

# THE FREETHINKER.

EDITED BY G. W. FOOTE.

Sub-Editor—J. M. WHEELER.

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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]

## PROSECUTION OF "THE FREETHINKER" AT GLASGOW.

### LATEST NEWS.

THE London evening papers on Wednesday announced Mr. Ferguson's sentence "for selling a paper called the *Freethinker*." How delightfully naïve. One would think those gentlemen of the press had never heard of the *Freethinker* before, whereas they are all well acquainted with it, and many of them chuckle over it in private. As a matter of fact, *the Freethinker* is better known throughout the country than any of the London evening journals. It goes into every town, and almost every village in Great Britain, and has readers in every part of the world where the English language is spoken.

THE *Pall Mall Gazette* had a special paragraph, headed "The *Freethinker* and General Booth," which stated that Mr. Ferguson was sentenced to fourteen days' imprisonment for selling the *Freethinker*, "containing a representation of General Booth and Bramwell Booth, and holding up to ridicule and derision the following words from the Bible—'Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic, and sore vexed.'" According to this, God Almighty is nowhere, and the question becomes one between us and the Booths. The *Pall Mall Gazette* people are hand in glove with the Salvationists, but we hardly expected they would go as far as this. We suppose Mr. Stead's next agitation will have for its object a Blasphemy Law Amendment Act, making it a penal offence to ridicule the Salvation Army or its chief showman. Gladstone may be satirised in the comic papers, and charged inferentially with arson, assassination and plunder; Chamberlain may be put in the most contemptible positions; Bradlaugh may be caricatured to the likeness of an ape; and Churchill may be depicted in every variety of impudence and imposture. But let no one deride the sacred bosses of the Salvation Army, or dare to insinuate that their performances are not as majestic as a Greek tragedy.

LAST Sunday morning a meeting of members and friends of the Glasgow Secular Society was held in the Ram's Horn Assembly Room, Ingram Street, to consider Mr. Ferguson's prosecution. Great enthusiasm prevailed, and much discussion took place on various suggestions. Eventually a resolution was passed pledging the Society to defend Mr.

Ferguson and to maintain as far as possible the sale of the *Freethinker* in Glasgow. A sub-committee of four was appointed, consisting of Messrs. Brown, McLean, Forrester and Wallace, to take all necessary steps in the matter. A Defence Fund was opened which the local Freethinkers are already supporting in the most admirable manner.

ANOTHER meeting was held at the Ram's Horn Assembly Room on Wednesday evening last. There was a large attendance. It was moved by Mr. Thomson, seconded by Mr. Robertson, and carried—"That this meeting resolves to support Mr. Robert Ferguson or others prosecuted for selling the *Freethinker* in Glasgow under the infamous Police Act, and appeals to all free men and lovers of the right of private judgment to assist in resisting tyranny or force in speculative matters."

It was also moved by Mr. Stewart, seconded by Mr. Allan, and carried—"That this meeting remit to the Committee of the Glasgow Secular Society the carrying on of the sale of the *Freethinker* in Glasgow."

IN writing the article in our ordinary number, which appears elsewhere, we were under the impression that Mr. Ferguson was out on bail pending the appeal, but we find that he was taken into custody at once and removed to the Glasgow Gaol. Mr. Angus Campbell, whose letter we publish in another column, appears to have prosecuted the appeal with great promptitude and vigor. His journey to Edinburgh on Thursday was quite successful, and late in the evening we received the following telegram:—"Notwithstanding strenuous opposition, Lord Adam to-day granted *interim* liberation on security of £10. Ferguson liberated to-morrow." So the gallant veteran is free to smoke his pipe by his own fireside again, and we hope he will never return to Glasgow Gaol to serve the remainder of his sentence.

WE regret that we unwittingly did Mr. Ferguson an injustice. When he appeared at the police court on the 14th inst, his counsel could not be present and sent a clerk to represent him. This gentleman asked for a postponement of the case in order that his principal might conduct the defence in person. The stipendiary magistrate, however, would grant no delay unless Mr. Ferguson promised not to sell the *Freethinker* in the interim. Our old friend refused point-blank, whereupon the magistrate threatened to send officers to his shop to seize the stock. Mr. Ferguson's friends then advised him to agree to the conditions for a few days, and he reluctantly complied. In a letter to us, dated the 17th inst, he says: "I had no other alternative. But I will not stop the sale after Wednesday on any account."

MR. FORRESTER in his last letter, which reaches us as we go to press, says that "Mr. Ferguson told me personally he would not pay even two pounds to save him fourteen days." One of the pluckiest things we ever heard from an old man of eighty.

MR. FORRESTER writes us :—"Fight we will, and the *Freethinker* will be sold in Glasgow in spite of the police. In the event of Mr. Ferguson being committed to prison, several very able friends have volunteered to take his place and continue the sale although they should go to prison."

MR. FORRESTER also informs us that "Three young men are ready, if need be, to take Mr. Ferguson's place in the shop, on condition that their mothers and families are provided for if they should go to gaol." We are delighted to see this brave spirit, and we beg to assure the "young men," that they need be under no apprehension as to the welfare of those dependent on them.

In conclusion we beg to impress on our friends the necessity of a prompt and generous response to our appeal for funds. The battle must be fought out at law, for if the *Freethinker* can be suppressed by local magistrates, without trial by jury, neither this journal nor any other is safe for a single day. While we were in prison one writer in the *Fortnightly Review* actually proposed that Blasphemy should be dealt with in a summary way, without the defendant being allowed to make a speech and so spread his pernicious views. But we are not yet come to that pass, although we should soon reach it if the Glasgow magistrate is allowed full swing. Let our readers remember then that every unpopular journal is threatened, and that without their assistance poor Mr. Ferguson may have to spend his Christmas holiday in gaol.

## REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS IN THE POLICE COURT.

THE following report is taken from the Glasgow papers, the independent report we arranged for not having arrived. Perhaps the reporters were frightened, or their manuscript has been delayed.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18th.

