

# FREETHINKER

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## Views and Opinions.

### A Dangerous Crime.

When I listened to the summing up of Mr. Justice Avory in the recent Blasphemy case, and noted the way in which he carefully suppressed everything that would tell in favour of the defendant, the emphasis placed on everything that would tell against him, the calm manner in which the jury was told that the right impulse of every real man who read Mr. Gott's publications would be to punch the head of the seller, above all, when I noted the malice of tone, manner, and speech, I felt that for sheer vindictiveness on the Bench that summing up would be hard to beat. Nearly everyone in court was impressed in the same way. But I had another surprise in the Appeal Court. Blasphemy has before been called by judges a serious offence, a grave offence, etc, but usually they have fallen short of calling it a crime, although they may have been technically justified in doing so. The Lord Chief Justice established a record in this direction. I do not altogether envy him this, as I do not think he is ever likely to establish a reputation for the brilliancy or profundity of his judgments. But he made history—of a kind—when he said that blasphemy was "a very dangerous crime." I noted the comment as it fell from his lips, and I see that it has stuck with a number of papers that reported the case. It was unique; it touched the very heights, or depths, of judicial stupidity. It makes one wonder where some of our judges are selected from, or why they are chosen. Perhaps, if they left off the wigs and coloured gowns and dressed like ordinary human beings they might import into the law the same common sense that obtains among reasonable men in every-day life. But the comment was made, and the man who made it sits in the seat once occupied by Lord Coleridge!

### Sincere Stupidity.

Unquestionably the Lord Chief Justice was sincere when he said blasphemy was a dangerous crime. But sincerity is no guarantee of intelligence, nor is it a protection against bigotry. And it is just as well to try and discover if any intelligible idea lay behind this momentous utterance. In the first place there could be no doubt as to the immediate facts which drew forth the declaration. These were supplied in the case before him. The particular passages which so moved the three judges who heard the Appeal were not read out,

but I was close enough to hear them reading them over to each other and can say what they were. The worst of them were that Jesus entered Jerusalem on two donkeys, like a clown entering a circus, that when the Bible says "In my Father's house there are many mansions," the word mansions should read "flats," that much of the Bible reads as though it were written under the influence of "spirits," etc. Now I am not going to discuss whether one ought or ought not, from the point of view of either taste or tactics, to talk in this way, although if any Christian tells me that I *must* not talk to him of his religion in this way, instead of leaving it to my own judgment as to how I should talk, I should most likely say these things and many worse, I am now only trying to discover in what way they constitute a dangerous crime. That they may be dangerous to those who utter them while there are judges like Avory and the Lord Chief Justice in power is clear. But that is only because a law that is the essence of religious bigotry finds certain judges in sympathy with it. More liberal minded and more genuinely cultured men would have found the law far more dangerous than the offence, and would have done their best to moderate its crude brutality. The tag "we must administer the law as it stands" is, in such cases, only an excuse behind which bigotry shelters itself. It is the duty of good men and wise men to temper the law to circumstances, not to make it an instrument of their own narrow prejudices.

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### The Feelings of Christians.

Putting the blasphemer on one side there remain only, as parties to whom the offence is a danger, God Almighty and his worshippers. But it can hardly be that the believer assumes that anybody's blasphemy can be dangerous to God. Personally, I think it is extremely dangerous to him. I hold that God only exists so long as anyone believes in him and takes him seriously. The moment you cease to believe in him or learn to laugh at him he ceases to be. I have never heard of a god who could persist in the face of a few jokes. Other things may, but not gods. There is so little humour present in their creation that no sooner is that element allowed to intrude than they shrivel and die. Still, one assumes that these three old gentlemen in robes as ridiculous and wigs as fusty as the law they were administering do not believe that. We must do them the justice of assuming that they have not developed beyond the point of assuming that the Biblical God, who is the only God in this country that is taken under the protection of the police, is an actual existence. Parents will be quite familiar with the fairy tale stage in children. So that we are thrown back on the only other class in relation to which blasphemy is a dangerous crime. It is dangerous to those who believe in this theological Fee-Fo-Fi-Fum. And the ground of this is plainly stated by both Justice Avory and the Appeal Judges. The feelings of Christians are hurt when they see or hear their religion being treated with ridicule. And they are then irresistibly tempted to commit personal violence on the blasphemer, unless a policeman steps in and punishes him instead. But

this is surely only an encouragement to hooliganism and intolerance. The right attitude would be to point out to these Christians that civilized and educated people no longer wish to murder a man because he differs from them in opinion, or because he laughs at things which they take quite seriously. The law should try to civilize people, not place a premium on their lack of culture. It is not a dangerous crime to laugh at a man's opinion in politics or in art or in anything except religion. Thus, it is not only I who say that a belief in the Christian deity is a mark of a low level of mentality. Justice Avory says it is. The Lord Chief Justice says it is. The Blasphemy laws say it is. For they all unite in saying that you must not expect people to exhibit the same restraint, and the same degree of toleration and good nature in relation to religion that they display in relation to other things. In religion they are still savages. And I should be the last to dispute that statement.

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#### The Limits of Self-Control.

But these stupidly solemn judges of ours should reflect that if there are limits to the self-control on the one side, so there are on the other. And there are limits to the degree of gravity with which I can treat the farrago of nonsensical stories that go to make up essential Christianity. Because he must, the Christian of to-day will permit the statement that I do not believe in the virgin birth of Jesus. But if I say that in my opinion there was in Jerusalem some ordinary man who was the father of Jesus, and that Mary could have thrown light on that matter, that is a dangerous crime. But surely the one statement involves the other. If I say it does not seem to me proved that Jesus fed five thousand people with a few loaves and fishes, and that there were left seven basketfuls of remnants when the multitude had fed, that statement will be permitted. But if I say, as Mr. Gott's indictment said, "And when the beanfeast was over there was more left than at the start," that is a dangerous crime. But what on earth can one do but laugh at absurd stories of this kind? When I read in the New Testament that Jesus took some earth, moistened it with spittle, and placed it on a blind man's eyes, and that he then recovered his sight, or that he cast devils out of men and sent them into pigs, or the other thousand and one absurdities of the Bible, what am I to do but laugh? I admit that it is dangerous to the absurd to laugh at it, but it is far more dangerous to the course of our civilization to keep a straight face before it. Why, I had all I could do not to laugh at the Lord Chief Justice when he used that fantastic expression, "a very dangerous crime." Had I done so, I might also have been fined five pounds for contempt of court. And in that case I should have felt tempted to repeat the action of a miner in a small town in America who was fined five dollars for a similar offence. "All right Judge," he remarked, "here's twenty dollars. I have more than five dollars' worth of contempt for this court."

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#### The Crime and the Criminal.

Were it not that a man is suffering nine months' hard labour for laughing at Justice Avory's ridiculous religion, I should be inclined to say that the sight of men who have never experienced an hour's inconvenience on account of any opinion they hold, and who have certainly never lost a single shilling for the sake of their opinions, assuming airs of superiority over those who have sacrificed much for their convictions and are willing to sacrifice more, that picture and the priceless absurdity of the remark of the Lord Chief Justice quite compensates for the trouble and expense of the trial. To these eminent judges the man who laughs at current religious beliefs is a dangerous

criminal. And consider the men who would figure in this Newgate Calendar. We should find there men like Lucian in antiquity, Erasmus in the Middle Ages, and in recent times Voltaire, Paine, Carlyle, Holyoake, Bradlaugh, Foote and scores of others. Indeed, Spencer, and Mill, and Arnold, and Shelley, and Swinburne, with most of the wits who have dealt with religion would scarcely escape. Imagine these men standing before a comparative nonentity such as Justice Avory, who really owes the whole of his dignity to his comic costume, imagine these men standing before him as dangerous criminals! A law which leads to that situation is an outrage on civilization, and it is a virtue to break it. If I believed in a deity I should certainly say thank God for the criminals! They are some set-off against the judge. It is only they who make the existence of the judges tolerable. For, after all, the real offenders are they who take an absurdity with the gravity due to truth and treat a collection of savage superstitions and nightmare like creations of ignorant religious fanatics as on the same level as the ascertained truths of exact science. When the next census paper comes round I fancy I shall describe myself thereon as a dangerous criminal. If men like Justice Avory are then permitted to exercise power it may be the only title that a man can wear with dignity. CHAPMAN COHEN.

### Professor Foakes Jackson.

PROFESSOR F. J. FOAKES JACKSON is one of the most remarkable men in the world of present-day scholarship. Both he and Professor Lake occupy chairs in the Union Theological Seminary, New York, which fifty years ago was a highly orthodox Presbyterian institution, when Drs. Shedd, Schaff, and Briggs were its most brilliant lights. A few years ago was published the first volume of a great work, entitled *Beginnings of Christianity*, under the joint editorship of Drs. Lake and Foakes Jackson. Part III. in this volume, dealing trenchantly with Primitive Christianity, has received the most hostile criticism from the Catholic and Modernist parties in the Anglican Church. The review of this part in the *Church Times* was scathing in the extreme; and in more than one paper read before the Cambridge Conference of Modern Churchmen held last August the same section of the book was somewhat roughly handled. In consequence of this Professor Foakes Jackson was allowed to address the Conference, which he did by reading an extremely outspoken paper, of which the editor of the *Modern Churchman* says: "This paper was not part of the original programme, but since Professor Lake's and Dr. Foakes Jackson's position had been criticized, it was felt that opportunity of defence ought to be given." With this paper we are not now concerned, farther than to point out that it was by no means a paper calculated to give satisfaction to any section represented at the Conference. In the current number of the *Hibbert Journal* Dr. Foakes Jackson has an article on the "Cambridge Conference of the Churchman's Union in 1921," in which he criticizes the papers which had ventured to criticize him.

