

THE Freethinker

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Liberty means responsibility. That is why most men dread it.—G. B. SHAW.

The "Blasphemy" Case.

THE Petition to the Home Secretary in favor of the release or better treatment of Thomas William Stewart, the latest prisoner for "blasphemy," came to what I thought it would do—nothing. But as I signed it myself, in a soft moment, as I explained, I cannot be hard on those who engineered it. They are now getting up another Memorial, this time to Mr. Asquith, the Prime Minister, practically asking him to supervise and rebuke a member of his Ministry. I have not signed that. It appears to me unwise to attempt what we know must fail. One does not help any cause, however much one may gratify oneself, by a waste of time, means, and energy.

Mr. McKenna's reply to the Petition was belated enough to be uncivil, and its character is such that he may live to regret it. It seems to have been written without the slightest sense of responsibility. It betrays a very hostile feeling towards the prisoner,—which, to say the least of it, is injudicial, and it shows no sort of respect for the more or less distinguished people, closely associated with the intellectual and moral life of England, who signed the Petition.

Mr. McKenna's reply to the Petition was as follows:—

"Home Office, Whitehall, December 27, 1913.

"Sir,—I have laid before the Secretary of State the petition on behalf of Thomas William Stewart which you forwarded on the 2nd instant, and am directed by him to say that he has carefully considered all the circumstances of the case and consulted the learned Judge before whom the case was tried, but regrets that he has failed to find any sufficient grounds to justify him in recommending any reduction of the sentence.

"Mr. McKenna thinks it right to point out that the prisoner is not punished for holding certain opinions, nor for seeking to support his opinions by argument, but because in his speeches, which were uttered in a public place so as to be heard by all manner of persons, he held up to contempt the religious beliefs of others, and made use of language which was calculated to wound, and cannot have been uttered without the intention of wounding, the feelings of others.

"Mr. McKenna would further point out, what may not be known to the signatories of the petition, that Stewart also delivered lectures on 'family limitation' and the treatment of venereal diseases, and was engaged in the sale of the appliances for the prevention of conception; and it would appear, from his own words and from his sending his wife among the crowd which he attracted to distribute handbills and to solicit orders, that the purpose of his speeches on matters of religion was that he might use the publicity so obtained to advertise, for his own profit, his lectures and the appliances he sold.

"I am to add that the prisoner was entitled, within ten days from his conviction or sentence, to bring his case before the Court of Criminal Appeal; and he may still do so if he can satisfy the Court that there are sufficient reasons for allowing him an extension of time.

"I am, Sir, Your obedient Servant,

"E. BLACKWELL."

No doubt Mr. McKenna felt he was in a position to assume a lofty attitude. He had the petitioners "on toast"—to use the expressive language of the man in the street, which is always disdained by authoritarians and pedants when it first emerges into public notice, but is frequently admitted afterwards into the most respectable dictionaries.

Even if his reply were followed by questions in the House of Commons, he could foresee his own triumph *there*. For all the Christian bigots of all parties would support him against the handful of adversaries who were bent on doing justice even to an "infidel."

I propose to answer Mr. McKenna, and deal with the "blasphemy" case, and with the whole law of "blasphemy" up to date, on Sunday evening at Queen's (Minor) Hall, which I have had engaged for the purpose through the agency of the Secular Society, Ltd., into whose exchequer the proceeds will go after the payment of the necessary expenses. I have views of my own on this subject, and I will express them with sincerity and fearlessness, whoever is pleased and whoever is hurt. Mr. Herbert Burrows has kindly promised to take the chair.

Sunday happens to be my birthday. I don't know that I could devote it to any better object.

Meanwhile, I venture to reprint a new view of "blasphemy" first published when I was under prosecution myself in 1882.

G. W. FOOTE.

CHRIST THE BLASPHEMER.

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

However they may shirk the fact, these malignant zealots must be reminded that Jesus Christ was a blasphemer. Let them not say that he was only accused as such without being guilty; for as the crime is impossible, or, if possible, only to be judged by God himself, the accusation is everything. Blasphemy is entirely a matter of opinion; it varies with time and place; but whenever a man is charged with it, we may be sure that he is in open antagonism to the established creed and its professional teachers.

Jesus Christ was in the same position as we are. He was not a learned rabbi, but a man of the people; not a courtly critic, but the sedition of the streets.

And his enemies were the same as ours. The Scribes and Pharisees were the orthodox scholars and priests; and Jesus had set them against him by going, as we have, to the masses with ideas dangerous to priestcraft and privilege. It was "the chief priests and all the council" who sought for witness to put him to death, and they acutely fixed on blasphemy as the surest accusation.

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

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

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

The Prophet of Nazareth had been called a blasphemer long before the tragic close of his career. We find the Jews saying "thou blasphemest" in John x., 86, and trying to stone him to death. He had evidently a bad reputation in that line. And it is remarkable that whenever the Jews uttered the word "blasphemy" they always wanted to do something vicious. It never expressed their love of God, but their hatred of somebody who differed from them and touched their prejudices to the quick.

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

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

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

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

G. W. FOOTE.

The Outlook.

REFORMERS are naturally optimistic. Their hopes lie in the future, and their ardor for reform is commensurate with their faith in the power of the ideas they represent, and in their belief that ultimately these ideas will triumph. Yet, because of this optimism, none are more ready to overvalue the actual progress already made. They shout, and mistake the absence of a counter cry for the non-existence of an enemy. They do not always reflect that the enemy, although silent—or comparatively so—may still be there, and that ideas that are backed up with a number of subsidiary interests, and resting upon a traditional basis, always have in them the possibility of a reaction. The number of people who take a genuine interest in advanced ideas is very small when compared with the rest of the world; and at any moment a combination of circumstances may present itself that would tempt threatened established ideas to make a last desperate struggle for unquestioned supremacy.

In other words, the possibility of a reaction is always present, and it is a possibility which reformers do not sufficiently take into account. Nor are there wanting signs that this process of reaction is already afoot. What, for example, has become of the Republicanism of fifty years ago? A half century since, with a woman on the throne—a circumstance that would not be without its appeal to male chivalry—one could have said with safety much more against Victoria than could now be said against George the Fifth. I do not, of course, refer to the personal character of either, but solely as Queen or King. During the past fifteen years the primitive superstition of the sanctity of the reigning monarch has made a strong and not altogether unsuccessful bid for re-establishment, and our glorious free press has, in general, worked hard in its behalf. Militarism is, apparently, more firmly established than ever; for if we do not have actual wars—although these have been plentiful enough of late—we have what is almost as bad, elaborate preparations for them, without the benefit of the object-lesson that a war provides. Both these things are enough to prove that the primitive man and the primitive mind are still with us, and that when the retrogressive section of society sets itself seriously to work, it is not impossible to neutralise the efforts of rationalistic workers.

In the religious world—in spite of all our talk about the advance of Freethought—we have seen within the last six or seven years a number of masked punishments inflicted for attacks on the Christian religion, and at least one man sent to prison avowedly for the Christian-made offence of blasphemy. Naturally protests have been made against this, although it is worth noting that the section of the Christian world which prides itself upon its liberality has remained practically silent. Prominent men in science and literature have raised their voice in protest, but prominent men did this in the case of the *Freethinker* prosecution of thirty years ago; so that this fact can hardly be chronicled as an advance. The important fact is that these prosecutions are still possible, that the mass of the people acquiesce in their existence, and that bigotry is powerful enough to set in operation this clumsy engine of suppression. In this respect we are practically where we were thirty years ago. Thought has broadened in the meantime, but has it deepened? What I mean is that there are unquestionably more disbelievers in Christianity than there were a generation since; but are there more disbelievers of the kind that really count on a critical occasion? One may well feel doubtful on this point. Non-religious scientists, politicians, and men of letters are as reticent now as they were a generation ago—perhaps more so. The real fighting is still left to a handful, and in this conflict there is hardly any such thing as a genuine neutrality. In England to-day the man who is not openly helping Freethought is covertly

assisting its enemy. His very silence gives Christian bigots a confidence and a strength they would not have if he were outspoken; and so long as religion can by any means enforce silence it is doing for itself the next best thing to suppression.

In England the great medium of popular education—perhaps one ought to say of popular misinformation—is the press. And there is little or no improvement regarding its attitude towards avowed Freethought. You may liberalise in its columns, within limits. If Christianity is attacked, it must be in the name of some ridiculous "higher Christianity." News of Freethought meetings is still rigidly suppressed. For all that the general public can learn from the daily press, anti-Christian societies and publications and speeches might be non-existent. Each member of the public must discover them for himself, and when he discovers them he usually keeps his discovery to himself. We talk of Spain or Ireland as priest-ridden countries, in reality we are almost as priest-ridden as either Spain or Ireland. Not by the same order of priests, but that matters little. For it is organised religion that is behind this press boycott; it is organised religion that decrees silence to so many of our public men. And what is this but the rule of the priest. Religion still exerts a commanding influence over numerous avenues of social advancement, and so long as this influence remains, so long we are priest-ridden. We shall only be really free when this power is broken for ever.

So far, the black side of the picture. But there is a brighter side. In spite of boycott and suppression, the critical study of fundamental religious beliefs has progressed. A small army of workers, whose right to speak authoritatively cannot be questioned, have demonstrated that our ideas of God and the soul take their origin in the fear and ignorance of primitive humanity. This speculation, which is at least as old as the days of the ancient Greeks, has now received positive proof by the careful collection and classification of religious beliefs amongst existing tribes of primitive peoples. It is too often forgotten that god-making is really not a lost art. It still flourishes. Gods are still being brought into being, fashioned by the same methods which have always fashioned them. One can see the gods, first in a larval stage, and later on in full maturity. This study of religious origins has been so well done that, in its main outlines, it may fairly be considered complete. Our present great need is to affiliate past and existing primitive religious ideas with modern religious beliefs and doctrines. At present this task is shirked by our chief writers. They stop short at the very point where their labors become of supreme interest. That is, in showing that all religious beliefs, no matter how refined or how advanced, really rest upon the discredited superstitions of the savage. They have no other basis. And the man who accepts the origin of the belief in God and the soul in the ignorance of primitive mankind, need not bother about modern theories concerning them. He knows that they are falsehoods, and that no amount of apologising can convert an established falsehood into a possible truth.