At the Central Police Court this morning—Stipendiary Gemmel on the bench—an old man named Robert Ferguson, carrying on business as a stationer in Ingram Street, and residing in Main Street, Gorbals, appeared at the bar to answer to a charge of having contravened the Glasgow Police Act, by offering for sale on the 11th November to the public generally, and in particular selling to Detective William Phillips (1) a copy of a paper entitled the *Freethinker*, containing on the first page a profane drawing or representation, entitled, "Comic Bible Sketch, No. 138," holding up to ridicule and derision the following verses from the Bible—viz., "Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen shook it; and the

anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his error, and, there he died by the ark of God" (2 Sam. xi., 6, 7), [the date of said paper being 25th October; (2) a copy of the *Freethinker*, containing on the first page a profane drawing or representation, entitled, "Booth and Bramwell," holding up to ridicule and derision the following words from the Bible—viz., "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatick, and sore vexed" (Matt. xvii., 15), the date on said paper being 1st November. It was stated in the complaint that he was liable to a penalty not exceeding 40s., with the alternative of 14 days' imprisonment, or alternatively to a term of imprisonment not exceeding 14 days.

MR. ANGUS CAMPBELL, writer, who appeared for the accused, took objection to the relevancy of the charge and the competency of the Court to decide it. He held that the contents of the periodicals amounted to blasphemy, being a more serious charge than that of profanity. If the Stipendiary sustained the charge as competent, he was making competent in a Police Court the trial of offences of all kinds against religion. He would be extending jurisdiction to an inferior Court in offences which at one time had attached to them the penalty of death. He admitted that the publication was of a most blasphemous character, and that it was a case worthy of the highest criminal Court in the country. Mr. Campbell quoted several authorities in support of his contention.

THE STIPENDIARY said it might be that the publication was blasphemous, but that was not the charge preferred against the accused. It was that he sold, or offered for sale, a copy of a paper on which was a profane drawing or representation; and he had, first of all, to decide whether that was a relevant charge. It might amount to a charge of blasphemy, but he had nothing to do with that. He held that the charge was a relevant one under the Glasgow Police Act.

DETECTIVE PHILLIPS stated that on the 11th November he went to the premises of accused, accompanied by Detective McKay, and purchased two copies of the *Freethinker* which he got from among a number of papers exposed for sale on the counter.

By MR. CAMPBELL.—He looked upon the illustrations as very scurrilous and as an attack upon God and religion.

DETECTIVE MCKAY corroborated, and stated that defender sold the papers, copies of which were produced.

MAY ROBBIE, a little girl, stated that she was shop and message girl in the employ of the defender. He was in the habit of receiving about 200 copies of the *Freethinker* weekly.

For the defence, a Mr. Jamieson said the *Freethinker* was edited by Mr. Foote, and published in London. It was in the sixth year of its publication. He had read the *Freethinker* for several years.

MR. DONALD M'PHEE (Procurator-Fiscal)—I noticed that you took the oath. Do you believe in God?

Witness—Taking the oath implies acquaintance in the dogma of Divine existence. I am not capable of defining God, but I am capable of believing in a Supreme existence.

MR. M'PHEE—Could your conception of a God be defined with reverence?

Witness—Yes.

MR. M'PHEE (handing witness the two copies of the *Freethinker*)—Look at these representations; one is entitled "A Comic Bible Sketch." Can you explain what it is intended to represent? Isn't it too horrible to express in words?

Witness—I regard it as an attempt on the part of the artist to ridicule what he considers a ridiculous conception of God.

MR. M'PHEE—By presenting God, who is commonly believed in, in a most ridiculous and abominable way.

Witness—Of course, a man cannot be guilty of irreverence who does not believe in God. The editor does not believe in God.

MR. CAMPBELL stated that he looked upon the paper with repugnance, but the prosecution would only increase its circulation. Besides, it could be sold in the suburbs, to which the Glasgow Police Act did not apply.

THE STIPENDIARY—The case could be brought up there under the General Police Act.

Mr. CAMPBELL—Well, in any case that Act would only apply to police burghs. Accused had been 24 or 25 years in business, and this was the first charge that had been brought against him.

The STIPENDIARY said that on the evidence which had been led he found the defender guilty of selling the two copies of the *Freethinker*. He agreed with Mr. Campbell that these proceedings might not put an end to the sale of the paper, but, so far as possible, he would do what he could to prevent its further circulation. Before he passed sentence, he wished to know whether the defender was to sell any more of the papers.

Accused stated to his agent that he declined to give any such obligation, as he could not say what the other papers would contain. He would, however, examine them, and use his judgment before selling them.

The STIPENDIARY—Then I impose a punishment of imprisonment for fourteen days.

Mr. CAMPBELL intimated an appeal.

(Continued on page 372).

## ACID DROPS.

OWING to the Glasgow prosecution, we are unable to find space for our promised leader on Mr. Stead's case. Fortunately we have already, at various times, expressed our views on the general subject. Mr. Stead has been removed from Coldbath Fields to Holloway Gaol, where he will be treated as a first-class misdemeanant, wearing his own clothes, eating his own food, drinking his own drink (*champagne* if he likes), having books, papers and writing materials, receiving and answering letters, and enjoying the visits of his wife and friends. What a remarkably cheap martyrdom! As prisoners sometimes say in the dock, we could have done three months of that "on our head." Mr. Stead was visited by a Christian minister on the first day of his imprisonment, and nearly all the Christian papers called either for his release or for his being removed from a criminal cell. Not one of them asked the same thing for us, although our offence was purely fanciful, and Mr. Stead's was one of downright brutality to a poor man's daughter and villainous slander of the mother. Being a Christian makes all the difference. If you have only a reputation for "piety" and have a lot of "pious" friends you may do pretty much as you like without fear of the consequences.

