceedings, and it is hoped that all Freethought or Rationalist societies in England and America will send their protests to our dear friend Eugène Hins at Brussels, and will follow the example of Geneva, which, under the able leadership of Dr. Karmin, has issued its protest in the name of the French, German, and Italian-speaking Freethought societies in Switzerland.

Prague has already received in its hospitality an International Freethought Congress—that of 1907, where Ferrer's presence did so much to awaken an intense enthusiasm for Rationalism in the Bohemian people. In 1915 the Czech nation will celebrate the five hundredth anniversary of the martyrdom of John Huss, and the Czech Freethinkers are anxious that the Freethinkers of every country will assemble that year at Prague, in order that the celebration of the memory of the martyr of Constance may signalise a new stage in the renaissance of the national and intellectual life of the Czech people. If in other countries Freethought springs from the conflict on the one side between the Roman Catholic Church and its rival religions, and on the other side between religion and the spirit of liberty and science, in Bohemia Czech Freethought, besides these resources of inspiration, has others which are racy of its heroic soil, on which the blood of martyrs innumerable has been spilt in the name of God and his Christ. Freethought amongst the Czechs springs directly from the national traditions and from the history of the Czech people in the course of her long and ensanguined conflict with the all-devouring aggressions of Rome. The philosophic consecration of the memory of John Huss is to be found in the vindication and triumph of the Freethought principles of Rationalism.

WILLIAM HEAFORD.

## Milton's Plea for Liberty.—II.

(Concluded from p. 769.)

LAUD being settled, and the Star Chamber itself abolished, the English press burst into the most exuberant freedom. The licensers were disregarded, the Stationers' Company treated with disdain, and illicit publishers openly put their imprint on works that stooped to no tribunal but the public. Among these were Milton's two *Tractates on Divorce*, which roused the ire of the Westminster Assembly, who named him in a batch of eleven "sectaries and heretics." On August 13, 1644, Mr. Herbert Palmer, preaching to the two Houses of Parliament, denounced Milton's second *Tractate* as "a wicked book abroad and uncensored, though deserving to be burnt." Following this, the Stationers' Company, egged on by the Presbyterian divines, petitioned the House of Commons to put a stop to such flagrant violations of the law, and of their trade privileges, as were involved in the wholesale circulation of unlicensed books. Milton was particularly mentioned as a peccant author. The House referred the matter to the Committee of Printing, and they judiciously let Milton alone.

The Committee of Printing were, in fact, a new censorship. This novel licensing board was appointed by Parliament in June, 1643, to "prevent and suppress the license of printing"; in other words, to prevent the diffusion of Royalist tracts and journals. The Ordinance declared that no—

"Book, Pamphlet, Paper, nor part of any such Book, Pamphlet, or Paper, shall from henceforth be printed, bound, stitched, or put to sale by any person or persons whatsoever, unless the same be first approved

\* *La Libre Pensée internationale* (Lausanne), November 29, 1913.



of and licensed under the hand of such person or persons as both or either of the said Houses shall appoint for the licensing of the same, and entered in the Register Book of the Company of Stationers according to ancient custom."

The Wardens of that Company, and certain officers of Parliament, were ordered to ferret out contraband literature, and to bring the writers, printers, publishers, and dispersers before either of the Houses or the Committee of Examinations. Justices of the Peace, Captains, and Constables were to assist in this laudable work, to apprehend offenders, and, in cases of opposition, to break open doors and locks.

Within a week after the passing of this Ordinance the licensers were appointed. Divinity, being a burning question, was thought to need the service of twelve examiners. Seven of them, if not eight, were members of the Westminster Assembly, and all the rest were parish ministers in or near London. These were good securities for orthodoxy, and Milton had excellent reason for thinking that "New presbyter is but old priest writ large." Miscellaneous literature was handed over to three other licensers; law-books to certain Judges and the Serjeants-at-Law; mathematical books, almanacks, and prognostications to a Reader of Gresham College, or a certain Mr. Booker, who was perhaps thought to be skilled in the black art; and "small pamphlets, portraitures, pictures, and the like" to the Clerk of the Stationers' Company.

