

THE
FREETHINKER

FOUNDED · 1881

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Our Jubilee—1881-1931.

IN the history of periodic journalism only two papers devoted to Freethought have survived long enough to celebrate their Jubilee. One is the *Truthseeker*, published in New York, the other the *Freethinker*. Freethought papers in plenty have been launched, but in the end the struggle for existence has been too hard, and they have disappeared. Not, however, without leaving some sign of their having existed. Nearly every one of them have lived long enough to have made some impression on the many headed monster of superstition, and even if they did not manage to achieve their own Jubilee their work has made it possible for us to achieve ours. Like soldiers who have held back the enemy until reinforcements arrived, or like pioneers who have met death at the end of the trail they have blazed, the success of the present is built upon the failures of the past. Let us salute the pioneers!

It is certain that these earlier journals did not lack ability on the part of those responsible for their existence. Neither were those for whom they existed wanting in enthusiasm. Few propagandist causes have been better served in both directions than has Freethought by the periodicals issued from the days of brave old Richard Carlile down to George William Foote. There has been courage of a very high order, and an intellectual ability that would have secured high public honour and position in any other direction than that of Freethought.

Nor, on the whole, have Freethought leaders had special cause to complain of want of enthusiasm amongst their supporters. But in the main these supporters were men and women poorly endowed with the world's goods, and the maintenance of a paper is, on one side, a purely commercial proposition. Printers and paper-makers must be paid, other expenses have to be met, and while the rank and file appear to have done what they could, journal after journal sank under the burdens their promoters could no longer successfully shoulder. The surprising thing is that so many of them lasted as long as they did.

One of my own unrealized—and probably never to be realized—ambitions is to see published a history of these brave pioneers of Freethought, with a complete and worthy account of the propagandist journals that have existed during the past century and a quarter. If that were done I think the world would be surprised to discover how much it owes to these, at present, almost unknown papers. Certainly nothing is more distressing than to find so many of those who to-day publicly attack orthodox Christianity evidencing such a complete ignorance of what has been done in the region of militant Freethought. Perhaps one day we may see a research scholarship established for this

purpose. If this ever happens I venture to predict that the outcome will be more illuminating, and certainly more inspiring than those bulky volumes which so often succeed in giving honour where it is not due, or piling up honour where its accumulation is quite unnecessary.

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The first number of the *Freethinker* was dated May, 1881. It began as a monthly journal, and consisted of eight pages only. It was issued at the popular price of one penny. Its editor was G. W. Foote, the printer, as advertised was E. W. Whittle, the imprint that of "The Freethought Publishing Company." Within a few months both the name of the company and that of the printer was dropped, and the *Freethinker* was announced as published and edited by G. W. Foote.

This was not Foote's first adventure in journalism. He had started the *Secularist*, in conjunction with G. J. Holyoake, and had founded a monthly magazine, the *Liberal*. He was also a frequent contributor to Bradlaugh's *National Reformer*, and had issued a number of pamphlets. In all these essays he had, however, travelled mainly along the lines marked out by Freethought journalists. Hitherto Freethought journalism had followed a severe, even a sedate, road. Naturally, a great deal of it had been called by its opponents "vulgar," "ribald," even "indecent," and there had been loud outcries against holding religion up to contempt. But in the main, as anyone can see who has the opportunity of running over a collection of the earlier Freethought papers, the manner was wondrously grave.

There were two reasons for this. First, the puritanism of English life had bitten very deeply. It contaminated both those who believed and those who disbelieved. It fouled everything it touched. It was, indeed, an impure form of religious asceticism. It disliked mere happiness, it hated laughter, and even in the act of denouncing monasticism its ideal was still the monk. And it had marked religion as something to be treated with tremendous gravity. Wit and humour were sure signs of religious backsliding. It was ill-work joking with the Lord.

The second cause of the gravity with which religion was treated was that they who attacked it were so recently liberated as to be profoundly impressed by Christianity even when they were consciously fighting against it. In such circumstances men take the criticism of religion seriously because they have only just ceased seriously to believe it. There was ridicule, but the ridicule was inclined to be grave and even apologetic.

The avowed policy of the *Freethinker* was from the outset on different lines. We are reprinting as part of this Jubilee Number, the first issue of the *Freethinker*, and readers of its statement of policy may judge as to how far and how well it has lived up to its first professions. It had in its editor a man who

wielded one of the ablest pens ever brought to the service of Freethought propaganda, a man of wide reading, of fine literary taste, of absolute fearlessness, one who was not only a Freethinker who claimed his own right to speak, but who over and over again stood up for the right of free speech for those with whom he was in complete disagreement. Timid Freethinkers were alarmed, but men such as Sir Richard Burton and George Meredith singled the paper out for their notice. Indeed, throughout the whole of its history the *Freethinker* has never lacked able writers, nor do I know of any Freethought periodical that has ever contained more of what G. W. Foote called "fundamental brain stuff." If a man had anything to say that was worth saying he could say it in the *Freethinker*. Whether he cared to say it in grave language or in terms of sarcasm or ridicule, was always his own concern.