We know absolutely nothing of Dr. Foakes Jackson as a positive theologian. It is merely as a destructive theological critic that we have to do with him. As such, his sole search is for facts which, when found, he has the courage to face. The Rev. C. W. Emmet, B.D., vice Principal of Ripon Hall, Oxford, in his paper before the Conference on "What do we know of Jesus?" charges Drs. Lake and Foakes Jackson with "appearing to give us the picture of a very commonplace and uninspiring prophet, differing from the prophet of the Liberal-Protestant in that he only

taught much what other people had already taught, except for a few original remarks which were either untrue or quite unpractical." To treat Jesus in that manner, Mr. Emmet contends, is to fail historically, because such a view ignores the portrait of Jesus in the Gospels and the profound impression he made upon his contemporaries. To this criticism Dr. Foakes Jackson replies thus:—

In the first place, in nearly every paper stress is laid on the influence of Jesus on his personal followers. The historian may well ask who these were. It is true in Acts there are many allusions to the Twelve, which Matthias joined as a disciple who had been with Jesus; but what is known of any of them? Of course, if the author of the Fourth Gospel is John, the son of Zebedee, and Matthew wrote the First Gospel, we have an impression made by Jesus on two of them. But how many of the scholars in the Churchman's Union admit this? In Acts eleven of the Twelve, including John, are a silent chorus, with Peter as their spokesman. None of the other principal characters in the book—Barnabas, Stephen, Philip, Mark—can be proved to have been with Jesus. Paul and his companions and Apollos certainly were not ..... There remains St. Peter. If his First Epistle is genuine, we have the testimony of a personal follower. But is the Jesus of that document the figure portrayed in the Synoptists? The speeches of Peter in Acts dwell not on the gracious Jesus of the parables, or even of the Sermon on the Mount, but on the risen and ascended Lord exalted to God's right hand and proclaimed as Lord and Christ..... Further, the people among whom Christianity spread most rapidly were not natives of Palestine; the Gospel made little or no progress in Galilee. Those who embraced Christianity were men for the most part unacquainted with the very scene of his ministrations—converted by preachers who themselves had never seen Jesus.

That extract, coming from a Professor in a Presbyterian Theological College, is a vastly significant sign of the times. Drs. Lake and Foakes Jackson are colleagues who have concentrated upon the history of Christianity, and who do not hesitate to accept every fact discovered by them, irrespective of the effect it may have on the orthodox Creed. In his sermon, preached at the conclusion of the Conference, Canon Barnes indulged in a ridiculously feeble criticism of the *Beginnings of Christianity*, claiming that the authors seem to arrive at what "we may not unfairly term rejective conclusions by an ingenuity of atomic disintegration which a physicist might envy." Then he chuckles with supreme content, saying, "Yet when the process ended, Christ still lives, great and unexplained!" Is this really true, or is it simply an idealistic picture drawn by a vivid imagination? Canon Barnes is himself a critic on a very limited scale; but in the sermon just mentioned he let criticism go by the board, especially in his illogical eulogy of Jesus Christ. He says, for example, that "the kingdom of God is a social ideal." This description is not true, and even if it were true, we are face to face with the fact that the ideal remains unrealized to this day; but how can this undeniable fact be reconciled with the other alleged fact that "Jesus still lives, great and unexplained"? If the problem of evil is still unsolved, as the Canon admits, what conceivable evidence is there that Jesus still lives? If Christ still lives and triumphs, in spite of all hostile criticism, then why do the Catholic and Modernist parties alike so vehemently resent criticism? The truth is that the champions of Christianity, to whatever school they belong, cannot tolerate criticism because they fear it, and fear springs from a conscious or unconscious sense of weakness and insecurity. The Christian cause is just now in an exceptionally parlous condition, which accounts for the frightful recrudescence of persecution on all hands. The recent barbarous sentence of nine months' imprisonment with hard labour, pronounced by Mr.

Justice Avory upon Mr. J. W. Gott, a thoroughly honest and harmless, if indiscrete, Freethought propagandist, was but a swish of the wave of reaction that is sweeping over the land, and which will soon spend itself. Judge Avory and Chief Justice Trevelyan have dealt Christianity a blow from which it will never recover. At the same time they have also given Freethought a powerful push forward towards greater unity and a more enthusiastic devotion to and pursuit of the fight for justice and freedom, of which Freethinkers will reap the advantage for many years. This fight, if unitedly, courageously, and zealously fought, is bound to end in complete victory to what Meredith calls "the best of causes."

Now, Drs. Kirsopp Lake and Foakes Jackson are in reality our allies in this great war of liberation. They are on our side though they do not fully share our views. They represent the Gospel Jesus as a merely human prophet who taught nothing new and who never claimed to be the Son of God and the Redeemer of the world. Professor Foakes Jackson blames the Modernists not for going too far in their break with orthodoxy, but for not going far enough. Indeed, it is amazing how anxious most of them are to make their dissociation from these two eminent critics as widely known as possible. Principal Major, when the charge of heresy hung over his head, was eager to declare that he did not agree with the extreme views of Professor Foakes Jackson. Even the Dean of Carlisle has done the same. "Repudiating the opinions ascribed to him he markedly declared himself to be entirely out of sympathy with those of Dr. Lake." Canon Barnes insists upon the centrality of the person of Jesus; but the fact is that the person of Jesus has been throughout the ages "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence" to his followers, who have stumbled thereon and fallen, and been divided into innumerable factions and warring schools of theology. In allusion to this point, Professor Foakes Jackson says, with dramatic effect and obvious truth:—

This raises the question how far reunion is possible, or even desirable, if scholarly Modernism is to be ignored. A Harvard professor once wisely remarked that the differences in Christendom were now rather horizontal than perpendicular. He meant that we consider the Churches to be rocks divided from one another by precipices. On each height the leaders stand, wishing that the chasms might be filled in, and all might be united on one mountain. But the fact is that the more serious fissures are beneath their feet. Each height is divided into orthodox, moderate, and ultra-critical strata, which those on the summit are careful to ignore. They assume an essential unity on fundamental truths, which may have existed sixty years ago, but has long since disappeared. Organized Christianity shows a growing tendency to discourage thinkers and students, and to exalt the claims of less inconvenient Christians who will carry on the business of the Churches, and dull their minds by restless activity.

Some of us know, by a more or less bitter experience, how profoundly true that quotation is, and how extremely cruel the Church's treatment of those who venture to think for themselves can be, and often is. The Modernists know now what the real meaning of persecution actually is; but we welcome them, not because we share their views, but because they represent a twentieth century inclination or trend towards a rationalized conception of human life.

We extend a warmer welcome still to such scholars as Lake and Foakes Jackson, not because we accept their theology whatever it may be, but because they have adopted the only right method of finding out the truth, which is the method of criticism. Dr. Foakes Jackson at the close of his *Hibbert Journal* article, makes a startling confession, though not wholly unexpected: "Unity can only come when men are agreed

that the supreme object of theology is the search for God." Just fancy, after many thousand years of Theism in Palestine and many other countries, and after eighteen hundred years of Christianity, God has not been found yet, but is still an object of search. Is it at all likely, think you, that, after so long a period of unsuccessful search, God will ever be found? And is not the failure to find him a strong presumptive evidence that he does not exist? On one point we agree with the Professor, that if God is ever really discovered, theology will, indeed, become "The Queen of the Sciences." J. T. LLOYD.

## An Old-World Freethinker.

Bird of the lithe, bright, grey, golden morn,  
First of all and sweetest singer born.

—Swinburne.

For proud and fury and swift and bold—  
Wine of life from heart of gold,  
The blood of his heathen manhood rolled  
Full billowed through his veins.

—James Thomson.

THE personality of Lucretius, the great Roman poet, is one of the most extraordinary and one of the vaguest in the world of literature. He comes before us in his works very distinctly; he is, as it were, always present, but the details of his life are so shadowy and misunderstood. Yet, in some ways, this old-world Freethinker comes closer to our modern sympathies than many others of those of the far-off time in which he lived. Across the gulf of twenty centuries, across the far deeper abyss of an older civilization and an alien language, we recognize in him a brave soldier in the Army of Liberty.

For this reason we welcome Mr. H. S. Salt's *Treasures of Lucretius* (Watts), consisting of select passages translated from the great *De Rerum Natura* (On the Nature of Things) by the most powerful of the Latin poets, whose sonorous verse and profound scepticism induced Elizabeth Browning to say that he "denied divinely the divine." Mr. Salt, in his foreword, well says that:—

The central belief which lay at the heart of his poem was that the universe is ruled by wholly natural laws, and that mankind is free to work out its own destiny, undisturbed by any supernatural guidance.

Lucretius denied the doctrine of a future life and its ethical usefulness. He declared the hereafter to be a fable and a dream. Moreover, and this is astonishing, he anticipated many of the scientific ideas of the nineteenth century. Writing about half a century before the alleged birth of the mythical Christ, Lucretius perceived the truth of evolution, the indestructibility of matter, the survival of the fittest, the origin of language, the progress of society. To us these things are but comparatively recent tidings. Twenty long centuries ago they dawned on the prophetic mind of the great Latin poet "dreaming on things to come."

Small wonder that the name of Lucretius is immortalized by his Atheistic work, *De Rerum Natura*, which remains the finest didactic poem in any language. In this wonderful poem, for whole pages together, he reads like a modern poet. We may gain some notion of the general effect of this masterpiece if we conceive Tennyson to have devoted his rare genius to versifying Spencer's *Synthetic Philosophy*, or Swinburne to have subordinated his splendid gifts to the poetic presentation of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. It is the best of these pages of the Latin

poet that Mr. Salt has translated into vivid and vigorous English. He has rendered them in such a way as to bring out the full force of the poet's meaning. From this point of view we commend Mr. Salt's book to the attention of readers.

Lucretius is more than a singer. He is man's champion against priestcraft. According to him, the great curse of human nature is religion, which priests still use to fool and degrade mankind. Now and again his cheek flushes with anger, as when he records, in lines of great beauty, the terrible guilt prompted by religion against the most sacred ties of humanity. No poet has presented us with a picture more finished than that of the sacrifice of Iphigenia to the gods, a story "too deep for tears." We see the hapless maiden trembling by the altar without power of speech, the murderous priest, the sorrowing father, the strong men powerless, and the awful end. Lucretius concludes his account with lines that make us feel his heart throb with indignation as we read.—

Learn thou then

To what damned deeds religion urges men.

A most marked characteristic of Lucretius was his passionate ardour for knowledge. His pathos and tenderness in contemplating the riddle of life have already been noticed. His was a tenderness which felt sympathy with the animals as well as humanity. He voices the helpless grief of brutes sorrowing for their young. His allusions to children are always touching and beautiful. His love of science, his austerity of character, the magnificence of his genius, rank him among the really great poets, who, like stars, shine for ever in the firmament of art.