These licensers went to work, and the result was that, while only 35 books were registered in the first half of 1643, no less than 338 were registered in the second half. Yet the new law was defied by several publishers, and among them Milton's. After the petition of the Stationers' Company in 1644, both Houses of Parliament assisted in strengthening the law, but prosecutions were stayed by Cromwell's great Toleration motion which passed the Commons on September 18, and "caused a sudden pause among the Presbyterian zealots," being, indeed, "a demand generally for clearer air and breathing-room for everybody, more of English freedom and less of Scottish inquisitorship." The Scotch were, in fact, carrying their "guid conceit o' theirsels" too far. They joined England in the revolt against their Stuart king, but fancied they could bind England afresh in their Presbyterian chains. Eventually, they saw their mistake, but it was not until Oliver Cromwell had frightfully pounded them at Preston, Dunbar, and Worcester.

Milton's natural bent was "beholding the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies," but he loved liberty sincerely, and knew that she and truth were inseparable twins. For this reason he had avoided the Church, for which his parents destined him, perceiving that "he who would take orders must subscribe slave," and preferring "a blameless silence before the sacred office of speaking bought and begun with servitude and forswearing." For this reason also he had joined in the controversial fray, forsaking poetry for the "cool element of prose," and undertaking tasks wherein, as he himself says, he had the use but of his "left hand." And now for the same reason Milton forged on the strong anvil of his mind a new thunderbolt of freedom. Utterly repellent to his broad spirit was the notion of handing all the wits and thinkers in England over to the tutelage of a body of orthodox gentlemen, who were empowered to stifle the offspring of laborious brains, and to act as mental abortionists. On November 24, 1644, appeared his *Areopagitica*, "A Speech of Mr. John Milton for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing, to the Parliament of England." The book bore the name of no printer or publisher; in defiance of old laws and new, it was unregistered and unlicensed. The title-page bore four lines from Milton's favorite "Euripides," which he rendered into English as follows:—

"This is true Liberty, when free-born men  
Having to advise the public may speak free,  
Which he who can, and will, deserves high praise;  
Who neither can, nor will, may hold his peace;  
What can be juster in a state than this?"

It was a fashion of that time to give Greek names to books. Milton's title was borrowed from an oration of Isocrates, addressed to the Areopagus of Athens.

Professor Masson says he has "sometimes been angry" at the public choice of the *Areopagitica* as the one of Milton's pamphlets "by which to recollect him as an English prose-writer." Yet, if a choice must be made, how could there be a better? It is, as Professor Masson allows, "the most skilful of all Milton's prose-writings, the most equable and sustained, the easiest to be read straight through at once, the fittest to leave one glowing sensation of the power of the author's genius." Certainly it is the *Areopagitica* which most fully justifies Macaulay's eulogy of Milton's prose-writings. "As compositions," he says, "they deserve the attention of every man who wishes to become acquainted with the full power of the English language. They abound with passages compared with which the finest declamations of Burke sink into insignificance. They are a perfect field of cloth of gold. The style is stiff with gorgeous embroidery."

Milton opens with a handsomely turned compliment to the Parliament. Allowing that the Commonwealth ought to have a vigilant eye on books—of which more anon—he recommends wariness, for "as good almost kill a man as kill a good book." True, no age can restore a life, yet "revolutions of ages do not often recover the loss of a rejected truth." Readers of Mill's *Essay on Liberty* may remember how he elaborates this striking truth.

Next, an appeal is made to history. Licensing was unknown to the ancients, and even Constantine and his successors only condemned books to be burnt after they were "examined, refuted, and condemned in the general councils." According to Milton, this discipline was not more severe than what was formerly in practice; but the voice of history is against him on this point. When he rushes on to the policy of the Popes he reaches firmer ground. The Papacy and the Inquisition were safer objects of attack than the early Church, and Milton baits them mercilessly, laughing at their "purgatory of an index," and mocking their last invention of ordaining that no book should be printed "unless it were approved and licensed under the hands of two or three gluttonous friars." This is followed by a specimen of their *imprimatur*. "Sometimes," says Milton in a rollicking vein, "five imprimaturs are seen together, dialogue wise, in the piazza of one title-page, complimenting and ducking to each other with their shaven reverences, whether the author, who stands by in perplexity at the foot of his epistle, shall to the press or to the sponge."

