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More About Blasphemy.

I COMMENCE my notes this week on the Blasphemy case with the publication of a letter which, in the present circumstances, is of considerable importance. A few years ago Mr. J. Bartram, who was then secretary of the Newcastle Branch of the N. S. S., wrote the present Home Secretary as to his attitude in relation to the repeal of the Blasphemy laws. To that enquiry Mr. Shortt replied as follows:—

*House of Commons Library,
26. 2. 1912.*

DEAR MR. BARTRAM,

I quite agree with you that teachers of Secularism are as much entitled to freedom of speech as any other members of the community. I am personally entirely opposed to your opinions and teachings, but I should think very little of my case if I found that it required the help of the criminal law to maintain it. I cannot see why the decencies of public religious discussion should not be sufficiently safeguarded by healthy public opinion as are the decencies of political discussion. I am opposed to all laws which attempt to stifle freedom of speech or discussion, whether emanating from priestcraft or from any other source. I think the sooner the Blasphemy laws are abolished the better, and I am obliged to you for the loan of the pamphlet which I return. I remember seeing it some years ago. You may rely on my help if an attempt is made to repeal the laws.

Yours sincerely,

EDWARD SHORTT.

Mr. Shortt is now Home Secretary and has, therefore, an opportunity of giving practical expression to his deliberate opinion. Nothing has occurred between 1912 and now to make the Blasphemy laws less obnoxious to right thinking men, and as a former Home Secretary, Mr. McKenna, has also expressed himself as opposed to the continuance of the Blasphemy laws, as did also Mr. Asquith while Prime Minister, Mr. Shortt will not be without support if he takes his courage in both hands and acts upon his expressed conviction.

* * *

As the Blasphemy case is at present the subject of an appeal to the higher court I am still precluded from expressing any opinion on that. But there are one or two aspects of the Blasphemy laws, usually overlooked, that will, I think, repay careful attention. It is, of course, well known that the only religion that is pro-

ected against "blasphemy" in this country is Christianity. Anyone may revile the Mohammedan religion as much as he pleases, no matter what he says about it or its founder, and no matter how coarse or abusive the language, no charge of blasphemy can be brought. The same holds true of all other non-Christian religious beliefs. All these religions, the law says in effect, can get along without the protection of the policeman. It is Christianity alone that needs the law to uphold it, the Christian deity alone who cannot stand against ridicule or "ribaldry." But it is not often recognized that the application of the Blasphemy law is much narrower than the Christian religion as a whole. On any legal definition of Christianity it would, I think, be found that the only form of Christianity recognized by the law is the Christianity by law established, that is, the teachings and doctrines of the Church of England. Other Christian sects can only be brought under the shelter of the Blasphemy laws so far as they hold doctrines in common with the Established Church. Where they depart from them they are not protected. Thus, any man may abuse the Roman Catholic Mass in any language he pleases, or he may take so solemn a festival among the Jews as the Day of Atonement and use any language he sees fit. He cannot be charged with blasphemy. It is the Church of England to which the law of blasphemy applies. It is the only religion really recognized by the State as a religion. The others are merely organizations calling themselves religious, and receiving certain privileges in virtue of their supposed service to the community.

* * *

And that gives rise to another curious and important point. In Wales there is at present no established, that is, no legally recognized religion. And if I am right in what I have said, it follows that blasphemy is at present an impossible crime in Wales. You may commit blasphemy in Bristol but you cannot in Cardiff. I have no doubt but that if the police took action there would be an attempt to apply the common law, but I am quite sure that we should have a good case for argument, and, if carried far enough, we should most probably win on the issue. And it would be quite a pretty position to find the judges trying to determine just what was the Christian religion that one was charged with blaspheming.

* * *

The other point is connected with the duties of juries when called to serve on a trial of blasphemy. There is only one statute law of blasphemy. That is the Act passed in the reign of William III, and it is so "ferocious," to use the description of one judge, that it has never been used in an indictment for blasphemy. Prosecutions for blasphemy have always taken place under common law, and, therefore, I have no hesitation in saying that in every charge to the jury, the judge, while he may have been technically correct in what he said, yet what he has said has been quite misleading as to the power and function of the jury in such circumstances. Where a case is being tried by statute law the issue is simple. The Act says that a certain thing is a crime, the judge explains the law to the

jury, who are presumed not to know what the law is, and the sole business of the jury is to find whether the person accused has been guilty of the offence or not. Neither judge nor jury have the power to alter a statute. Their sole function is to decide whether the offence has been committed.

* * *

Common law is an altogether different proposition. It is not established by Act of Parliament, although it may be abolished by Parliament. It has grown up on a basis of custom, modified by the repeated findings of juries and the decisions of judges. Common law is a fluid thing, and its precise form is determined by the opinions of those who have the working of the law as to how far the old reading of it suits the changed circumstances of the time. Thus, in the case of blasphemy. For a very long period the common law treated blasphemy as consisting in a denial of any of the doctrines of the Christian religion. Then it was decided that the denial of the truth of Christian doctrines was not blasphemy so long as it was expressed in "seemly" language. Now we have had it decided in both the case of *Bowman v. Secular Society, Limited*, and in the present case, that the element of unseemliness must be of such a kind as is likely to lead to a breach of the peace. Presently we may expect to see a charge that was originally an offence against "Almighty God" brought down to the level of a case of "drunk and disorderly." Blasphemy was once a dignified offence, it is now becoming ridiculous.

* * *

But a judge in charging a jury in a case of blasphemy takes exactly the same line as he does when he is dealing with an offence under statute law. He usually says, "I will tell you what the law is on the subject of blasphemy, and then you must put on one side your own opinions as to the advisability or inadvisability of the law, and decide according to the evidence." Now that is, in my opinion, positively misleading, and I want to emphasize its misleading character as strongly as I can. Judges do often point out that the common law as to what constitutes blasphemy has undergone change. But how? A judge has no greater power to alter the law than has a jury. And there has been no legislation altering it. But if a judge has the power and the right to tell a jury that the times have now changed so much that the common law which formerly was interpreted in one way should now be interpreted in another, a jury has just as much right as the judge to make that opinion manifest in their verdict, and whether the judge agrees with them or not. I say that a jury has not alone the power to do this, it is their duty as intelligent members of the community to do so. A jury is not, when trying a case at common law, bound to take its law from the judge. All a judge can tell a jury is how the law has been interpreted up to then. It is the function of the jury to say whether it shall be interpreted in that sense in the case before them. In other words, juries have the power of making common law by their decisions, and are not altogether at the mercy of the judge.

* * *

What I am driving at, and what I want every man and woman to realize who is called to serve on a jury where a case is being tried at common law, is that the making of the law, the determining of what shall be the expression of the common law then and there is as much within their province as it is within that of the judge. And when the judge tells them that it is their duty to interpret the law as he lays it down they may put that advice behind them. It is not worth the breath wasted on it. The modification and interpretation of the common law is in the hands of both judge and jury. The judge may tell them what

the law has been hitherto, he should tell them that, but he has no moral or constitutional right to tell them what the law *must* be in their decisions. And I am quite sure that if juries clearly distinguished the difference between common and statute law, and realized that they had the power to say whether the former shall function in the old way or not, many of the verdicts of guilty that have been returned would never have been given.

* * *

Next week I hope to commence a more connected view of these Blasphemy laws, with an examination of some of the reasons that are given for their retention. For the present I satisfy myself with a comment of the Home Secretary's, "I should think little of my case if I found it required the help of the criminal law to maintain it." I wonder that every right-minded Christian in the kingdom does not repeat that sentiment and demand the abolition of the Blasphemy laws with more insistence than does the Freethinker. The Catholic Church brandishes the keys of St. Peter and Protestants laugh at its superstition. But is it an advance to discard the keys of St. Peter and substitute those of the prison warden? Does the formula "I believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost" gain anything by adding "and the policeman"? A religion that is worthy of any decent man's or woman's attention should stand by its own strength, and not seek to silence opposition with a criminal court. But Christianity has never yet maintained itself in virtue of its own strength. In no country in the world has it ever held its own without the support of the civil power, and in no country in the world has it ever successfully replied to opposition save by the stake, the rack, and the prison. For every honest man it can count in its service it has made a score of hypocrites by its methods. It has neither the strength to live with decency nor the courage to die with honour. It knows it cannot adequately meet the arguments that are brought against it. It can only bite and scratch like an angry ape, and so proclaim itself a detected imposture, and a social anachronism in a civilized community.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Christmastide.

(Concluded from page 804.)

This is Christmas Day, celebrated in the Catholic Church by special services, including three masses, one at midnight, another at dawn, and the third in the forenoon. In the Anglican Church also a special service is held, at which special psalms are sung, special prayers read, and the Athanasian creed is recited. Most of the Nonconformist bodies celebrate the day, though not on so elaborate a scale as Catholics and Anglicans. At all these services the supreme emphasis is laid on the alleged fact that on this day the world's Divine Redeemer was born. The angel's message to the shepherds is usually repeated with great glee: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people; for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." No sooner did the angel deliver his message than he was surrounded by "a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." The birth was a miracle of surpassing splendour, though nobody was aware of it at the time: According to the evangelists Matthew and Luke, Jesus had no human father, Joseph, Mary's husband, being only "reputed" to sustain that relation to him. He went through life, not as an ordinary individual, but as an abnormal being, possessing and exercising super-

natural powers. His death was a propitiation for the sins of the world, and after lying in the tomb for so many hours, he rose and became the Prince of Life for evermore. His abnormal birth was followed by an abnormal death—a death which answered not at all to its name.