The *Freethinker* gave the boldest challenge to religion ever offered in this country. There was to be no pretence of treating a religion so absurd and so bigoted as Christianity with deference or respect. The foolish and stupid profession of treating an *opinion* with respect was deliberately thrown overboard. It was the right to express an opinion that was to be respected. And as though to emphasize the need for such an attitude as that adopted, the Freethinkers of the country had before them the object lesson of the Bradlaugh struggle, in the course of which the Christian world, with a few exceptions, showed that no lie was too gross, no slander too vile to stir up prejudice against the hated unbeliever.

Christians were outraged by the audacity of a paper which said without any kind of apology or evasion, that it not merely intended to teach people to disbelieve in Christianity, but also to laugh at it. Objections came from other quarters. There have always been in the Freethought Party a number of individuals who paid greater attention to gaining the good-will of Christians, than they did to putting an end to Christianity. Had Lucian or Voltaire lived in England instead of in Rome and France, they would have had to face the same criticism. These people thought the *Freethinker* too frivolous. Christians said it was coarse and vulgar, and without reflecting that Christians had always said much the same about any attack on their religion, these susceptible critics "rationalized" their timidity by repeating the accusation. We note in the fourth issue of the paper a reply to "A. Fisher.—You say the *Freethinker* is invaluable, but a little frivolous. Well, we cannot suit everybody's taste. We can only do our best. Perhaps it would be well to have a separate column 'For dull readers.'"

Only four monthly numbers were issued. The success of the venture warranted a more frequent appearance, and on September 4 the paper made its first appearance as a weekly—still containing but eight pages.

The inauguration of the paper as a weekly contains one article, not remarkable in itself, but noticeable as a promise of things to come, and in the light of after events of great importance to the whole of the Freethought movement in the country. This article consisted of a review by the editor, of the appearance in France, of Leo Taxil's *La Bible Amusante*. The following are the opening paragraphs:—

Voltaire's method of attacking Christianity has always approved itself to French Freethinkers. They regard the statement that he treated religious questions in a spirit of levity as the weak defence of those who know that irony and sarcasm are the deadliest enemies of their faith. Superstition dislikes argument, but it hates laughter. Nimble and

far flashing wit is more potent against error than the slow dull logic of the schools, and the great humorists and wits of the world have done far more to clear its head and sweeten its heart than all its sober philosophers from Aristotle to Kant.

And after a description of the book with its numerous illustrations, the article concludes with:—

The designs are admirably conceived and skilfully executed. We shall reproduce in the *Freethinker* some of the raciest plates. We shall be greeted with shrieks of pious wrath if we do so, but we are not easily frightened.

The prophecy was fulfilled as to the shrieks of wrath, as was also the promise that the courage to face the storm would not be wanting.

The first of the famous "Comic Bible Sketches" appeared in the issue dated November 6, 1881. The first Christmas number followed in December. This was an issue filled with illustrations and humorous sketches bearing on Christian doctrines. This Christmas number contains the first signed article by Dr. Aveling, although I fancy he had written a little before then. J. M. Wheeler had written for the paper from the first number, although he did not become sub-editor, officially, for some months later.

Foote was not out in his anticipation as to how an illustrated *Freethinker* would be received by the bigots. The paper was a direct challenge to religion, striking it at its weakest point and with the strongest weapon. "You may not believe in us," cried Christians, "but for God's sake treat us with solemnity. Meet solemn absurdity with solemn arguments, and the people may not quite realize what we are. But do not laugh at us, or we die."

Epithets of "Vulgar," and "indecent" began to fly about. They did good service for the bigots, and even to-day are not worn out. I have had this description of the *Freethinker* given me by men who did not know the paper save by repute. I am, too, old enough to remember when the same phrases were common concerning both Ingersoll and Bradlaugh. My own experience offers a curious illustration of the way in which these slanders work. Until I was actually at work on the Freethought platform I knew nothing of the National Secular Society, except its name, I had seen a few issues of the *National Reformer*, and one or two copies of the *Freethinker*. I had no contact, even that of a listener with any Freethought speaker. My impression of Bradlaugh, received from Christian and "liberal" friends was that he was a strong man, able, but coarse, uneducated, and vulgar, and the National Secular Society a mob of vulgar ranters. Had I been governed by these impressions my connexion with the movement would have ended before it began.

But the general effect was enough to warn off many. The usual snobbishness of the English character is such as to keep many off anything that is not "respectable," and when the taboo enters the field of religion it is all powerful.