Next to this, we have the help derived from a saner conception of historical growth and of the nature of the social forces. The average man cares but little for subtle points concerning doctrine. His interest in religion is of a more general character. So far as he values religion, it is because he believes it to have a beneficent influence on life; and, as his attention becomes directed to the real nature of the social forces, and to the part played by religious beliefs in social history, religion is contemplated from an altogether different point of view. It is then seen that religion, as such, can never give an impetus to reform. It never gives anything new; that is quite beyond its power. Its gods are always the shades of dead men; its heaven always a picture of the earth of yesterday, with its more disagreeable features eliminated. It is also being realised that the world-wide fight between

religion and progressive ideas is not an accidental conflict. It is inevitable. The great social function of religion is to conserve. It aims at perpetuating the past because it is only by this means that it can live. All the fashionable talk about growth in religion is quite fallacious. Man does not grow in his religion, he grows out of it. His ghosts, his gods, his heavens and hells become less substantial with each generation. What is called growth in religion is really civilised common sense criticising the beliefs of the past, but without the moral courage for a complete break.

But, above all, the force working on the side of the reformer is the insistent, but largely unconscious, pressure of a changed social and intellectual environment on established beliefs. Against this force it is difficult for religion to guard because it does not express itself at any particular place or in any particular person. It is felt rather in the altered tone or temper with which religion is faced. Thousands of people who are not susceptible to a direct attack, yield to the insidious proselytising of a changed environment. Their beliefs slip from them without their knowing how or why. And it is precisely because of this fact that the immediate work of the Freethinker is to create a full consciousness of the nature of these changes. It is only by this method that Freethinkers can protect themselves against the dangers of reaction. It is not enough to merely note the broadening of thought and congratulate ourselves on the disintegration of religion. So long as people are not conscious of the full significance of the change, they represent a mass of material that may at any time be exploited by religious reactionary organisations.

This is more than a possible danger, it is in actual existence. The various "liberal" movements in the Christian churches, the new-born enthusiasm for social reform, and the like, really means this: large numbers of people have outgrown the old creeds, and were they fully conscious of the nature of their own growth they would be in the ranks of avowed Freethought. But they are not conscious, with the result that they offer the opportunity for exploitation by the Churches, and one which they cannot afford to neglect. And in any really decisive struggle, it is this class that will turn the scale. Conscious orthodoxy is no longer strong enough in this country to work its will. Neither is conscious Freethought. But between the two lies this large and growing body of people, dissatisfied with the old and not enlightened enough to take on with the new. They are easy slaves to phrases and catchwords. The cry of reform satisfies their ears, and their minds are not acute enough to see whether what is being offered them is genuine reform or not. It is this class that has, historically, always been the obstacle to reform, and it remains so still. We are not, as I have said, sufficiently advanced to be beyond the danger of a reaction; indeed, I believe that this reaction has set in. But how far this reaction is to go, to what extent it is to meet with success, will, I believe, be decided by our efforts in rousing this intermediate body of public opinion. We cannot convert the genuinely orthodox—at least, to any considerable extent—but we can awaken the minds of others as to where they really are and why they are there. The immediate question of the future is just this: Can Freethought enlist on its side the immense body of partly emancipated opinion that undoubtedly exists, or will it be captured by the pretended liberalism of the Churches, and so made the instrument of reaction and disaster?

C. COHEN.

Is Religion a Necessity?

NATURALLY the Pulpit assures us that in the absence of religion human life would be dark and miserable in the extreme, decidedly not worth living. Without a doubt religion is a necessity to the clergy of all denominations, for if it were suddenly to disappear

their means of subsistence would be gone. And yet we are told of some ministers who are convinced that the common people could not possibly live without it, though they themselves do not believe in it. The "Man in Black," who figures so largely in Borrow's *Lavengro* and *Romany Rye*, was a Catholic missionary, entrusted, among others, with the reconversion of this country to Catholicism. Borrow described him to Isopel Berners as "a prowling priest," who could quaff an enormous quantity of cold gin and water with a lump of sugar in it. Isopel was instructed to keep the dingle well supplied with hollands, so that the "Man in Black" might quench his endless thirst and be induced to talk whenever he honored the strange couple with a visit. On one occasion the subject under discussion was Religion, and this is how Borrow introduces it:—

"He proceeded to tell me that the experience of countless ages had proved the necessity of religion; the necessity, he would admit, was only for simpletons; but as nine-tenths of the dwellers upon this earth were simpletons, it would never do for sensible people to run counter to their folly, but, on the contrary, it was their wisest course to encourage them in it, always provided that, by so doing, sensible people could derive advantage; that the truly sensible people of this world were the priests, who, without caring a straw for religion for its own sake, made use of it as a cord by which to draw the simpletons after them" (*Romany Rye*, p. 9).

The "Man in Black" despised and reviled the very Church whose servant he was, and admitted his unbelief in the Christian religion itself. He called it a "ferocious" cult, which could have given all other cults "a lesson in the art of persecution." "None but Christians," he said, "have ever been good persecutors; well, the old religion succumbed, Christianity prevailed, for the ferocious is sure to prevail over the gentle." He was anxious to enlist Borrow as a partner in his mission, in spite of his unbelief in the Catholic Church; but having patiently listened to all he had to say, Borrow answered:—

"I will not entertain your proposal; I detest your schemes; they are both wicked and foolish."

'Wicked,' said the man in black; 'have they not—he! he!—the furtherance of religion in view?'

'A religion,' said I, 'in which you yourself do not believe, and which you condemn.'

'Whether I believe in it or not,' said the man in black, 'it is adapted for the generality of the human race; so I will forward it, and advise you to do the same' (*Ibid.*, p. 20).

Here we have a man advocating the necessity of religion because it enabled the only sensible people, the priests, who did not believe in it, to live in luxury upon the simpletons who did. We know that many priests are sincere believers in the Gospel which they preach; but we also know that there are hundreds, if not thousands, whose private creed is of much smaller dimensions than the one they avouch in public. In other words, the religion which many clergymen preach from the pulpit is not the religion by which they live from day to day. The common people must have a religion, they declare, and it must be much larger and fuller than their own.

But do the so-called common people need a religion? What has religion ever done for its professors? Of what benefit has Christianity been to the inhabitants of the United Kingdom, for example? Read their history, contemplate the present conditions of life among them, and specify, if you can, the good which their belief in God and a future life has done them. It is our vaunted boast that we are the most Christian people under the sun, which no doubt we really are; but are the conditions of life amongst us just and humane? Do we live together in perfect peace and happiness as brothers and sisters in the Lord? No man of God has the temerity to answer those questions in the affirmative. The truth is that socially and economically we are more backward than some non-Christian nations. Are not capital and labor at perpetual war in our midst? There is no lack of religion in Dublin and Leeds, and yet in both cities employers and employees

are at daggers drawn. God is powerless to keep order among his children, whom he is said to love with boundless affection. To safeguard life and property in London we require a Police Force numbering upwards of twenty thousand men and costing nearly two million pounds a year. We have fourteen Police Courts, presided over by twenty-six magistrates, and many other Courts, in which prisoners and litigants are dealt with. With these facts in mind, we wish to know what Christianity has done for British and Irish people. It has certainly not united them in the bond of brotherly love, abolishing class distinctions and antagonisms, and establishing economic justice and harmony.

It is safe to affirm that religion has conferred no benefit whatever upon mankind; and it is also safe to declare that it has done our race incalculable harm. So far has it been from promoting our progress, that it has even acted as a retrogressive agent. It is universally admitted that war is a terrible curse; and the majority of the wars in Christendom have been religious. Who can read the story of the bloody conflict between Presbyterianism and Episcopacy in Scotland without being forced to the conclusion that the Scottish people would have fared much better had they been without any religion at all? The battles of Rullion Green and Drumclog, and the fearful persecutions which lasted for years, were distinctly anti-social and anti-progressive in their direct and indirect influence. The same remark applies to the wars waged in this island between Protestantism and Catholicism, now the one and now the other being victorious. When Catholicism held sway Protestants were cheerfully put to death as dangerous heretics, and when Protestantism was in power, Catholics were treated in the same way. Whether in the Catholic or the Protestant form, Christianity has always been a disturber of the peace. Even in the twentieth century, religion, though it has lost most of its ancient power, is still setting its champions at loggerheads. Religious controversies are as acrid and heartless now as ever they were; and the people who engage in them never escape unscathed. Of necessity, they exert an injurious, degrading influence upon character. The Kikuyu controversy, now raging in the Anglican Church, only shows how Christian belief cramps and corrupts the mind, making it impossible for those who cherish it to act naturally and spontaneously in any given circumstances. The Bishop of Zanzibar may be a most excellent Christian; but his excellency, as a Christian, has engendered an exclusiveness which is fundamentally inconsistent with any rational doctrine of human brotherhood. Indeed, the brotherhood of man is not, never has been, a Christian tenet; and in practice Christians are the least brotherly of all people. Episcopalians cannot sit at the Lord's table in company with non-Episcopalians without being subjected to the charge of heresy—a charge which the Bishop of Oxford seems to justify. To non-Christians the Kikuyu controversy is infinitely ridiculous; and certainly nothing could be more calculated to alienate thoughtful people from the Christian Church.

The only conclusion to which we can come is that religion, so far from being necessary to mankind, is detrimental to its highest interests. It is a notorious fact that Christianity and intolerance have always gone hand-in-hand. Catholics hate Protestants, and treat them as schismatics. Different sections of Protestants are constantly unchurching one another, and not much love has ever been lost between them. Yes, the religion of the Galilean has been eminently successful in setting "a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law," and in causing a man's foes to be "they of his own household." The idea that we need such a religion is so absurd as to be intolerable. If we could but free our minds from prejudice we would see clearly that religion is an enemy of progress, a hindrance to the development of man-

hood, and a destroyer of social union. Like the vermiform appendix it is a useless vestigial structure, and often proves harmful. We have outgrown it, and the wisest thing we can do is to cut it off and fling it away. They who have managed to do this rejoice in their deliverance. Life has become a new thing to them, and the world is clothed with fresh glory. They are no longer under the dominion of false fears, neither do they harbor illusive hopes. The earth has become their home which they love and never wish to leave. Their ideal is soundness of mind and body, which is the one condition of individual and social happiness. Our worst foe is disease, mental and bodily, and our first and supreme duty is to fight it. It is in disease that all the wrongs and ills of life have their root, and once we have got rid of it our greatest problems will be solved.