Such, in brief, is the story which will be repeated to-day from tens of thousands of pulpits throughout Christendom. It is the old, old story which for fervent believers is for ever new. It is with neither its oldness nor its newness, however, but with its truth that we are now concerned. Let us take the angel's announcement, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people; for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord," and do our utmost to ascertain whether it is true or false. Has the world been gladdened and made joyous in consequence of the birth of the Gospel Jesus? No intelligent and honest person can answer that question in the affirmative. Christian apologists, being at their wits' end, exclaim, "But look at the marvellous progress that has taken place in Christendom." We are told, for example, that "no one can say that since the Reformation the Christian nations have been retarding the world's progress." Dr. T. R. Glover, who makes that statement, is aware of the risk he runs in making it, for he immediately adds:—

We may lament that they (Christian nations) have had so many wars and been guilty of so much wrong done against primitive peoples, but we must recognize that these defects they share with all mankind, while the progress is their own. There is *something* about Christianity, candid students of human affairs will admit, that is of value. What is it? (*The Christian Tradition and its Verification*, p. 199.)

What does Dr. Glover mean by progress? Is the progress he mentions moral or material, religious or scientific? Does he maintain that the Church, for which he evidently holds a brief, has ever distinguished itself as a brave and persistent champion of moral and social reform? As Dr. Glover is a lecturer on history at the University of Cambridge, one expects him to be thoroughly familiar with the story of the Church, and it would appear from the passage just quoted that he has not formed a very high estimate of it in its attitude to progress prior to the Reformation; but even in post-Reformation times all he ventures to claim is that "Christian nations have not been retarding the world's progress." Moderate as that claim is history disproves it. Did not the British nation, for a period of twenty years, not much over a century ago, strenuously and bitterly resist the movement for the abolition of the slave trade? The movement was led by Wilberforce, Pitt, and Clarkson. So strong was the opposition that, despite most heroic attempts to educate public opinion by Thomas Clarkson and annual resolutions in the House of Commons from the year 1788, it was not until 1807 that complete success crowned the movement. Significantly enough, the most uncompromising and embittered enemies of progress in this country were the Anglican clergy, led by their bishops and the universities. In 1808, when a measure was proposed to compel absentee pluralists to provide curates for their forsaken parishes, the Bill was opposed by the whole bench of bishops and finally rejected without a division in the House of Lords.

It is a well established fact that with few exceptions the American Churches defended slavery in the name of the Lord, and violently denounced all attacks upon the system as rebellion against the decrees of heaven. Assemblies, synods, conferences, and unions passed resolutions justifying slavery as a Divine institution, and condemning all efforts to put an end to it as disloyalty to the Creator and Redeemer of the world. A few clergymen had the courage to join the abolitionist

movement, but their outward reward was persecution, and in more than one case, death.

The truth is that whatever progress has been realized during the last few hundred years must be attributed, not to the influence of religion, but to the growth of secular knowledge among the masses of the people. Indeed, it may be stated that progress has advanced almost in exact proportion to the decline of interest in religion. The fruits of Christianity have been envy, strife, division, tortuous disputes about God, the Devil, the soul, and the world to come, persecution, and devastating wars. Christ's gift to the world is not peace, but a sword; not happiness, but increased sorrow; not actual salvation here and now, but the dream of salvation beyond the grave. Has Dr. Glover the temerity to declare that Christendom has ever been, or is now, a delightful place to live in? Face to face with the troubled conditions of life in all sections of society, can he honestly say that the Christ he portrays has triumphed, or that his religion has fulfilled its own brilliant promises? Christmas carols may be exquisitely pretty and prove exceedingly soothing to certain temperaments, but they cannot solve the world's perplexing problems, the joyous thrills experienced by the singers and the listeners being purely sentimental, doing, perhaps, on the whole, more harm than good.

Now, what accounts for the dismal failure of Christ and his religion? To us the only possible answer to that question is that both Christ and his religion are fanciful creations of the theologians, and are intellectually and morally impotent. Usener, in his article on the Nativity in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, treats the Gospel birth stories as legends which took shape in Gentile-Christian circles, possibly in the reign of Nero, their substratum being Pagan, which practically means that the Gospel Jesus is largely, if not wholly, a legendary being. The merest suggestion that Jesus is not a historical character causes Dr. Glover to lose his mental balance. In his extremely able and original work, *The Christian Tradition and its Verification*, referring to the historicity of Jesus as "the main issue here for us," he says:—

If the ordinary canons of history, used in every other case, hold good in this case, Jesus is undoubtedly an historical person. If he is not an historical person, the only alternative is that there is no such thing as history at all—it is delirium, nothing else; and a rational being would be better employed in the collection of snuff-boxes. And if history is impossible, so is all other knowledge (p. 198).

That is a sweeping assertion based on neither argument nor fact. What we maintain is, not that a man named Jesus never lived, but that the Jesus portrayed in the Four Gospels never did. If a man named Jesus lived at the time fixed upon in the Gospels, no biography of him ever appeared; he lived and died unknown, and now it is utterly impossible to ascertain anything concerning him. If the Gospel legends were woven round about such a man, to disentangle fact from legend or legend from fact is surely now a hopeless task. Intensely interesting are the various attempts now being made by Liberal divines to reconstruct the historical Jesus, and the result is a number of imaginary portraits which differ considerably from one another. Our contention is that if the Gospel Jesus is a historical person, still living and reigning, the failure of Christianity to transform the world and fill it to overflowing with righteousness, peace, and joy, is absolutely inexplicable. Dr. Glover is convinced, according to a review of one of his books in the *British Weekly*, that "under the influence of Jesus mankind is gradually improving"; but as already pointed out, the improvement of mankind began when the influence of the Church was already on the wane. In any case, the continued existence of the Church is no proof what-

ever of the historicity of the Gospel Jesus. Dr. Glover asks, "What is it that gives the Church its power?" and without a moment's hesitation we answer, that it is the credulity of its members. But a much more pertinent question just now is, what is it that robs the Church of the power it once possessed and exercised so mercilessly? and again with equal confidence our reply is, that it is the growing intelligence of the people, which is making clear to them that the Church's claims for itself are wholly false. The Church is a purely human institution, and its power, when it had it, was solely due to the fact that the people, in their ignorance, took it at its own valuation, and allowed themselves to be mentally dominated by men who pretended to be God's representatives on earth.

Dr. Glover asks, "Who will say he is ripe enough to judge Jesus Christ?" Curiously enough, the questioner thinks he is ripe enough himself to judge Jesus Christ, and his judgment, according to Sir W. Robertson Nicoll, is "painfully shallow and inadequate." We, too, think ourselves ripe enough to judge both the Gospel Jesus and the Church's Christ, and our judgment is that neither ever had an objective existence. If our conviction is true, it fully explains the Church's supreme and never-ceasing insistence upon unquestioning belief or faith on the part of its members. But whether the Gospel Jesus and the Church's Christ are historical or not, the sun does exist, and is once more returning to us with the healing balm of spring and summer in its glorious wings. On the basis of this knowledge we can wish one another a merry Christmas and a prosperous new year.

J. T. LLOYD.

The Strangest Ghost Story.

It is a lie—their priests, their pope,
Their saints, their—all they fear or hope
Are lies and lies. —Robert Browning.

At this season of the year some of the newspaper editors have been discussing as to which is the strangest and weirdest legend of the alleged supernatural current in this country. Ghost stories have been retailed from all parts of Great Britain, and even London, the Metropolis of the Empire, which seems a most unpropitious place, has had its haunted houses catalogued. The list even included a stupid story of a ghost in the old Tower of London, that used to frighten young sentries, and was said to be like a bear. It is a very silly story, and the evidence would hardly satisfy a jury of kindergarten scholars.

The editors wasted time, paper, and ink, and even then failed to agree concerning which particular ghost story was the strangest. Yet, had the journalists but admitted it, the strangest ghost story is that associated with the festival of Christmas. Its accuracy is vouched for by fifty thousand straight-faced clergymen, whose solemnity would wrinkle the face of a funeral horse with smiles. Not only do these men-of-God protest the truth of this particular ghost story, but hundreds of thousands of their followers support their pastors and masters in their extraordinary allegation. It is, therefore, fitting to recount the chief points of such a remarkable legend.

In the year nought B.C., or A.D. nought, a child with a ghost for its father is alleged to have been born in a stable at Bethlehem, in Judæa. The infant was considered to be of such importance that a massacre of children was said to have been carried out in the hope of getting rid of the prodigy. So thorough and sensational was this massacre that profane historians did not consider it worth notice. The subsequent life of this ghost-child is one long string of marvels, quite as extraordinary as the stories in the *Arabian Nights*,

the favourite hunting ground of the pantomime producer. The ghost's son is said to have restored blind people to sight, and brought the dead to life. He is alleged to have fed thousands with a few loaves and fishes, and turned water into wine. At his death a three days' darkness overspread the earth, although no contemporary astronomer noticed the awful and depressing occurrence. After death he is said to have appeared again in ghostly form, and he finally ascended into the sky like an aeroplane, and has never been seen since. He may be "looping the loop" or "nose-diving" somewhere in space to-day. There has never been so astonishing a career. Yet, outside of what are called the four Gospels, written no one knows where, no one knows by whom, no one knows when, there is no corroboration of this most popular of ghost stories. So far as sober historians are concerned, "the rest is silence."

Nor is this all. The ghost-story is said to have happened in December. It was not, however, in that month, even according to the legends. For shepherds do not watch their flocks by night in that most unromantic time of the year. Why, then, are these events said to have happened on the twenty-fifth day of December? The answer plucks the heart out of the Christian superstition concerning Christmas.

It was in competition with the Roman Saturnalia that this particular ghost story was fixed in December. It was to counteract the attractions of these Pagan holidays that the leaders of the Christian Churches sanctioned the merry associations they could not suppress. So many curious things were incorporated. In the far-off centuries white-robed Druids cut the sacred mistletoe with a golden sickle, and chanted their hymns to the frosty air. These features were absorbed, and the mistletoe and carol-singing still play their minor, if amusing, part in the celebration of a great Christian festival. Christmastide is a jumble of Paganism and Christianity, and has as many diverse ingredients as a Christmas pudding.

This Oriental ghost story, associated with the pharisaical profession of goodwill to men, is pretence and make-believe. There is no "bogey" there at all, except the "starving" clergy who make millions out of this sacred sham, and who hiss at the "intellectuals" who would free mankind from superstition. The clergy are not deceived. They would sympathise with the worldly-minded candidate at an election who was asked by a fierce Churchwoman if he believed in the immaculate conception. "My dear lady," sweetly replied the canny candidate, "I believe in all conceptions that are immaculate."