Knowing his audience, and having a personal inclination that way, Milton quotes from Scripture, dwelling especially on Paul's "Prove all things, hold fast that which is good," and "To the pure all things are pure." Knowledge cannot defile unless the will and conscience are defiled already. Besides, good and evil grow up inseparably in the field of this world. Virtue consists in seeing and knowing, and yet abstaining. Ignorance is not innocence. "I cannot praise," he exclaims, "a fugitive and cloistered virtue unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and seeks her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat."

Milton then proceeds to examine the alleged mischiefs of free printing and free reading. If the spread of infection be feared, the censorship will have to be very drastic; the Bible itself will have to be removed, "for that oftentimes relates blasphemy not nicely, it describes the carnal sense of wicked men not unelegantly, it brings in holiest men passionately murmuring against Providence through all the arguments of Epicurus"; and for these causes the Bible was put by the Papists in the first rank of prohibited books. Besides, if the English press be gagged, objectionable foreign books will creep in, and these will be read by the learned, who will distil their poison for the illiterate. Learned men must



therefore be most closely fenced round, and to do this the licensers must assume "the grace of infallibility." This capital point has also been enforced by Mill. Further, such restraint will lead to "the fall of learning and of all ability in disputation." This is obviously unjust. Why should one man wear a strait waistcoat because another is mad? "If it be true," says Milton, "that a wise man, like a good refiner, can gather gold out of the drossiest volume, and that a fool will be a fool with the best book, yea, or without a book; there is no reason that we should deprive a wise man of any advantage to his wisdom, while we seek to restrain from a fool that which, being restrained, will be no hindrance to his folly."

Why also, Milton asks, should we stop at books? All our surroundings influence us, and to be consistent the State must meddle everywhere

"If we think to regulate printing, thereby to rectify manners, we must regulate all recreations and pastimes, all that is delightful to man. No music must be heard, no song must be set or sung, but what is grave and Doric. There must be licensing dances, that no gestures, motion, or deportment be taught our youth, but what by their allowance shall be thought honest; for such Plato was provided of. It will take more than the work of twenty licensers to examine all the lutes, the violins, and the guitars in every house; they must not be suffered to prattle as they do, but must be licensed what they may say. And who shall silence all the airs and madrigals that whisper softness in chambers?"

And so on for a couple of pages. "Reason is but choosing," Milton finely says, and you cannot remove more than a fraction of life's temptations by the most rigid censorship. Besides, virtue consists in motive, and depriving men of all opportunity of evil would not rob them of their evil inclinations. "Though ye take from a covetous man all his treasure," says Milton, "he has yet one jewel left; ye cannot bereave him of his covetousness."

As for the "preventing of schism," Milton reminds the Parliament that Christianity itself was once a schism, and the licenser who is "to sit upon the birth or death of books" needs more than human wisdom never to suppress the truth in his prevention of error. Ten to one he will stifle all novelties, and every truth is a novelty at first. "The hide-bound humor which he calls his judgment" will let him pass nothing but "what is vulgarly received already." For this reason Sir Francis Bacon said that "such authorized books are but the language of the times." Licensing treats learned men like children; it is a burden on "the hapless race of men whose misfortune it is to have understanding," and it is also "an undervaluing and vilifying of the whole nation."

Milton beautifully says that truth is like a streaming fountain; "if her waters flow not in a perpetual progression, they sicken into a muddy pool of conformity and tradition." A man may be a heretic in the truth. How many Protestants, who rely upon their pastors, show as much "implicit faith as any lay papist of Loretto":—

"A wealthy man, addicted to his pleasure and his profits, finds religion to be a traffic so entangled, and of so many piddling accounts, that of all mysteries he cannot skill to keep a stock going upon that trade. What should he do? Fain he would have the name to be religious, fain he would bear up with his neighbors in that. What does he, therefore, but resolves to give over toiling, and to find himself out some factor to whose care and credit he may commit the whole managing of his religious affairs; some divine of note and estimation that must be. To him he adheres, resigns the whole warehouse of his religion, with all the locks and keys, into his custody; and indeed makes the very person of that man his religion; esteems his associating with him a sufficient evidence and commendatory of his own piety. So that a man may say his religion is now no more within himself, but is become a dividual movable, and goes and comes near him according as that good man frequents the house. He entertains him, gives him gifts, feasts him, lodges him; his religion comes home at night, prays, is liberally supped, and sumptuously laid to sleep; rises, is saluted, and, after the malmsey or some well-spiced brage, and

better breakfasted than He whose morning appetite would have gladly fed on green figs between Bethany and Jerusalem, his religion walks abroad at eight, and leaves his kind entertainer in the shop trading all day without his religion."