What was overlooked in the case of the *Freethinker* was the fact that the paper was planned as a direct challenge to the assumption that religious subjects should not be dealt with as are other matters. No one objects to caricaturing in politics, in art, or in science. To mark off religion as something that must not be made the subject of caricature is to tacitly grant the essential Christian claim. It is this principle that is responsible for the existence of the Blasphemy Laws, Sunday Laws, and all the legal and social regulations that give religion special privileges. The man who objects to religion being caricatured has no right whatever to ask for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. For the fundamental objection to these laws is not that they punish too heavily, or that they

are administered with partiality, but that they devise regulations about religion that do not apply to other subjects of discussion.

So much has been said about these *Freethinker* cartoons that it is worth while taking one or two of the characteristic statements concerning them. In the *Freethinker* for January 15, there appears the following quotation from a Plymouth paper—the *Western Figaro*. Referring to the ordinary issue and to the Christmas number this critic says:—

The publications before us are simply lewd and blasphemous caricatures of what to the majority of ordinary people are sacred subjects . . . Occasion is taken of the season just past to ridicule the birth of our Saviour, who is represented in the most hideous of drawings, surrounded by a collection of imbecile old men who are tendering their gifts . . . In another equally artistic wood-cut Eve is represented in the most vulgar manner, and of the writing a fair sample of its style is one page in which Jesus and Jehovah are represented as having a free and easy conversation on general topics . . . The stuff before us is infamously bestial in its suggestion and vulgar in expression, apart from the offence intended to religious people; and we sincerely hope steps will be taken to prevent their further issue.

Here is the letterpress referred to. The scene is in heaven, God the Father is presented as old and unwell, with Jesus in attendance.

Presently the massive bony frame of the Father was convulsed with a fit of coughing; Jesus promptly applied a restorative from the phial, and after a terrible struggle the cough was subdued. During this scene the Dove fluttered violently from wall to wall. When the patient was thoroughly restored the following conversation ensued.

Jesus: Are you well now my Father?

Jehovah: Yes, yes, well enough. Alack, how my strength wanes! Where is the pith that filled these arms when I fought for my chosen people? Where the fiery vigour that filled my veins when I courted your mother?

(Here the Dove fluttered and looked down.)

Jesus: Ah, sire, do you speak thus. You will regain your old strength.

Jehovah: Nay, nay, and you know it. You do not even wish me to recover, for in my weakness you exercise sovereign power and rule as you please.

Jesus: O sire, sire.

Jehovah: Come now, none of those demure looks. We know each other too well. Practise before the saints if you like, but don't waste your acting on me.

Jesus: My dear Father, pray curb your temper. That is the very thing the people on earth so much complain of.

Jehovah: My beloved Son, in whom I am not at all well pleased, desist from this hypocrisy. Your temper is as bad as mine. You've shed blood enough in your time, and need not rail at me.

Jesus: Ah, sire, only the blood of heretics.

Jehovah: Heretics, forsooth! They were very worthy people for the most part, and their only crime was that they neglected you. But why should we wrangle? We stand or fall together, and I am falling.

Satan draws most souls from earth to his place, including all the best workers and thinkers, who are needed to sustain our drooping power; and we receive nothing but the refuse; weak, slavish, flabby souls, hardly worth saving or damning; gushing preachers, pious editors, crazy enthusiasts and half-baked old ladies of both sexes. Why didn't you preach a different Gospel while you were about it?

You had the chance once and let it slip; we shall never have another.

Jesus: My dear Father, I am reforming my Gospel to make it suit the altered taste of the times.

Jehovah: Stuff and nonsense! It can't be done; thinking people see through it; the divine is immutable. The only remedy is to start afresh. Could I beget a new Son all might be rectified; but I cannot.

I am too old. Our dominion is melting away like that of all our predecessors. You cannot outlast me, for I am the fountain of your life; and all the multitude of "immortal" angels who throng our court, live only while I uphold them, and with me they will vanish into eternal limbo.

Now although a great deal was said by many about the crudeness of the drawings, they as a matter of fact compare not unfavourably with a great many of the newspaper illustrations of the late seventies and the early eighties. Besides, the *Freethinker* was not an art magazine, and did not set up to educate the public in the art of picture-making or of engraving. And the one picked out by the *Western Figaro* is peculiarly unfortunate as an illustration of the writer's statement. For the picture is quite classical, almost severe in outline. There is just the standardized picture of Eve, clad with a girdle of fig leaves, with a serpent erect on its tail, standing beneath the bough of an apple tree laden with fruit. It is the kind of picture that one sees in many old Bibles and in some of the pictures of famous old painters.