MIMNERMUS.

In the Psalter of St. Louis itself, half of its letters are twisted snakes; there is scarcely a wreathed ornament, employed in Christian dress, or architecture, which cannot be traced back to the serpent's coil; and there is rarely a piece of monkish decorated writing in the world, that is not tainted with some ill-meant vileness of grotesque—nay, the very leaves of the twisted ivy-pattern of the fourteenth century can be followed back to wreaths for the foreheads of bacchanalian gods. And truly, it seems to me, as I gather in my mind the evidences of insane religion, degraded art, merciless war, sullen toil, detestable pleasure, and vain or vile hope, in which the nations of the world have lived since first they could bear record of themselves—it seems to me, I say, as if the race itself were still half-serpent, not extricated yet from its clay; a lacertine breed of bitterness—the glory of it emaciate with cruel hunger, and blotted with venomous stain: and the track of it, on the leaf a glittering slime, and on the sand a useless furrow.—John Ruskin, "The Queen of the Air."

The Bible Vindicated at Last.

The Church authorities repeat a series of phrases which they are pleased to call answers to objections; they treat the most serious grounds of perplexity as if they were puerile and trifling; while it is notorious that for a century past extremely able men have either not known what to say about them, or have not said what they thought. On the Continent the peculiar English view has scarcely a single educated defender. Even in England the laity keep their judgment in suspense, or remain warily silent.—*J. A. Froude, "Short Studies on Great Subjects,"* Vol. I., p. 177.

DR. A. T. SCHOFIELD has been to Palestine to investigate for himself the scene of the narratives contained in the Bible, and has come back convinced of the truth of these marvels. At a lecture given in London on November 29 entitled "Recent Discoveries in Palestine," he told his audience—according to the report appearing in the *Westminster Gazette* for November 30—that:—

The story of the Gadarene swine was attacked years ago by Professor Huxley, who said that it could not be true, because nowhere around the lake of Galilee did the hills run directly down to the water. But Dr. Schofield claimed that he had seen and photographed one steep place, the foot of which was actually in the water.

Now, we have been through all the articles contributed by Professor Huxley to the *Nineteenth Century* during the years 1889, 1890, and 1891, now included in *Science and Christian Tradition*, Volume V. of Huxley's collected essays, and cannot find any such objection made. Huxley objected to the story on historical grounds; he declares:—

It is a purely historical question whether the demons said what they are declared to have said, and the devil-possessed pigs did, or did not, rush over the heights bounding the Lake of Genesaret on a certain day of a certain year, after A.D. 26 and before A.D. 36.¹

And he goes on to ask whether reasonable beings are to be seriously asked to credit statements—

on the acceptance or rejection of which his whole view of life may depend, without asking for as much "legal" proof as would send an alleged pickpocket to gaol, or as would suffice to prove the validity of a disputed will?

Indeed, so far is Huxley from making the objection attributed to him by Dr. Schofield, that he says:—

The swine may well be imagined to have been feeding (as they do now in the adjacent region) on the hillsides, which slope somewhat steeply down to the lake from the northern boundary wall of the valley of the Hieromices (*Nahr Yarmuk*), about half-way between the city and the shore.²

Dr. Schofield here seems to have adopted the good old theological trick of inventing his opponents arguments in order to demolish them.

The report goes on to say:—

Dr. Schofield claimed to have verified the story of Rahab, who had a house on the wall of Jericho, and produced the handle of a Canaanitish jug which he found on the spot, and which quite possibly, he said, was the handle of Rahab's own water-jug.

This dubious relic of the traitress Rahab, the harlot, is worthy of being enshrined with the pipe of the Witch of Endor which the Arab guide sold to Mark Twain, who said it looked old enough to have been hers, and when he smelt it he was quite convinced of its authenticity.

But Dr. Schofield's greatest triumph, his masterpiece, so to speak, is his explanation, after personal investigation, of the fall of the Walls of Jericho. He says:—

As to the story of the walls of Jericho falling down after Joshua's host had walked round them for seven days, he said the top of the old wall had been found in the ditch which formerly surrounded the city outside the wall. Dr. Schofield's explanation was that the walls, built only of sun-dried clay, were pushed outward by the pressure of people within the city rushing to see the meaning of the mighty shout which the Israelites gave on the seventh day of their perambulation.

This is a novel method of interpretation that might well be applied to other difficulties in the holy book. For instance, the story of Jonah's three days' sojourn in the whale could be rationally explained by supposing that the whale was the sign of the public-house where Jonah lodged, and from which he was ejected after three days for holding too many prayer-meetings. Dr. Schofield really ought to make a search for the ruins of this ancient pub, he might even find the handle of a beer jug.

Another question Dr. Schofield dealt with was, Where did Elijah get the water with which to flood the altar he built on Carmel when he confounded the priests of Baal? The answer was, there was a spring of water on the top of the mount which had never been known to run dry.

This objection as to the water supply seems to be another offspring of Dr. Schofield's fertile invention, it never occurred to me. What the sceptic wants to know is, where the fire came from, and why the flooding it with water did not extinguish it? It has been suggested by the profane that the water Elijah used was really paraffin.

"Dr. Schofield," says the same report, "also mentioned other recent discoveries which verified the site of the Crucifixion and the guard room in Jerusalem where Christ was mocked by the soldiers."

Apparently, Dr. Schofield believes that the houses in Jerusalem are the same as existed 1900 years ago! In spite of its utter destruction by the Romans under Titus! As for the site of Calvary, where the crucifixion is supposed to have taken place, which Dr. Schofield claims to have verified, Kinglake, the historian, in the account of his travels in Palestine, given in that well-known classic, *Eothen*, tells us that when he visited the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem—supposed to be built over the tomb of Christ—and being weary of the crowd, asked his Dragoman whether there would be time before sunset to send for horses and ride to Mount Calvary. "Mount Calvary, Signor?" replied the Dragoman, "It is upstairs—on the first floor."

If Dr. Schofield hoped to convince an audience of the truth of the Bible by such childish methods of proof as these he must have a low opinion of its intelligence. But what shall we say of the *Westminster Gazette*, the new two-penny London morning Liberal paper, which gives Dr. Schofield's marvellous discoveries a prominent position in the middle of the paper under the heading, "New Discoveries in Palestine," with the sub-heading, "Confirming Stories of the Bible"? Probably there was not one of the staff, from the chief editor down to the printer's devil, but what sniggered when they read this clownish account of the inhabitants of Jericho pushing their own walls down.

Why, then, did they give it such prominence? The answer is that they wished to show the Nonconformist-cum-cocoa capitalists that they also are on the side of the angels and can be depended upon to keep this manual of superstition in the schools. W. MANN.

¹ *Science and Christian Tradition*, p. 335.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 378-9.

Monism and the Theory of Relativity.

III.

(Concluded from page 790.)

EINSTEIN'S THEORY OF RELATIVITY.

It was stated at the outset of this article that modern philosophy, in pursuance of its task of unification, must follow science wherever it may lead, so we have now to inquire what the Monistic philosophy has to say regarding the most abstruse and revolutionary scientific conception that has ever occupied the mind of man. It is, perhaps, too early in the day to consider the co-ordination with known truth of a set of speculative ideas which have not yet been completely verified, and which even their advocates do not seem to have thoroughly grasped; but it may be possible to estimate the direction in which these speculations are leading, and to judge whether or not it is in line with all previous scientific advance. And to this question we seem to get an affirmative answer.

In the first place the theory seems to be a distinctly physical one. A real physical existence is distinctly postulated, as, for instance, in the following passage from Professor Eddington's *Space, Time, and Gravitation*, p. 187: "What we have called the world might perhaps have been legitimately called the *æther*. At least it is the universal substance of things which the relativity theory gives us in place of the *æther*." (*Italics* are the author's.) This seems to be exactly the universal substance which Monism postulates—that immaterial substance from which matter and all the functions of matter have arisen. And as Monism fully admits the uncognizable nature of this ultra-material substance, regarding matter and mind alike as but functional manifestations of it, so does the new theory admit that a knowledge of this ultimate world-substance can never be reached, for, to quote Eddington again, p. 185: "The ultimate elements in a theory of the world must be of a nature impossible to define in terms recognizable to the mind."

In the second place, the direction in which the theory points seems to be distinctly that of unification. Indeed, it seems to imply a degree of unification more complete than any previously attained or even attempted. No system of philosophy which recognizes the objective reality of space and time has ever sought to identify these conditions of existence with the substance of existence itself. And no scientific generalization has ever gone so far as to suggest some sort of connection between physical relations and the abstract relations of pure geometry. And not only is it sought to co-ordinate physical relations with those of space and time, but space and time themselves are in some way co-ordinated with each other and merged into some sort of composite order called "space-time." As far as one can gather, this space-time is regarded as being in some way an attribute or function of the world-substance, whence it follows that space-time varies according as it is occupied or unoccupied by matter. From an evolutionary point of view the theory may be regarded as postulating a world-substance not "existing in" space and time (according to our familiar conception) but as being itself the condition precedent to all space and time relations—the basic "continuum" in which space-time resides as a sort of attribute. As evolution proceeds, and the world-substance assumes material form the space-time continuum, originally amorphous, undimensional, and undifferentiated, evolves with the evolution of matter, the time element differentiating from the space element, and the latter differentiating into various dimensional orders and undergoing various changes, or "curvatures," under the influence of matter. Thus gravitation comes to be explained

no longer in terms of "attraction" or "force," as in the Newtonian system, but in terms of "space-curvature" as brought about by the proximity of material masses.

To the evolutionist such a theory would possess a peculiar attractiveness, for it would fall completely into line with his evolutionary conceptions. He would see the processes of differentiation and integration operating in spheres of existence of which no evolutionist had ever dreamed, and he would be glad enough to accept a theory so much in accord with his ideas of the world process. But the theory has one drawback—the sort of world process it postulates is utterly beyond human comprehension!