ANOTHER thing. Why does the Home Secretary, and why do all the pious screamers, make a difference in Mr. Stead's case? Poor Jacques, whom he employed, and who cannot be quite as guilty as the principal, is lost sight of altogether, and eats his skilly in Coldbath Fields apparently without a thought of his sufferings disturbing the mind of any of Mr. Stead's supporters. The French midwife, on whom they relied so much, languishes in the same obscurity, and not a petition is sent in for poor Rebecca, whom Mr. Stead forced into the business, according to his own confession, against her will. Whatever glory there is in the business Rebecca deserves. But Mr. Stead gets it all, as well as the lightest punishment.

THE notions of chivalry entertained by Mr. Stead and the shrieking sisterhood are very peculiar. They are very anxious about poor women's daughters, yet they abduct Eliza Armstrong from a home no better and no worse than thousands of others, and they persist in accusing the mother of the most abominable crime a mother could commit, although the judge and jury, as well as every sensible man and woman, are satisfied of her innocence. If this is Christian chivalry the less we have of it the better.

WHAT do Cardinal Manning and the Archbishop of Canterbury and Samuel Morley say now? Their *secret* investigation at the Mansion House is directly at variance in its results with the *open* investigation at the Old Bailey. The fact is they only heard one side, which is a Christian virtue all the world over. Of course they displayed as much common sense, and as much idea of the laws of evidence, as could be expected. Two eminent sky-pilots and a professional philanthropist might be expected to go wrong on any subject. Fancy what a mess they would make of their dogmas and their "history" if they had to defend them in open court against the Attorney-General and Mr. Poland, briefed by Common Sense and Fair Play.

THE *Weekly Times and Echo* says: "When Messrs. Foote and Ramsey were sentenced to a good deal more of the same sort of thing some time back by Justice North, no ministers visited them in gaol, or published harrowing descriptions of the hardships they were undergoing. They surely did not deserve imprisonment more than Mr. Stead does, but their friends decently abstained from bewailing their fate in the doleful manner peculiar to the sympathisers with the 'Secret Commission.'"

JOHN the Baptist Freund has got another month's imprisonment for brawling in St. Paul's Cathedral. He was only carrying out the Lord's commission to predict vengeance on the ungodly.

In the list of members of "The Ritualistic Conspiracy," published in the *English Churchman*, appears the name of the Rev. F. T. Hetting, the chaplain to the Marquis of Salisbury, who is marked as an extreme Ritualist.

THE checks which the religionists have received in France have induced a great increase of the nunneries and sisterhoods in England. Mr. Newdigate Newdegate is a bigot, but his bill for "the inspection of convents" was not so uncalled for as many lovers of liberty imagine.

THAT eminently meek and mild Christian Archdeacon Denison has met with a rather warm reception in Somersetshire in consequence of his abuse of Mr. Gladstone. He tells his hearers that they may as well cheer for the Devil as for the Liberal leader. The other night, when he presided at a meeting in Taunton in defence of Church and State, he was greeted with hissing and hooting, and great disturbance ensued. Chairs were smashed, ladies fainted, and the meeting broke up in confusion. Several free fights occurred. "Christian" gentleness of speech naturally provokes "Christian" gentleness of action.

THE Archdeacon of Taunton was enthusiastically received by the Conservatives of East Brent. In his speech he told them he was not a politician, but he stood up for the connection of Church and State. To disendow the Church, he said, was to rob God. This is the first time we ever heard that any such person as God was recognised at law as an owner of property. On the other hand, we fancy we have read somewhere that very similar exclamations were used by a silversmith called Demetrius against a pestilent agitator named Paul.

THE Rev. R. H. Muir has issued a letter on the Disestablishment of the Church of Scotland, in which he denounces the proposed measure as a deliberate and intentional national apostasy from the Christian faith, and threatens dreadful judgments from God if it be carried out. Mr. Muir is a specimen of the sky-pilots who affect to believe that the sky will fall if their own livings are in danger, and who do not scruple to attribute their own folly and malignancy to the God of the Universe.

A WRITER in the *City Press* laments the fact that Reuben May "does not stop the mouth of scandal by publishing balance sheets;" yet at the same time he butters Reuben in a way that would make the editor of *Truth* stare. He says that out of Reuben's funds 60,000 meals were supplied during the winter, but he does not say how many of them were consumed by the noble Reuben and his family and relations.

THE Rev. Henry Elwell Smith, of Liverpool, is a distinguished ornament to the Church of England. He seduces the widow of a brother clergyman, and then assaults her in the public street and tries to take away her character. At present he has got off with a fine, but no doubt the matter will come before the bishop, and he may have to pay further for indulging his passions.

THE Rev. James Le Fleming Mitchell, curate of Sotterly, was visited one evening by a constable, who came to serve him with a summons. Seizing a candlestick, the irascible sky-pilot tried to print the pattern upon the man of law's face; for which summary action the magistrates summarily gave him seven days' hard labor. Oakum and reflection will probably tone down the reverend gentleman's exuberance.

ARCHDEACON FOULKES, of St. Asaph, is of opinion that working men are not fit to be entrusted with local government. His state of mind is easily explained. He receives £350 a year for residing in the city three months out of every twelve.

AN inquest on a servant girl in the employ of the Rev. R. E. Bambrough, Wesleyan Minister of Barnsley, who died covered with bruises, resulted in the very mild verdict "that deceased should have had more attention shown to her."

THE London *Echo* notices "a lack of the Christian spirit" among the teachers of religion who so frequently make a charge of Atheism against Liberal candidates "without the shadow of a shade of evidence." This only shows how little the *Echo* knows "the Christian spirit." Anybody who reads our "Crimes of Christianity" will see that these clergymen are true to the great traditions of their faith.

THE *Echo* further thinks that these imputations of Atheism are "a powerful testimony to the religious spirit of the British people." We think so too, but in quite another sense than our contemporary.