Of course, I do not mean it to be understood that all the *Freethinker* cartoons were on this level. They were not. I cite it to prove that it was not the caricature, but the subject caricatured to which objection was taken. Such words as "indecent" "vulgar," "lewd," and so forth are old weapons in religious warfare, and they usually have the effect they had in the *Freethinker* controversy. They give the bigots so many bricks to throw, they furnish a certain type of heretic with something that enables him to gain the good-will of the religious world by his disowning his bolder brother heretic, and they create a cry which passes into a tradition.

As to the letterpress, what we have here is something in the style of Lucian's Dialogues of the Gods, a form that has been followed in numerous books that have now passed into the ranks of the world's classical writings. Only a little while ago the papers of the country were lauding *Green Pastures* as a great "spiritual" play, a book in which God is represented as walking into the heavenly office, throwing things about, smoking ten cent cigars, discussing with Moses how he can "out-trick" the Egyptian conjurors, and using language at the side of which the discussion selected for abuse is severely puritanical by comparison.

Of course, times have changed, but the gallant little *Freethinker* has played no small part in bringing about this change. In this country religion had not merely demanded respect, whether one believed in it or not, without caring in the slightest for the intellectual degradation involved in a man dealing "respectfully" with what he considered contemptible, but it had enforced it. It was this demand that had to be broken down, and no other paper did so much to do this as the *Freethinker*. It made the air freer for the more timid to breathe, and even Christians laboured with the greater security on account of its work.

But more serious things were in store. In February, 1882 the matter of the *Freethinker* was raised in the House of Commons, in the form of a question addressed to the Home Secretary, Sir William Harcourt. To this question that spiritual ancestor of "Jix" and Clynes replied:—

I am sorry to say that my attention has been called to a newspaper published in Northampton, and I agree that nothing can be more pernicious to the minds of right-thinking people than publications of that description, but I think it has been the view for a great many years of all persons responsible for these matters, that more harm than advantage is produced to public morals by Government prosecu-

tions of this kind. I believe they are best left to the reprobation which they will meet in this country from all decent members of society.

This talk of "morality," "right thinking" "decent members" was quite in line with Christian tradition, and admirably calculated to frighten all who move in fear of the great goddess Grundy. And yet, if Harcourt had seen the *Freethinker*, he would have known that it was not published in Northampton at all, but in London. But there was then some hopes of damaging Bradlaugh in his Parliamentary fight by associating him with "indecent" and "immorality."

A further attempt was made in the House to prod the Government into action, but without avail. Eventually a move was made in another direction, and on July 11, Messrs. Foote, Ramsey and Whittle, as editor, publisher and printer of the *Freethinker* appeared before the Lord Mayor at the Mansion House to answer the charge of publishing a blasphemous libel. The case was adjourned, and before the second hearing a further summons issued which included Mr. Bradlaugh—a false step, as Bradlaugh had no connexion at that date with the *Freethinker*. Ultimately the whole four were committed for trial at the Old Bailey, but the charge against Whittle was withdrawn, he having ceased to have anything to do with the printing of the *Freethinker*. But the case was not tried at the Old Bailey, Bradlaugh having obtained a writ removing it to the Queen's Bench. Subsequently Bradlaugh foiled the bigots in another direction by having the charge against himself tried separately, and as he was able to prove that he had no connexion with the *Freethinker* when the incriminated numbers were issued, he was discharged from the case. But his legal knowledge remained, of course, at the service of the other defendants.

It was this charge that was heard some months later before Lord Coleridge.

One consequence of the summons was that no comic Bible sketches appeared in the paper for the issue dated July 16 and 30. This was due to Whittle refusing to print the pictures for the 16th—and on the 23rd he refused to print at all. It was only at the last moment that a few copies of a number was pulled from a hand press for the purpose of maintaining continuity of issue.

There was still some little trouble, even when the usual publication was resumed, and the issue for August 6 contains No. 1 of "Serious Bible Sketches," accompanied by the notice that as "Comic" Bible sketches were objected to some pictures from old Bibles would be issued. The first one represented Moses sitting in the cleft of a rock, and looking with astonishment at the back parts of a crowned figure which represented God. Only one of this series appeared. This was rather a pity as many of the old Bible illustrations would have supplied some curious samples of quite orthodox "blasphemy."

From the date of the issue of the first summons until Foote's liberation from prison in February 1884, the *Freethinker* bore at the top of the front page, in heavy block letters, the legend "Prosecuted for Blasphemy." The bigots were to have the full benefit of their action. In a Christian country Freethinkers can never expect full justice, and must always be prepared for rebuffs. But they can, if they are wise, always make the bigots pay as dearly as possible for their victory. As will be seen later, their victory in this case was to be one of the dearest they had yet won.