J. T. LLOYD.

The Unregenerate Kaffir.

It always comes as a great surprise to the earnest observer of the Kaffir to find no evidence of the existence of that innate predilection towards belief in a Supreme Being which most Britishers have been taught is universal among savage races. No South African native language has any word descriptive or even suggestive of God or an after-life. Colenso and some of the German Lutheran missionaries have interpolated certain words and phrases which are intended to do duty for those religious ideas, but they are not in general use, and not understood outside certain mission stations.

I have had twenty years' intimate relationship with the Zulu, Basuto, Swazi, and Shangaan, both raw, civilised, and Christianised, and have never met one who could be said to comprehend the spiritual. Their ideas of an after-life, even after a course of missionary instruction, is childishly vague, and confirms the assertion of some that the Kaffir is incapable of grasping an abstract idea. Their idea of God is always that he is a severe white boss whom it is better to keep out of the way of. Jesus is still more incomprehensible. As an intelligent Swazi put it to me, Jesus was the favorite son of a great chief. Therefore it was foolish of him to go away from his father's kraal to live with a tribe who did not want him, and who tried to assegai him.

The hope or fear of an after-life, if it be entertained at all, certainly does not influence the Kaffir's present life in the slightest. In my official capacity I had charge of a native awaiting hanging for a murder. He had escaped after arrest, and was only recaptured after much trouble and nine months. After sentence he was assiduously attended by a young Lutheran missionary. I asked the native what the missionary talked to him about. He gave me a summary of the discourses, adding, "He says that I shall come alive again." I suggested that would be satisfactory. "No, they would only hang me again," he objected. I hinted that God being a white man, as all Kaffirs are taught, he would not hang twice for the same offence. With perfect sincerity, he answered, "That may be, but Inspector Clarke would not let him interfere." Inspector Clarke had shown great zeal in effecting the re-arrest and conviction. The natives stood in great awe of his detective and authoritative capacity.

A dying Swazi, who had been comforted by the missionary's assurance that he would meet his father in heaven, confidentially assured me that he had no wish to meet his father, as they always quarrelled, and "he is very clever with the sticks, although he is so old."

The "converted" Kaffir always regards his association with the mission as a business investment. I say, with a full sense of the weight and meaning of words, that I never knew a native Christian who did not retain his connection with a mission because of some material advantage. It might be only the privilege of grazing his goats on the mission reserve,

or getting blankets a little cheaper than from the store, but there was always a tangible, material result. It is a matter of local history that I made a bet that I would empty a mission church one Sunday by the offer of a shilling and a feed of sheep meat to all absentees. I lost the bet, but 22 out of a congregation of 36 came ten miles on Sunday morning for the shilling and the feed. I believe that I would have won had not an old native insinuated that the affair was a sell, or a pretext for collecting arrears of hut-tax.

Those who have had experience of the incisive logic of the Kaffir can easily understand how Bishop Colenso was set thinking and eventually converted by the unanswerable questions of the old Zulu who had been unable to make the genealogy of Genesis harmonise. The Kaffir is strong on genealogy, and can trace his family tree through the tangles of a score of generations. Here are a few gems of Kaffir criticism and comment that I have heard from natives:—

"God and Jesus are white men. No white man can get on without Kaffir servants, therefore we natives will be servants in heaven as we are on earth."

"If God can mend a broken leg if you ask him, why can he not restore one that has been bitten off by a crocodile?"

"Why cannot God cure the bite of a black mamba?" [The black mamba is the most deadly African snake. Recovery from its bite is exceedingly rare.]

"The Boers prayed to God before they fought, and were beaten; the Tommies [British] never prayed, but drank and swore, yet beat the Boers."

"When a native chief becomes a kolwa [Christian], he gets drunk oftener and always dies soon."

"The missionary tells us that hard work is good, but he never does any himself, but makes the Kaffir do it for very little pay."

The year 1896 was disastrous for South Africa. We had the Jameson Raid, the terrific dynamite explosion at Braamfontein, lost a million cattle by rinderpest, had a severe small-pox epidemic; locusts appeared in record swarms and ruined many farmers, and the Boer Government enforced several vexatious laws against the natives. An influential chief in the Spelonken district, claimed by the missionaries as a model native Christian, was discussing affairs with me. In the most reverential tone, he asked if I did not think God was getting too old to look after so many things, adding, "I think he ought to let Jesus do more than he does to help him."

These remarks may sound flippant, but they were not so intended. The native is never jocular in discussion, or for that matter in anything else. He has no perception of humor apart from physical buffoonry, and sarcasm or irony are lost on him. His criticism is the genuine reflex of his thoughts. Reticence or regard for the feelings of the person criticised he knows not, as witness these remarks made to my face by natives who were "nobodies" in the kraal, while I represented the majesty of the law:—

"God does not love you so much as he loves M'futa [the chief magistrate] because he lets you do all the work and you do not get so much money. You are foolish to love Jesus for so little money."

"Why do you not pray to God to teach you to speak better Zulu. Is it because he cannot?"

"Why did God let you, who are a Christian, be nearly drowned, but keep Masupa, who is not, safe?"

This related to my being carried down a river in flood, while my Kaffir servant, who could not swim, escaped without risk.

I enjoyed a fairly good reputation among the natives as a humane official. Most of my colleagues with me in our Volunteer company during the late Boer War were regarded as the reverse. I was the only one of the party severely wounded. When the news reached the Native location, the Chief Induna remarked that he did not think much of God in letting me be shot in the stomach while Captain So-and-So, who was much fatter and wickeder, was not hurt.

DOUGLAS BLACKBURN.

Acid Drops.

It is amusing to see the Archbishop of Canterbury and other members of the episcopal bench calling for special prayers against the calamity of civil war in Ireland. The right reverend fathers in God never trouble about civil war unless they think their "pals" will get the worst of it. We say deliberately that their calls for prayer at this particular juncture are simply a part of the organised Tory campaign to frighten John Bull into fits over the Home Rule Bill. "King" Carson keeps a solemn face over the farce, but even he must envy the preternatural seriousness of the head jokers of the Protestant Church of England.

Don Quixote, the wise madman, told Sancho Panza that there were only two parties in the world—the "haves" and the "have-nots." That is the key to all political battles. With it the secret of all political questions is unlocked. We may say this without going any further in the *Freethinker*. But this is enough for readers of common sagacity. Before any question enters into the field of practical politics you can always say which side Bishops will take.

The prayers for Ireland are "special." This does not mean that they will make a special impression on the Almighty. It really means that the object in view is one of special importance—to the ladies and gentlemen who do the praying.

The *Humanitarian*, the monthly organ of the Humanitarian League, is not a comic paper, but there is an intensely comic paragraph in the January number's editorial notes:—

"The late Mr. Montague Crackanthorpe, K.C., was, in one way, the most remarkable man the world has seen. He did a thing that no one else has yet done. Having asserted that garrotting was put down by the lash, and having been confronted with the absolute proofs to the contrary, he actually admitted that he was wrong! Dozens of eminent persons, from the late Sir Walter Besant to the present Mr. Plowden, and scores of anonymous journalists of every grade, have found themselves in Mr. Crackanthorpe's position, and have taken refuge, as the case might be, in evasion, or in silence, or even at times in abuse; but none of them, as far as we remember, has ever owned his mistake. We suggest that a statue of Mr. Crackanthorpe should be erected."

We repeat that this is intensely comic. We add that it is also intensely tragic. What a satire it is upon human nature!

We are glad to see the *Humanitarian* continuing its crusade against the beating of children in public elementary schools. It is not called beating, of course; it bears the highly respectable designation of "corporal punishment." It is simply abominable that parents who would not strike their own children for the whole world, should be compelled to place them at the mercy of other people, and be told to mind their own business when they complain of vulgar ill-treatment. For beating children is a most shockingly vulgar performance. No further proof is wanted than a look at any person engaged in it. Why the teaching profession still uphold the necessity of this vulgar performance in the schools passes our comprehension. In doing so they deliberately rank themselves on a lower level than the teaching profession in other civilised countries. The plea that a small cane is used only in a small way upon small boys is all nonsense. Serious injuries are sometimes inflicted, and slighter injuries are quite common. The *Humanitarian* cites a recent case in which the medical evidence was to the effect that fifteen or sixteen blue and black weals were on the boy's back, painful and tender to the touch, and two on the arm—and that one of the blows must have required considerable force, as there was a bruise beneath a vaccination scar. The magistrate, however, "did not think any unnecessary violence was used." Of course not. Magistrates never do. State functionaries stand by State functionaries. One policeman's word, for instance, outweighs the word of a dozen citizens in every Police Court in England.

The South Normanton school managers have taken action in this matter. They protest against the "growing tendency of the staff to inflict corporal punishment." Some of the managers spoke of boys and girls having been shockingly treated, some of them having fingers swollen to double their ordinary size and discolored. It was stated that in one case a finger was stripped one inch, and that in some cases the punishment was "fearful." Mark that the "tendency" to beat children is "growing." Naturally. The appetite for

cruelty grows by what it feeds on. It grows from a luxury into a lust. Teachers may rail at this as much as they like. It is the simple truth. It is a universal law of moral pathology.

James Woods, the sexton and parish clerk of Billingford, Norfolk, committed suicide in the vestry of his church, which had to be reconsecrated by a special service, at which the Holy Ghost must have been present, for all consecrations are effected through that personage.

The Bishop of Thetford was responsible for that reconsecration. Thetford is where Thomas Paine was born. They haven't made much progress in that district during a hundred and fifty years.

Some thirty years ago (we have not the exact reference by us at the moment) a Freethinker named Gilbert Easton shot himself in St. Paul's Cathedral. His case was hopeless. He was suffering from creeping paralysis. His suicide necessitated the reconsecration of Wren's great masterpiece.

Journalists are often jovial theologians. A writer in the *Southend Standard*, speaking of Christmas, said recently that "a truth to be found alike in the dicta of a Colonel Robert Ingersoll and in the teachings of the founder of Christianity is that the way to be happy is to make other folk happy." This is, indeed, the newest theology. We shall expect to hear presently that the Man of Sorrows wrote the *Mistakes of Moses*.