MR. JOHN MORLEY is a great friend of liberty, and Mr. Joseph Cowen is a greater friend still. Curiously, however, though both of them *privately* disapproved our imprisonment, neither of them could be induced to sign the *public* memorial for our release. So far as Freethinkers can *press* these Liberal

Members of Parliament we shall get justice from them, but not an inch farther. Most of them would see Freethinkers burnt alive without lifting a finger to save them, if inaction did not imperil their seats. It is worth remembering that the only Member of Parliament who could be got to question the Government on our case was Mr. Peter Taylor, who is a thorough-going Freethinker. All the other Radicals were dumb.

SERVIA and Bulgaria are flying at each other's throat, and both call on God for victory. His answer will depend on a good many causes. How will Russia act, and how Austria? What will the other powers do? Will the winter set in severely and make the country impassable? And so on. Answer all these questions accurately, estimate the relative strengths of Servia and Bulgaria, and you may predict to a certainty what God will do; for, as Napoleon says, Providence is always on the side of the strongest battalions.

POOR Bulgaria is suddenly invaded by Servia, which cannot afford to lose so good an opportunity of plundering and slaying brother Christians. Roumania is also demanding that Silistria shall be ceded to her by the Bulgarians. Montenegro and Greece are arming for the fray. All these petty Christian powers seem far more anxious to despoil or ruin each other than to combine against their common enemy, the Turk. Of what value is their Christianity?

ACCORDING to the latest reports the Mahdi left a hundred and forty-five better halves to mourn his loss. What a *penchant* prophets always have for women! No doubt some other man of God, perhaps the Mahdi's successor, will console the hundred and forty-five widows.

THE Bishop of St. Davids owns that the great mass of mankind "are neither saints nor reprobates, neither fit for eternal life, nor deserving of eternal death." He says: "The terrible chiaroscuro of good and evil, of which we read in Scripture and in history, seems to have gradually toned down. In morals as in other things, men appear to be settling, under the pressure of a conventional system, to a dead level of mediocrity." But all this don't fit in with Gospel theory and Evangelicalism. If the mass of mankind are not deserving of hell-fire how can the Christian approve of the action of their God who sends them there? The only remedy for the puzzled bishop to adopt will be to turn Roman Catholic and then he can send all this mass of mediocrity to purgatory, and so escape the insuperable difficulty of classifying all men as either extremely good or extremely bad.

It appears from the *Church Review* that many curates are of opinion that their position cannot be much worse under disestablishment. They complain that if without influence they have no chance of promotion in age to any of the better paid offices of the church and that they are continually at the mercy of the caprices of a vicar or a vicar's wife, liable at any moment to be dismissed for incompetence if unpopular and from motives of jealousy if more popular than the vicar.

THE London hoardings are plastered with big bills headed "The Church of our Fathers." It calls on the electors to defend the Establishment, and is signed by a dozen or two of the "nobs," including several members of the House of Lords. The only truthful part of the bill is its heading. The signatories are right in saying "The Church of our Fathers," for half the nobility derive their estates from the spoliation of the old Church of England in the reign of Henry the Eighth, while their predatory ancestors set up the new Church which is now threatened.

THE *Rock* endorses the circular sent forth by our Archbishops calling attention to the approach of the "Day of Intercession for Missions." The prayers of the whole Church, it appears, are "urgently needed." We are to pray that more volunteers for the missionary work may come forward, and each one is to ask himself while he prays, "Why should not I go?" But the editor and staff of the *Rock* don't go. The Archbishops don't go. They know too well on which side their bread is buttered. Hardly anybody goes, unless by so doing he can get a better salary or more notoriety.

#### THE SOLICITOR'S ACCOUNT.

MR. ANGUS CAMPBELL writes as follows:—

SIR,—As the solicitor who conducted the defence of Mr. Ferguson, who to-day was, by our stipendiary magistrate, sent to prison for fourteen days, without the option of a fine, and as your readers will doubtless desire to have an accurate notion of the case, I take the liberty of writing you on the subject.

The prosecution is founded upon the Glasgow Police Act, which is directed against "every person who offers for sale or distribution, or who sells, distributes or publicly exhibits any profane, indecent or obscene book, paper, print, photograph, drawing, painting or representation," and to that offence

attaches the penalty of imprisonment for fourteen days, or, in the option of the magistrate, such imprisonment with the pecuniary alternative of a fine not exceeding 40s. The charge against Mr. Ferguson was that he sold to a detective officer two copies of the *Freethinker*—the issues of October 25 and 1st November respectively—and that the particular representations thereon were profane. On behalf of Mr. Ferguson, I maintained that the police magistrate in such a question had no jurisdiction, and I did so on the grounds that from an orthodox standpoint the word "profane" was inappropriate, the woodcuts and their relative texts being blasphemous—blasphemy being a crime not cognisable in the police court; that the prosecution was opposed to the liberty of the press and would place the existence of journals at the discretion, or want of discretion, of local magistrates; that the accused desired to be tried by a higher tribunal; that he was not the publisher, editor, or in any way responsible for the *Freethinker* and its contents, and that the papers were sold in the ordinary course of business. I also strongly maintained—also from an orthodox point of view—that the prosecution would utterly defeat its ostensible purpose, giving, as it necessarily would, publicity to the newspaper attacked, as well as increased circulation, and that the interests of the established religion itself would be best served by entirely ignoring such complaints and leaving the matter in the hands of the public. I admitted again, from an orthodox point of view, that the cartoons were not defensible, and think so still; but I am also strongly of opinion that the conviction is bad. I hold that opinion upon the following grounds:—(1) That seriously considered from the orthodox standpoint, the cartoons are not only profane but blasphemous, and according to our law profanity and blasphemy are distinct and separate crimes. No doubt blasphemy includes profanity, as murder includes assault, but the jurisdiction of the local magistrates being strictly limited, and profanity and not blasphemy being the subject matter of jurisdiction, the Public Prosecutor was not entitled to minimise the charge of blasphemy into one of profanity, and so bring—what would otherwise not be competent—the case before the police court. (2) I have grave doubts as to whether newspapers are within the scope of the statute at all; they are not referred to *per expressum*, and I can scarcely suppose it ever was in the contemplation of the Legislature to insert in a local Police Act a clause which would amount to censorship of the press in its worst conceivable form—placing in the hands of local nobodies the consideration and disposal of questions as to which was or was not profane, libellous, indecent, or even blasphemous, in a public newspaper; (3) that the sentence pronounced is in the circumstance excessive. It is the highest possible; and notwithstanding the present being the first case of the kind tried, the accused has been denied the option of a fine. On this ground alone, I lean to the opinion that our Supreme Court would be disposed to quash the sentence. I have advised An Appeal, or as it is called in Scotland, suspension of the whole proceedings, and have been instructed accordingly. To-morrow the case will be submitted to one of our Supreme Court Judges in Chambers, when I hope to get an interim order of release, and the whole question will fall to be disposed of in a few weeks before the High Court of Justiciary at Edinburgh.