Mr. Salt's book deserves notice, and we hope that it will find a place on many a bookshelf. When we reflect on the present condition of priest-ridden Ireland, Spain, Portugal, and Italy, when we think of the struggle of reason and religion, written in blood and fire during the centuries, we feel it but just to acknowledge that this old-world Freethinker, twenty centuries ago, fought the battle for Freedom. Lucretius also helps us to understand the magnitude of the struggle between reason and unreason. In his days, each, as it were, armed with simple weapons, fought together. Now, Freethought, armed with far more formidable weapons, marches to battle in the confident hope of certain victory. MIMNERMUS.

## A Religion of Hate.

In the Old Testament, when God got a man dead, when he saw him quietly in his grave, he was satisfied. The muscles relaxed, and a smile broke over the divine face. But in the New Testament the trouble commences just at death. In the New Testament God is to wreak his vengeance for ever and ever. It was reserved for one who said, "Love your enemies," to tear asunder the veil between time and eternity and fix the horrid gaze of men upon the gulfs of eternal fire. The New Testament is just as much worse than the Old as hell is worse than sleep, just as much worse as infinite cruelty is worse than annihilation; and yet the New Testament is pointed to as a gospel of love and peace.—Col. R. G. Ingersoll, "The Dying Creed," p. 10.

THE belief in eternal punishment is not now held among the educated classes, or, broadly speaking, among the skilled artisans. It is still prevalent among the fishing population of the coast towns and the agricultural population. Large numbers among the lower classes of our large towns and cities have also discarded the belief, and where it still obtains credence, it is not held with anything like the same fervour as formerly. That is why the new revival movement is confined to the fisher-folk and the lower classes of

Scotland and Wales. Where there is no belief in hell there will be no revival. It was by working upon this belief that Wesley and his followers brought about the great Evangelical revival of the eighteenth century. It was the same belief which provided the driving force behind primitive Christianity, without which it would have made no progress whatever. As Dr. F. C. Conybeare, who has a minute knowledge of early Christian literature, observes:—

It is the fashion in the present day, especially with our court divines, to pretend that the teaching of hell-fire and of eternal torture therein is no essential or original part of Christianity. If we dip but cursorily into the *Acta Sanctorum* we are forced to come to a very different conclusion.

To the educated Greeks and Romans the fear of death and future punishment were the very essence of superstition. But "the Christians," says Dr. Conybeare, "to their eternal shame, availed themselves eagerly of an infirmity of the human mind which pagan philosophers had deplored." And, he further declares:—

In the dread of death and in the belief in the eternal fire of hell, which pervaded men's minds, a few philosophers excepted, Christianity had a *point d'appui*, without availing itself of which it would not have made a single step towards the conquest of men's minds.

As he briefly and concisely sums it up: "Belief in hell was the fulcrum of early Christianity."<sup>1</sup> Apart from that belief there is no vitality in Christianity. If there is no hell, where is the necessity of striving with your fellow-men to prevent them falling into it?

Men's fear of death and the unknown terrors which the early Christians declared to have been revealed by the Gospels, led the new converts to dwell upon the unknown, and as the fear of punishment is always stronger than the hope of reward, the terrors of hell occupied his mind almost exclusively. If one compares the description of the joys of heaven with the details of the horrors of hell, it will be at once noticed that the description of the joys of the redeemed are tame and feeble, consisting mostly of what Falstaff calls the "hollaing of Anthems," compared with the minute and detailed description of the agonies of the lost.

The Bible had left every scope for the imagination; in Matthew, xxv. 41, we learn that the wicked will be dismissed into "everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." In verse 30 of the same chapter we also learn that they will be cast "into outer darkness and gnashing of teeth." In Mark, ix. 45-6, we are told of "the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." In Revelation, xiv. 10-11, we are assured that those consigned to hell "shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth for ever and ever." Here was something to stir the most sluggish imagination. What was "their worm which dieth not"? What were the devils like? And what torments did they inflict upon the lost? No one had been there and returned to give an account of these things, for once within the adamant walls of hell there was no escape. It was not far from heaven, for the saints enjoyed the privilege of witnessing the torments of the damned. But we learn from Luke, xvi. 26, that there is a great gulf fixed between the two abodes so that neither can visit the other, and doubtless the same gulf prevented the return of the damned to earth.

These details caused the liveliest consternation

<sup>1</sup> F. C. Conybeare, *Monuments of Early Christianity*, 1883: pp. 15, 16, 17.

among the ignorant and superstitious multitude to whom they were first preached. The gospel of "glad tidings" of this dreadful everlasting torture house, for all those who rejected the new faith, caused a panic, a stampede of terror-stricken souls seeking safety from this eternal torture chamber prepared by the Almighty Inquisitor for the punishment of the beings he had himself created. The success of Christianity was assured.

Later writers soon set about filling in the details of this infernal abode which the Bible had omitted. St. Stephanus Grandimontensis declares: "If a man were to see the infernal miseries he would not be able to stir a limb, and would die incontinently of sheer fright."<sup>2</sup> Peter Damiano, an Italian prelate and cardinal, says, in his fifty-ninth sermon:—

I shudder all over at the mention of this locality, and all my bones are shaken. There is the fire which is never kindled, there is the worm which never dies. There the awful cold, the intolerable stink, the incessant wailing, the reduplicated blows, the confusion of sinners, the frightful faces of demons, the fertile multitude of inextricable chains. *Ibi alternantia mala impios sine pietate discernunt*. There are the impious ones distracted without ruth by ever alternating ills.<sup>3</sup>

Matthew Paris, the mediæval historian, in his chronicle of the time of King Stephen, A.D. 1153, gives an account of a certain Irishman who visited hell and discovers a vast twilight plain in which he is grievously assaulted by devils, but escapes by uttering a sacred formula.

In the second plain he sees persons of every age, and of sexes, naked, with their bellies nailed to the ground by red-hot nails of iron, and all uttering a common *miserere!* Upon these wretched ones demons ran, whipping them as they went.....In a third plain men and women and children are being boiled alive, like lobsters, in cauldrons of molten metals of many kinds..... In another plain the people are lying on their backs, fixtures, with fiery dragons and flaming serpents and horrid toads banqueting upon the contents of their bowels. In a fourth plain the ill-starred damned hang suspended over flames of sulphur by iron hooks in their feet, eyes, hands, nostrils, ears, navels, and other parts of their anatomy. Several pages follow of equally excruciating agonies.<sup>4</sup>

It is recorded that St. Martin once met a demon, and the odour of him was such as to cause the saint to reflect on what it might be when its index was indefinitely multiplied. St. Catherine of Siena wished, rather than see a devil twice, to walk barefoot through streets of burning coals till the day of judgment. The story follows of a good man who saw two devils. "And," says he,—

that you may know what a thing of horror it is to see a devil, I would rather be immersed for ever in a lake of molten brass and sulphur than see a third. But in hell there are devils innumerable.<sup>5</sup>

The odour of the damned is illustrated by the following story. A clerk died and was damned; he, however, returned to visit a monk, a friend of his. During the visit he shook one drop of perspiration from his forehead, with disastrous results. For the odour was so foul that it not only half killed the monk, but brought all the other monks in a body to his cell to learn the origin of the stench. Ultimately, the whole monastery was abandoned as uninhabitable. W. MANN.

(To be Continued.)

<sup>2</sup> Mew, *Traditional Aspects of Hell*, 1903; p. 217.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 233-4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 299-300.

## Public Meeting to Protest Against Blasphemy Laws.

DESPITE the unfavourable weather last Wednesday there was a very large and enthusiastic attendance at South Place Institute to protest against the existing blasphemy laws.

Mr. Chapman Cohen, the Chairman, before proceeding to the special business of the evening, asked Miss Kough to read the correspondence. Letters were read from Lord Harburton, Professor Gilbert Murray, Right Hon. J. M. Robertson, Right Hon. John Collier, Miss Maud Royden, Messrs. Halley Stewart, J. F. Green, M.P., B. T. Hall, H. G. Chancellor, Henry Salt, Vyvian Phillips, Norman Angell, George Lansbury, and Frederick Verinder, who all wished to include their names in the list of those opposed to the existence of blasphemy laws. The Home Secretary, acknowledging the N. S. S.'s invitation, replied that he could neither accede to the request nor authorize the use of his name in connection with the Society.

The Chairman briefly outlined the history of the recent Gott case from the first trial on December 7 to the decision of the Court of Appeal on January 16, when the Lord Chief Justice declared blasphemy to be a "most dangerous crime." The whole proceedings bring to the front the fact that laws still exist which are an outrage on the rights of Freethinkers as citizens, and which many Christians even regard as unnecessary for the support of religion. What is blasphemy? The common law said it was a misdemeanour, a "dangerous crime" to deal with Christianity in a way which will outrage the feelings of Christians. By statute it was blasphemy to deny the doctrines of the Anglican Church and of Holy Scripture, an exception being made in regard to the Trinity. But if you protect Christian's feelings, you must protect everybody's feelings. Several of the letters referred to Mr. Gott's methods of propaganda. But his methods were his own, carried on in his own way, and no particular organization was to be held responsible for them. In every blasphemy prosecution this talk about ribaldry and coarse language had formed part of the charge, and probably did so when the founder of Christianity was first charged with the same offence. The personality of the man charged is not the point at issue, but the maintenance of a law which is the product of centuries of ecclesiastical intolerance, an outrage on the minds of all decent men and women, and which ought not to exist in a free country. When a jury of Christians try a Freethinker the odds are heavily weighted against him. We lost in the Criminal Court, and we failed in our appeal. But we have not really lost. The true reformer cannot lose, he can only be checked, and the recent decision is not a defeat, it is an episode on the road to victory. The pinchbeck Torquemadas of to-day cannot stem the advancing tide of human emancipation. Our interest in the question must not stop at this meeting, it must be carried outside, and a committee had already been formed to organize a plan of campaign. He called upon Rev. Stewart D. Headlam to move the first resolution.

The Rev. Stewart D. Headlam moved:—

That this meeting views with the utmost concern the recent revival of blasphemy prosecutions, and regards the existence of the blasphemy laws as an infringement of the principle of religious equality, and as contrary to the more enlightened temper and thought of the day; it therefore demands the repeal of both the Common and Statute Law of Blasphemy, thus leaving all alleged offences against public order and decency to be dealt with by the ordinary law.