The *Daily Express* recently pointed out that "Jericho was a very important city, situated on a caravan road, which led, probably, due north and south, or, perhaps, east and west." When told to go to Jericho, our contemporary will have difficulty in making an express journey.

The editor of *Howe's Directory of Metropolitan Charities* estimates the income for 1914 of the charitable institutions in London at over eight millions of money. Of this huge sum no less than three millions will be devoted to missionary work, and £373,320 to Bible and tract societies. Not a bad economic basis for a superstition alleged to be "without money and without price," and the founder of which was a pauper.

Dr. Clifford has discovered another reason why he supports religious teaching in State schools. He believes, he says, in Cowper-Templeism because it is democratic in tendency. It gives voters a measure of control over the religion taught. This apology is rather worse than the others with which Dr. Clifford has sought to befool the public. In the first place, the voters are not allowed to say what religion they will have taught. They may not choose Roman Catholicism or any other 'ism. All the State says is that, if a district requires religion, it must be of an "undenominational" character. And, in the next place, Dr. Clifford should remember that it is one of the professed principles of Nonconformity that the State should have nothing to do with religious teaching in any form. It is not a thing that should be decided by vote. Imagine putting it to the vote whether religious doctrines are true or not! Why, in some parts of the British Empire Christianity would be hopelessly "snowed under." Really what Dr. Clifford wants is the State to teach a religion that is agreeable to him, but he lacks the candor to say so. And, after all, this is only what the Roman Catholic and the Episcopalian, and all the other odds and ends of the religious world, desire.

Meanwhile the *Church Times* remarks that it is strange to find the "descendants of the Puritans" wishing to impart a "residual" religion through teachers ranging from Romanists to Atheists, about whose convictions no questions must be asked. Nonconformists are not quite so simple as the *Church Times* assumes. It is true that on the surface no questions are asked concerning the religious opinions of teachers. Nevertheless religion does very frequently enter into the appointment of teachers, and more frequently still into the question of their promotion. Everyone knows, who knows anything about the work of local bodies, that in the choice of teachers the sect to which they belong plays a very pronounced part in appointments. And all over the country there are thousands of teachers who are fully aware that to let it be known they are Freethinkers means an absolute bar to promotion. They are not rejected on this ground, of course; others are appointed—that is all. And so long as religion is in the schools, so long this will continue. Christian members of an Education Committee would no more vote for the advancement of a teacher known to be an Atheist than they would support an Atheist in any

other direction. The facts are patent. To deny their existence argues either deliberate lying or an almost incredible stupidity.

On the other side of the hedge the *Catholic Times* seems to be getting nervous about the approach of Secular Education. It remarks in a recent issue that "either Cowper-Templeism must go or other religions must come. More than likely Cowper-Templeism will go and Secularism will come." Secularism, as a distinct "ism," will not come, nor do Freethinkers desire that it should. But we may take the above as the Christian way of saying that the abolition of all religious teaching in State schools is not only the logical, but also the inevitable issue to the present controversy. We welcome the admission, and we hope that the *Catholic Times* will turn out to be a true prophet.

When the Churches found that they were unable to stop Sunday concerts, a good many of them started Sunday musical entertainments of their own, either in conjunction with, or following the ordinary service. The same thing seems to be taking place in connection with Sunday cinematograph displays. The Y. M. C. A. has now announced a series of "Electric Picture Services for Men." The idea, apparently, is to get people to a picture show and sandwich a sermon in between. The Christian gospel is truly a powerful instrument when it has to play second fiddle to the film.

The Middlesex County Council has forbidden Sunday picture shows. This is not only bigotry, but impudent bigotry. As a matter of fact, they have no legal power to grant a seven-days' license or to interfere with a seven-days' performance. The question of Sunday entertainments, with a charge for admission, falls under a special Statute.

Christian missionaries of any kind are kept out of Afghanistan. What a wicked country! It ought to be wiped off the map.

Dr. A. C. Dixon (the libeller of Ingersoll) has been preaching some special sermons on "Heroes and Heroines" at the Metropolitan Tabernacle lately. One was on Joseph—of course. The Potiphar's wife's temptation of this "purity" hero "was dealt with in a frank and plainly spoken address." Something like the lady's own address to Joseph, we suppose. Three words expressed all that she desired and expected of him. It was a model of brevity. Not one preacher in a million could equal it.

We have received the report of a sermon on "The Future Life of the Soul," by the Lord Bishop of Down; and, after glancing over it, we must confess that his lordship appears to know as much about the subject as anyone else. The Lord Bishop observes that it is only a very few sophisticated people who are capable of imagining that death ends all, and their minds have been warped by modern Materialism. We quite agree the number of those who reject the belief in a future life is small compared with the rest of the world, but "very few" is rather a misleading expression. Between six and seven millions returned themselves as Atheists at the last census in France, and there are probably as many unbelievers in this country. And these are certainly not the least thoughtful among the population.

Quite unwittingly, however, the Lord Bishop stumbles on a truth when he points out that only the minority are capable of imagining death as the end. This psychological fact contributed in no small measure to build up the belief in a future life. Death, although it has always occurred, yet stands as one of the discoveries made by the human mind. The savage does not conceive death as a cessation of personality because his mind is not capable of a conception of this character. The majority cannot conceive it even to-day. How many people talk of the "terrors of annihilation"? What they have in mind is, obviously, themselves as spectators of their own annihilation, and imagining themselves living to see themselves quite dead. So the savage does not think of death as death, but as a mere change of existence. The man is somewhere still. The human mind cannot picture its own non-existence, and this inability forms one of the foundation stones of the whole doctrine of immortality. But our difficulty in thinking a thing as true is a very long way off demonstrating it to be false.

For the rest, the Bishop of Down is just full of the usual "ifs," which, like a true theologian, he takes as the equivalent of demonstrated truth. If there is a good God, if

human beings are the special objects of his care, etc., etc., it is impossible to believe that he will let them perish. Well, but God—if there be a God—does neglect his children. And if he neglects them now, there seems no reason why he should not go on neglecting them to the end. It is, of course, admirable to think the best of people, even of God; and so one may hope that—if there is a God—he will behave himself better in the future than he has done in the past. But his past record does not provide very strong ground for such a belief. The Bishop asks the unbeliever, "What about the wrongs that are never righted, the sorrows that are never assuaged, the tears that are never wiped away?" etc. Exactly; what about them? This is not a question that Christians should put to Freethinkers; it is one that Freethinkers should put to Christians. It is their God that made the world; he made it so that things run in an unsatisfactory way; and then his worshipers argue that there must be another life because the Divine Creator has so badly bungled this one. And this is their great argument for another life—the fact that God has arranged this one badly. Of course, the belief gives God one more chance to redeem his reputation. But suppose the next world—if there be a next world—is as bad or worse than this one. What then? It is at least possible. The Creator who bungled once may bungle twice. God is the only one who gets credit for good work in the future because the samples already supplied are admittedly unsatisfactory.

Rev. Alfred Barff, vicar of St. Giles, Cripplegate, London E.C., fell in getting out of a train at Hammersmith, on Christmas Day. He struck his head and never regained consciousness, dying at the West London Hospital. The Bishop of London called to see Mr. Barff who was a personal friend of his, but the unfortunate gentleman had already expired. The Bishop offered a prayer in the ward, however, but what good it did is not ascertainable. Somebody, perhaps, will inform us how the hand of "Providence" is to be traced in this sad incident.

Nearly 25,000 persons have formally seceded from the National Protestant Church in Berlin during December. The Church authorities are at their wits' end how to deal with the movement. All they can think of at present is to get the police to stop public meetings against the Church.

Mr. G. K. Chesterton is getting tiresome in his assumed rôle of defender of the faith. In the current issue of *Nash's Magazine* he girds at the Higher Critics, and suggests that these gentlemen are incomprehensible. They are not nearly so incomprehensible as the faith they try to explain.

Mr. G. S. Street has been appointed censor of plays in the place of the late Mr. Charles Brookfield. A brilliant critic, he is austere in his use of language, and has been described wittily as "the Street which is called straight."

The Bishop of Carlisle has expressed his astonishment at London fashions. Laymen have been more astonished for centuries at the fashions of parsons. It was John Stuart Mill who declared that he would not say that every bishop was an impostor, but every bishop looked like one.

"Minister as Fire Fighter" is a bright headline in a contemporary. That sub-editor was asleep, for that is exactly what parsons are paid for.

A new society for the encouragement of pure English, both written and spoken, has been formed. Christian Evidence lecturers kindly note.

Mr. James Bryce has been lamenting the decline of a knowledge of the Bible amongst all classes of the population. The same thing, he says, is observable in the United States, from which country he has just returned. He also asserts that the loss of knowledge of the Bible—if only from the standpoint of education—would be an incalculable loss to the country. We see no reason why there should be an absence of knowledge of the Bible, nor do we believe that this will occur. But it is a very different thing to have a knowledge of the Bible as a part of the world's literature in a special direction, and giving the Bible a place in education above all other books, and to which it is certainly not entitled. The Bible was given the supreme place at a time when the Christian religion dominated everything. But it was inevitable that, with the growth of a more rational view of life, other interests should arise and receive attention. All this talk about the supreme value of the Bible in education is pure nonsense. It is no more indispensable than is the Koran. It has its place in a complete education, just as

the Koran has; and from this point of view it will always receive attention. Freethinkers have not the slightest desire to prevent the Bible exercising any legitimate influence it may possess. But they do object to it being given a fictitious importance, and other things woefully neglected, in order that this fictitious importance may be maintained.