I would not have thought it necessary to write you, but that as usual I find our local papers remarkable in such cases for the *suppressio veri et suggestio falsi*.—Yours truly,

ANGUS CAMPBELL.

109 West George Street, Glasgow,  
Nov. 18, 1885.

#### THE GLASGOW PROSECUTION.

(This article appeared in our ordinary edition.)

FOR the first time since the City police worried Mr. Cattell, at the time of our own prosecution, a newsagent is summoned for selling the *Freethinker*. Since our release from prison the old policy of the *Freethinker* has been resumed and continued, yet the authorities, who have frequently had it pressed on their attention, have refrained from interfering with us again. Probably they think the success of their previous efforts to suppress this journal not very encouraging. At any rate, they have left us alone, although we have flagrantly defied bigotry in every number. What the Crown officials wisely shrink from doing, however, the Glasgow police have undertaken, after the manner of those fools in the poem, who rush in where angels fear to tread. Drest in a little brief authority, these guardians of the peace, whose proper business is to look after our shutters, presume to be the censors of the press, and to decide what the citizens shall and shall not read. Have they no legitimate work to do in Glasgow, that they have so much leisure on their hands? Are there no criminals at large in that city? Are there no undetected

offences against the ordinary law? Is there no drunkenness in the streets? And is the open-air society in the Trongate and the Saltmarket so refined at last, that the police must turn their attention to a paper which is quietly read by the most orderly and inoffensive section of the community? Or are they so disgusted at the way in which Freethinkers keep out of the police courts, that they must drag one in by main force, on a trumped-up charge of a purely imaginary crime?

The unlucky newsagent singled out for attack is Mr. Robert Ferguson, an old man of eighty, whose long and blameless life has been associated with Freethought. He was, in his young days, a disciple of Robert Owen, and when the Socialist movement collapsed he identified himself with the new party of Secularism, which carried on the propaganda of what was best in its principles. Mr. Ferguson has sold the *Freethinker* openly ever since its first appearance, exhibiting the contents-sheet outside his shop, and transacting his business like a man in open daylight. Until now he has neither been molested nor threatened. For four years and a half he has sold this journal over his counter to all comers, and during all that time the police never suspected him of vending poison. What has aroused their suspicion? Can it be that some local sky-pilot, burning with the hatred of what he cannot answer, has invoked the magistrates and the constables to avenge the insult to his trade?

On Wednesday and Thursday in last week two common detectives visited Mr. Ferguson's shop, and purchased some back numbers of the *Freethinker*. Before leaving they told him their errand, took his name and address, and warned him to expect a prosecution. The next day he received a summons to appear on Saturday morning at nine o'clock at the police-court, which is pretty sharp work even for bigotry. The numbers selected for attack were 43 and 44, for Oct. 25 and Nov. 1. Directly the news was telegraphed to us we instructed counsel to be engaged at our expense; and we advised Mr. Ferguson by letter as well as we could without being in full possession of the details. Of course, we hold ourselves responsible for the costs, but our income is not a large one, and we have many claims on it. We therefore appeal, without hesitation, to our many friends to assist us with their subscriptions until this question is fought out. Every halfpenny received will be acknowledged and accounted for, and the balance-sheet audited by two members of the Glasgow Society and two members of the Executive Council of the National Secular Society.

Mr. Forrester, one of the most active Freethinkers in Glasgow, informs us that great difficulty was experienced in obtaining the services of a "writer." But eventually one was secured, and, on the ground that he wanted time to look into the case, it was postponed till the following Wednesday, Mr. Ferguson promising not to sell in the meantime. A notice was exhibited in his window to this effect—"In this shop, the sale of the *Freethinker* is stopped until further notice, being prosecuted by the police." Meanwhile the Society is devising plans for selling in the streets or elsewhere, and we feel sure there is pluck enough among its members to teach the police a memorable lesson.

Mr. Ferguson is prosecuted under the Glasgow Police Act of 1866, section 135, clause 18, which enacts that "Every Person who offers for Sale or Distribution, or who sells, distributes, or publicly exhibits, any profane, indecent or obscene Book, Paper, Print, Photograph, Drawing, Painting, or Representation" shall be liable "To a Penalty of Forty Shillings, or alternatively, without Penalty, to Imprisonment for Fourteen Days."

The illustrations in Nos. 43 and 44 are prosecuted as *Profane*, which is a very elastic term, and might be construed to mean anything displeasing to a Christian. Properly speaking, every publication which is not religious is profane. The Glasgow magistrates seem to be entrusted with very wide powers.

On Wednesday morning Mr. Ferguson appeared again at the police court, and was sentenced to the full penalty of fourteen days' imprisonment. Meanwhile bail is lodged on an appeal for quashing the conviction. Mr. Ferguson may not go to prison after all, but if he does, his interests shall be looked after in his absence.