He agreed with every word uttered by the Chairman, and was glad to be side by side with his old friend, Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner, but was ashamed of the occasion which brought him there. For many reasons he was disappointed, but especially because of the slur on the Church to which he belonged. Let anyone say what he likes about religion. He looked back to Charles Bradlaugh, who attacked much that many loved, but also attacked much that was rubbish. There are plenty of laws of wide enough scope to prevent a breach of the peace without a blasphemy law. Ridicule is quite a right weapon in controversy, and he would not object to one's

ridiculing what one considered the follies of Christianity, though he would plead for proper care in the use of language, and this principle should apply all round. The whole thing is absurd, for all sorts of views and opinions on religion to-day are technically blasphemy, and he felt as hot on this subject now as ever he did, as hot as when he was Warden of the Guild of St. Matthew.

Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner seconded the motion. The vindictive spirit which actuates the persecutor is always the same. When the Lord Chief Justice declared blasphemy to be a "most dangerous class of crime," he labelled himself as a survival. He belonged to the age and temper of Lord Halsbury, whom she heard in the court in 1883 describe G. W. Foote as worse poison for men's souls than nitro-glycerine. In regard to blasphemy, some people say the law is only enforced against the vulgar and offensive, and seem to approve of one law for the scholar and another for the uncultured, whose only weapon is the vulgar gibe. Why should that principle apply only to anti-Christian propaganda? Missionaries offend the religious feelings of the adherents of other religions, and yet Christians find large sums for this field. Again, who is to decide the "decencies of controversy"? The policeman, the packed jury, or the fossil on the bench? The decencies of controversy can only become popularly observed, and be effective, by the advance of education and culture. But we must work hard. A general election is close at hand, and our immediate work lies in the constituencies. She would, in conclusion, make a special appeal to the younger ones among them. The older ones long to see their children shoulder this burden and carry on the fight to victory.

Mr. S. H. Swinny, of the Positivist Society, supporting the motion, said that however firmly we thought the battle of religious liberty already won, and regretted the recent revival of the blasphemy law, it was not without consolation to feel that we, too, have some part in the great fight for which our forefathers suffered so much more than we. The controversy between Catholics and Protestants is carried on now in better taste than in former times. Is that because Protestants were put in gaol? No, it is due to the general improvement in public taste, which has affected everything. While controversialists are exposed to the law, how can free opinion be expressed?

Colonel Arthur Lynch said that in this year of grace to have to demand freedom of thought shows how near we are to the Dark Ages. In the House of Commons once he was rather taken back when a fellow-member asked him, "What would you do with a man who had been offensive to the Holy Ghost?" He replied that the Holy Ghost had enough power and authority to defend himself. When, however, a man accuses another of blasphemy, he is really offended on his own account. What the Lord Chief Justice says in effect is, "This little brain of mine contains all the wisdom of the world after millions of years, and whoever differs from me shall be cast into prison." Laughter is a subtle thing and spontaneous. What is the good of a law to suppress it?

Mr. E. S. P. Haynes spoke in support of the motion. Ten years ago he urged Gott, who printed a pamphlet for him, to change his methods. Nevertheless, Gott has never provoked a breach of the peace, and such controversies rarely do.

Mrs. Seaton Tiedman expressed her pleasure in associating herself with a movement for the repeal of the blasphemy law. We are in the hands of reactionary judges and magistrates, who can construe words as they choose. Just now we are in for a period of reaction and must watch the times closely. There were many ways in which they could help to remove an iniquitous law. They could question M.P.'s, and strengthen the committee formed to rouse public opinion on the question.

The Chairman put the motion to the meeting, and it was carried enthusiastically, with one dissentient.

The Rev. Dr. Walsh then moved:—

That this meeting further regards the sentence of nine months with hard labour, passed on J. W. Gott at the Old Bailey on December 9 last, as harsh and vindictive, and requests the Home Secretary to exercise the power he has to modify or annul the sentence there given.

Freedom of speech includes ridicule. He did not know

Gott from Adam, but would think it contemptible to have to say that he did not agree with him. He (the speaker) was brought up in a hot-bed of evangelicalism, and once saw a picture of the New Jerusalem in the skies. It was nothing but a big Scotch tenement house, with back stairs. Yet no one was sent to gaol for irreverence. The combination of "God and Gott" had been censured, but the deity would rather enjoy the joke that a little mannikin should have the same name as himself. If Gott is put in gaol, an eminent poet who, during the war, parodied the prayers on both sides, should be with him. The poet is still at large. No blasphemy is so vicious as the blasphemy that the law of England is synonymous with the law of God. A large experience of men of all schools of thought, rationalist, secularist, and orthodox Christian, had convinced him that there was not much difference between them, except that there was less cant among the rationalists and secularists. As long as blasphemy laws are on the statute book tyrants will not be wanting to administer them.

Mr. D. Carmichael, of the London Trades Council, had just attended a meeting at Islington, which expressed its unanimous support of the meeting of protest. The Council represents 120,000 workers in the metropolis and is likewise unanimous in demanding the repeal of the blasphemy laws, and only the existing depression in the world of labour makes it impossible for them to force the government to give effect to that demand. He knew Gott personally and read his *Rib Ticklers*, which, however, made so little impression on him that he forgot what they were about. Gott considered religion chloroformed the people and he spoke to them in their own language. He (the speaker) was brought up a Calvinist, and what he heard to-day from Christian Evidence platforms was blasphemy from the point of view to which he had been brought up. He approved of the attitude of Ted Leggatt in the court, and thought the he had not been fairly dealt with. (Mr. Leggatt, from the body of the hall: "I have not paid the fine yet"). During the past twelve months in England free speech had been attacked more than at any time for forty years.

Mr. W. Siddle, of the Union of Ethical Societies, was tired of hearing of Gott's vulgarity, whatever truth there might be in the charge. Our "friends" on the other side will say plenty about that and perhaps add something to it. What he was thinking of was the cruel sentence of nine months, and he asked, Whose fault is it? They should all take that question to heart. This blasphemy case represents only one aspect of a great problem before us. Within the next few years they may have to fight as they had never fought before. He was thinking of the censorship and suppression of free speech everywhere, not only officially, but exercised through press and pulpit and other channels.

Dr. C. V. Drysdale, of the Malthusian League, hardly knew why he was asked to speak, unless it was as the son of two individuals who stood by Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant in a great Freethought trial. It was his fate, before the war, to be haled up to face a bench of bishops and doctors, and threatened with prosecution. He could not understand the mentality of those who wanted to suppress free speech, especially if they believed in Omnipotence. Nor, again, did such people realize what an asset such an attitude is to the other side. Repressive law was an asset to a movement and he urged that view upon the N. S. S. In the past he had often regretted that they had not something more repressive to overcome.

The Chairman agreed that persecution advertised a movement, but he would be sorry to think that the Freethought cause represented only the interests of Freethinkers and not the whole community. Freethought was not sectarianism, which he disliked in anything. The blasphemy law cannot hurt those who have got rid of Christianity. The movement for its repeal is one for social sanitation. We want to turn Avory into a man and the Lord Chief Justice into a human being. The blasphemy law is cowardly. He had poured more ridicule on Christianity in one month than Gott had in a life-time. On the 8th instant at Stratford Town Hall, he repeated all the counts in Gott's indictment and nothing had happened.

The motion was put to the meeting and carried unanimously.

## Acid Drops.

The Churches never omit to pursue the end they have in view, no matter what else may be overlooked. And no matter what may be the subject that is occupying the attention of the nation, their chief thought is how to turn it to their own sectarian advantage. So that in the distraction of public attention has been presented to Parliament, and generally agreed to by the Nonconformists and Episcopalians, which promises to give religion in State maintained schools a stronger and a more definite position than it has at present. Fortunately for the nation the Roman Catholics do not agree with the proposed measure, and their hostility may go some distance towards wrecking it. Apart from that there is grave danger that if all the sects can agree this government of ours, which has no principles of any kind on any subject whatever, will offer facilities for the Bill passing into law. And that is something to which we hope the Labour organizations and Freethinkers all over the country will offer the strongest opposition.

It is difficult to get Christians to recognize the existence of anyone but themselves, so that we are pleased to notice the *Cambrian Leader*, pointing out in connection with this Education Bill, remarking that if this Bill goes through it will inflict an injustice on Unitarians, "Atheists, Freethinkers and others who have no religious sense at all," by compelling them to pay "for the inculcation of beliefs with which they have no sympathy. And that is hurting Freedom in its most vital part. We may have little or no respect for the Atheist, but he is a member of the State, as we are, and there is no right we can call upon to justify his coercion in the realm of conscience." The difficulty is to get the average Christian to feel otherwise than that it is only as an act of grace and forbearance that the Atheist is permitted to exist at all.

The *Daily Telegraph* recently contained two items of news which should have been placed in adjacent columns. Rev. H. D. A. Major, who was recently declared by some members of the flock to be guilty of heresy, not only admitted that the churches to-day are nearly empty, but he added that those who remain in them "do not as a whole represent the more intelligent and vital elements in our community." Earl Haig pleads, as we might expect a Field Marshal to plead, for an Imperial Church, in which Christians will overlook their differences and remember their common aims. That noble aspiration represents "the faith once delivered to the saints" in twentieth century England. Doubtless there are still some difficulties in the way of realizing it, but the English (and Scotch, too) are a practical people to whom anything Imperial makes a solid appeal.

The Vice-Chancellor and Proctors of Oxford University have "removed from the books" of that home of classical learning the names of Reade and Gray, the editor and assistant editor of the *Free Oxford*. That such a flagrant instance of what seems to the ordinary fair-minded man an act of intolerance should pass in England with the barest comment, and hardly even that, from "our glorious free press," affords lovers of liberty in this country, if there are any, food for serious thought. The *Spectator*, however has expressed outspoken disapproval of the action of the university authorities. "Whether repression of ideas can ever be right may be an arguable matter, but certainly the last place for such repression is a university." We are not at all sure that this view is borne out in practice. Perhaps Oxford remembers that this year we are celebrating the centenary of the death of Shelley, and is too proud of its record in the matter of "sending down" to allow the occasion to pass without enriching its register with still further triumphs. *Dominus illuminatio mea.*

Church receipts are down by half. A comparative statement of receipts submitted to the Central Board of Church Finance shows that during 256 days in 1920

£106,000 was received, against £53,000 for the same period during 1921.