Naturally the prosecution of the paper attracted wide attention. No Freethought paper ever published excited the virulent hatred that was excited by the *Freethinker*. It gave no mercy and it asked for none. There were complaints over and over

again of the police visiting newsagents and warning them of the risks they ran in supplying the paper. Some of the wholesale agents refused to supply, and naturally retailers followed. This was overcome in many places by private individuals undertaking to handle the paper.

It was while Foote and Ramsey were awaiting their trial in the Queen's Bench, that a further summons was issued mainly with respect to the second illustrated Christmas number—that of December, 1882. A police officer, one James Macdonald, laid information that his religious feelings had been outraged by this issue, and in all the pompous solemnity of the law the three alleged blasphemers—Foote, Ramsey and Kemp—were ordered to appear before the Lord Mayor and justify their action.

The hearing opened on the 2nd of February. The issue was a foregone conclusion, and all the defendants were committed for trial at the Old Bailey.

The case was tried before the notorious Judge North. North was a bully, a bigot, and in this case, at least, played the part of prosecuting counsel as well as judge. He was everything a judge should not have been, and was certainly a disgrace to a body of men who stand first in the world's judicatures for fairness and consideration towards those brought before them. He refused to postpone Foote's speech in his own defence until after lunch, obviously counting on the advantage to the prosecution of breaking it into two parts; he repeatedly interrupted the speech while it was being made, and was gratuitously and deliberately rude whenever he had the opportunity of being so. And when the trial resulted in a disagreement among the jury, and a new one became necessary, he was so eager to sentence the prisoners that he fixed the new trial for Monday, three days later, and with studied vindictiveness declined to permit bail in the interval. At the end of the second trial, and with all the malignant pleasure of a modern Judge Jeffries, he sentenced Foote to twelve months imprisonment, Ramsey to nine, and Kemp to three. Foote's reply to the Judge on hearing his sentence, "Thank you my Lord, the sentence is worthy of your creed," has become historic. It was the most biting comment ever given in similar circumstances.

North's conduct stood out in marked contrast with that shown by Lord Coleridge. Fortunately such judges as North are not common on the English bench, although I have myself seen a man dying of diabetes given by Mr. Justice Avory the sentence of nine months imprisonment for ridiculing religion. Religion and humanity do not run well together.

The sentence was sheer vindictiveness, calculated brutality. Not even North could have been stupid enough to believe that the sentence would stop people "blaspheming," or that it would crush the *Freethinker* out of existence. On the contrary, the paper went on as strongly as ever. The only difference was that by Foote's express order the illustrations were forbidden until he was once more at liberty. In the interim Dr. Aveling acted as editor, with J. M. Wheeler as sub-editor. Of Aveling's ability there could be no question, and Wheeler had a hero's spirit in the frailest of bodies. Immediately after the imprisonment he had a mental breakdown, and was absent from the paper for some time. So soon as he was released he resumed his work and continued as sub-editor until his death. I can only say that I would count myself fortunate to have a sub-editor with one half of Wheeler's learning, ability, and devotion to Freethought.

With regard to the illustrations in the *Freethinker*, on which the North trial mainly turned. As I have said these were discontinued during Foote's imprisonment, on his instructions. He was released from

prison on February 25, 1884. There was a huge crowd awaiting him outside the prison. He was driven direct to the Hall of Science to a luncheon, and two days afterwards he delivered a lecture at the Hall of Science, on "How I fell among Thieves." Evidently twelve months in gaol had not cured him of the "vulgar" habit of being witty where religion was concerned. Foote resumed editorship with the issue of March 2. The next week, March 9, the following sentences appeared in an editorial:—

I feel a little stiff in writing, but that will wear off in a few weeks, and my friends throughout the English-speaking world may look forward (if they care to look forward for anything of mine) to far more trenchant articles against "the infamous" than any I have ever penned. The *Freethinker* shall, as I promised from Holloway Gaol, be a greater terror than ever to priests and bigots; they shall hate it with the hatred of fear. I defy as I despise their power, and I would rather return to the loathsome brick vault I have tenanted for a whole long year than suffer them to divert me a hair's breadth from the policy I have pursued since this journal was started.

The following issue, dated March 16, the earliest date at which it could be done, the "Comic Bible Sketches" were resumed with a cartoon as "blasphemous" as ever. There was also an open letter to Judge North, which should have made a man of sensibility squirm. A copy of the paper, with a card and compliments was left at the house of Judge North by G. W. Foote himself. North was thus able to judge the benefit of his sentence. July saw an illustrated Summer number, December a Christmas number, with each week a daring "Comic Bible Sketch." And these illustrated issues were continued—Christmas numbers, and extra numbers right up till 1889. Altogether about 300 of these Bible sketches were issued. They were then dropped, having, as Foote once remarked to me, served their purpose. They had shown the bigots that the *Freethinker* was not to be intimidated. They hated the *Freethinker* none the less in consequence. They hate it none the less to-day. It is still the best hated of papers. That is the compliment paid it by those who know it can neither be bought, frightened nor bullied into silence.