Mr. Gladstone once said that English civilisation carried the blessing of toleration wherever it went, and Liberal orators are never tired of repeating that England is a free country. Very free indeed, only you must not try to

exercise your freedom without a State ticket-of-leave. What a glorious spectacle for the true believer! What a splendid proof of the truth and beauty of Christianity! A Freethinker who has lived a blameless life, whose temperance keeps him hale at eighty, who earns his daily bread still although the shadow of death is on his brow, dragged from his honest home at the very last, and taught a final lesson of Christian charity in a police court by a sentence of fourteen days' imprisonment like a common thief! And for what? For selling one of the few honest papers in Great Britain; for vending a *profane* journal that dares to ridicule an old superstition which not one man in a thousand seriously believes. Verily the Galilean serpent is known by its trail. All the hireling priests of its obscene worship can do is to fling open a cell door, show an honest old man of eighty in a felon's garb, and say, "Behold the latest witness to Christ!"

G. W. FOOTE.

## SUGAR PLUMS.

OUR Christmas Number will be ready next week, and we venture to predict for it an unprecedented success. The illustrations are more numerous and spirited than ever, and the articles and tid-bits eclipse all our previous efforts. A full list of contents will be advertised next week. This makes the fourth special "Budget of Blasphemy" we have issued since our imprisonment, and those who read it (and who will not?) will say that we have no fear of Judge North before our eyes.

PROFESSOR STUART, M.P., has at length promised to vote for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. Mrs. S. E. Barralet, in sending us the news, says "I pride myself that this promised vote was won by a woman."

ADMIRAL EGERTON, M.P., promises to vote for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws, and to support the Affirmation Bill.

MR. GLADSTONE was heckled at Edinburgh on the question. He pretended not to know anything of Mr. Justice Stephen's draft Bill. But he certainly knows something of the Blasphemy Laws, for he was personally appealed to on our behalf, and he received a resolution from the Chelsea Clubs that our imprisonment was an indelible stigma on his Government. Mr. Gladstone knows how to evade questions as well as any man living, but we hope the gentleman who so courageously questioned him at Edinburgh will press him again on the subject.

COLONEL HOZIER, the Liberal candidate for Woolwich, is sound on the oath question, and in favor of repealing the Blasphemy Laws. He added, in reply to a question, that "he did not consider there should be anything to interfere with the religious liberty of anyone."

MR. HAYSMEN, the Liberal candidate for the Brentford division of Middlesex, in reply to Mr. A. J. Smith, who asked, "Are you in favor of the Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws?" answered "Most certainly." Mr. Haysman, being a staunch churchman, is of opinion that no sane man can be an Atheist or a Freethinker; but his opinion doesn't matter much so long as he votes right.

WE are informed that the Mr. Percy who spoke in favor of retaining *Progress* in the Wigan Public Library is the Liberal candidate for the Ince division.

MR. C. T. MILLS, of Sowerby Bridge, asked Mr. Crossley, the Liberal candidate for the district, whether he would vote for the Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. Mr. Crossley replied that he had not studied them, whereupon Mr. Mills sent him Mr. Foote's pamphlet on the subject, after reading which the candidate replied that he would sweep the laws away altogether.

MR. GEORGE SMART, an advanced political and social lecturer, a zealous Freethinker and a working man, has been elected a member of the Salford School Board, a churchman being ousted to make room for him. Among the questions put to Mr. Smart by the religious party were: "Do you believe in Jesus Christ?" and "Do you say your prayers when you go to bed?" We hope Mr. Smart will justify his success by working hard at the Board for the cause of Secular education.

ALDERMAN HUSBAND is the churchman ousted by Mr. Smart. He is a narrow-minded bigot who opposes the Sunday opening of museums and libraries and tries to stop the sale of Sunday papers. Turning to this worthy Christian, after the declaration of the poll, Mr. Smart said, "I am glad to see you at the bottom of the poll; allow me to congratulate you on your position." Husband's feelings on his defeat are probably known only to his wife.

A MOST important work by Herbert Spencer has just been published by Messrs. Williams and Norgate. It is called

"Ecclesiastical Institutions," and is Part VI. of "The Principles of Sociology." "Ecclesiastical Institutions" deals with the evolution of priestism from the time of the savage medicine-man to the modern "divine," and concludes with the chapter on "A Religious Retrospect and Prospect," which Mr. Spencer contributed to the *Nineteenth Century*. A full notice of the work will appear in our columns shortly.

ON the 4th, 11th and 18th of last month a census was taken of all the visitors to the churches, chapels and mission rooms in the parish of Shoreditch, which contains a population of 126,591. The total attendance at morning service was 6,445; at evening service, 10,768. These figures include the attendance at two large halls—the Shoreditch Town Hall and the Costers' Hall—where specially attractive services were announced. It thus appears that only 5 per cent. attend the morning services, and about 8 per cent. those held in the evening. As the numbers of the latter doubtless include the major portion of the former, we think it would be safe to say that not more than 10 per cent. of East Londoners attend any form of religious worship.

OWING to the great accumulation of new stock in our publishing business, we are obliged to clear out some of the old at reduced prices. We advertise this week Dr. Aveling's capital works on Darwinism. Others will be advertised shortly. This is a good opportunity for poor Freethinkers.

MR. FOOTE is seeing through the press a volume on his Trial and Imprisonment for Blasphemy. It will contain all the articles on the subject that have appeared in *Progress* during the last eighteen months, with some improvements and considerable additions. A long Preface will deal with the discussion on the Blasphemy Laws in the leading magazines since the first trial; and there will be an appendix on Prison Labor and the general system of penal establishments. There will be two editions of the book; one printed on good paper, and bound in paper; the other printed on very superior paper, and bound in cloth.

NEXT week will appear in our columns a capital article on "Woman" by Col. Ingersoll, written as an introduction to a little volume on "Men, Women and Gods," by Miss Helen Gardener, the American Freethought lecturer.

*La Tronada*, a weekly Spanish anti-clerical journal published at Barcelona, has reached its one hundred and eightieth number. It is giving its readers translations of some of Colonel Ingersoll's lectures.