The Christian world, or at least the English part of it, makes the most of anything in the writings of eminent men that can be twisted, by hook or crook, into lending some sort of sanction to their doctrines. The Rev. Dr. Warschauer played this little game for all it was worth, in his debate with us at the Caxton Hall. He must have known if he had read Dr. Russel Wallace's writings, even with the care he devoted to the morning newspaper, that the great biologist's views on the subject of religion were as much like his as cheese is like chalk. Nevertheless, he put Dr. Wallace forward as a sort of champion of orthodox Theism. The fact was even concealed that Dr. Wallace was avowedly not a Christian. The honesty of this proceeding is, of course, only what might be expected from any practitioner of the art of priestcraft. But it is a useful thing to draw attention to the *mala fides* of practically all the members of this profession—which begins in ignorance, continues through mystery, and ends in fraud. We suggest, therefore, that Dr. Warschauer and the rest of his fraternity might exercise their great intellects in dealing with a startling statement of Dr. Wallace's which was published not very long before his death. It runs as follows:—

"I have come to the general conclusion that there has been no advance either in intellect or morals since the days of the earliest Egyptians. Everything is as bad as it possibly can be. There exist in our midst horrors and dreadful diseases never known before. Our whole social environment is rotten, full of vice and everything that is bad."

What a terrible result of nearly two thousand years of "Christian" civilisation. We say "Christian" advisedly. It is the simple truth. Christianity has been the dominating power. It has been so at every point—from the coronation of kings and queens down to the laws of Sunday observance. Only Christians—and in England only Churchmen—could go to a university. Since that state of things was altered national education has come in, and Christian religious teaching exists in elementary schools at public expense and under public authority. It is perfectly true, then, that Christianity still controls education—as it really controls almost everything else. And the result is—well, we need not repeat Dr. Wallace's indictment. "Call you that backing of your friends?"

Dr. Wallace's estate was of the gross value of £5,823, the net personality being £2,884. Put the savings of a lifetime (only ten years short of a century) against the Archbishop of Canterbury's £15,000 a year, or some of the big fortunes left by Church parsons! Science is not as grasping as theology.

Rev. John Clough Williams Ellis, Glasfryn Llabgybi, Carnarvon, left £41,989. Dr. Wallace was quite a poor devil compared with this wealthy man of God.

Rev. William Smith, Edge-lane, Liverpool, left only £9,968. But even he throws Dr. Wallace into the shade.

Here is another poor Christian. Rev. Prebendary James Fraser, of Chichester, left £16,160. How will he get through the needle's eye?

The Rev. R. J. Campbell receives almost as much advertisement in the public press as Saint Bernard Shaw. Only the other day a paragraph announced that the pastor of the City Temple was a grandfather. But why did one newspaper writer head it "The Campbells are Coming"?

The special new year's number of the *Daily News* opened with a characteristic article by Mr. Bernard Shaw on "The Peace of Europe"—obviously written for the public entertainment. We wish Mr. Shaw could be more serious. War itself is a very serious thing. It is an ill-subject for jesting. It often occurs to us that many professed friends of peace do not realise the horrors of war. Mr. Shaw appears to us to be one of them. He is capable of writing ably and vehemently against wrong and wrong-doers, but we feel the lack of sympathy and imagination. There is cleverness and logic, but little of what is not inaptly called "human nature." Curiously enough, the same number of the *Daily News* contains a report from Mr. William Willard Howard, of New York, who had just arrived at Paris in returning from his visit of investigation to Albania. The Balkan war is supposed to be over. But this only means the Great

Powers cry "Peace" loud enough to drown the cries of strife. He reports as follows:—

"Mr. Howard said that civil war was imminent between the forces of Essad Pasha and those of Ismail Kemal Bey, President of the Provisional Government of Albania.

"Great distress, he also declares, exists in Northern and Middle Albania. During the past ten weeks 100 Albanian villages have been destroyed by Servian troops; 12,000 houses burned; 4,000 men, women, and children killed or burned to death; more than 100,000 made homeless. Of this number, Mr. Howard estimates that 30,000 will starve and freeze to death."

This horrible state of things should be put an end to at once. The great Christian Powers could do it. They are like Mr. Shaw in one thing,—they are not in earnest.

There is only one way to be good, and that is to do good. We venture to say that one practical resolution of the European Powers to terminate the Albanian tragedy would do more for international peace than all the books written and all the meetings held in its favor from one end of Europe to the other. The logic of peace won't save us from war; only the love of peace will save us from it. And love, like every other emotion, strengthens with exercise. A real act of kindness by the European Powers to a gallant but hopeless people would soften the heart of the western world in a way that nothing else could do. And it is to the development of moral qualities that we must chiefly look to stop the barbarities of war. One does not keep one's hands from one's neighbor's throat because one believes one would gain more by letting him live in peace and comfort. One abstains from attacking him out of respect for his right to life and liberty, and out of sympathy with him as a brother man and a fellow-citizen.

American statesmen seem more ignorant, ill-mannered, and silly than our own—when it comes to anything outside politics, and especially when it comes to religion. Most of our readers will remember Roosevelt's description of Thomas Paine as a "filthy little Atheist"—which we branded as "three lies in three words." Paine was not "filthy" but a remarkably clean and well-dressed gentleman until he was rendered helpless by a painful bodily affliction. Paine was not "little" but five feet ten inches high; that is, several inches taller than Roosevelt. Paine was not an "Atheist"—in fact, he wrote eloquently against Atheism. It follows, therefore, that Roosevelt deserves to be called a "filthy little liar" much more than Paine deserved to be called a "filthy little Atheist." Yet this vulgar libeller has been President of the United States of America, and wants to be so again.

Roosevelt has frequently been asked to justify or withdraw his printed description of Paine. But he never answers. He takes no notice. He stands upon his dignity. And what that is worth is obvious to anybody who takes a fair look at him.

Roosevelt has just published his Autobiography. We cannot afford time to go through it. One or other of our readers may be blessed with greater leisure. It would be interesting, in its way, to know whether "Teddy" shows any repentance for his abominable lies about a far better man than himself.

Bryan is another U.S.A. statesman. His party are now in power, but they won't have him as President. Still, he has a minor office, and is well paid for it, but he ekes out his salary with some public lecturing, his idea being that a good Christian like himself cannot possibly live on less than £4,000 a year. Bryan is not to our knowledge a libeller of "unbelievers" except in a general way. He has always been fond of preaching—even when he is supposed to be lecturing; and it is sad to say that his pious platitudes are accepted by "believers" as grand oratory. His mental calibre is of the very lowest. He is reported to have lately given a "crushing" answer to Atheism. It takes the form of a question: "How does a red cow, fed on green grass, produce white milk?" The way to answer some questions is to propose another. We submit the following: "How does Infinite Wisdom produce so many Bryans?"

"More than 2,000 persons work in Somerset House, and not a soul sleeps on the premises," the *Daily Express* informs us. What terrible Materialists there are in London.

There were 2,285 novels published during 1913; but no work of fiction approached the circulation of the Bible. Nor were all the books together so outspoken on sex matters as the sacred volume.

Mr. Foote's Engagements

Sunday, January 11, Queen's (Minor) Hall, London, W.; 7.30, "Mr. McKenna and Prisoners for Blasphemy."

To Correspondents.

- E. B.—Thanks for cuttings, and new year's good wishes to "all connected with the splendid *Freethinker*."
- A. BRIDGES.—Thanks, but the Esperanto writer is not very witty; the thing were better left to imagination.
- J. M. GIMSON, J. T. GRIFFITHS, L. GJEMRE, AND OTHERS.—1914 acknowledgments will be started a little later on.
- J. ELLISON.—Always glad to see wives joining husbands in salutes and good wishes to the *Freethinker*.
- W. P. BALL.—Thanks again for useful cuttings.
- SEDERNEY SMITH (Canada).—Passed on to our shop manager.
- E. NORWOOD.—We have more than once stated that, except as printer and publisher, Charles Watts's share in the *Heroes and Martyrs of Freethought* was confined to the title page. Mr. Foote wrote every word of the book, and also of several numbers that were issued after the publication of the bound volume. There was some idea of Watts's co-operating at the outset, but it never approached to realisation. This is obvious to any judge of composition. It is not a question of good or bad, but of individual style.
- H. BLACK.—See paragraph. Thanks.
- W. C. T. J.—Stupid Christians, who invented the "watch story," charged Bradlaugh and other Freethought leaders with blasphemously giving God five minutes to prove his existence by striking them dead on the public platform. Now your Christian daughter wants to know why they *don't* use that argument. It is no argument at all. The result would prove nothing either way. Surely she has sense enough to see that.
- R. C.—The report of a funeral on December 30 ought to reach us before January 6 (Tuesday!).
- 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.

Tickets (4s. each) are now on sale for the London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner at Frascati's on Wednesday evening, January 28. Mr. Foote presides, and the toast list includes many well-known London speakers. Mr. Cohen and Mr. Lloyd, of course, will be present.

Frascati's will not be able to accommodate more than two hundred diners on this occasion. Those who want to be absolutely sure of tickets should therefore purchase them early. They can be obtained of Miss Vance, N. S. S. secretary, 2 Newcastle-street, E.C., or at the Pioneer Press shop at the same address.

The Annual Circular re the President's Honorarium Fund will not be sent out until the end of the month, after the Annual Dinner. Mr. Foote will also have something to say on the subject. Meanwhile, subscriptions that arrive for 1914 (and they are coming in already) will be acknowledged privately—and held over otherwise until the first list is published.

Our good friend and highly valued colleague, though so distant in space—Mr. George Macdonald, editor of the *New York Truthseeker*—has been expending some of his humorous criticism on a suggestion of the veteran J. E. Rensburg's. The said suggestion is as follows:—

"Freethought needs something to arouse it to a greater activity, and if the imprisonment or hanging of an Infidel editor will effect it, I know you are willing to be used as a sacrificial offering."

Mr. Macdonald retorts, with perfect good humor, that his

old friend Rensburg should speak for himself on a subject like this. "Whenever have *we*," he asks, "shown any such recklessness of life and liberty as would justify a conclusion like that?" And why expect that the imprisonment or even the hanging of an Infidel editor would stir up a lot of so-called Freethinkers? All that could reasonably be expected of them, in view of their monotonous stagnancy, is that "they would submit the whole matter to the jurisdiction of evolution and the judgment of posterity." These people are "gifted with absolute self-possession; nothing rattles them." Mr. Macdonald most positively declines, if he is left any choice in the matter, to play the part of a scape-goat in "the vain hope of waking them up." He thinks he ought to require an assurance that at least one inactive Freethinker would open his mouth, the day after the hanging "without saying that the religious issue is settled." We confess that we agree with him in this matter. Those who yearn for martyrdom should be allowed to seek it—and enjoy it. But others should be equally free to adopt the attitude of the old lady who had an ill-selected portion of Scripture read to her by a district visitor. It had reference to painful exercise of the teeth by the inhabitants of hell, and the old lady remarked, with a mixture of indignation and reassurance, that it didn't apply to her. "Let them gnash 'em as has 'em," she exclaimed.