And as the philosophic basis is incomprehensible, so also are the mathematical generalizations founded on it. These proceed on a seeming identification of physical relations with those of abstract mathematics, and the purely physical fact of the velocity of light seems to play an all-important part in them. It would be out of place to discuss the mathematical aspects of the theory here, but brief mention may be made of the fundamental formulæ which lie at the root of the whole theory. These constitute what are called the Lorentz Transformation, and are the formulæ by which the "space-time interval" between any two "point events" referred to any co-ordinate system can be transformed into the corresponding interval referred to any other co-ordinate system in movement relatively to the first. The constant term which enters into these formulæ, both for space and time co-ordinates, is the velocity of light, and Einstein, in his book *The Theory of Relativity*, is at some pains to establish the constancy of this velocity irrespective of the movement of any co-ordinate system. But to the ordinary mind the irrelevance of the velocity of light to the abstract relations of space and time seems to crop up at every point of the argument. We will take as an instance of this Einstein's exposition of "The Relativity of Simultaneity," which, being interpreted, means that two so-called simultaneous events are not absolutely simultaneous, but only simultaneous relatively to the conditions under which they happen to be observed. This is explained (Section IX, p. 25) by the illustration of a passenger in a moving train observing two events, say two flashes of lightning, occurring "simultaneously" at two widely separated points on the railway embankment alongside the line. A stationary observer, standing on the embankment midway between these two points, would see the flashes at the same instant, and therefore to him they would be simultaneous. But an observer in the moving train, passing this midway point at the moment when the flashes occur would not see them at the same instant, since the movement of the train is carrying him towards one flash point and away from the other. This illustration is simplicity itself, and even Macaulay's "intelligent schoolboy" would probably grasp it with ease, but unfortunately it leaves us quite unconvinced. At the outset of his exposition Einstein says: "When we say that the lightning strokes A and B are simultaneous with respect to the embankment we mean the rays of light emitted at the places A and B where the lightning occurs meet each other at the mid point M of the length A—B of the embankment." But we mean nothing of the kind—nothing half so complicated. We mean simply and solely that the flashes occur without any time interval between them, and we feel convinced that their occurrence has nothing to do with their subsequent transmission through space, or their meeting at any point whatever. We are compelled to the conviction that there is *absolute simultaneity* or *absolute succession* between all events throughout the universe, whether or not there be any "observers" to observe them, and quite independently of such a merely physical condition as the velocity of

light. To show how completely this physical relation dominates all the mathematical reasonings of the theory, we may mention that it enters even into the new formula for the expression of energy. The energy of a body of mass m moving with velocity v must no longer be given by our old friend the expression —, but by a formula which includes a term

$$\frac{1}{2}mv^2$$

representing the velocity of light. One naturally asks, what would be the energy of a body of mass m moving with velocity v in a universe where light does not exist and has never existed?—a quite conceivable condition.

These, then, are the premises and these the arguments on which we are asked to abandon what seem to be the irresistible convictions of the human mind regarding the Euclidean geometry of three-dimensional space. For there appears to be no doubt that the Relativists will have none of it on any terms, since Professor Eddington tells us that "the real three-dimensional world is obsolete, and must be replaced by four-dimensional space-time with non-Euclidean properties" (p. 181).

Now, considering that the Relativists themselves seem unable to form any intelligible conception of "four-dimensional space-time," this seems to make too heavy a demand on the human intellect. Nor, as we have seen, does the Monistic Theory of Knowledge require any such wholesale denial of our fundamental cognitions. For the simple truth seems to be that though there may indeed exist some higher order of geometry based on some profound relationship in the real world between matter, motion, space, and time, this relationship completely transcends our intellectual faculties, though it cannot belie them. For our mental faculties are themselves the products of these real relations, and hence, while necessarily limited in their scope, are also necessarily true in their ultimate verdicts.

A. E. MADDOCK.

Acid Drops.

There is a gentleman living in Yorkshire named W. Cunliffe. He is, in fact, the Vicar of St. Chrysostom's Parish, Bradford, and after reading a letter sent by him to the *Yorkshire Observer*, and dealing with the Gott case, we felt strongly inclined to use a mouth wash. This good man desires to say a word on behalf of Mr. Gott. He knew the latter well when he lived in Bradford, and "as one who seemed a model father and husband." He then refers to the death of Gott's wife, who died, "I believe, in the faith of Christ crucified"—a statement entirely without foundation—and finishes paragraph number one with a compliment to that "exemplary young lady" his daughter. He then leads up to what is a very important topic to a parson—money. He solemnly warns believers that "unless they give more liberally than at present towards the religion of Christ, spiritual indifference, unbelief, Atheism, blasphemy, and their concomitant revolution and danger to the State are as certain as night follows day."

Having gone thus far with this fine Christian mixture of misstatement and stupidity, the vicar returns in a closing paragraph to Mr. Gott. He does not sympathize with him because of the punishment he is undergoing, but because of "the exhibition of weakness" in attacking Christianity. "To break the law of the land is nothing compared to the violation of any one of God's laws. Mr. Gott's punishment is no 'relic of the Dark Ages.' It would seem to be the best method devisable, and the most humane, so far as we know, for preventing unnecessary mental defilement, to the young especially." So ends the most contemptible exhibition of cant, silliness, and thinly disguised religious malignancy that we have seen for a long while. The only problem suggested to the psychologist

by such a letter is that of whether Christianity robs a man of decency or whether it attracts to itself those in whose make-up decency is reduced to a minimum. Probably it works both ways.

The dead hand counts for much in the survival of superstition. The late Sir F. Bowden left £2,000 to the Salvation Army. The money will serve to keep hell alight a little longer, and handicap England's chance of being civilized.

The vicar of St. John's Church, Southend-on-Sea, has been preaching on "Christ in Southend." It is an alluring subject. We wonder what Christ would have thought of excursion trains at fifty miles an hour. His modest travels were performed on the back of a donkey, like the Bank Holiday folk on Hampstead Heath.

Some well-meaning busybodies have sent religious tracts to Landru, who is under sentence of death for the murder of eleven persons. As Landru was formerly a chorister, and a sub-deacon in a Roman Catholic church, probably he knows more of tracts than his correspondents. His career is a striking example of the real value of a religious education.

There is to be a Conference at the Royal Military College, Camberley, to discuss the following questions:

Analyse and understand the present apparent indifference to Christianity.

Realize what the young generation is really keen on.

Consider whether our presentation of Christianity is a true one, and whether if it were true it would not meet the actual needs and wants of men.

The joke of the whole thing is that the Conference is being arranged by clergymen. It has just struck some of them that it might be as well to settle whether there is any truth in Christianity and do the people want it. But they will keep on drawing their salaries in any case. They say to the public, "Heads I take, tails you pay."

There has been an outbreak of collective religious insanity in the North-east of Scotland among the fishermen. Some wild scenes have been witnessed, and many of the fishermen are refusing to go to sea for fear Jesus Christ will come during their absence. Doctors have scores of patients under their care as a result of the "revival," and some are being sent to asylums. We venture to predict that, as is usual in these outbreaks, there will not alone be an increase in the number of cases under treatment for mental disorders, but there will also be an increase in the illegitimacy rate. The grave injury done to both individual and social health is now being generally recognized by efficient medical men and scientific sociologists, but the clergy care but little for that so long as their immediate ends are served.

It looks as if the long-promised revival of religion was at hand. The Bishop of Oxford confirmed 166 Eton boys recently. On reflection, however, the boys couldn't help it.

Miss Edith Picton-Turbervill has written a book on *Christ and the International Life*. In it she says that Jesus "dwelt in a carpenter's shop." If the lady turns to the old legends she will find that the Founder of Christianity wielded the jack-plane with his sacred hands. He was more than a mere lodger.

The Grand Jury has been revived, and we do not at all endorse the views of papers such as the *Westminster Gazette* and the *Daily News* that it should have been allowed to lapse. It did lapse during the war, but that was not because it wasted time, but because the Grand Jury having to return a true bill before a case could be tried, that body might have stood in the way of some of the

high-handed and quite unconstitutional actions of the Government. And, indeed, protest against its suspension was raised in the House of Lords, which body showed far more regard for constitutional rights than did the House of Commons. Historically, the Grand Jury has done more than merely decide whether there is a *prima facie* case for trial. It has often defeated the action of the authorities in setting on foot purely vindictive prosecutions, or rendering bad Acts of Parliament ineffective by declining to return a true bill. One cannot trust to judges or magistrates in such cases. They are usually hide-bound by the letter of the law, and in the case of common law the direction of a judge, while right enough by the mere letter, is positively misleading to the jury before him. We deal with this important aspect of the common law elsewhere in this issue.

The *Leeds Mercury*, in a leading article on "The Tragedy of Irreligion," deeply regrets that religion is losing its hold on the people, and hopes that there will be a revival. It points out that at the beginning of the nineteenth century English people were passing through a period of economic depression, but were able to pull through because the period "coincided with one of constantly intensifying religious fervour." What the *Leeds Mercury* might have said had it been informed and honest, is that it was while the people were having their attention distracted by the religious revival they were robbed of almost their last rights in the common lands of England, driven from the fields to the workshops to become so many pieces of machinery, that children of seven years of age were herded into the factories and died like flies while this epoch of "religious fervour" saw initiated one of the most retrogressive periods in the history of modern England. "Look to heaven" is a favourite method of robbing people of the things of earth.

A terrible disaster occurred when the King opened Parliament. When the speech was prepared for reading in the House of Lords those responsible for it omitted to wind up with the customary "I pray that the blessings of Almighty God may rest on your labours." When the omission was discovered a message was sent to the papers asking them to insert the missing words. And now, unless Almighty reads the papers he will never know that he is expected to bless the present session of Parliament.