ACCORDING to Mr. Cross's new edition of the "Life of George Eliot," a Christian minister was requested by some of her friends to check the growth of her pernicious views on religion. He egregiously failed, and said afterwards: "That young lady must have had the Devil at her elbow to suggest her doubts, for there was not a book that I recommended to her in support of Christian evidences that she had not read."

As a matter of fact, Christian evidences have made more Freethinkers than they ever converted. One of our correspondents this week tells us that his eyes were first opened by reading Paley and Grotius. John Stuart Mill tells us in his "Autobiography" that Butler's Analogy made a complete sceptic of his father.

REJOICING as we always do to see women take a practical, and not a merely sentimental part in public life, and especially in education, we are glad to chronicle the fact that Miss Connell, a school teacher at Gateshead, has been returned at the head of the poll as a member of the School Board for that borough.

MISS HELEN TAYLOR, whose enthusiasm too often runs into crazes, has retired from the London School Board, where she might have condescended to be useful, and is contesting a parliamentary seat at Camberwell.

#### A HEAVENLY TELEPHONE.

"PUBLIC worship by telephone" is now one of the luxuries indulged in by rich Christian invalids. Talmage's Tabernacle at Brooklyn is one of the places which were to be fitted up with microphones for this purpose.

Would it not be better to fix the end of the telephone wire up in heaven so as to worship direct? If this were done some of us would very much like to be switched on so as to have a little conversation with the upper circles. Let us imagine the thing done. Christian papers have given accounts before now of children sending prayers to heaven by telephone, and by paper "messengers" on a kite-string, and these prayers have been duly received and answered. Conversation proceeds.

OURSELVES. Are you there?

ROUGH VOICE. Go to blazes!

This unseemly reply strikes us with amazement until we remember that none are so truly profane as the truly religious, and that after all the exclamation is as thoroughly orthodox as any exclamation possibly can be. He that believeth not shall be damned. Our duty as Freethinkers is to be damned, to go straight to hell, to blazes—for what is hell but blazes, and why is the more horrible word and idea any more orthodox than its more commonplace synonym? Satisfied with these reflections we pick up our mouth-piece from the office floor again and resume our interrupted but promising conversation.

OURSELVES. Latitude and longitude of "blazes" unknown. Please mention distance and send itinerary of route, if you really wish us to travel in that direction.

VOICE. Blaspheming wretch! Prepare to meet thy God!

OURSELVES. Capital! We've long had a burning desire to see the old governor and have a fling or two at him. Hope he's colloquially inclined?

VOICE (we begin to think it is Peter's) Miserable trifler! Tr-r-remble at your fate. He comes! Robed in fire! Thunderstorms are on his brow. He heard your voice!

OURSELVES. Switch him on then. We'll pay the exes. Our Sinai's 28 Stonecutter Street.

DEEP VOICE (extra double-bass and supposed to be very solemn, but for faulty transmission and lack of the right frame of mind, namely, terror at our end, it savors rather of the roaring of wild bulls of Bashan, or the tuning of the biggest 'cello ever known.) Hardened sinner! Hast thou no fear of the everlasting lake of fire, no dread of the fierce torments of eternity soon to be thine.

OURSELVES. None whatever. Have you?

VOICE LIKE THUNDER. Die in thy mockeries, blaspheming hound!

Here a long spark leaped from the telephone and knocked us senseless for the moment, but the excessive distance of heaven and the fineness and consequently limited carrying capacity of the wire along which the celestial lightning had travelled, had saved our life by moderating the electric shock which divine anger had discharged upon us as its "messenger of death." Before resuming a discussion of so unsatisfactory a nature we thought it advisable to hitch our wire on the gas-pipe so as to divert any further arguments or witticisms of this kind into a safer channel. We then proceeded in quite as choice English as he deserved, to give Mr. Deity our opinion of him.

OURSELVES. You, up there! Conversation is conversation, and fair play's a jewel. To stab an unsuspecting man with lightning is a bravo's act. You're a treacherous villain, an assassin, and a contemptible coward.

VOICE (full of suppressed passion, and sounding like the rumbling of the thunders among distant hills). Accursed dog! Spawn of lowest hell! Abortion of the vilest scum and dregs of human profanity! Beware the fiery worm that dieth not, the horrors of the second death!

OURSELVES. Oh, you caution me, do you, after failing to assassinate me?

VOICE. Thou shalt not baffle me. My saints shall rise and glut their ire. The bottomless pit that I have made shall swallow thee. The smoke of thy torment, the shrieks and groans of thy despair and anguish, shall ascend for ever! Verily, verily, I, Jehovah, have prepared a hell!

OURSELVES. We reciprocate your caution. Beware yourself. They that dig a pit for others commonly fall into it themselves. Learn to swim amid flames of liquid fire, for, as sure as you're the most atrocious tyrant and coward that ever breathed, the huge majority of living souls whom you empty headlong into your lake of fire will find means of turning upon you and will drag you in or cast you in and, in the desperate malice and revenge, which you have taught them, will keep you there for evermore in the pit of torment you have digged for others far less evil and fiendish than yourself.

The only reply to our somewhat excited remarks came in the form of another and still more violent electric discharge, which was evidently intended to take shape as an irresistible death-dealing thunder-bolt; but the divine anger overreached itself by sending so powerful a current that the wire of the telephone fell to the ground in melted drops of shining metal. The communication was thus cut off, and up to the present we have not succeeded in restoring the broken continuity. We shall not absolutely die of grief however if we never have another word with this truculent torpedo-god. Indeed, only strong curiosity and strict devotion to business would induce us to attempt to

resume communication with so ugly a customer. Next time we are switched on we will endeavor to interview— orally interview that is—some more reasonable member of the celestial establishment.

W. P. BALL.

## THE BIBLE DEITY.

PART II.—CONTINUED.

"God is love."—1 JOHN IV., 8, 16.