We have pleasure in reproducing the following leaderette from the *Daily News* (Jan. 2):—

"MR. MCKENNA AND THE BLASPHEMY LAWS.

"The sentence of four months' imprisonment for blasphemy passed by Mr. Justice Coleridge at the Stafford Assizes on Thomas William Stewart was difficult to defend in any case; and to that extent Mr. McKenna is to be pardoned for his failure to defend it successfully. But his reply to the petition for the reduction of the sentence not only fails as a defence of the Blasphemy Laws but does something much worse. It leaves it to be inferred that at any rate a certain type of offender who happens to be unpopular may be punished in the last resort not for any offence of which he may have been found guilty, but for actions or speeches of which he has been definitely acquitted or which are not illegal at all. All the suggestions which Mr. McKenna advances in defence of the imprisonment of Stewart belong to one of these two classes. He was tried and acquitted on the charge of publishing an indecent pamphlet, and it is most improper that this particular charge should now be brought up against him by the Home Secretary himself to palliate the sentence passed upon him on another count. Other alleged offences imputed to him by Mr. McKenna are not legal offences at all; it is not a crime to preach Malthusianism or to sell the appliances which Stewart is stated to have sold. As to the actual indictment, it is manifest that it is almost impossible to attack the fundamentals of Christianity without, in Mr. Justice Coleridge's words, 'ridiculing, outraging, and scandalising the feelings' of devout Christians. Much that Stewart said seems to have been mere vulgar nonsense; he is most probably weak-minded. That is no reason why the administration of the law should be so too, or why the public generally should be exposed to the perils which leap to the eye if Mr. McKenna's letter is to be allowed to pass unchallenged."

This protest will, of course, have no effect on Mr. McKenna. On a matter like this he is backed by the Christian bigots of all parties, and they are an overwhelming multitude.

It may almost go without saying that the *Star* had a good article on the "blasphemy" case. We are glad to see that "Sub Rosa" devoted his column in the *Daily News* on Tuesday to the same case. His treatment of the matter was eminently satisfactory from beginning to end. He calls for the "repeal" of "the stupid law."

The *Inquirer's* leaderette on the Stewart case is as follows:—

"The Home Secretary has refused to interfere with the sentence passed recently on Mr. T. W. Stewart for blasphemy. We should like to have some explanation of his reasons. The petition to which we referred last week was one of great weight. It was not the expression of popular clamor or of sentimental pity for a man who has received a severe sentence, but of the clear convictions of a large body of men who represent much that is finest in the intellectual and religious life of the country. No one will suspect them of sympathy with obscene or disgusting language. It is a case in which a natural feeling of distaste for the whole subject has not been allowed to interfere with the high demands of freedom and equity. It is clear that the matter cannot be allowed to rest where it is. The next step must be taken in the House of Commons."

With regard to the last sentence we have something to say in our own article this week.

In another paragraph the *Inquirer* speaks of 1883 as "the date of the famous Bradlaugh prosecution." What a peculiar reluctance some people have to mentioning Mr. Foote! The real explanation, of course, is that Bradlaugh is dead

and cannot profit from any compliment or courtesy. Very little of either was shown to him when he was living—not even by Unitarians. The story of the *Freethinker* prosecution and imprisonment has been out of print for many years. One of our publishing ventures in the new year, and as early as possible, will be a new edition. It is positively necessary to prevent misunderstandings and misrepresentations.

Professor Geldart's letter in the *Manchester Guardian* contains the following passage:—

"This recrudescence of prosecutions for blasphemy is an extremely disquieting symptom. It suggests that there is a diminution in the public, or at any rate in the official, mind of the value set upon freedom of speech, and that the police believe that their efforts to secure convictions for blasphemy will be viewed with favor."

We have been saying this all along. The more "blasphemy" prosecutions we have the more we shall get. Going to prison is not the shortest cut to the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws; keeping out of prison is the shortest cut; that is to say, by making it difficult or impossible for the bigots to obtain convictions. The real fight is in the court before the judge and jury. Everything else is only auxiliary.

A further article on the "blasphemy" case appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* on Friday, January 2, under the heading of "Mr. McKenna's Strange Letter"—which is described as "mischievous." "The question," it says, "after Mr. McKenna's letter, cannot be allowed to remain where it is. We look confidently for further explanation from him, and not only for explanation but for action, too."

Mr. George Greenwood, M.P., who has been out of the advanced fighting line for some time in consequence of a surgical operation, and is still awaiting another when the doctors give the word, was not able to refrain from writing to the *Daily News* on the Stewart case. Mr. Greenwood, who is a lawyer himself, says he has read a full report of Stewart's trial. "And I found," he continues, "that he had used language very foolish and vulgar and in very bad taste, but that he had said nothing which, in my judgment, having regard to the best interests of the community, ought to have subjected him to a single day's imprisonment." Mr. Greenwood asks "where is our boasted freedom of speech?" and what of our boasted Liberalism?" Echo answers "what?"

Last week's *Reynolds'* contained the following leaderette:—

"POOR MR. MCKENNA.

"Really we are almost inclined to pity Mr. McKenna. He has an unfortunate genius for saying the wrong thing. If he had simply refused to interfere with the sentence of four months' imprisonment passed upon T. W. Stewart for blasphemy he would have disappointed many Liberals. But he goes out of his way to add to his refusal a statement of his reasons which are quite irreconcilable with any idea of justice. Stewart must serve his sentence for blasphemy because, in addition to blasphemy, he was charged with indecency (of which he was acquitted) and because he sold appliances for the limitation of families, which is not a legal offence. He has placed himself in an absurd position from which he had better withdraw as quickly as possible."

Mr. McKenna *won't* withdraw. But the rest of this leaderette is very good.

There are so many demands for photographs and mentoes of the late Charles Bradlaugh that Freethinkers will be glad to know that a unique statuette of the great Freethought leader is now obtainable. The original and only existing bust, modelled by the sculptor Burvill in 1881, is in the possession of Mr. Victor Reger, who has permitted a model to be taken and to become the exclusive property of the N. S. S. Mr. Thos. Judge, a member of the N. S. S. Executive, and a professional modeller, is supplying the statuette as a labor of love, at the bare cost of material. Mr. Foote is also kindly giving the statuette a gratuitous advertisement in these columns, and it can be seen at the offices of the Pioneer Press at 2 Newcastle-street, E.C.

The January *English Review* is well up to the mark. Mr. Aleister Crowley provides the opening poetry, which is a feature of this periodical. He is certainly a poet, but many people, unused to his symbolism, will probably find him none too intelligible. Mr. Gosse's paper on Laurence Sterne is both laudatory and discriminative. Mr. Ernest Newman has an excellent article on The Piano-Player and the Music of the Future. The editor's article on the State and the Family should arrest attention. Among the rest of the contents is a brief, bright, satirical article on the dinner given to M. Anatole France.

Natural Atheists.

CHRISTIAN conduct is a wonderfully made coat of many colors. In the various lights and shades of life it assumes many peculiar shapes, many strange assortments of color. To the Freethinker, whose sensitiveness are easily aroused, it affords an all-round experience in human emotions. Let his enthusiasm for the cause be never so little, he need not search for uncommon mental experiences beyond the limits of his own restricted sphere. Close at hand he will discover, in Christian conduct, sufficient incentives to give his mind a taste of nearly every emotion that has swayed mankind from its earliest dawns of mentality. Cynicism, amusement, anger, hate, revulsion, fascination, wonderment, amazement, hopelessness, will all crowd upon him, like little multi-colored angels, from this coat of many colors. And in every mental state he passes through laughter and wrath will struggle hard for supremacy. Christian conduct has its funny side, but it has also its serious side; and the Freethinker will often be at a loss to determine which is the stronger.

Some time ago I had a good opportunity to indulge in this weakness of mine for studying the Christian's wonderful ethical arrayment. Congregations of people go under many names. This one was called "a party."

Everyone was in the merriest of moods. Laughter was the reigning sovereign, and drew great tribute from all present. The room was large enough both for dancing and the usual party games; and old people and young people were carried away on the wings of happiness into that unnamed country where we are our real selves.

Sometimes, in private argumentation with our friends, we are met with great astonishment when we say that man, regarded homogeneally, is naturally good. So accustomed are they to dwell on individual trivialities that their minds cannot comprehend Humanity as an entity apart, and yet inseparable from the unit. They shake their heads dubiously when we suggest that Humanity survives because it is innately good; if it were inherently corrupt it would perish. They are too concerned with the personality of life to fathom the deeper and grander truths latent in the impersonal Humanity. Surrounded, as they think, by innumerable petty faults and failings, feeling their own weaknesses perhaps, their own tendencies to deceit and dishonesty in many paltry ways, they conclude that the shortcomings predominate over the virtues. When we base our endeavors at social regeneration upon our conviction of man's soundness of nature, nearly invariably they tell us our experience of life must have been miraculously pleasant. They wish *their* outlook could be so optimistic; but they have all passed through the hards, toiled through disillusionment and despair, tasted the bitterness of human misdemeanor, and they *know* what life is; *our* ideas are filmy flagrees of theory, dreams that stand us in no good stead when we are assailed by adversity; which is untrue.

How much is Christianity responsible for this attitude? Mankind required a savior. To predicate a savior entailed a notion that man was bad, so bad that he could not save himself from his own degradation. In the process of salvation the individual casts aside his nature, becoming born again, as it were, with a totally different "heart," into a completely different life. But man was naturally evil. His real nature was bad. He could only achieve redemption by being saved through something absolutely foreign to him, something over which he had no control, but that could elevate him from his old and natural self into a new and unnatural self.

Christianity's keystone is man's vility; and in the face of that fact it seems a pitiable display of contradictoriness on the part of our pastors to exude so much puerility regarding moral impurity. Con-

sistently has Christianity taught that Humanity was evil in the very heart of it; and so strongly emphasised has the teaching been that some of our friends, whom we know to be as near the hall-mark of human perfection as one could wish, will gravely inform us that the love of God alone keeps them from sin. Religion has built in their minds the idea of the necessity of a savior, with all its correlations, and with all its socially disastrous results.