In America, at the opening of the Peace Conference a prayer was offered by the Rev. Mr. Abernethy. A reporter was afterwards enquiring of Prince Tokugama, one of the Japanese delegates, his impression of the meeting. "Doesn't it seem strange to you?" he was asked. "Indeed, yes," he replied, "for instance, there was the prayer of Mr. Abernethy. It was given out all nice and printed to reporters in advance. It reached your newspapers before it reached God." We wonder how "God" will take that snub! To find the impromptu prayer of Mr. Abernethy given out to the *Baltimore Eagle* before it was offered to God is enough to make Mr. Justice Ivory squirm. We suggest that in future these offered prayers might be abbreviated to "Oh, Lord, see last night's 'Late Extra' for all our needs." It would save time and would be quite as effective.

Speaking at the annual dinner of the Savage Club, Dean Inge said that the average man wasted two years of life putting on and taking off clothes; and women wasted ten years in the same occupation. The dean might have added that the dresses of the clergy are but a savage survival, and they also waste much time putting their petticoats on and off.

Glancing the other day at some of the illustrations in one of the daily papers we came across a picture which we thought at first to be an advertisement of one of the forthcoming pantomimes. A closer look showed it to be merely a picture of a number of some of the "celebrities" of the House of Lords at the opening of Parliament. And that made us wish, not for the first time, that we could all see

ourselves as others see us. For a more ridiculous picture than these men in their cocked hats, feathers, laced coats, etc., it would be impossible to conceive. If they saw savages dressed in feathers and paint for one of their ceremonies each of these feathered and costumed gentlemen would smile inwardly, if not outwardly. But what essential difference is there in the two pictures? And was not Emerson right when he suggested that these wigs, and patches, and scarlet coats, together with titles belong to the category of paint and tattoo marks and to the atmosphere of Australia and Polynesia? It is playing to the primitive and savage instincts of mankind, and it is by playing to these that social absurdities are prolonged and social injustices perpetuated.

If people could only develop a sense of humour in relation to these things, how much easier the task of the reformer would be! If we could only divest these social functions of all these pantomimic trappings how much easier it would be to get people to judge our institutions from the standpoint of social utility! As it is these absurdities not only impose upon the mass of the people, they impose upon those who carry them out. Put Lord Dunfinkum into a laced coat and a hat with a cockatoo's feather and he becomes impressed with the gap between himself and the ordinary man. Put him into the dress of an ordinary man and he is driven back upon his own common sense and whatever genuine intelligence he happens to possess. You revive the atmosphere of Patagonia along with the dress, and help to preserve institutions that should long since have been wiped out. We wonder how long it will be before men of real worth refuse to accept titles, and insist on dressing themselves like ordinary gentlemen, instead of dressing like a troop of travelling players who are compelled to wear their stage clothes because they are without the funds to purchase others. In other words, how long will it be before the world is really civilized?

The late Rev. L. F. Tyrwhitt, of Burton-on-Trent, left £7,417. Another worthy man gone to the place he used to preach of.

Bad News for Parsons.

It is the proud boast of Walcott, the richest town per head of its population in Iowa, that it has neither churches nor a gaol.

The town, says the *New York Central News'* correspondent, is unique. For more than fifty years it has been without a church. It once had a gaol, but, like its only church, established sixty-five years ago, it is now discarded.

While the gaol building still stands, there is no vestige of a church edifice. But there are no locks to the gaol, and its hinges have rotted off. It is never used.

"We are free thinkers, and believe in free American citizenship seven days a week. We do not need preachers to dictate to us. We are better without them," says the Mayor.

"We are getting along very well as we are—much better than with churches. We like to be let alone. There is no more peaceful or law-abiding town in the whole United States than Walcott. Why should we want churches? They bring strife and dissensions—we want peace and quietude."

It is no secret how Walcott residents spend their Sabbath. "Shows and dances are our principal Sunday amusement," the Mayor added. "Then in summer we enjoy baseball and automobile riding." In case of weddings, most of the couples go to Davenport and look up a justice. In very rare instances a minister is called in.

Most of the funerals in the town are conducted by Johannes Kroeger, who delivers the oration in either German or English, as the mourners desire.

Kroeger possesses no Church affiliations or religious beliefs. In other words, he is a pastor without a creed. Baptisms are unknown in the town.

—From the *Pall Mall Gazette*, December 7, 1921.

WHY NOT HAND THIS COPY TO A LIKELY

Special.

A SPECIAL meeting of the Executive of the N. S. S. was held on December 15 to consider the position of the Society with regard to the Blasphemy trial. After carefully reviewing the situation it was decided to carry the matter to the Court of Appeal. We believe this to be in accord with the general desire of the Freethought Party, although it is well to warn them against building extravagant hopes of the result. But there is certainly good ground for an appeal in the summing up of Justice Avory, about which we can speak more freely when the appeal is out of the way. Anyway, we are used to fighting against odds, and it will be some gain to keep public attention fixed on the trial. Light and air are the natural enemies of disease, whether the disease be social or personal, and every time we drag these infamous blasphemy laws into the light of day we are bringing them a step nearer extinction. And we may yet make the bigots regret that they entrusted their creed to the care of a West Ham policeman and crowned Justice Avory with the diadem of Defender of the Faith.

It is the aim of the Executive to make this case the starting point of an agitation which shall have as its object the abolition of the blasphemy laws. A meeting is being arranged, to take place early in January, and some well-known men and women are being invited to attend. We are refusing the co-operation of none and inviting that of all in this agitation. And in this a large number of our readers can lend a hand. We invite them to keep the matter well to the front. They can do this by writing to the papers, several good letters have already appeared, they can see to it that at all meetings where it can be managed a resolution condemning the blasphemy laws is passed, and this should be sent to the Home Secretary, properly signed by the chairman. They can interview their Parliamentary representative, and as an election is near at hand candidates should also be questioned, and their replies forwarded to us so that they may be filed. If we are to succeed we must show the world that we mean business.

The two trials were briefly reported in a large number of papers, but there were few comments on them in the shape of leading articles. The religious papers remained quite dumb. This could not be because the trials were not of importance to them, we suspect it was because they felt it rather dangerous to make any comment. If they approved they were open to the charge of bigotry, if they disapproved they would offend the more bigoted section of their own readers. So they remained silent, contemptible enough to take advantage of the law, and yet without the courage to openly support it.

In the long run we shall have to depend mainly upon ourselves. That is not surprising. The rough work, the work that involved the greatest danger and the greatest labour has always fallen to the lot of the N. S. S., and we suppose it always will. For my own part it is no light task to have added to my own already sufficiently large volume of work that of a closely contested and long drawn out blasphemy prosecution, and I have several times lately felt that I was getting very near the margin of physical resistance. But the work *must* be done, and that is all there is about it.

Mr. Gott is at present in Wormwood Scrubbs prison, and the solicitor who visited him there in connection with the appeal tells me that he is in hospital and on hospital diet. He wished him to convey his thanks for all that has been done for him, and is quite pleased and satisfied with the way in which his case was fought. An application has been made to the Court for his release on bail, pending the hearing of the appeal, which is not expected to occur until the new year. We have only slight hopes of the application being granted, but we can try.

A question concerning the Blasphemy prosecution was asked in the House of Commons by Mr. Will Thorne on December 16. We take the following report from the *Daily Telegraph* :—

MR. W. THORNE (Labour, Plaistow) asked the Home Secretary whether he was aware that Mr. W. Gott was sentenced at the Central Criminal Court on a charge of blasphemy, and that his trial took place on Wednesday, December 7; that the jury disagreed and were discharged,

and a new trial ordered two days later, namely, Friday, December 9, and that after a long consultation the jury brought in a verdict of guilty and recommended clemency, and the man in question was sentenced to nine months' hard labour; who was responsible for the prosecution and who would pay expenses; whether the man in question was ordered out of the borough of West Ham, and under what order or regulation the police had power to do so; and whether the Home Secretary would take action so that in the future any offences against public decency should be dealt with by the ordinary law.

MR. SHORTT: The facts are as stated in the earlier part of the question. The Commissioner of Police instituted the proceedings on the advice of the Director of Public Prosecutions, and the expenses will fall on the metropolitan police fund. About a month before the arrest of Gott he was causing an obstruction in the West Ham district, and a police officer, in accordance with his duty, cautioned him and caused him to move on. The prosecution was conducted under the ordinary law applicable to such cases. Gott had previously been convicted six times of similar offences.

The answer was distinctly misleading in several particulars, and did not reply to the concluding sentence of the question. If the number of times Mr. Gott was convicted referred to blasphemy charges, there were only three previous charges, not six. To say that the prosecution was conducted "under the ordinary law" after having dwelt upon the question of obstruction was misleading, since this was not the offence for which Gott was convicted, but the anything but ordinary law of blasphemy. And in view of the letter from the Home Secretary which we publish this week, in which he says, substantially, that he is ashamed of the Blasphemy laws, we are not surprised that he shirked answering the question whether he would take action to see that offences against public decency should be left to the ordinary law. Perhaps we may manage to force him to face this issue on some other occasion.

The subscriptions have come in wonderfully well, and I thank all those who have responded to the call. Above all, I have been touched by the number of small contributions that have come to hand from those who could ill afford to give, but who have given their mite merely to show that they were with us in the fight. But three trials for blasphemy, with counsel in each case, are not fought for nothing—in England. There is no country where the law is so costly as it is in this country, and where, consequently, the poor man is so helpless. Counsel *will* be paid, and their fees do not err on the side of moderation. So I commend the subscription list to all who are in earnest over this fight. My first estimate of £150 was for one trial, and it was about correct. But the two trials, with the expense of carrying the case to appeal, look like trebling the bill. And we are still a long way from that. I have no doubt the balance will soon be forthcoming, and I shall hope to see the list closed very early in the new year. I think that is all I need say on that head, except that I felt the party would not like to see the bigots beat us for want of funds. And we will make them pay the bill in full before we have finished with them.