This capital passage is one of the few in which Milton displays a sense of humor. The climax is especially shrewd.

Milton has another gird at the Presbyterian divines, and twits them with being blinded by the blaze of Calvin's beacon. "The light which we have gained," he says, "was given us, not to be ever staring on, but by it to discover onward things more remote from our knowledge." He protests against "the forced and outward union of cold and neutral and inwardly divided minds," and warns the new tyrants that it is necessary to reform even the reformation itself. After a noble apostrophe to London, then the vital centre of the new freedom, he argues that differences are a good sign of health and vigor, and utters the fine aphorism that "opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making." He is dull-witted who groans over "parties and partitions." "Fool!" exclaims Milton, "he sees not the firm root out of which we all grow, though into branches." England is not decaying, but casting off the old skin of corruption:—

"Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks. Methinks I see her as an eagle mewing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full mid-day beam, purging and unscaling her long-abused sight at the fountain itself of heavenly radiance; while the whole noise of timorous and flocking birds, with those also that love the twilight flutter about, amazed at what she means, and in their envious gabble would prognosticate a year of sects and schisms."

This magnificent passage is one of the ultimate glories of our literature. Surely the man who wrote it deserves a niche in the sanctuary of every English heart.

The rest of the *Areopagitica* is a direct and noble appeal to the Parliament to abolish the licensing system, to let books enjoy the same freedom as men, to give them liberty, and punish them only when they have sinned. "Liberty is the nurse of all great wits," says Milton. "Give me," he exclaims, "the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties." Aye, and "though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously by licensing and prohibiting to misdo what her strength. Let her and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worst in a free and open encounter?"

Unfortunately, Milton himself halted in sight of the goal; he hesitated to run the whole course, and fight the good fight to the end. At the very outset he seems to approve the Grecian laws for the suppression of "atheistical and blasphemous" books, and at the conclusion he will not hear of tolerating "popery and open superstition," still less what is "impious" and "against faith." He only pleaded for charity and peace among dissentient Protestants. Great as was his genius, noble as was his nature, he could not absolutely free himself from the prejudices of his age. He showed that the horizon of the very loftiest is bounded. Yet in pleading for such liberty as he thought desirable he was obliged to maintain principles that overshot the mark he aimed at. The full meaning of a great idea cannot be perceived at once. Milton saw deeper than most of his contemporaries, though his vision was still limited; he felt more than they of the spirit of liberty, though it did not animate his whole nature. Sufficient unto the day was the service he performed. Other ages brought other tasks. The time came when other hands hurled the thunderbolts he forged at other barriers to freedom than those he assailed, when his own lightnings were darted to every point of the compass; for at last Liberty, like Wisdom, is justified of all her children.