We must retrace our steps a bit. There was no court of criminal appeal in those days. Had there been it is probable that the sentence would have been either reduced or quashed altogether. Legal opinion was fairly general concerning the unfairness of the trial, and almost united as to the savagery of the sentence. What could be done was to memorialize the Home Secretary, asking for a remission of the sentence imposed. This Memorial was very widely signed, among the signatories being many well known men of science and letters, and a number of well known clergymen. Some of those who refused to sign (one notes the name of George Jacob Holyoake) were probably sorry for their refusal when they saw who had signed it. They would have been in excellent company. Mr. Holyoake, with that fatal facility of his for saying things on critical occasions that heartened Christians rather than helped Freethinkers, put forward the fantastical objections to signing the petition that the memorial asked for "the mercy of the Crown," and this implied a renunciation of doing the same thing again, and that the prisoners were not convicted for blasphemy, but "outrage." The first statement was a quibble, the second was a sheer untruth. But it is one of those untruths that pass into an almost unquestioned tradition because it is used in the first instance to discount attacks on certain established institutions, and is endorsed either tacitly or explicitly by many who ought to know better. The truth

is that there is not one of the illustrations, or even one of the incriminated pieces of writing that would have been considered an outrage if used with reference to any subject other than that of religion. Certainly no prosecution would have been possible with regard to them. It was the fact that the illustrations and letterpress dealt with religion that constituted the outrage; and a Freethinker above anyone should be the last to countenance so obvious and so dishonest a trick.

Let me repeat what I have already said. No man who considers it justifiable to punish me for using language or exhibiting cartoons dealing with religion that would not be punishable if used with relation to other subjects, has the slightest grounds for objecting to the existence of the Common Law of blasphemy. For that is precisely the ground on which the law of blasphemy is justified to-day.

On this point the attitude of the *Freethinker* has always been the same. No matter what a man has done every charge of blasphemy must be resisted. If a man has really been guilty of abusive language, or indecent language, let him be dealt with under such laws as apply to all citizens alike. Until that is done a charge of blasphemy is an outrage on the principle of the equality of all before the law. "Indecency" is a mere subterfuge for the exercise of religious intolerance. And yet, in spite of the assurance of the Lord Chief Justice in his charge to the jury, in the third trial, that while Mr. Foote might be guilty of blasphemy, "you do not find him pandering to the bad passions of mankind," there are still to be found those who will calmly inform you that it was the vulgarity and coarseness of the *Freethinker* that led to the prosecution!

The *Freethinker* was not yet done with the courts. The first charge, which had been removed from the Old Bailey to the Court of Queen's Bench, and which concerned Foote and Ramsey had yet to be tried. This came on during April, and both men were brought from Holloway to answer the charge. Each prisoner conducted his own defence, and both speeches were worthy of the occasion. But that of Foote's was striking in its power and brilliancy. I have, I think, read nearly all of the speeches delivered by defendants in blasphemy trials during the past couple of centuries, so far as they are available, and I have no hesitation in saying that there is not one that quite equals that speech of G. W. Foote's. I regard it as the most impressive speech ever delivered in a law court in answer to such a charge. It was not the greatest legal speech, but for the manner in which it covered the ground, the appeal it must have made to the jury, and also to the outside world, it stands above all. As I intend shortly to republish this speech, my readers will have a chance of forming their own judgment as to its intrinsic excellence.

The speech made a great impression upon the jury, and this combined with the fairness and courtesy of Lord Coleridge, and the character of his summing up, made it a turning point in the history of trials for blasphemy. It should also be said that the judge treated the men before him with unflinching courtesy and consideration. He made no secret of his disgust with the treatment Foote and Ramsey had received, and did what he could to remedy it.

The trial resulted in a disagreement among the Jury; and as the Lord Chief Justice made it known that he would take the case if it came on again, the Crown threw up the sponge and withdrew it from the list. It was not a victory in the sense of securing an acquittal, but it was a victory in the sense that the prosecution backed out for fear an actual acquittal should be obtained.

In legal and constitutional history that trial, on

account of the restatement of the common law of blasphemy as laid down by the Lord Chief Justice, marks an epoch. This was quite new in substance, but it was laid down in such a way that there could not in the future be any doubt that a man might criticise the Christian religion in the most thorough-going manner provided "the decencies of controversy" were respected. What was left wanting was some clear definition of what constituted the decencies of controversy.