The following is a list of subscriptions to date :—

Previously acknowledged, £208 12s. 6d. Secular Society (second subscription), £25; C. Bush (second subscription), £25; H. G. Waters, 10s.; F. C. (Blackburn), 10s.; Mrs. B. Siger, 2s. 6d.; W. Ainsley, 2s. 6d.; J. Churchill, 1s.; W. Gee, 1s.; S. Hammett, 6d.; E. Gill, 1s.; S. D. 6d.; S. G. Bullock, 1s.; E. K., 1s.; J. Drayton, 2s. 6d.; Varkin, 5s.; G. E. Finch, £1 1s.; H. Lupton, 5s.; H. Dawson (second subscription), £1; J. Sumner, £10; G. Lunn, 2s. 6d.; G. G., 5s.; W. Thomson, 10s.; C. Clayton Dove, £1; G. Saunders, 5s.; G. Robertson, 5s.; J. Robertson, 5s.; F. Wright, 1s.; G. E. Webb, £2; S. A. Gimson, £1 1s.; Alfred Howson (Per J. Bartram), 10s.; E. H., 2s.; V. Wilson, 2s. 6d.; J. B. Palphreyman, 10s.; F. Billington Grieg, £3 3s.; W. Ramsden, £1 1s.; W. C. Mackay, 2s.; W. Challis, 5s.; J. Corkery, 2s. 6d.; S. H. Waite, £2; H. Barber, £1; C. E. King, £2 2s.; W. Nelson, £1 1s.; E. Truelove, 5s.; A. Button, 2s. 6d.; F. Scrace, 2s.; E. Lechmere, 2s. 6d.; A. D. M., 10s.; R. B. F., 5s.; J. White, 2s. 6d.; H. Butler, 2s. 6d.; J. Wearing, 1s.; A. D. Corrick, £1; Dr. A. W. Laing, £3.

Per H. Black (Manchester), H. W. S., 2s. 6d.; T. T. 2s. 6d.; Miss E. Williams, 10s.; Anything, 5s.; Anon, 6d.

Total—£297 6s.

SUBSCRIBER AFTER YOU HAVE READ IT?

O. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

January 8, Stratford Town Hall; January 15, Swansea; January 22, Stratford Town Hall; January 29, Stockport; February 5, Birmingham; February 19, Glasgow; March 5, Nottingham; March 12, Manchester; March 19, Leicester.

To Correspondents.

Those subscribers who receive their copy of the "Freethinker" in a GREEN WRAPPER will please take it that the renewal of their subscription is due. They will also oblige, if they do not want us to continue sending the paper, by notifying us to that effect.

V. BOND.—We have so much of our space taken up with the report of the blasphemy proceedings and so many other things that cannot be further postponed, that we are quite unable to use your MSS. Thanks all the same.

E. T. KERR.—Sorry that pressure on our space prevents our printing a lengthy account of the debate between Mr. Hendry and the Rev. Thompson. It is bound to do good in Coatbridge by calling attention to aspects of Christianity that believers seldom hear.

J. CHURCHILL.—We are obliged for your interest in the blasphemy prosecution. As you say, each fight brings us nearer the end.

F. C.—We did no more than our duty in doing what was done.

C. PENGILLY.—We know nothing of any proposed debate between Mr. J. M. Robertson and Dr. Tisdall. Mr. Robertson must be his own judge as to whether he will debate with any particular man or not. And his position is sufficiently assured to enable him to do so without any misunderstanding.

R. C. PROCTOR.—The 2s. 6d. was acknowledged in the first list, and your subscription in the second. The total was 7s. 6d. It was by an oversight that they were not both acknowledged at the same time.

MR. H. IRVING asks whether we can blame Mr. Justice Avory? He is a Christian judge, and without the jury's recommendation he might have shown his Christianity more vividly. We do not doubt. Christianity is a terrible disease when it really seizes hold of a man. Those of us who have it not do not always realize how very fortunate we are.

W. COLLINS.—We are quite at one with you in your feeling of contempt for the Press which, while eloquent in its talk about liberty, says nothing when so infamous a law as that against blasphemy is put into operation. And when two such papers as the *Daily News* and the *Star* remain silent one cannot wonder at others. Perhaps these two were afraid of being suspected of even a distant sympathy with those terrible Freethinkers. Now if it had been some milk and water unbeliever with a title or a social position that would have guaranteed "respectability," we have no doubt that the *Star* and the *News* would have discovered the matter worth noting, and would have published a column of platitudes on the matter.

F. HOBDAV.—We appreciate your indignation, but we must not lose our heads. The way to beat the bigots is to keep cool, and take every step with discretion and wisdom. We have several plans in our mind which will be made public as occasion permits.

G. PARSONS.—The pretence that the verdict in a blasphemy case is not dictated by bigotry only adds hypocrisy to the offence. A jury trying a case at common law have not only the power to render a law inoperative by declining to convict if they consider the law out of touch with the time, it is their duty to do so. And the charge of a judge to the contrary is simply so much legal verbiage.

J. JACKSON.—We do not know whether any of our readers would care to purchase the *Freethinker* Christmas numbers for 1881-2-4-7-8 and 9, but if they do we append your address, 15 Cecil Street, Massley, Lancs.

E. A. PHIPSON.—We should say that it is not at all uncommon for doctors to find their patients seeing visions of their dead friends just before they themselves die. But we do not know any medical man who regards this as anything but a delusion. On this matter Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's credulity seems boundless, and his testimony is absolutely without scientific value.

E. WALTERS.—We cannot answer your question fully in this column, but you will find the whole question of the relation of Freethought to social reform discussed in the second, third, and fourth chapters of Mr. Cohen's *Grammar of Freethought*. The book on a Future Life will be published about the end of January. It has been delayed owing to Mr. Cohen's work in other directions.

H. R. ROSETTI.—We are not forgetting the matter you raise, but we should have enough notice to make some sort of preparation. Thanks for offer of assistance.

MR. J. SUMNER sends us congratulation on our conduct of the Blasphemy trial, and says that he has doubled his intended contribution as an act of penance for being late in sending. That is quite an admirable way of making atonement.

J. ROBERTSON.—Thanks for the contributions for various friends.

G. LUNN.—We are hoping for a little interval of rest at Christmas, but as the time nears the prospect gets more remote. Glad to have the appreciation of so old a reader of the *Freethinker*.

MR. F. BILLINGTON GRIEG writes: "This number (for the 18th) is a splendid issue, and I enclose six trial subscriptions for a quarter and shall be glad if you will have the paper sent for three months, beginning with this week's issue." Mr. Billington Grieg also tells us that we were wrong in giving *Macbeth* as the source of "Damnable Iteration." It occurs in *Henry IV*, part I., act ii., scene 2. We are obliged for the correction.

G. E. WEBB.—Thanks for good wishes. We shall get all the rest we can over Christmas, but it will not be much. We are not surprised at your indignation over the blasphemy trial. The humbug of *Christians* fuming over the decencies of controversy is superb. The cant is worthy of the creed. Make the bigots pay is now the best motto for every Freethinker, and very many seem resolved to do so.

W. J.—No one likes to have his feelings hurt, and no right-minded person wishes to unnecessarily hurt the feelings of others. But we should have thought that the distinction between that and a law which specially protects the Christian religion and makes it a criminal offence for Freethinkers to offend Christians, while leaving the latter quite free to outrage the feelings of others, would have been so obvious as to make the writing of your letter quite unnecessary.

The "Freethinker" is supplied to the trade on sale or return. Any difficulty in securing copies should be at once reported to the office.

The Secular Society, Limited, office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

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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, giving as long notice as possible.

Lecture Notices must reach 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4, by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4, and not to the Editor.

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Letters for the Editor of the "Freethinker" should be addressed to 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

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

The "Freethinker" will be forwarded direct from the publishing office to any part of the world, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—

The United Kingdom.—One year, 17s. 6d.; half year, 8s. 9d.; three months, 4s. 6d.

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Sugar Plums.

We have had applications for many years for an index to the *Freethinker*. Last year we had an index compiled and printed along with bound volumes of the paper. This involved us in considerable expense and the copies sold did not justify the expenditure. However, we are trying the experiment again this year, and we should like those who desire the bound volume, with title page and index, to let us know if they can. We should then know how many to prepare. The index and title page will be sold separately, as will the covers for binding. The price will be 17s. for the bound volume, postage 1s., cloth cases with title page and index 3s. 6d., postage 4d.

We have seen nothing in the Labour papers concerning the latest blasphemy prosecution save a remark in the

Daily Herald: "We protest against the legal brutality which, because he (J. W. Gott) expresses his views in a particular manner, casts him into prison." But the Labour papers never do seem seriously interested in a fight for freedom of speech, careless of what is the opinion attacked. There appeared a very good letter from O. R. Tyndale, and another from V. Wilson, in the *Manchester Guardian*, and also an equally good one from H. L. S. in the *Yorkshire Observer*. The editor of the latter paper lamely remarks that as several of our judges have condemned Mr. Gott to imprisonment, it appears that he has had fair play. On that we shall say more when the appeal is out of the way. At present we can only remark that the editor of the *Yorkshire Observer* either does not, or will not, understand the point at issue. This is not that judges have failed to administer the law fairly, but that the law itself is a radically bad one, and should be resisted by every man and woman with a proper sense of justice.

The Newcastle Branch of the N. S. S. has sent the following resolution to the Home Secretary:—

That this meeting desires to call your attention to the disgraceful sentence of nine months' imprisonment passed upon John William Gott at the Old Bailey on the 9th inst. for Blasphemy. It knows you appreciate that these Blasphemy laws should be abolished altogether and therefore trusts that the direction of your attention to this vicious and anomalous sentence will suffice to lead you to immediately quash it.

From the West Ham Branch we receive the following resolution:—

The West Ham Branch of the National Secular Society emphatically protests against the revival of the obsolete Blasphemy laws, and considers the sentence of nine months' hard labour passed upon J. W. Gott, after the jury's failing to agree at the first trial, and its recommendation to clemency at the second trial, as being severe, vindictive, and alien to the sense of justice, and asks the Home Office either to liberate J. W. Gott, or place him in the second division.