It appears that there is some blasphemy that does really upset some people. "I sent my man to Surrey Commercial Docks to fetch some goods," complained a litigant at Southwark County Court, "but he was so blasphemed that he bolted."

The clergy of the Church of England are seeking to remove the legal restraints which prevent their undue interference with politics, and they are making their claim as "citizens." They should remember that at present they are over-represented in the House of Lords.

The newspapers on January 21 announced the death of his Holiness Pope Benedict, in his sixty-eighth year. His infallibility in matters ecclesiastical did not enable him to resist successfully an assault of bronchial catarrh. His attitude throughout the war was an interesting study in political ultramontaniam. German Catholics were powerfully organized in the Centre Party, and Protestant Prussia had long cultivated the favour of the Vatican. The relations of Rome and Austria were, of course, more cordial still, and were consistently used to advance the latter's interests among the rebellious subject-races in the old Danubian empire. There is no record of any official Roman Catholic protest against Austria's ruthless suppression of the national spirit among the Czechs and Croats, or against what happened at Termonde and Louvain. It is doubtful whether there was any moral sympathy with these oppressed nationalities. The Habsburgs and Hohenzollerns were good friends of Benedict and he knew it. The development of the spirit of intellectual freedom has been most noticeable in the parts of Europe re-constituted since the war—a striking comment on the connection between political despotism and organized religion.

The need for educating our members of Parliament is shown by a letter received the other day from our friend and contributor Mr. Andrew Millar. At a meeting in Ayrshire, addressed by Sir George Younger, Mr. Millar put a question on the Blasphemy laws. Sir George replied that he knew nothing about the recent blasphemy case and was ignorant of the blasphemy laws. He said that perhaps he ought to have known about these laws, but he did not, but if a wrong had been done the Court of Appeal would put it right. And Sir George is a leading politician! When men who take a leading part in the country's affairs are so ignorant of matters that so vitally concern the mental and moral health of the community, it is small wonder that things are as they are. We hope that Sir George may find time to acquire a little knowledge on the matter. As for the Court of Appeal—well, there is the imbecility of the Lord Chief Justice that blasphemy is a dangerous crime. There is no need to say anything further.

Mr. Filson Young contributes to the *Saturday Review* (January 21), under the heading "Hymns and Humbug: Doings at a Seance," seven columns of notes and comments on a spiritualistic seance which he recently attended in the company of Sir A. Conan Doyle. Mr. Young declares, with considerable emphasis:—

That no manifestations of supernatural force occurred there; that the origin and method of production of such manifestations as did occur were plainly apparent to me; that the people present were unconsciously and very willingly deceiving themselves and one another.

Intent on "proving all things," he discovered some of the means by which certain effects may have been produced. The article concludes with some letters which passed between Mr. Young and Sir A. Conan Doyle. The "spirit" that pervades them is not a noticeably amiable one, but they are all the more instructive on that account.

Mrs. Fanny Guthrie was granted a decree of nullity of marriage the other day in Liverpool. Her husband was

secretary to the American Y.M.C.A. and came over here during the war. Immediately after marriage he went with the Y.M.C.A. to France, and that was the last Mrs. Guthrie heard of him. Then she discovered that he was a married man, and an American Court sentenced him to five years for bigamy. In the words of Inspector Elphick, we might say that G. W. Guthrie belongs to the worst type of Christian.

The question of what is taught in schools, in the name of religion, is rapidly becoming an acute problem for the bulk of the nominal Christians in England, and even in Scotland some of the doctrines of the Shorter Catechism are declared to be out of harmony "with present-day religious beliefs and ideals," and "unsuited to the child's mind." At a recent meeting of the Glasgow Educational Authority, one of the members moved that the Catechism be discontinued in the schools. It was pointed out, however, that the Catechism was approved by the Educational Institute of Scotland. That settled the matter. The motion was defeated by 31 votes to 6.

Prebendary Smith Dorrien wants to know if the Prime Minister will not advise His Majesty the King and Emperor (how these fellows do like to grovel before a mouthful of title), now that the treaty of peace with Ireland is ratified, to appoint May 24 as a day of thanksgiving. To whom! And for what! What have we to thank God for anyway? If he had kept out of Ireland there would have been no trouble of the kind there has been. It has been precisely because his two sets of followers have had their minds and their mouths full of God that the trouble has been so hard to settle, even to the extent to which it has been settled. Now if His Majesty the King and Emperor could be brought to the point of advising the people of Ireland to leave God alone for the future and trust to their own good nature and common sense, that would be a really important piece of advice. But that certainly will not be done.

It is expected there will be two Archbishops and several Bishops to marry Princess Mary. And yet it will be no more of a marriage than seven and sixpence worth before a Registrar. But the people must have a show, and all that results is that a ceremony becomes a performance.

Organized Roman Catholicism is also preparing for a new fight on the old question of religion in the schools. The Catholic Teachers' Federation, at Preston, has just declared very positively that it accepts no system which "does not guarantee the retention of their statutory rights to Catholic schools, staffed by Catholic teachers, with Catholic control of the religious teaching." In U.S.A., Australia, and some of the re-constituted States of Europe, the civil government is confronted with similar demands, and will continue to be as long as it gives any official countenance to any religion.

According to the *Yorkshire Post* the Archbishop of York asserted recently that "the bulk of the people" are "agreed upon the great facts of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian tradition." We congratulate his Lordship on this discovery, and the courage with which he announces it. With Canon Barnes rejecting the doctrine of the Creation and the Fall, Rev. H. D. A. Major denying the physical resurrection, others urging the revision of the Book of Common Prayer, and the policeman's truncheon at work on the heads of blasphemers, the workers in Christ's vineyard to-day need not feel the burden on their consciences as a particularly grievous one.

A distressing occurrence took place in a church at Grand Rapids, Michigan. Painters at work in the building left behind some wood alcohol which was being used to make shellac. This was mistaken for communion wine, and was used on the Sunday with the result that eight persons are lying in hospital in a critical condition.



## Blasphemy Defence Fund.

BELOW will be found a statement of income and expenditure in relation to this Fund. Owing to the legal expenses being not quite so heavy as was anticipated there is a small balance in hand, and I am suggesting to the Executive at its next meeting that this surplus should be devoted to a similar purpose to that for which it was subscribed, namely, to promoting the repeal of the blasphemy laws. The expenditure, it will be noted, is almost entirely concerned with legal charges. I have made no charge, nor do I intend making any, for my own inevitable out-of-pocket expenses during the proceedings, and which while not large for a millionaire are not inconsiderable to one in my position.

The expenditure and income account stands as follows: Received as per acknowledgements in *Freethinker*, £434 19s. 3d. Expenditure: To charges of Counsel and Solicitor in the two trials and taking the case to the Court of Appeal, £383 os. 6d. To Press Association reports, Press Cutting Agency charges, etc., £29 10s. To expenses incurred by Mr. Gott from the time of his arrest till December 7, £6. Total expenditure, £418 10s. 6d. Balance of income over expenditure, £16 8s. 9d.

It remains only to thank all those who have so promptly and so generously helped in the matter of finance. We have not succeeded in breaking down this particular prosecution, but we came within an ace of doing so. There were eleven out of twelve on the first jury in favour of an acquittal. But I do not acknowledge defeats in a fight of this character; all we experience are checks on the road to victory, and I believe that by this fight we have advanced a step farther towards the repeal of the Blasphemy laws. Wide-spread publicity has been drawn to the case, and almost every paper that commented on the case condemned the prosecution. And we have shown the police that while they are safe so long as they can secure judges of the Avory type, they will always run the risk of getting a judge of a more enlightened character, and in any case must always be prepared to fight a Society which is not to be frightened and which declines to be bullied.

Nothing has been more delightful than the way in which the fighting spirit of Freethinkers rose with each rebuff. It has meant a lot of hard work, but I owed it to those who placed confidence in me that nothing should be spared in the shape of effort. And I am quite satisfied that the time, the money, and the energy have all been well spent. It has brought our final victory a step nearer.

Meanwhile I may return to what I said last week about the education of public opinion. My pamphlet on the Blasphemy laws is going out to all members of Parliament, of the House of Lords, all papers, Justices of the Peace, etc. I now want readers in the various localities to send me the names and addresses of all the public men in their neighbourhood, and all liberal minded clergymen, so that they get a copy of the pamphlet. We will see to the distribution at the *Freethinker* office, and we intend making this a new step in the movement for the repeal of the Blasphemy laws. Since I wrote last week I have received from Mr. H. Jessop a cheque for £50 which will be devoted to sending out the *Blasphemy* pamphlet and other propaganda literature. There are always plenty of openings for this kind of work. But I want all *Freethinker* readers to put their backs into the work. There exists a frightful amount of ignorance among public men with regard to the Blasphemy laws, and we must do our best to enlighten them. We must make the bigots pay, and the best way to do that is to rob them of the weapons they use to satisfy their intolerance.

### FINAL LIST OF SUBSCRIPTIONS.

Previously acknowledged, £416 19s. 6d. Swansea, £1 1s.; J. S. Buckle (second subscription), 10s.; V. H. Smith (Intended amount doubled after reading the Lord Chief Justice's comments), £1; W. Sandars, 2s. 6d.; M. T. S., £1 os. 7d.; E. Wall, 10s.; W. F. Ambrose, 2s.; V. B. N., 10s.; M. Ray, 10s.; Mr. and Mrs. Cooper, 5s.; Mrs. E. Holyoake Marsh, £1; J. R. Lickfold, 10s.; A. G. Lye, 5s.; W. Boll, 5s.; T. Sharp (third subscription), 2s. 6d.; E. W. Youell, 10s.; H. Silverstein, 10s.; W. H. Hicks (second subscription), £2; W. Challis (second sub-

scription), 5s.; R. Wood, 5s.; D. Macdonald, 4s.; Mrs. A. Robertson, 10s.; A. W. B. Shaw (second subscription), £1 1s.; R. Moore (second subscription), 10s.; H. Foyster, £1 1s.; Mr. and Mrs. T. White, 5s.; H. C. B., £1; Well Wisher, 5s.; Miss C. Johnson, £1; W. T. Allfrey, 2s. 6d.; W. Bean, 2s. 6d.; C. M. Deadnell, 5s. 6d.; D. C. Drummond, 4s. 8d.; H. M. S. Butler (third subscription), 2s. 6d.; Earnest, 2s. 6d.