For two years he travelled about the country, partly as a religious teacher, but mainly as a political agitator. He promulgated no new doctrine, but he laid the foundation on which the structure of a new theological system was ultimately raised; a system which is still constantly evolving new ideas, and appearing under fresh and multitudinous forms. He was a Jew, and believed that he was destined to become the king of his people, and to raise them above all other nations of the world. He had adopted the notion of the resurrection, and believed that should he even meet death in the pursuit of his object, he would rise again, and his kingdom be established. But he never thought of destroying the Jewish theology. On the contrary, he was most rigorous in fulfilling its precepts to the very letter. Still, the spirit of his teaching was essentially opposed to that of Moses. Moses was the actual founder of a religion. Jesus only endeavored to reform his system, and, like all religious reformers, failed to see that his task was an impossibility. To reform a religion is to take from it all claim to a divine origin which is essential to its life, and to construct a human system from its corpse. It is like trying to fashion a living man from the ashes of a dead god. Moses, a man of strong and able mind, led his nation from captivity, and gave them laws and instructions calculated to make them a powerful and wealthy, if an unjust and brutal, people. Jesus, a poor, half-witted fanatic, began his teaching with the words, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matthew v., 3) and held that poverty and persecution, sorrow, meekness and humility, were the paths to success. Luckily for mankind, his teaching has been practically carried out in only a very few instances. Those who adopted it in early ages fled into deserts; in more recent times they have enclosed themselves between convent walls. In either case the result has been the same. They became aliens from their own race, strangers to the hopes and fears, the struggles and the toils, the sympathies and kindnesses of their fellow-men. For the love of love, they lived unloving and unloved, forsaking the real to dwell in the ideal, and when they died and passed away, this living, moving, breathing world went on and never missed them, for though they had been in it they had not been of it, and had conferred upon it no blessing to entitle them to its remembrance or its regret.

Besides teaching, Jesus, as we are told by his biographers, performed certain miraculous acts. He began in a small way, not to put his infinite power to too great a test at first. At a supper party he turned some water into wine. This having become known he was invited to a great many similar parties in the course of the next two years. He was, no doubt, considered a profitable guest. He then tried his hand on more important matters. He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and on three occasions he is recorded to have raised the dead to life. After such wonderful success it seems a matter for regret that he did not adopt the medical profession, but his ambition was to be King of the Jews. His efforts at miracle-working, however, were not at all times successful. He was travelling one day with his apostles and had become hungry—"And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find anything thereon: and when he came to it he found nothing but leaves, for the time of figs was not yet" (Mark xi., 13). He knew that it was not the season for figs and that in the common course of nature none could be upon it at that time. But he had brought himself to believe in his own power, and he approached the tree in the hope of a miracle. He was disappointed, and his rage, humiliation and hunger combined, found vent in curses. "Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever" (Mark xi., 14). As he stood under that tree, he was not divine love incarnate, but an irritated maniac. Nor did this fit of senseless passion rapidly pass away. He journeyed on to Jerusalem and entered the court of the temple. There he found as he had found at the same time every year, those who sold

victims for the sacrifices, and those who exchanged foreign money. Their avocations were harmless and necessary. Without them Jews who arrived from distant places could not have fulfilled the laws. Nevertheless, he cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves; and would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple. And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves? (Mark xi., 15-17).

(To be concluded).

E. J. BOWTELL.

## JUSTICE STEPHEN'S BILL.

The following is the text of the Bill drafted by Sir Fitzjames Stephen for the Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws:—

"Whereas certain laws now in force and intended for the promotion of religion are no longer suitable for that purpose, and it is expedient to repeal them,

"Be it enacted as follows:—

"1. After the passing of this Act no criminal proceedings shall be instituted in any Court whatever, against any person whatever, for Atheism, blasphemy at common law, blasphemous libel, heresy, or schism, except only criminal proceedings instituted in Ecclesiastical Courts against clergymen of the Church of England.

"2. An Act passed in the first year of his late Majesty King Edward VI., c. 1, intituled 'An Act against such as shall unreverently speak against the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, commonly called the sacrament of the altar, and for the receiving thereof in both kinds,' and an Act passed in the 9th and 10th year of his late Majesty King William III., c. 35, intituled 'An Act for the more effectual suppressing of blasphemy and profaneness,' are hereby repealed.

"3. Provided that nothing herein contained shall be deemed to affect the provisions of an Act passed in the nineteenth year of his late Majesty King George II., c. 21, intituled 'An Act more effectually to prevent profane cursing and swearing,' or any other provision of any other Act of Parliament not hereby expressly repealed."

## PROFANE JOKES.

If some of the deck hands on the ark had only shoved that sample fly overboard, what a vast amount of profanity would have been spoiled in after years!

"WHY did the Apostle Paul go to Athens?" asked a Sunday-school teacher. "Please, sir, it was to throw the detective off his tract!" answered a Canadian tourist's little boy, whose papa had left him behind.

FIRE with emulation of Evangelist Sam Jones, the Rev. Job Cooley, a Methodist minister at Spring Place, Tenn., preached a vigorous sermon to his flock, remarking that if they didn't like his style they could leave. In five minutes Mr. Cooley was alone.

WILLIE, aged ten, and JEMMY, aged six, were playing together. One of them was minutely examining a fly. "I wonder how God made him?" he exclaimed. "God don't make flies as carpenters make things," observed the other boy, "God says, Let there be flies, and there is flies!"

"My daughter, what made you look around in Trinity Church so much this morning? It disturbed me very much. What could you have been thinking of?" "Well, I happened to think what a nice skating-rink it would make if all the pews were taken out! Don't you think it would be just elegant?"

"Well, Johnny," said his mother, "did you have a pleasant time at the Sunday-school picnic?" "Naw," Johnny growled, "I didn't get nothin' to eat but a sandwich an' a couple of dry cookies with red sand sprinkled on top." "Why, what became of the beautiful chocolate cake and chicken salad that I gave you to contribute?" "The superintendent an' the teachers eat 'em."

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