The Branch is also sending a request to the West Ham Library Committee that the *Freethinker* be placed on the tables of the public libraries. We have received similar resolutions from the Leeds Branch of the N. S. S. and from the North-west Glasgow Unemployment Committee.

There was an excellent attendance at Friars Hall last Sunday to hear Mr. Lloyd's lecture on "The Bankruptcy of Christianity." Referring to the persecution of the world's great thinkers by the Church, the speaker said that such a thing as a prosecution for blasphemy was a sign of the weakness, not the strength, of organized Christianity to-day. This remark met with the marked approval of the audience. At the conclusion there was considerable discussion, including opposition to the lecturer's opinions by two evangelical Christians, both of whom condemned the corrupt teachings and practices of many modern dignitaries of the Church.

We have had certain enquiries lately why no mention was made of certain provincial Freethought meetings. We can only say that we have refused insertion to only one, and in that case we wrote the Secretary, who quite approved our action. But we cannot insert notices or paragraphs unless the information reaches us in time for that week's issue of the paper. Notices must reach us by the first post on Tuesday morning if they are to be inserted in that week's issue.

Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner contributes an article to the January number of the *Literary Guide* in which she remarks that Justice Ivory, as Mr. Ramsey's counsel in the 1883 trials, "had a unique opportunity of learning wisdom and tolerance from that high-minded and eminent Judge, Lord Chief Justice Coleridge; but, either because advancing years have dulled his perception or for some other reason, he does not seem to have profited by his great opportunity." She rightly insists that in these cases

it is the principle, not the person, that is at stake. This makes it more regrettable that the Rationalist Press Association did not see its way to identify itself with the defence, although Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner and Mr. C. A. Watts both contributed to the Defence Fund. The *Guide* also contains about a column of editorial notes on the subject, in which a protest is made against the severity of the sentence, and mention is made of the prompt way in which the cost of the first trial was met by *Freethinker* readers—we believe it established a record in the speed with which the amount then required was subscribed. Unfortunately, the extra trial and the appeal considerably increase the expense. The *Guide* mentions this and draws the attention of its readers to the fact that the Fund is in existence. We agree with the writer of the notes that the trial should be made the starting point of an agitation for the repeal of the Blasphemy laws, and the Executive has already taken the preliminary steps for this. The co-operation of the R. P. A. has been invited, and the invitation accepted. Others are also being asked to cooperate. Once more we must make the bigots pay.

We are pleased to learn that the Manchester Branch held two successful meetings on Sunday last, both the speakers being local men. In the afternoon the President of the Branch, Mr. F. E. Monks, lectured on the "Blasphemy Laws," and in the evening Mr. S. Cohen lectured. A resolution demanding the repeal of the Blasphemy laws was also passed.

We have an article in type on Gustave Flaubert which to be strictly "on time" should appear in this issue, the week of the Flaubert centenary. Unfortunately, we have so much other matter that must appear this week that we must hold it over for the new year's issue. But it will be none the worse for the keeping.

Prosecution for "Blasphemy."

II.

(Continued from page 814.)

JUDGE'S SUMMING UP.

THE JUDGE: The prisoner is charged in this indictment with publishing a blasphemous libel in a pamphlet called *The Rib Tickler* on the 12th November, in the second count he is charged with publishing a further blasphemous libel in the small pamphlet called *Rib Ticklers, or Questions for Parsons* which was enclosed in one of the others, and in the third count he is charged with publishing in another pamphlet, *God and Gott*, a blasphemous libel. No question arises before you as to whether it is good or bad policy to prosecute people for blasphemy. All that you have to do to-day is to determine according to law whether the defendant has been guilty of the offence of publishing a blasphemous libel. I cannot do better in laying down the law to you than to repeat what was said by the late Lord Chief Justice Coleridge as far back as 1883. Mr. Curtis Bennett says that the law has progressed like everything else since 1883, but in point of fact in my opinion the law has not progressed one single step beyond that which was laid down in 1883, and the fact that the law as it was then laid down has been approved and adopted in quite recent years shows that that is still good law as it was then laid down. I will repeat the passage which I cited in answer to the argument of Mr. Curtis Bennett when he contended there was no case for the jury.

The law is this: "The denial of the truth of the Christian religion or of the Scriptures is not enough by itself to constitute a writing a blasphemous libel so as to render the writer or publisher indictable, but indecent and offensive attacks on Christianity or the Scriptures or sacred persons or objects calculated to outrage the feelings of the general body of the community do constitute the offence of blasphemy." The question for you in this case is whether the passages in these pamphlets which were being sold by the defendant, and from which extracts have been taken and appear in the abstract of the indictment of which copies have been handed to you, are within the meaning of that definition blasphemous libels. That is a matter entirely for you. You have the responsibility of

judging, looking at, and reading these passages, whether they are blasphemous libels. I cannot assent to the view which has been put before you by Mr. Curtis Bennett that the question is whether persons on that Saturday night in Stratford Broadway would be incited by the sale of these pamphlets to commit then and there a breach of the peace. It may well be that the one man who made the observation to the effect that the defendant ought to be ashamed of himself was the only man who stopped to read the contents of the pamphlet before he went away. It may be that even if others did stop and read them they happened to be of the same way of thinking as the defendant. It does not follow that those persons who happened to be there on Saturday night can be taken fairly to represent the community at large, and the question for you is whether these passages or pamphlets are calculated to outrage the feelings of the general body of the community. It is not a question whether they are calculated to outrage the feelings of the people who happen to be in Stratford Broadway on a particular Saturday night. It is you who are supposed to represent the general community, and to have to say whether in your opinion these pamphlets are calculated to outrage the feelings of the general community. Certain passages have been read from another case which went to the House of Lords, and which, in my opinion, not only do not alter the law, but they confirm it. One of the Law Lords in 1917 in this case said: "In my opinion to constitute blasphemy at common law there must be such an element of vilification, ridicule or irreverence as would be likely to exasperate the feelings of others and so lead to a breach of the peace." He does not mean that there must be some evidence that anybody who bought this pamphlet would naturally immediately turn round and give the man a thrashing who sold it. Breaches of the peace might be caused by persons who go home and read this pamphlet and come down next day and find the man still selling it and may then be provoked to a breach of the peace. That is how breaches of the peace might be caused. If the defendant had made some insulting answer to the man who said "You ought to be ashamed of yourself," what would have probably happened?

Another Law Lord said: "What after all is really the gist of the offence of blasphemy? Ribaldry has been treated as the gist. The Courts of Law dealt with such words for their manner, their violence, their ribaldry, or—more fully stated—for their tendency to endanger peace then and there." It does not mean then and there on the spot where the things are sold, for such things may be sold in a shop or there may be an advertisement in a window. Some one goes in, buys it, takes it out of the shop and never looks at it until he gets it home. It is not necessary to prove that anybody who buys the thing is provoked then and there to a breach of the peace.

It is not necessary for me to say anything more to you about the law. You have these extracts which have been taken from these pamphlets before you and you should, before making up your minds, not stop at one page, but read through the whole of them, and if any of the passages come within the definition as being ribald, irreverent, and not in any sense coming within the definition of decent controversy, which is protected on any subject in this country, then you must determine whether they are not as the prosecution say blasphemous libels. You have before you an abstract of the three counts of the indictment. If you will look at the second count of the indictment you will find toward the end of the passage in the second count a passage which comes just after "Faith as a mountain will not move a grain of mustard seed." And another passage beginning "Where the Bible reports Jesus as saying 'In my Father's house there are many mansions' the word mansions should read flats." Ask yourselves whether that comes within the bounds of decent controversy, or whether it does not come within a description of blasphemy, as something ribald, insulting to anybody who holds the Christian faith.

I only call your attention to that as a specimen. You must look at them all. In the third count of the indictment you will see a passage "If Jesus were alive now." I only point those out, I am not professing to express any opinion of my own on them, as examples of what the prosecution may fairly point out as matters which are quite outside the bounds of decent controversy, quite out-

side the bounds of decent denial of the truth of the Christian religion or of the Scriptures. Whether it is not an indecent or offensive attack on Christianity or the Scriptures calculated to outrage the feeling of the general body of the community is for you to say.

After deliberating among themselves for a little time the foreman, addressing the Judge, said there were eight for and four against. The Judge interrupting, asked the jury if they wished to retire. The jury expressed a wish to withdraw, and after an absence of nearly two hours they returned and the foreman said there was no possibility of them agreeing. "One gentleman is biased," he said, "we cannot convince him at all."

The Judge said he must reluctantly discharge them from giving a verdict, and he would try the case again on Friday.

The jury was accordingly discharged and the case adjourned.

SECOND TRIAL.

At the Central Criminal Court on Friday, December 9, the case was retried in which John William Gott, 55, was indicted on three charges for publishing blasphemous libels on November 12 in a pamphlet called *The Rib Tickler* concerning the Holy Scriptures and the Christian religion. The charge also related to another pamphlet called *God and Gott*.

DEFENDANT pleaded not guilty.

SIR RICHARD MUIR prosecuted, and MR. CURTIS BENNETT, K.C., and MR. HAROLD MURPHY were for the defence.

The case was first tried on Wednesday, December 7, but the jury failed to agree and Mr. Justice Avory ordered a re-trial.