G. W. FOOTE.



## Some Little-Known Freethinkers.

## VII.—JAMES WATSON.

THE subject of my present sketch was one of those quiet, unassuming, unobtrusive workers whose services to the good old cause are too little known, but, where known, should be highly appreciated. Born of poor parents in an obscure town, Malton, in Yorkshire, September 21, 1799, a taste for reading led him in a Freethought direction. Employed at Leeds, he became acquainted with such Radical works as Wooler's *Black Dwarf*, Cobbett's *Register*, and Carlile's *Republican*. When Carlile was imprisoned with his wife and sister for selling blasphemous publications, he appealed to lovers of free discussion to serve in the shop. Humphrey Boyle was the first volunteer from Leeds. He was arrested, tried, and sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment. When sentenced, May 27, 1822, Boyle remarked: "I have a mind, my lord, that can bear such a sentence with fortitude." Of similar stuff was James Watson, the second volunteer from Leeds. He, too, was arrested in February, 1823, for selling Palmer's *Principles of Nature*. His trial took place on April 23. In his defence he endeavored to prove from the Bible that Palmer was justified in what he had written, but the judge told him he "might quote from the Bible, but not comment upon it." He was convicted and sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment in Coldbath Fields Prison, and to find bail for good behavior for two years. In prison Watson read Hume, Gibbon, and Mosheim, which he said "would have made me a Freethinker if I had not been one before." He afterwards conducted Richard Carlile's business until Carlile's liberation from Dorchester Gaol in November, 1825, and then became a compositor on Carlile's *Republican*. Attacked by cholera, he was nursed by Julian Hibbert, who employed him on his own projects, giving him his own type and presses, and at his death leaving him a legacy of £500. In the meantime Watson suffered another six months' imprisonment for selling Hetherington's unstamped *Poor Man's Guardian*. With the legacy from Hibbert, James Watson constituted himself a sort of society for promoting useful knowledge. He set up as bookseller and publisher, issued many Freethought works, such as D'Holbach's *System of Nature*, Volney's *Ruins of Empires*, Paine's *Age of Reason* and *Common Sense*, Palmer's *Principles of Nature*, Frances Wright's *Few Days in Athens* and her *Lectures*, R. D. Owen's discussions and pamphlets, Shelley's *Queen Mab* and *Masque of Anarchy*, Byron's *Cain* and *Vision of Judgment*, J. Clarke's *Letters to Adam Clarke*, Godwin's *Political Justice*, Lamena's *Modern Slavery*, Evans Bell's *Task of To-day*, Powell's *Bible of Reason*, Yahoo, *Eccle Homo*, *Human Origin of Christianity*, Hume's *Miracles*, Diderot's *Thoughts on Religion*, Lawrence's *Lectures on Man*, Engleclue's *Physiology*, Dr. T. Cooper's *Rights of Free Discussion*, T. Cooper's (the Chartist) *Purgatory of Suicides*, Southwell's *Impossibility of Atheism*, Holyoake's *Rationalism*, *Logic of Facts*, etc.

The list is a goodly one, though far from complete. It represents valuable works, tending in the direction of mental emancipation and of political and social reform; works tabooed by the privileged classes, and many of which they had sought to suppress. Let it be remembered, too, that the cheap publication of such works was the direct incentive to that rivalry of new cheap literature intended to counteract the supposed pernicious effect of the dissemination of "infidelity and sedition." I do not scruple to say that, by his publications, James Watson did more for the real education of the people than some vaunted societies and wealthy firms with all the influence of respectability at their backs. His publications, though cheap, were not of the "cheap and nasty" order. They were neat, well printed, and showed throughout a publisher who loved sound thought and sound work in every department. Mr. W. J. Linton, his friend for forty years, says:—

"There was no mistaking an edition by J. Watson. To him life and all its circumstances were to be kept in wholesomeness, though means of beautifying might fail him. The pride of the poor man was his. His honesty should be clean skinned and pure, if his clothes were threadbare; his public appearance, as his home, ever dignified, made worthy of respect. Serving in his shop, he had pleasant and informing words for all who sought his wares; the character of this or that book about which you asked might be trusted to his judgment. His conversation, if you cared to make acquaintance with it, supplemented what he sold—what he had given, if apostles in his day had been able to print and live without death.....He was of the stuff of those old martyrs who smiled when they were flayed alive; who thrust their hands into fire to pluck out unharmed their more tender souls. For the respect in which his probity and his business qualities were held, his name as treasurer of his subscriptions in aid of political sufferers may be vouchered enough. He was one to whom you might have trusted untold gold; he could not have wronged you of the smallest coin." Mr. Linton gives a pleasant instance of how principle was

more than profit with Watson. In '38 Linton projected a cheap library, for the people, of extracts from works beyond the purchasing reach of working men. Watson laid before him the difficulties, and, finding him resolute, offered him (a nameless stranger) his books and services. When the account was made up he found there was no charge for folding and stitching. Watson had been sure the book could not pay, and he and his wife had folded and stitched every copy to save Linton so much expense.

By judicious investments in works of solid value, James Watson served the cause in perhaps the most effective way in which it can be served—by the spread of its literature. He did this more for the sake of propaganda than for profit, but by economy he was able to retire when between fifty and sixty. On January 23 1854 a public tribute was paid to him at the Literary Institution, John-street, Fitzroy-square, at which Mr. W. D. Saull presided, and Messrs. T. Cooper, R. Moore, W. J. Birch, R. Le Blond, and G. J. Holyoake testified to his great services to the Freethought cause. He lived at Norwood until November 29, 1874, and in Norwood Cemetery a plain granite obelisk bears the following inscription: "James Watson, 1874. Erected by a few friends as a token of regard for his integrity of character and his brave efforts to secure the right of free speech and a free and un-stamped press." A Memoir, by his friend, W. J. Linton, to which I am indebted for most of these particulars, has a copy of Watson's photograph as frontispiece, and is a modest, yet not unworthy, memorial of a sterling though little-known Freethinker.