Total—£434 19s. 3d.

This Fund is now closed.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### O. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

January 29, Stockport; February 5, Birmingham; February 19, Glasgow; February 20, Motherwell; 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.

F. S. FADELLE.—Pleased you find so much satisfaction in the *Freethinker*. Literature is being sent. Yes, there are few, if any, parts of the world where Freethought is not making headway.

A. G. LYE.—There are some people who are constitutionally unable to use a word that has a straightforward meaning in an important controversy. Presumably, it is due to lack of moral strength, although that class of people, who are so strong on the correctness of their moral attitude, would be surprised to learn it. But to them ethics means to keep as nearly as possible to the line of the conventional.

V. WILSON.—We agree with what you say, but we thought it best to let that particular comment speak for itself.

J. ROBERTS.—We really do not know what Temperance organization it is best for an Atheist to join. There are one or two we fancy that are very strongly religious, but some are just Temperance organizations and nothing else. Perhaps some of our readers can give more exact information.

N. S. S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges: Mrs. I. J. King, 5s. 6d.; Mr. Herbert King, 5s. 6d.; "R. J. T.," 5s.; F. MacLachlan, 10s.; H. Foyster, £1 7s.

MR. DAN GRIFFITHS writes:—"Will you allow a poor Welsh schoolmaster to add his humble but passionate protest against the savage sentence which has been so callously confirmed on our poor friend Mr. Gott. To ridicule superstition and error is not a crime but a social duty." We quite appreciate the warmth of our friend Griffiths's indignation. The idea that these judges can terrify Freethinkers by sentences of imprisonment would not obsess them if they could bring a little more common sense and a little more knowledge of human nature into their survey. But some of them are only made judges when they can be no longer tolerated as counsel.

I. ROWLANDS.—That man is a spiritual being is one of those expressions which, because they mean anything, generally end by meaning nothing at all. If it means that man is a body plus a something called a spirit, the statement is sheer nonsense. If it means merely a name for the finer shades of intellectual relationship, the phrase is useful enough. The trouble is that so many use it in one sense and apply it in the other. Like yourself, we think it best to avoid so far as one can the use of these question-begging and confusing phrases. Thanks for cutting.

M. BEESLEY.—Quite an interesting address it must have been. We hope it did good.

J. HAMPSON.—If you could get a good hall for a meeting Mr. Cohen would come down and lecture some Sunday in April. We do not think there would be much trouble in getting together a good audience provided a suitable hall—a well-known one—is obtainable. Perhaps you would write us stating cost and other particulars.

H. SILVERSTEIN.—Thanks, we are feeling better, but not quite yet what we ought to be. We must take things as easily as may be during the next two or three weeks.

CONNAUGHT.—Pleased to hear from you. We agree with you as to your opinion on the blasphemy case. You may rely upon our doing all that can be done to make the bigots remember their "victory."

We must ask the indulgence of a number of correspondents who have written us on various matters. We have not yet

recovered from the attack of influenza, and for a few days must try to get all the rest we can, which at the best is not much.

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 National Secular Society's office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

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.

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All Cheques and Postal Orders should be made payable to "The Pioneer Press" and crossed "London, City and Midland Bank, Clerkenwell Branch."

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.

Foreign and Colonial.—One year, 15s.; half year, 7s. 6d.; three months, 3s. 9d.

## Sugar Plums.

To-day (January 29) Mr. Cohen pays a visit to Stockport. He will lecture in the Stockport Labour Church at 6.45 on "Freethought and Social Reform." In the afternoon at 2.30 he has promised to deliver a short address to the "Adult Class." This is Mr. Cohen's first visit to Stockport, although he has been often enough near it. Local Freethinkers will please note the time and place.

Mr. Cohen has also received an invitation from the Minister of Pembroke Chapel to occupy that platform on one Sunday evening. He has promised towards the end of March, the subject to be, of course, a Freethought one. On the same conditions he is prepared to visit any established Church or Chapel in the country. Christians will then at least know what Freethought is and what it is aiming at. Mr. Cohen often receives invitations to speak for different societies and organizations on other than definitely Freethinking subjects, but invariably declines. He is on the platform for one purpose only, and is not concerned with merely occupying a platform in order to enable some folk to spend a pleasant evening. There are plenty of professional speakers who can attend to that kind of thing. But he is always ready to pay a visit to an outside society that is willing and desirous to hear anything about Freethought. Audiences, particularly religious and semi-religious ones, get far too few chances of hearing about that.

Next Sunday (February 5) Mr. Cohen will lecture in the Town Hall, Birmingham. Special attention has been paid to advertising this meeting, and it is hoped that the attendance will repay the efforts made. As the Town Hall is a very large building, we trust that the lecture will be made as widely known as possible by those who are interested in the matter. Mr. Cohen is taking for his subject Bishop Gore's new book, *Belief in God*. The publishers announce that the work represents a lifetime of thought and study, so it will be interesting to have a Freethinker's view of what it is worth.

Last Sunday provided the worst and thickest fog for years in London and district. Mr. Cohen left home for the Stratford Town Hall, and then had to give it up owing to the almost impossibility of finding one's way about. But he managed it on a second trial, and found that about 200 persons had also braved the night. In the circum-

stances it was a wonderful audience, and we hope that they felt repaid for their trouble in coming out on such a night.

Manchester friends will please note that to-day (January 29) Mr. Lloyd will lecture twice, afternoon and evening, in the Public Hall, Rusholme. The hall is over the Free Library in Dickenson Road. We should like to hear that the hall is crowded out. This will be the last time, we think, that Mr. Lloyd will visit Manchester this season, and Freethinkers should not alone make an effort to be present themselves, but to see to it that a Christian friend accompanies them. There is nothing like a little personal advertising in the matter. The hall is reached quite easily by car from almost any part of the City.

There was an echo of a bygone era of blasphemy prosecutions in a note we received from Mrs. Holyoake Marsh—daughter of George Jacob Holyoake. Enclosing a subscription to the Blasphemy Defence Fund, she writes: "It is eighty years since my father was prosecuted, and it seems disgraceful that we should still have to protest, and that it (the blasphemy law) has not been repealed." Truly disgraceful, and a lesson of how slowly bigotry learns—if it ever learns any lesson save that of the lash. George Jacob Holyoake's offence was that at the close of a lecture, and in reply to a question, he suggested treating the deity as we do retired army officers and putting him on half pay. That earned him a term of imprisonment in Cheltenham gaol. The suggestion always seems to us to err on the side of generosity. Why God should be put on the half pay list we cannot tell. It certainly cannot be on account of services rendered, for so far as anyone can tell he has never done any service at all. It does often happen that the country pays a pension to a man for no other reason than that he once drew a salary; the proper course to take with the deity is not to pension him, but to discharge him and have done with it.

We print elsewhere in this issue a summary of the speeches delivered at the Blasphemy meeting at South Place Institute on the 18th. Despite the very bad weather the hall was filled, and the meeting went with a swing from the time that the chairman got upon his feet till the last speaker had finished. Mr. Cohen managed to get to the meeting, rather against his doctor's advice, but he kept his share of the speaking to a minimum, doing no more than outline the occasion and the purpose of the meeting. Nor was there any need for him to exert himself with so many excellent speakers to carry on the business of the meeting. The general level of the speeches made was so high that it would be invidious to particularize. The best proof was that there were ten speakers, without the chairman, and the meeting seemed quite fresh at the end. It is to be hoped that those who took part in the gathering will make it the starting point of an agitation that will not rest until the Blasphemy laws are repealed. And what would our mediæval Lord Chief Justice and Mr. Torquemada Avory do then?

The English press, "glorious" and "free," well maintained its traditions in regard to the South Place meeting. The aim of the Press is to exclude from its columns whatever seems likely to stimulate inquiry into the real nature of organized religion in England to-day. The reports of revival meetings, spiritualistic seances, the utterances of a Barnes and the heresies of a Major—all this is excellent "news" to divert attention away from the things that really matter in regard to the prevailing religious beliefs and professions. Our Press, largely supported on middle-class respectability, dreads any indication of the existence of a straight-out Freethought movement in England. The *Daily News* noticed the meeting, in about eight lines, which made no reference either to the individual speakers or the enthusiasm of the large audience. It did, however, refer to the Blasphemy laws in a leading article which stated, in effect, that as long as these laws exist the judges must administer them. But we do not complain of the attitude of the Press.

Its business is to advertise the sale of advowsons or record the most recent manifestations of the "Non-conformist conscience," and if it is not in a position to confer much dignity on the Freethought cause, it can at least afford an insight into the working of Christian principles in practice.

In the speeches made at the meeting there were two distinct notes struck which have a direct bearing on the future of the Freethought movement. The first was that we are probably in for a period of reaction and must be wide-awake if we are to counteract its influence. During the past two years the *Freethinker*, as our readers are aware, has insisted strongly on the same thing. And it seems to be fairly general. In New Zealand we hear of blasphemy prosecutions, while in Australia the Government recently prohibited the importation into the Commonwealth of various works which it deemed to be of a revolutionary nature. The second note struck in the speeches was the supreme necessity of enlisting the rising generation in our cause. The younger men and women must shoulder their burden, and regard it as a privilege to shoulder it. We "older ones," as Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner said, long to see them become standard bearers in our ranks and "carry on the fight to victory."

A preliminary meeting for the formation of a Committee for the repeal of the Blasphemy laws was held at the Emerson Club on January 17, and another meeting has been fixed for February 1. When that is over we hope to be able to make another and a more definite announcement on the subject. The Committee will be as representative as it can be made, and will have for its sole object the repeal of the laws. It will thus unite all who believe in this as a measure of social sanitation.

On Monday (January 30) at 9 p.m. Mr. A. D. McLaren will address the Associated Engineers' Union, Cricklewood Lane, Cricklewood, on "The Workers' Interest in Science." Judging from the interest aroused by his address here on "The Workers and the Freethought Movement," Monday evening's lecture should be productive of a good crop of questions and discussion.

Mr. Whitehead paid his first visit to Birmingham on Sunday last, and we are pleased to learn delivered a much appreciated lecture to a very good audience. On Saturday, February 11, the Branch holds its annual dinner at the Crown Hotel, Corporation street, at 6 o'clock. Tickets for the dinner are 3s. each, and there will be the usual accompaniments of speeches, songs, etc. We have no doubt but that those who attend will spend an enjoyable evening.