SIR RICHARD MUIR said that the prisoner was charged with the crime of blasphemy. Blasphemy might be either spoken or written. In this case it was written blasphemy, printed documents that the prisoner was selling on the 12th November last at 7.30 in the evening at the Broadway, Stratford. They were in the form of pamphlets, one called *The Liberator* and the other called *The Rib Tickler*, and in *The Liberator* there were two minor pamphlets which contained passages or some of the passages that were charged as being blasphemous. The subject of blasphemy had been discussed in the Courts for a good many years. In 1883 there was a decision by the late Lord Chief Justice Coleridge which made the crime less wide in its scope than it had heretofore been thought to be. Since then the law had been administered uniformly so far as he was aware in accordance with that decision. The whole matter in the year 1917 came under the review of the House of Lords and the law was restated then by the various Law Lords who dealt with that case, and he would read one short passage which in his submission stated the law accurately as it existed at the present day: "In my opinion," the late Lord Parker had said, "to constitute blasphemy at common law there must be such an element of vilification, ridicule or irreverence as would be likely to exasperate the feelings of others and so lead to a breach of the peace." In order that what was meant by that might be fully grasped counsel read a passage quoted by Lord Finlay, then Lord Chancellor, in the same judgment, from the judgment of Lord Chief Justice Coleridge, to which he had referred. He said in page 421: "Lord Chief Justice Coleridge laid it down in the case of the Queen against Ramsey and Foote that if the decencies of controversy are observed then the fundamentals of religion may be attacked without the writer being guilty of blasphemy." So that those two passages were the co-relatives of each other. In attacking the fundamentals of religion, in order to avoid being guilty of blasphemy the decencies of controversy must be observed, and there must not be used vilification, ridicule or irreverence such as was likely to exasperate the feelings of others and so lead to a breach of the peace. What took place on the evening in question was that the defendant was selling the pamphlets. A police inspector came upon the scene and in the hearing of the police inspector and others, members of the public were heard to express within the defendant's hearing their annoyance and disgust at the contents of the pamphlets which he was selling. Of course, the measure of annoyance and disgust was not to be ascertained on the spot where the people bought the pamphlets. Many of them

would not read, he submitted that probably the bulk of them would not read, them at all until they got home, and their disgust would be expressed out of the hearing of the defendant. And according to the strict rules of our law what they said when they read them would not be evidence against him, but what they said in his presence was evidence against him. But after all it was not the opinion of the man or woman in the street which was the criterion of whether those passages were blasphemous or not. The twelve gentlemen of the jury were the judges of that, and if in their opinion the passages in question, attacking as they did the fundamentals of religion, of the Christian faith, did not observe the decencies of controversy, and on the other hand they used terms of vilification, ridicule, and irreverence such as was likely to excite annoyance and so lead to a breach of the peace, then the documents in question were blasphemous. "We have taken the precaution to have prepared for your use a dozen copies of the passages, which are not in controversy," counsel proceeded. "It is not suggested at all on the part of the defendant that he did not publish these passages. What will be submitted on his behalf I do not doubt is that they are not blasphemous, and you are the judges of that. Will you look at the documents which will be handed to you containing the passages from the indictment which are relied upon by the prosecution as being blasphemous. The first of the passages begins—I do not propose to read them out for reasons which you will thoroughly appreciate—'He fasteth' and you will then observe the comment at the end 'No witnesses.' The third contains the expression 'Beaufeast,' the fourth of them 'He occasionally amused himself,' and sixth compares our Saviour to a circus clown, and there are other passages all of which I submit to you are blasphemous. Then take the next one contained in the second count from the pamphlet called *The Rib Tickler*, where there is a reference to a 'pub and the inspiration of spirits.' Then in the third count I will call your attention to one or two references. One is 'interned in gaol or in khaki,' and you will see the other passage from 'If Jesus were alive now.' I do not think I need read any more of them, but you will read and consider the whole of them, and you will have to say: Do these passages observe the decencies of controversy? Do they not, on the other hand, contain such an element of vilification, ridicule, or irreverence as to be likely to exasperate the feelings of others and so lead to a breach of the peace? Those are the questions that you will have to answer, as I anticipate, my Lord will direct you, in deciding whether or not these statements are blasphemous, and if you find that any one of them come within the definition which my Lord will lay down to you, of blasphemy, then your duty will be to find the defendant guilty. Can you imagine passages more likely to exasperate the feelings of persons, some of them it may be women, who are not likely to go up to the defendant and attempt to assault him, but will communicate their views to others? Women and children might get these pamphlets. Can you imagine anything more likely to lead to a breach of the peace than any member of the Christian faith being shown, or purchasing by inadvertence pamphlets of this description, than the passages to which your attention will be directed? I suppose that no subject in history has led to more bitter controversy or public disturbance than the question of religion, and even where the fundamentals of the Christian religion are not attacked we know from bitter experience in the neighbouring island that people who differ on views of the Christian religion resort to violence and bloodshed as the result of the exasperation of their feelings caused by controversy upon that subject. In my submission the documents which are here charged as having been published by the defendant do come within the definition of blasphemy as it has been laid down in the Courts. And if that is so you will find the defendant guilty."

INSPECTOR HORACE ELPHICK, of the Metropolitan Police, stationed at West Ham, said that on the 12th November at 7.30 he saw the defendant in the Broadway, Stratford. He was, with another man, selling two pamphlets, one called *The Liberator* and one called *The Rib Tickler*. He produced the pamphlets. Inside *The Liberator* were two smaller pamphlets entitled *God and Gott* and *The Rib Tickler*. He saw a large number of persons buy both pamphlets. Defendant was charging for them twopence

each. Witness heard one man say, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself." He sent a man to purchase two pamphlets and as there was a large crowd around prisoner he arrested him for obstruction. He made no reply. On the 21st November he was charged with blasphemy and again made no reply. Witness had previously cautioned defendant for selling pamphlets and had turned him out of West Ham.

In cross examination witness admitted that there was a large crowd there at the time.

He had two placards which he was holding up?—Yes.

Was he saying anything to the people who bought the papers?—I did not hear him say anything.

I suggest to you that he was making quite clear that these were documents which were against the Christian religion?—No, sir.

How far were you away?—A few yards.

You say you had warned him before. Was he causing an obstruction on that occasion?—Yes, sir, but he went away immediately.

When you arrested him you did not arrest him for blasphemy but for obstruction?—That is so.

Of course that was an offence for which he might have been dealt with before the magistrate, and he was in fact so charged before the magistrate upon the first occasion?—Yes.

And then after the lapse of a week he was charged with blasphemy?—Yes.

None of these things were being given away they were all being sold?—That is so.

HIS LORDSHIP: Had you yourself seen the contents of these papers before you arrested him?—Yes, my lord.

P.C. IVAN WRIGHT said he was with Inspector Elphick, but he did not hear what any of the people said in the defendant's hearing.

This witness was not cross examined.

WILLIAM ROGERS, Chief Inspector of the R.S.P.C.A., said on the evening of 12th November at the request of the inspector he bought a couple of pamphlets which the defendant was selling. He heard a lady who had purchased a copy and read it under a lamp-post say on coming back to the prisoner "Disgusting, disgusting."

Was the inspector there when that was said?—No, he was in the middle of the road.

You were just acting as his agent in buying these articles?—That is so.

SIR RICHARD MUIR intimated that that was the case for the prosecution.

(To be Continued.)

Correspondence.

FREEMASONRY WITHOUT GOD.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I would take the liberty of bringing to the notice of the different readers whose enquiries I have seen through the "To Correspondents" column in the past, from time to time, that there exists in London a Masonic Lodge where no belief in God or Oath on the Bible is exacted. The address is The Concordia Lodge, 8 Taviston Street, Gordon Square. ASILAR.

EARLY CHRISTIAN BLASPHEMY.

SIR,—I enclose herewith one pound in cheque for your "Blasphemy" Fund. The early Christians, those models of meekness and forbearance, used to blaspheme the Pagan deities with both words and deeds. Celsus (A.D. 178) introduces the typical Christian of his day as saying, "I place myself near the statues of Zeus or Apollo, or of any other god, and I blaspheme and I strike; and yet in no wise does he revenge himself on me" (8.33). Celsus reminds such blasphemers that the god whose living images they profess to be allows their persecution without avenging them, and that he even permitted his own son to be blasphemed and crucified without avenging him. To the rejoinder that the Christian God has reasons for his longanimity Celsus replies, that the same thing might be said of the Pagan deities. Origen, many years later, in his answer to Celsus, attempts to deny those blasphemies, but they are fully proved from other sources (Keim's *Celsus*). C. CLAYTON DOVE.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF SPECIAL MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON DECEMBER 15, 1921.

The President, Mr. C. Cohen, in the chair. Also present: Messrs. Corrigan, Lloyd, Moss, Neate, Rosetti and Silverstein; Miss Pankhurst, Miss Pitcher, Miss Kough and the Secretary. Mr. Brandes, President of the South London Branch, also attended.

The business before the meeting was to consider the Society's further action in regard to the vindictive sentence passed on J. W. Gott on December 9. The Chairman, who was present at both trials, gave a detailed account of the proceedings and of his interviews with the counsel and solicitor concerned as to whether or not there should be an appeal.

After a few questions it was resolved, unanimously:—

That this Executive learns with the greatest indignation of the sentence of nine months' imprisonment with hard labour inflicted upon Mr. J. W. Gott at the Old Bailey on December 9 for the manufactured and theological offence of Blasphemy. It strongly protests against the revival and application of so mediæval an instrument as the Blasphemy law, and in view of the attitude of the judge who tried the case, and the nature of his charge to the jury, resolves to carry the case to the Court of Appeal, and authorizes the President to take whatever steps may be necessary to secure a reversal of a judgment so entirely at variance with enlightened sentiment and opinion.

It was further resolved that a Public Meeting be called to protest against and demand the repeal of the Blasphemy laws. The Secretary was given instructions to make arrangements for a suitable hall, and to invite the co-operation of various public bodies. The Rationalist Press Association had already been invited.

The Editor of the *Freethinker* was requested to kindly continue his appeal for funds.

E. M. VANCE,
General Secretary.

Obituary.

It is with the deepest regret that we learn of the death of Mr. David Seddon, of Prescott, near Liverpool. Mr. Seddon was a well-known and greatly respected figure in the local life of Prescott, and had held there several official positions. He had also been a member of the Liverpool Branch of the N. S. S., and was an enthusiastic supporter of local and general propaganda. For some time he had been suffering from cancer of the stomach, although not aware of the nature of his complaint. He died on December 12, aged 74, leaving a son and five daughters. A lengthy obituary notice of Mr. Seddon, paying a high tribute to his character, and mentioning the fact of his being a Freethinker appeared in the local press. There was a large attendance at the funeral, which was one of a non-religious character. His death removes a familiar and genial figure from the ranks of Liverpool Freethinkers.



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