One other important consequence arose from this trial, although it did not eventuate for some years. A large number of bequests had been lost to the Freethought Party in this country on the ground that a bequest to an association which existed for the purpose of attacking Christianity was illegal (in the sense of not being enforceable). I have always held, ever since I joined the Freethought Party, that this was a mistake, and was one of the very few mistakes made by Bradlaugh and other Freethought leaders on a point of law. My point of view was that a legacy left to an unregistered body was substantially a legacy left to the individual members comprising that body, and that while the legacy could be obtained on that ground, there was no security of expenditure. The law would have to wait to see how these individuals expended the money, but it could not prevent their getting it. To claim it as an association was quite another question. It was playing into the hands of the enemy. But I was met with the authority of Bradlaugh, and my judgment went for little, until a case, in which the Franciscans were concerned, came before the courts in 1908. The legacy was claimed on the lines I had suggested might be done in the case of legacies to Freethought bodies, and the Judge decided in favour of the claim.

The Coleridge judgment gave the fertile mind of Foote a plan by which the legal security of a legacy to a Freethought body might be established. In a way that no future judge would be likely to gainsay, it had been laid down, that it was perfectly legal to attack the fundamentals of the Christian religion. That being the case, what was there to stand in the way of a Society being formed which should avow this as its substantial purpose? It was not likely, in view of the decision of Lord Coleridge, that registration would be refused. The result of this was the formation of the Secular Society, Limited, a Society which had for its purpose all the substantial propaganda of the National Secular Society. The Society was formed in 1898, and already it has been the means of placing the Freethought movement on a better financial footing than has ever been the case. The formation of the Secular Society, Limited marked a turning point in the history of Freethought in England. It was the greatest piece of legislation that had yet been done, and it had its birth in the trial of Foote and Kemp before Lord Chief Justice Coleridge in 1883. That is what I had in view when I said that the prosecution of the *Freethinker* carried its own Nemesis to the Christian world.

* * *

I have spent a great deal of my available space on an account of these early years of the *Freethinker* because it contained the seed of so much that happened afterwards. Its bold policy taught Freethinkers that the Christian world was more likely in the end to yield to a bold defiance than to a half-hearted attack. For the future the powers that be left the paper severely alone. It kept up the line for which it was attacked and slandered, and men imprisoned, until there was no longer a possibility of any such attack being repeated. Henceforth the enemy had to resort to boycott, to silence, to an elaborate pretence that all was well, while it was forsaking position after position on account of the way in which the public mind was being educated and liberated.

I must pass very rapidly over the succeeding years. In the issue for August 24, 1890, there is a notice from the Bethnal Green Branch of a lecture by C. Cohen in Victoria Park. This must have been my first lecture

from a Freethought platform. The following summer I was lecturing from that platform nearly every Sunday, and I observe a note from G. W. Foote that sixty new members had been enrolled in the Society from that station. Evidently I was giving Christians something for which to thank the Lord.

The first article I can trace from my pen appeared early in 1896. This was an account of a lecturing tour which covered some thirty-three days. During that time I had visited twenty towns, delivered thirty-three lectures, held two debates, and travelled 1,500 miles. Articles appeared occasionally, but about two years later I commenced to write regularly, with sometimes an extra article under another name, and contributions to the "Acid Drop" columns. I wrote very much more after the death of J. M. Wheeler in 1898, and gradually began to play the part of sub-editor. Wheeler's death was a great loss both to the *Freethinker*, and to the whole of the Freethought movement. He had been connected with the paper from its first number. He was a man of wide reading, careful research and genuine scholarship. He had a real love of books, not merely a knowledge of them, and he brought to his work a singleness of mind and a whole-hearted devotion that cannot be over-praised. His articles, week by week were fine examples of careful and scholarly work. He would have been an ideal man to write a history of Freethought on the lines indicated at the opening of these notes.

I wish I had space to note the number of causes on behalf of which the *Freethinker* spoke, even though it was quite opposed to the cause in question. It never forgot that freedom of speech and publication stood far above the particular opinion or the particular publication that was threatened. Even Roman Catholics were defended when it appeared that they were being treated unfairly. In 1909, just about the time when it was protesting against the murder of Ferrer by the Church and Government of Spain, I find the following paragraph dealing with Protestant assaults on Catholic meetings in Liverpool:—

"This sort of thing, of course, is very regrettable. We may even call it a disgrace to Liverpool, and indirectly to the whole of England. Such a state of affairs ought to be dealt with firmly. Mob violence should not be tolerated for a moment in a civilized community. It makes no difference whether Catholics attack Protestants, or Protestants attack Catholics, or both of them attack Freethinkers; the first duty of the public authorities is to maintain public peace and order and secure to every citizen the free exercise of his rights. If it takes all the police in the place to do this, and the soldiers behind them, it should be done. There should be no temporising. Disorder should be sternly suppressed. Those who attack their fellow-citizens in the name of religion, or anything else, are waging war against human society; and mere self-preservation dictates that they should be brought to heel as promptly as possible, and with all the severity that may be necessary. We would protect the Liverpool Catholics at all cost, just as we would protect Protestants, Jews, Freethinkers, or any other denomination."