(The late) J. M. WHEELER.

## Correspondence.

LIBERATION SOCIETY AND SECULAR EDUCATION,  
TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—My attention has been called to an article on "Nonconformist Cant" in your issue of November 28. Mr. Cohen says in the course of the article that "out of several hundred delegates only twenty-one supported the resolution"—i.e., the resolution in favor of Secular Education which Mr. Halley Stewart submitted to the Triennial Conference of the Liberation Society. The fact, of course, is that only twenty-one voted against the resolution.

DAVID CAIRD, Secretary.

Society for the Liberation of Religion from State Patronage and Control.

Mr. Cohen writes:—"Unfortunately, I cannot now say on which paper's report I depended for the figures concerning the Secular Education vote at the Liberation Society's meeting. I see so many papers during the week, and, of course, do not preserve them all. It is, therefore, impossible for me to say definitely whether I misread the report or the report misled me; but as I am usually very careful in such matters, I cannot help thinking that it was the latter. Still, whatever the cause, the fact remains that my article converted a majority of twenty-one into a minority of twenty-one, and for that I must express sincere regret. It would have given me much greater pleasure to have chronicled a victory for Secular Education than to have recorded its defeat, and the Liberation Society is entitled to my apologies for having, quite innocently, misrepresented its proceedings."

## "WAIT TILL YOU COME TO DIE."

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—The article of Mr. Mann in this week's *Freethinker* reminds me of an incident in which I was involved a few years ago. Whilst cycling in the traffic, I was knocked under a pair of horses, and, being unable to free myself from the machine, I had to be dragged out. Probably I was not under the horses for long; but both horses were kicking out continuously, with the result that my machine was bent into all shapes by the horses' hoofs, and made useless. I was underneath all the time, expecting the next blow would be on my head, and I had no doubt whatever in my own mind that my "hour had almost come." Did I turn my thoughts to Jesus? No; I simply thought it was all over with me, and my only desire was to say Good-bye to my wife and children before I "passed away." Of course, it is very absurd to say that an Ath-ist cannot face death. Only a very ignorant Christian could be guilty of such a blunder.

Probably very few people have been so near death, and perhaps my experience will interest you, and also your readers, if you think it worth printing.

I may say that the cause of my "downfall" on this occasion was a clergyman (also cycling), who rode out of a side street on his wrong side, and cleared off without speaking to me. Peradventure he was praying for my life to be saved? I never thought of it in this light before! In any case, I should have appreciated a few kind words, or a cheque for the cost of a new machine much more.

L. W. WILLIS.



## 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

#### INDOOR.

QUEEN'S (MINOR) HALL (Langham-place, W.): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "Shaw Among the Prophets."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Workman's Hall, Romford-road, Stratford, E.): 7.30, J. J. Darby, "The Present Attitude of Science towards Religion."

EDMONTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Edmonton Green): 7.45, Mr. Marshall, a Lecture.

### COUNTRY.

#### INDOOR.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (North Saloon, City Hall): Mrs. H. Bradlaugh Bonner, 12 noon, "Conscription"; 6.30, "Freethought at Home and Abroad."

LEICESTER (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, C. Cohen, a Lecture.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): 6.30, Joseph A. E. Bates, "The Twilight of the Gods."

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This Society was formed in 1898 to afford legal security to the acquisition and application of funds for Secular purposes.

The Memorandum of Association sets forth that the Society's Objects are:—To promote the principle that human conduct should be based upon natural knowledge, and not upon supernatural belief, and that human welfare in this world is the proper end of all thought and action. To promote freedom of inquiry. To promote universal Secular Education. To promote the complete secularisation of the State, etc., etc. And to do all such lawful things as are conducive to such objects. Also to have, hold, receive, and retain any sums of money paid, given, devised, or bequeathed by any person, and to employ the same for any of the purposes of the Society.

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