The *Malthusian* has ceased to exist, but its place is now taken by a new monthly journal, issued by the Malthusian League, called the *New Generation*, so that it is more a change of name than anything else. The first issue, besides a number of interesting articles, contains a column by Miss Maude Royden on "The New Generation," and an editorial dealing with the new departure notes that the great date in the history of the Birth Control movement was 1876, when Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant were prosecuted for publishing an American pamphlet on the subject. This is a striking contrast to the somewhat contemptible attitude of Dr. Marie Stopes who, in a letter to the press, noted at the time in these columns, went to such unnecessary lengths to separate her movement from that of two such terrible Atheists as Bradlaugh and Besant. We doubt whether Dr. Stopes and her work would have been heard of had it not been for the work of these and other Atheists who sowed the seeds of the harvest she reaps. It is significant to note that of the names mentioned by the editor of the *New Generation* as creating the Malthusian movement, Malthus, James Mill, Place, Carlile, Stuart Mill, Bradlaugh and Besant, all with the exception of the first were avowed Freethinkers. The *New Generation* is published at 6d., and we wish it a lengthy and prosperous career.

## The Blasphemy Case.

### APPEAL PROCEEDINGS.

BEFORE the Lord Chief Justice Trevethin and Justices Roche and Branson in the Court of Criminal Appeal on Monday, January 16, John William Gott, 55, an editor, appealed against his conviction at the Central Criminal Court and his sentence of nine months' hard labour for publishing blasphemous libels. He was indicted on three charges for publishing blasphemous libels on November 12 in a pamphlet called the *Rib Tickler*, concerning the Holy Scripture and the Christian religion, and the charges also related to another pamphlet called *God and Gott*. The original trial took place on Wednesday, December 7, when the jury failed to agree, and the case was re-tried two days later when the jury agreed on a verdict of guilty.

SIR HENRY CURTIS BENNETT, K.C., appeared for the appellant together with MR. HAROLD MURPHY, and in stating the grounds for the appeal he said: This is an appeal against a conviction which took place before Mr. Justice Avory at the Central Criminal Court on December 9 last for publishing a blasphemous libel. I can put the facts before your lordships very shortly indeed. The appellant was seen at 7.30 at night upon November 12, which was a Saturday, in Stratford Broadway. He was assisted by another man and he was surrounded by a large crowd. He was selling to that crowd two papers, one entitled the *Rib Tickler* and the other entitled the *Liberator*. The *Liberator* contained inside two other pamphlets, one called *Rib Ticklers, or Questions for Parsons*, and the second one called *God and Gott*. The two men, the appellant and the man assisting him, were also holding up in front of them two placards. The price of twopence was being charged for each of these pamphlets and the evidence was that a considerable number of the pamphlets were being purchased and that two people, one a man said "You ought to be ashamed of yourself," and one woman said "Disgusting." The appellant was approached by an Inspector of Police and he was arrested and charged first of all with obstruction. Upon the remand before the Police Magistrate that charge was altered into a charge of publishing a blasphemous libel, and it was upon that charge that he was tried at the Central Criminal Court. For the purpose of your lordship's being seized of the facts what I have already said will make sufficiently clear the circumstances in which this alleged offence was committed, but I shall have to refer a little later in more detail to what was said in the pamphlets themselves and also to one of the placards which were being held up. The appellant was first of all tried upon December 7 before Mr. Justice Avory and a jury. Upon that occasion, after a long retirement, the jury were unable to agree upon a verdict and were discharged. The case was again tried on December 9, and upon that occasion I submitted to the learned judge that there was no case in law to go to the jury. After careful consideration my learned friend, Mr. Murphy, and I do not prepose to occupy your lordship's time here by arguing that question of law as to whether or not there was a case in fact to go to the jury. You will, no doubt, have read the shorthand notes of this trial and you will have seen the line upon which that submission was made. Quite shortly it was that the law of blasphemy alters with the times, and that since 1883, when Lord Chief Justice Coleridge had laid down what was the law, there had been a great difference in the right of the individual to express views, to use free speech, and my argument was that the law then laid down ought not to be the law to-day. I do not propose to occupy the time of the Court to-day in submitting that there was no case here to go to the jury. The case for the appellant to-day is directed to the learned judge's summing up, and in my submission there were three misdirections in the summing up and there were two important omissions to the jury also. If I might at once draw the Court's attention to these three points of alleged misdirection the first occurred in my submission upon page 20 of the shorthand notes. I want it clearly to be understood that not for one moment am I arguing here that the language which was used in these different pamphlets was desirable language, and of course I did not argue that before the jury. The case of the appellant before the

jury was that he enforced his argument as an unbeliever in the Christian faith by using language which a more educated and less ignorant man would not use, and the submission was that in using somewhat strong language to point out as he thought the falsity of the Christian religion he was not being himself within the law of blasphemy. I will draw your attention to something not pointed out to the jury, but I do not want it to be understood that I am here trying to justify the subject matter.

**THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:** Disconnect yourself from your client's views as far as you can.

**SIR HENRY:** The first matter is upon page 20, where there are these words, "You must ask yourselves whether if a person of strong religious feelings had stopped to read this pamphlet his instinct might not have been to go up to the man who was selling it and give him a thrashing, or at all events to use such language to him that a breach of the peace might be likely to be occasioned because that would be quite sufficient to justify the definition." In my submission that was not the proper test to apply at all to the case. The test to apply to the case was not whether a person of highly religious feelings might do this, that or the other, but whether the ordinary member of the public, the ordinary man in the street would have taken that course. I suppose that in every political meeting or in any statement which is made by a speaker in Hyde Park you will find people of strong feeling one way or the other who object to that statement, but the real and proper test in my submission to this Court is not to take the person who is an extremist one way or the other, but to take the ordinary man in the street, and the test again in this case is this: Stratford Broadway—Saturday night—half past seven—a large crowd—and the only evidence that any person at all was either holding strong feeling about what they had purchased, or that a breach of the peace was likely to result, was the evidence that one man said "You ought to be ashamed of yourself"—I suppose that is a remark which might be made to any speaker on any subject—and the other statement of a woman who said, "Disgusting, disgusting." That is my point upon that particular part of the summing up that that was the perfect test.

**THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:** Of course one understands the test is as you say the ordinary man. Is there any authority for saying that you might address a crowd of people in language that would be likely to produce a breach of the peace in people who take strong views?

**SIR HENRY:** The difference between that occurred in a case between *Rex v. Boulter* which was tested in 1908. There the question which arose was the man who was being tried got up in a public place where he could be heard not only by the people around him, but the evidence was that people who were in the houses round about with the windows open could hear, and there he made statements against the Christian religion. Here the case is not that at all. The case is that the blasphemous libel, if it was a blasphemous libel, was being sold in pamphlet form, and that any person who did not pay the sum of twopence was not in possession of these pamphlets at all. I am going to say something in a moment on the manner in which they were sold, but the evidence was that no person who did not desire to see the inside of these pamphlets need listen or need read. That is the distinction I draw from what your lordship has put to me of the religious person who in walking along the street has to hear it whether he desires to or not.

**THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:** There was no shouting?

**SIR HENRY:** Nothing at all. The evidence was that nothing blasphemous was said. There was nothing except the mere selling of these pamphlets and the reception of the twopence, except what I have said.

**THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:** I was rather seeking to find what the evidence was as to how the selling was being conducted.

**SIR HENRY:** The evidence is that nothing was being said at all, that the two men were selling these pamphlets having in front of them placards. I cross examined the inspector at the trial, thinking what is in your lordship's mind, that people who sell usually say something to effect the sale. But the answer I got from the inspector was although he was only two or three yards away he heard nothing said by the appellant or by the man assisting him. The evidence was that he was merely holding the

pamphlets up, one in each hand, and he had a placard in front of him and the man assisting him was doing exactly the same, but nothing was said at all. The second matter that I was going to draw the attention of the Court to is upon page 23 of the summing up. "One other word only I have to say to you. Counsel for the defence has relied upon the fact that these things were being sold and that it was open to anybody to pass by without buying them. It was of their own choice that they paid twopence for each of these things. That does not affect in any way the question whether they are blasphemous libels. It may affect the degree of publication and it may affect the gravity of the offence whether a man publishes these things by shouting them from the housetops or by selling them in the streets or by selling them in a shop. It does not affect the question of whether they are blasphemous libels. It may be a greater offence to shout them in the streets than to sell them. It might be a less offence to sell them in a shop but it does not affect the fact that they are blasphemous libels." In my submission the question of the way in which these words were published does affect the question as to whether or not what is being published is a blasphemous libel, and I desire to draw your lordship's attention upon this matter to the case which I have already mentioned, the case of *Rex v. Boulter*, reported in "72 Justices of the Peace" on page 189. This is in the summing up of Mr. Justice Phillimore as he then was, and the learned judge says this: "He is free to teach what he likes as to religious matters, even if it is unbelief, but when we come to consider whether he is exceeding the permitted limits we must not neglect to consider the place where he speaks and the people to whom he speaks. A man is not free in a public place where passers-by who might not willingly go to listen to him knowing what he was going to say might accidentally hear his words or where young people might be present a man is not free to use coarse ridicule on subjects sacred to most people in this country. He is free to advance arguments." In my submission that direction of Mr. Justice Phillimore is the direction which ought to be applied in this case, and it ought to have been pointed out to the jury that it does make a difference in the question as to whether it is a blasphemous libel or not, whether or not you are forcing upon people something which they may or may not desire to hear, or whether you are giving the person the right of purchase. That direction of Mr. Justice Phillimore was followed by Mr. Justice Horridge in *Rex and Salter* in 1911. As far as I know it is not reported in any book, but I have got a note of what was said in that case by Mr. Justice Horridge and he follows the words I have read to this Court in his direction to the jury.

**MR. JUSTICE ROCHE:** What does your argument come to? That blasphemy may be in words, but may not be in writing?

**SIR HENRY:** The test is whether or not it is likely to outrage the feelings of individuals or whether it is likely to cause a breach of the peace. That is what was said by Lord Sumner in the case of *Bowman v. The Secular Society* in 1919. Supposing what might be blasphemous libel when spoken is sold in a shop and the shop has written outside it "Anti-Christian documents are sold here." In my submission the question then as to the mode of publication is a question which does concern the further matter as to whether it is a blasphemous libel at all.

**THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:** To follow out your illustration suppose visitors merely saw "Anti-Christian publications only sold here" they might go inside and get a document which is calculated to outrage the feeling of the person who reads it and is likely to cause that person to commit a breach of the peace. What do you say to that?

**SIR HENRY:** One has to assume in my submission if you have a notice outside a shop or a notice outside the document as in this case that it is a document against Christianity, and in this case, as I am going to point out to your lordships, showing upon the face of it that the man who publishes it has himself been prosecuted for blasphemy, then you have to look to the sort of person who is likely to buy it. Is he a man who is likely to have his feelings outraged and is he a man "likely to cause a breach of the peace there and then"?

THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE: I do not know whether the fact that he was punished affects him except that he might be a most amiable person by this time.

SIR HENRY: Perhaps I should not have anticipated, but my argument is that the mode of publication goes to the root of the offence as to whether or not what is written or being said is in fact a blasphemous libel.

THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE: That does not seem to me to be wrong if you carry it to its final conclusion. I might say that the fact that he was doing nothing, shouting nothing, is in his favour. Then you have to go further and say that the mode of publication, although it contains strong anti-Christian views, is in other respects such that its publication is to be justified. You must look at the documents and see whether the publication is of a reasonable, argumentative character, such as would be lawful to address to your audience or to the people who want to see what your views are. You cut off the supplies at the point that seems to me to be a little early.

SIR HENRY: Do not you have to look at both matters?

THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE: I agree. You are only looking at one. I do not say you are not going to take us to the other.

SIR HENRY: My submission is that you have to look at both, and in looking at the mode of publication it is one of the matters to determine whether or not the document is blasphemous libel, and the learned judge says here quite distinctly that the mode of publication has nothing to do as to whether it is a blasphemous libel or not. The learned judge says it might have something to do with the question of sentence.

(To be Continued.)

## Correspondence.

### IS DEATH CRUEL?

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—It is difficult to see the point in the reiterated comments in your columns on various forms of death as proving callousness or cruelty on the part of a deity or nature, or some special malice or carelessness towards a particular person. Unless death is abolished altogether and every creature becomes immortal, the mere form of dissolution is a minor matter, and the present impartial incidence of it is surely much less terrifying than would be an obviously arbitrary choice of one victim rather than another. Since it involves either annihilation or the transference of a personality from one sphere of existence to another under the same power or natural law, we know not under what conditions, it is evident that we cannot possibly tell whether it brings pain or pleasure to the individual affected, or consequently whether the power or law responsible is cruel or kind. In any case it has the same right to take the life as to give it.

EVACUSTES A. PHIPSON.

### THE LATE MR. HYNDMAN'S VIEWS.

SIR,—On February 27, 1913, Mr. Hyndman wrote in the *Daily Express*: "I know of no country in which a low type of supernatural religion is used so systematically to chloroform what little of intelligence is left to the wage-earning class." This is straight talk without compromise. I preserved the cutting in my scrap-book, volume viii. p. 62, and have just found it after a long search.

GEORGE IVES.

### MORALITY AND A FUTURE LIFE.

SIR,—I am the writer of the notes and other editorial matter in *Light*, and therefore responsible for the observations on your *Grammar of Freethought*.

May I explain that I wished to convey that a man owed a duty to himself as well as to others, and that there is a morality personal to the individual. The term "spiritual community" did not necessarily involve the idea of "assumed spiritual beings," but was intended to suggest a deeper relationship between man and man than that implied by physical contiguity.

I am glad to see that you propose to elucidate the point further.

I will not pay you any fulsome compliment on the ability you display in your conduct of the *Freethinker* further than by saying I read your articles with interest.

Naturally there is an acute intellectual difference between our respective attitudes towards life, but that is not of the essence of any question arising out of life itself.

DAVID GOW.

Editor, *Light*.

[We are pleased to see that Mr. Gow is not one of those who are using all the stupid talk of the Christian mythology in order to commend their belief in a future life to a superstition-soaked and little-thinking public. We will deal with the whole question of Materialism so soon as we can find time. But time seems to be always finding us first.—Editor, *Freethinker*.]

### KING'S PROCTOR;

### WASTE OF PUBLIC TIME AND MONEY.

SIR,—It is announced to-day that eight decrees nisi have been rescinded by Mr. Justice Hill, the King's Proctor showing cause. There can be no doubt that the King's Proctor's department is putting out its best efforts to justify its existence, but it would be interesting to know why his activities do not extend to wealthy litigants. His activities would appear to be concentrated on poor persons' cases. It is obvious that undefended cases of husbands against wives, disposed of at the rate of four to six minutes a case, cannot have received the necessary amount of investigation, and it is equally obvious that in a number of these cases, through ignorance of the law and procedure, a large number of poor women are being "scrapped" who could put in a good defence if they knew how to proceed.

The fact that four or six minutes is all that can be allowed for the hearing of divorce cases proves that the congestion in the Divorce Court has become a national danger and scandal, that decentralization is overdue, and that the cases of the poor should be heard in the districts where the parties reside, and where witnesses are at hand.

The office of the King's Proctor is an anachronism, and the enquiries of his agents a form of inquisition difficult to associate with modern life. Moreover, it must be plain to everyone that the department is an unnecessary expense. It would be interesting to know how many of the counsel who conduct the cases of the Poor Person's Department act also for the King's Proctor. Indignation is growing in the country on the whole method of procedure in these cases. If, as it would appear, the King's Proctor can step in to undo the work of the Court, then public time and money is being seriously wasted in the first instance, and if it is added that his interference is effective in very few cases then it cannot be denied that a department is being worked at great expense to the public, in order that a few poor people should be irrevocably bound in a marriage which has often ceased to be a marriage long before any suit for divorce was even thought of.

(MRS.) M. L. SEATON TIEDEMAN.

### EVOLUTION AND PROGRESS.

SIR,—Reverting to Mr. Bax's friendly criticism of your contention in *A Grammar of Freethought* that evolution "has nothing whatever to do with progress," I certainly think he is right in saying that a good many will dissent from the statement because, even admitting that evolution is but another name for "change," and that "change," in the organic world, merely implies the adaption of an animal form to a different or changing environment, the fact remains that adaptability involves, in the majority of cases, characteristics which are of a lasting and mutual benefit to the animal group in which it takes place, and consequently the above assertion is negatived to the extent that, whereas evolution or change has, strictly speaking, no definite affinity to progress, progress, on the other hand, depends primarily for its advancement on the eternal sifting process of nature which we term evolution.

Science teaches us that the organic world is the natural offspring of the inorganic world and that it has and is, in spite of many setbacks, gradually adapting itself to a slowly changing environment by a process generally known as natural selection, and this process, as the creator of the term himself says, "works solely by and for the good of each being," and "all corporeal and mental endowments tend to progress towards perfection."

Mr. Bax himself has pointed out in another work that "the reality of any given thing is simply the temporary form assumed by the elements composing it," and this is easily applicable to evolution. The fact that life has tended towards improvement for many thousands of years does not necessarily prove that it always will do so. It is just one aspect of "change" on a big scale, and progress regarded in this light obviously does away with any idea of premeditated "design" or "plan," and it is very much to the detriment of the average Christian that he, while solemnly chanting "Change and decay in all around I see," should piously refrain from taking a less prejudiced view of the situation than he generally does, for otherwise he would see that, although there certainly is change and decay, development is also in evidence, and that the latter outbalances the former, for, far from remaining stagnate or declining, life has, as we know, advanced and improved through all the generations of which we are cognizant, though apparently it is left for the Materialist to say, with Darwin, that "there is grandeur in this view of life." FRANK W. ROBINSON.

[We do not see that either of our critics meets the point raised by us in *A Grammar of Freethought*. We do not deny that what we term "progress" emerges from the evolutionary process. What we contend is that the conception of progress is something that belongs to us, and consists in a measurement of change in terms of a standard which we arbitrarily create. But evolution is, in itself, merely a biological change resulting in adaptation to environment, and the fact of its being evolution is not at all concerned with whether the change is in the direction of progress or not. And a change which spells progress to one species may spell destruction to another. Our object was to warn readers against the anthropomorphism and the disguised Theism which is implied in so many statements of evolution, even when made by avowed Freethinkers. And we think the need for the caution is shown by the remarks from two such able critics as Mr. Bax and Mr. Robinson.—Editor, *Freethinker*.]

### Obituary.

Tyneside friends will learn with regret of the death of another firm adherent of Secularism in the person of John Richardson who for many years carried on a business of clock and watchmaker in Church Street, Blaydon. Deceased was for over thirty-six years a steadfast member of the Newcastle Branch of the N. S. S., and was well known and greatly respected. Being confined to his bed for the past three years, and fully conscious of approaching death, he made repeated requests for a secular burial. He peacefully passed away in his eighty-sixth year, and was laid to rest in Blaydon Cemetery beneath the snow covered earth on January 14. The funeral service by Austin Holyoake was read by the undersigned to a large number of friends and relatives, several of whom expressed their admiration of a service which they had heard for the first time.

J. G. BARTRAM.

### Bargains in Books

#### A CANDID EXAMINATION OF THEISM.

By PHYSICUS (G. J. Romanes).

Price 4s., postage 4d.

#### THE ETHIC OF FREETHOUGHT.

By KARL PEARSON.

Essays in Freethought History and Sociology.

Published 10s. 6d. Price 5s. 6d., postage 7d.

#### KAFIR SOCIALISM AND THE DAWN OF INDIVIDUALISM.

An Introduction to the Study of the Native Problem.

By DUDLEY KIDD.

Published 7s. 6d. Price 3s. 9d., postage 9d.

THE PIONEER PRESS, 61 FARRINGTON STREET, E.C. 4.

### SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

#### LONDON.

##### INDOOR.

A. E. U., Cricklewood, (Trades' Hall, Cricklewood Lane, Cricklewood): Monday, January 30, 9 p.m., Mr. A. D. McLaren, "The Workers' Interest in Science."

METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (JOHNSON'S DANCING Academy, 241 Marylebone Road, near Edgware Road): 7.30, address—"Corn Plasters for Cancer," Mr. J. H. Van Biene.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, N.W., off Kentish Town Road): 7.30, Mr. A. D. McLaren, "Has the World Gained from Christianity?"

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