It is extremely difficult for them to understand that the existence, the survival, of Humanity depends upon the high level of its morality; and that, if this be true, it disposes of the need of an unnatural savior. Disposing of a savior, you logically annul Christianity. Discovering that Humanity is naturally inclined to goodness, you discover also the falseness of the teachings of Christianity. But the Christian idea rises up in the minds of our friends to confuse these plain truths, to fill the path with obstacles.

When we say that the impregnation of religious falsehood into the communal mind has been socially disastrous, we mean that the upward social movement has been, and is being, seriously handicapped by Christianity.

Had religion retained its mediæval power, very probably Europe would have lapsed into savagery. Against the restricting influences of religion the forces of civilisation have fought, sometimes openly, when great minds came to suffer for their championship of the natural; often quietly, silently, in the unwritten lives of little people, when the demands of the commonplace relegated the claims of religion, for the time being, to the Never-Never Land. These forces of civilisation have kept the level of human goodness intact, proving themselves as strong as, if not stronger than, their enemy. Over the ordinary happenings of the ordinary day the power of religion has gradually lessened; but, some of us think, if the religious idea of man's natural evilness were assailed as it ought to be, the plane of national morality would be an inclined one, tending more and more to a wider angle as religion disappeared and reason came into its own.

These disconnected, fragmentary thoughts passed through my mind as I sat in the garden in the starlight, while the others kept laughter reigning merrily in the room. For them all the little worries and grievances and anxieties of ordinary life, the irritations that arise, so many of them, from our irrational manner of living, and upon which religion feeds, were forgotten. For a few hours these people were living their real selves. No one even dreamed of inflicting the least hardship upon the other. The welfare of each was the unconscious endeavor of all. Happiness gave the gathering a communistic character. In the absence of all the confusions that spring from the cutting of life from a hideous slab of leaden necessity, they were good friends. If evil were the unconquerable element in man's nature, as religionists din into our ears, it was strange that these people betrayed no deliberate and painful attempt to subdue it. Evil, in fact, had fallen into that profound a slumber that one might have said, so quite justifiably, that it was dead. My friends were quite justifiably, that it was dead. My friends were living their real, unfettered, happy, natural selves. More strangely interesting still: sleeping side by side with evil, was religion.

Naturally these friends of mine were Atheists: they were living without the least recognition of God. Happiness had banished an idea enforced upon their minds by environment. Had I entered the room and rudely interrupted the merriment by drawing their attention to this, I should have cast the whole party into a fit of the blues.

Decidedly religion is a socially dangerous thing. When it stalks upon the stage there comes with it an unnaturalness that proclaims its antihuman character. People lose their real selves. Their attitudes are stiff; their manners are strained; their deference is forced; their words ring hollow. Everything partakes of unreality. Religion, even despite the habituality of it, brings an unintrinsic element

in its train. To the acute observer the operations of this intruder are always visible. To Christians, even those whose minds are particularly susceptible to the influences of religion, the presence of the foreign spy is equally and similarly evident.

In their attempts to harmonise an instinctive feeling of repulsion—for, after all, the word most truthfully describes their feeling—with their beliefs, they find refuge in the delusion of sacredness. This sacredness casts a holy glow over themselves and their environment; it coats their objection with religious sugar. But the intruder does not settle itself comfortably in a moment. It does not enter and instantaneously eject the previous resident. A gradual, if sometimes speedy, process takes place; and, ultimately, the mind, having first resigned itself to the inevitability of the heavenly spy's determination to abide for a time, loses its repulsion. Custom and training assert their power; the mind bows itself humbly; and, if the circumstances are not too awfully embarrassing, it imagines itself in the presence of God.

I returned to the room to rejoin the merrymakers, to assist my Christian friends to forget God; and in my mind were the thoughts that the coming of happiness meant the going of God; and that, some day, Freethought would be hailed as one of the greatest influences in making the way to happiness safe.

ROBERT MORELAND.

Seeking the Light.

I.

WE met in one of the loveliest parks in South London—and there are many; but the one which, I think, in the summer-time, is the most picturesque and beautiful of them all, viz., Peckham Rye Park, with its old English gardens, its shady nooks, its glorious avenue of trees, its beautiful flowers. We met after many years, two old schoolfellows, and we sat beneath an old oak tree and talked of the happy days we spent at the dear old school in Tooley-street, then known as Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School, but now known throughout the length and breadth of the land as "St. Olaves."

II.

We had both been brought up as Christians, and attended Sunday-school and church with unerring regularity in our youth. When we started to earn our living I went into the commercial world, and my friend did likewise. Neither of us were very successful, and my friend went into the Army, but I continued in the commercial world, going from occupation to occupation, until I finally landed in a berth that seems likely to last until I give up the regular pursuit of earning an income altogether.

III.

Many years elapsed before I met my friend again. He had had a most adventurous career—had fought in two wars, and had come out of both encounters unscathed. When we met in the Park, we fell into talking of old times. While he had been away he had heard, from a very reliable source, that I had joined "the wicked infidels." At first he could not realise how I could have taken such a step; he knew how earnest I had been in my early belief, and he could not understand what motive could have induced me to give up a belief in which I was trained from my childhood. But while he was away in South Africa he heard of the name of Charles Bradlaugh and read of his great parliamentary struggles. Then his interest was awakened. This Charles Bradlaugh, he said, was the famous Freethinker, and his old friend and schoolfellow was one of his disciples. Bradlaugh was a disbeliever in the Bible, and, what seemed to my friend at that time a great deal worse, "an Atheist." And so my friend thought he would look into the Bible to see what was the matter with it, and see what great men like Bradlaugh, and

earnest, intelligent men like his old schoolfellow, could find in it to upset their early belief. And light came before many years. One of the young sergeants in the same regiment as my friend had some of the works of Ingersoll sent out to him; my friend borrowed them, and read diligently.

What a revelation to be sure! The Bible, then, was not God's Word at all: it was the word of man—in short, it expressed only the primitive ideas of our early ancestors. But, thought my friend, "if the Old Testament is unscientific in its statements, if it cannot be relied upon in its history or its morality, how stands the New Testament—is that any more reliable than the Old?"

A year or two later my friend, while still in South Africa, received some more pamphlets from the old country. He read Ingersoll's pamphlet on *What Must I Do to be Saved?* and then he began to get some larger works, such as Samuel Laing's *Modern Science and Modern Thought*, and these helped very much in dispelling the old superstitions that had found a place in his young mind in the old country. Two or three years later my friend went to India, and subsequently to China, and learned something of other great religions that not only had a larger number of adherents than all the sects of Christians put together; but some of them, like Brahminism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, were more ancient than any form of Christianity.

IV.

As we sat under the shadow of the glorious oak, my friend at length observed: "How different our meeting would have been if either of us had remained a Christian. We should probably have exchanged greetings; but if I had known that you were a Freethinker, while I was a Christian, I should have tried to be friendly, but I should have felt all the while that you were a person to be avoided, and that the very air would have been polluted with your infidel expressions, and that I should have run the risk of contamination. But now we can both speak with perfect freedom. I can show you my thoughts on any subject without reservation. That is a great gain, is it not?"

"It is indeed," I replied; "and that is the condition of mind I have been trying to bring about all my career as a Freethought advocate. Freethought purifies the atmosphere. A man who has once become a Freethinker could never again live in an atmosphere of superstition."

"What was your first step towards intellectual freedom?" my friend inquired.

"The first book I read on the subject was Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*. That convinced me that Christianity was not true. You see, I have always had a logical turn of mind, if I may say so; and when Thomas Paine demonstrated to me that the story of the Fall of Man in Genesis was purely legendary and absurd, I saw at once that if the first Adam did not fall, there was no necessity for the atonement by the second Adam."

"That destroyed the whole scheme at one stroke?"

"But I was not satisfied to remain there. I wanted to know something of the origin and development of man from the point of view of science. I studied Darwin and Haeckel and a large number of other writers who had written on the subject, and I became convinced of the truth of the doctrine of evolution. That gave me a firm platform to stand upon, and, as a propagandist I did my best to popularise the facts upon which the great doctrine rests."

"Ah, but," said my friend, "do you not believe that there was some such person as Jesus Christ—a good man who went about doing good—and who was betrayed by one of his disciples, condemned for sedition or blasphemy, and crucified?"

"No, I am satisfied that no such person as the Jesus of the Gospels ever lived—that the character is purely mythical. That is, I do not believe that there ever was a Jesus who was born of a Virgin, whose date and place of birth are doubtful; a Jesus who fed five thousand hungry people on five loaves

and two small fishes, who made the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, and the dead to come out of the grave at his command, who was crucified and rose again from the dead. No, I do not believe that there ever was such a person as the Jesus of the Gospels, and no other Jesus concerns me. There may have been hundreds of other men named Jesus (it is merely Joshua, you know) among the Jews in the early centuries of the Christian era, but I am convinced that there never was one who was capable of performing the wonders attributed to the Jesus of the Gospels, and that is enough for me."

"I am glad to hear you upon that point," said my friend, "because that is a point upon which so many persons get confused. That, however, is because they know nothing about the gods of other religions. They have probably neither heard of, nor seen, representations of the Vedic virgin Indranees, wife-mother of the savior-god Indra; nor of the Hindu god Vishnu, nursed by his virgin wife-mother Takshmi; of Devaki and Christna; or the Hindu god Siva, nursed by his virgin wife-mother, Parvati; and numerous other gods alleged to have been born of virgins."

"Quite so. And I may as well tell you that all these virgin births, and many others, are mentioned by Dr. Harwicke in his very rare and valuable work on *Evolution and Creation*. I have a copy which was presented to me by the author, which I value very much, and which I will show you when you pay me a visit."

"But what about the teachings of Jesus—what do you think of them?"

"I could not answer such a question in a few words. This, however, I can say, that I do not recognise any originality in the teachings of Jesus. A good deal of what he is alleged to have taught, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, had been taught by others hundreds of years before the alleged birth of Jesus. Recollect, I am not saying that some of the teachings of Jesus are not good, and some of them beautifully expressed; but I do say that many of them are absolutely impracticable, and some of them positively pernicious, and I do not think that one ought to be able to say with truth such a thing of the teachings of one who claimed to be one with God."

"No, I cannot agree with you altogether on that," said my friend, "because the Jesus of the Gospels appears to me to have been a very fine character and a bit of a Freethinker in his way."

"Well, I was not discussing his character—which I have said I regard as mythical—so much as his teachings, and it was to some of those that I found exception. But, never mind, we will discuss these questions at greater length when next we meet. And now let us walk through the park. It contains some spots of rare beauty. Let us walk over this rustic bridge, and then through this shady wood, to the old English gardens, and then through the main avenue of trees to the cricket grounds. We shall probably see some sport. In any case, I am glad that we have met after all these years; and I am still more glad that you are 'seeking the light,' and that you have cleared your mind of many an old superstition. Get on, my friend, in the path you are pursuing; per-severe, there is a great deal for us all to learn; we can help one another. What do you think of the park? Is it not charming? Well, till we meet again, good-bye."

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

He gazed around the cheerful and comfortable-looking apartments; then, addressing the widow, he said: "Your husband's been dead over a year now?" "Yes," she answered, with a sigh; "over a year." "I remember reading his obituary," he said, "and I thought it contained a misstatement of facts." "A misstatement of facts?" "Yes; it said he had gone to a better home. In my opinion, it would be impossible for him to find a more cheerful, more comfortable, and, with you in it, a more charming and desirable home than this." The widow smiled sweetly, then he was accepted.

Some Little-Known Freethinkers.

XI.—HENRY HETHERINGTON.

How many of those who enjoy the benefit of a cheap press know anything of the labors, dangers, and sufferings of those who made the cheap press possible? Not least among these must be counted the name of Henry Hetherington. Born in Compton-street, Soho, in 1792, he was apprenticed to Hansard, the parliamentary printer. He was one of the most energetic working men engaged with Dr. Birkbeck in establishing the Mechanics' Institution in London. In 1830 he drew up a "Circular for the Formation of Trade Unions," which formed the basis of the "National Union of the Working Classes," and led eventually to Chartism. On July 9, 1831, he first issued from his house in Kingsgate-street, Holborn, the *Poor Man's Guardian*, price one penny. On the title appeared the words, "Established contrary to the 'Law,' to try the power of 'Right' against 'Might.'" In place of the Government fourpenny stamp was a picture of a printing press, with the words, "Liberty of the Press," "Knowledge is Power." The *Poor Man's Guardian* was issued to fight the Battle of the Unstamped. It consisted of but eight small quarto pages; yet, immediately on its appearance, obtained a circulation of 50,000 copies, and when prosecution began it run up to double that number.

Only those who know the tyrannical censorship exercised over the newspaper press when it first became an influence in this country can rightly estimate the work of men like Carlile, Watson, and Hetherington in establishing for us a cheap and free press. Little more than a century ago publishers of papers were fined and imprisoned whenever they as much as mentioned the name of a peer of the realm. Press prosecutions were numerous. Hardly any paper ventured to exercise independent judgment. Anything and everything relating to politics or religion was at the mercy of the Attorney-General, who had the power of summary arrest for seditious or blasphemous libel. As the demand for newspapers increased the tax upon them was enhanced. In 1765 the newspaper stamp duty was three-halfpence; in 1789 it was raised to twopence, in 1797 to twopence half-penny, in 1804 to threepence, and in 1815 to fourpence. Here it remained until, through the agitation of Hetherington and his co-workers, it was in 1836 reduced to one penny, at which figure it remained until abolished by the exertions of men like Austin Holyoake and S. D. Collet in 1857.

Hetherington's *Poor Man's Guardian* was the chief instrument in the battle for the removal of taxes upon knowledge. It was the first penny newspaper in the country, and was followed by *Cleave's Gazette* and other unstamped papers. The general price of newspapers at that time was sevenpence. The first number of the *Poor Man's Guardian* coolly cited the law under which it was liable, and which it defied. Three convictions were soon obtained against Hetherington; but the Bow-street magistrates were unable to enforce their order for some time. With provoking coolness Hetherington sent them a note to say he was "going out of town," and went on a tour spreading the *Poor Man's Guardian* in the provinces. On returning to London to his mother, who was dying, he was dragged off to prison while knocking at his own door; and in prison he was kept for six months. Hibbert, Watson, Cleave, O'Brien, and others, saw that the *Guardian* with its outspoken policy was maintained, and as soon as Hetherington came out he was again directing affairs.

Mr. James Grant, in his work on the *Newspaper Press* (vol. ii., p. 302), says:—

"Hetherington was in many respects a remarkable man. He was intelligent and clever, but it was in the qualities of determination and courage that he chiefly excelled. Nothing daunted him. He knew not what fear was. In the army he would have been a hero. Of all men in London at the time, he was just the man to fight the great battle of an Unstamped Press."

To courage he added resources. He evaded arrest by disguise. To distribute his paper dummy parcels were made up, duly labelled "*Poor Man's Guardian*," and sent off in one direction by persons instructed to make all the resistance they could to constables who seized them; while the real parcels were sent off by another exit. He got his friends to dress in his clothes, and again and again they were arrested in mistake for himself. In 1832 he was again convicted and imprisoned, together with his friend, James Watson, for six months. During the progress of the "unstamped" agitation fully five hundred persons were arrested for selling the *Poor Man's Guardian*. Their pertinacity gained the day in 1834.

The case came for trial before Lord Lyndhurst, who, says Mr. James Grant, was then a thorough Republican. In charging the jury he took up a copy of the *Poor Man's Guardian*, and, looking at it with an aspect of pity and contempt for its poor appearance, said, with a peculiar

expression in his countenance, and no less peculiar in his tones: "Gentlemen of the jury, that is what they"—meaning the Government—"call a newspaper." All in the court then saw that the triumph of Hetherington, and the defeat of the Government, were certain. The jury returned a verdict that the *Poor Man's Guardian* was not a newspaper. No. 159 bore these words: "This paper, after sustaining a persecution of three years' and a half duration, in which upwards of five hundred persons were imprisoned for reading it, was declared in the Court of Exchequer to be a strictly legal publication."

The veteran William James Linton, in his *Memoir of James Watson*, has the following on Watson's friend, Hetherington:—

"For four years he bore the brunt of the battle for a free press. Ever busy in the interest of his class during the Whig Reform ferment, he was among the most zealous as well as the wisest leaders of Chartism afterwards. A ready speaker, bold and fluent, passionate, sarcastic, or humorous on occasion (he had a spice of fun in him through all his trouble), he was deservedly popular in those days; and in the Chartist Convention of 1832 sat as delegate for Stockport and for London."

In 1840 Hetherington was arrested for selling Haslam's *Letters to the Clergy*. To test the impartiality of the law, some of Hetherington's friends commenced prosecutions against four high-class publishers—Moxon, Frazer, Richardson, and Saunders—for the publication of *Queen Mab*. The law was clear. Shelley's poem was a blasphemous libel, and, despite the eloquent defence of Serjeant Talfourd, Moxon was declared guilty. It remained for the prosecutors to call him up for judgment, which was never done, their object being merely to call attention to the state of the law, and to advertise *Queen Mab*. This course obtained for Hetherington the mildest sentence then given for blasphemous libel—four months' imprisonment. While in prison Hetherington wrote *Cheap Salvation*, a tract showing that all the advantages ascribed to religion could be retained, while dismissing priests and their theology. On coming out, Hetherington resumed Freethought publication, issuing the first translation of Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, *The Existence of Christ Disproved*, by a German Jew, *A Few Hundred Bible Contradictions*, *A Hunt After the Devil* and *Other Odd Matters*, by P. Lecount, tracts by Emma Martin, etc. He also devoted himself to the spread of Chartism and Socialism. He died August 24, 1849, leaving a will, signed shortly before his death, in which he says:—

"I calmly and deliberately declare that I do not believe in the popular notion of the existence of an Almighty, All-wise, and Benevolent God, possessing intelligence, and conscious of his own operations, because these attributes involve such a mass of absurdities and contradictions, so much cruelty and injustice on his part to the poor and destitute portion of his creatures, that, in my opinion, no rational reflecting mind can, after disinterested investigation, give credence to the existence of such a Being."

He was buried in the unconsecrated portion of Kensal Green Cemetery, where lie the remains of many other worthy Freethinkers.

(The late) J. M. WHEELER.

Three of our "admirers" at Grahamstown, S. Africa—H. E. Griffiths, E. W. Stoyell, and D. H. Priest—have "taken the liberty" to send us a case of pines. "May the new year," our correspondents add, "bring you increased vigor for the cause you so splendidly champion is the wish of all three of us."

Mr. George Macdonald, of the New York *Truthseeker*, with some other "saints," has been trying to revive Freethought platform propaganda in "the empire city." A strong effort was made last winter, but it does not seem to have been very successful. The effort is renewed this winter, and we wish it every success. This is not a mere form of words. We mean all that the expression involves. We would much rather, though, that the wish were a hope. But a hope has to rest upon some certitude—and we confess that we see none in this case. It appears to us that the difficulties of regular platform propaganda in New York are nearly, if not quite, as insuperable as they are in London. Plenty of money, of course, would alter the aspect of affairs. If a fine central hall could be thrown open free on Sunday evenings, and a decent fee guaranteed to the lecturer or lecturers, the enterprise might succeed in all senses of the word in a few years. We throw this opinion out for what it is worth. We do not presume to instruct Mr. Macdonald and his colleagues in the problem of New York as New York. They know it a great deal better than we do. But we have had as much experience as anybody in the general problem of Freethought propaganda in big cities, and they will pardon what would otherwise be obtrusive advice on our part.

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, London. W.: 7.30, G. W. Foote, "Mr. McKenna and Prisoners for Blasphemy."

OUTDOOR.

EDMONTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Edmonton Green): 7.45, Miss Kough, a Lecture.

COUNTRY.**INDOOR.**

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (King's Hall, Corporation-street): 7, E. Clifford Williams, "Napoleon Bonaparte and Thomas Paine."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): 6.30, Amos Rothwell, Humorous Dramatic Recital (Lancashire dialect).

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