And a little earlier, when the French Government had disestablished the Church and was inclined to treat it with unfairness, the late W. T. Stead pointed out that of all the English papers the *Freethinker* stood alone in its whole-hearted protest against singling out the Church for special legislation. It insisted that so long as the Church was in France it should receive exactly the same treatment as other organizations.

There were many other contributors to the *Freethinker*, and many other phases of the work of the paper I should like to have dealt with had I the space. Many of its writers, for obvious reasons, found it advisable to write under assumed names. Nearly always it has had a number of working journalists writing for it who sought in its pages an anti-toxin against the drudgery and "tossiness" of their everyday work. They all helped to make the *Freethinker* what it was—one of the most outspoken of Freethought papers in which men did not confine their learning in order to secure appreciation. Many of these are now beyond reach of any tribute to the value of their work, but that work, flowers and fruits in the larger and wider mental life that is now ours.

1915 brought to the *Freethinker* what might easily have been disaster. The health of G. W. Foote had been failing for some years, and his death occurred in October, 1915. The loss of such a man was a blow from which many journals would never have recovered.

There was, moreover, the tradition—in this instance a fairly reliable one—that Freethought papers seldom survived their founders for long. This had been the case with nearly every Freethought journal. Even the *National Reformer*, with the tremendous reputation of Bradlaugh behind it, survived him but a bare two years. I am proud that the *Freethinker* broke this tradition, as it has broken others, and proud also that it was under my editorship that this was done.

But it was not merely the death of its editor and founder that the *Freethinker* had to face. At his death the European War had concluded the first year of its run, and things were beginning to tighten up rapidly. There was first of all the paper difficulty. Paper was rising rapidly in price. When the war opened we were paying just over twopence per pound for paper. In October, 1915, prices had advanced by about three-halfpence a pound. Then the prices did not advance, they jumped. Before the close of the war we were paying as much as one shilling and threepence per pound, and glad to get it, putting up with whatever quality we could grab. The Government had placed fortunes within the reach of the paper merchants, and they were not slow to avail themselves of the opportunity.

That was not the end of the trouble. In October, 1915, our paper agent, probably finding a more lucrative position, threw up his business and we were left without a source of supply.

A Government order was issued that supplies were to be cut down to half the normal quantity, and paper-makers refused to arrange for a regular supply to anyone but their established customers. Meanwhile I had commenced publishing a number of books and pamphlets, and the sales of the *Freethinker* began to go up. We were needing about twice as much paper as usual, and were officially cut down to half the quantity we had been getting. And any paper we could get had to be paid for cash with order or on delivery. To make the situation more interesting the *Freethinker* exchequer was, as usual, beautifully empty. The difficulties were great enough to be quite fascinating.

How this paper difficulty was overcome cannot now be told. It is well to keep a card up one's sleeve in case of eventualities in the future. But within a few months, thanks to the effective help of a few very good friends, paper only was made certain that the extra supply of paper would be secured, but we had managed to lay up not less than six month's supply, all paid for on delivery. No one knew to what pass things might come, and that reserve store was maintained until the end of the war. It was a lively and interesting time.

There were some other interesting incidents connected with the war period. Thanks to the Northcliffe influence the Government had embarked on an intensive war-propaganda. Papers were bought, journalists were hired by the score, everyone, who could write, and was prepared to turn out standardized articles were pressed into the service. Just at the beginning of 1916 I received a visit from two men who professed to be Freethinkers and business men in the City. I did not know them, nor could I find out, from their conversation, any Freethinker who did. But they professed a great interest in the paper, and thought that the time had arrived when it might be turned into a company, and they were willing to purchase. I listened to what they had to say, and was doubtful whether I had to compliment them upon their business philanthropy or sympathise with their financial folly. I found afterwards that one at least of the two was a government agent. He came into notice through inciting a Derbyshire school teacher to concoct a fantastic plan to poison Lloyd George, and then acted as informer. I had other visits from people I knew, who were engaged in Government work, their object being to induce me to utilize the paper in the common game of preaching war and singing a "hymn of late" week by week. These professed fear that I would ruin the *Freethinker* by my policy, although they had never shown any interest in the *Freethinker* before, and

have not done so since. But they were quite sure that I ought to fall into line with other papers, and be as jingoistic as possible.

My reply to these was that there were plenty to preach war, without my adding my voice to the number. Besides, I would take no hand in disseminating the fantastic tales that were abroad, or to make more difficult the solution of peace problems once the war came to an end. It was not the business of the *Freethinker* to oppose the war, and it was certainly not its business to join in the foolish talk of seventy millions of people being made up of none but scoundrels and degenerates. We were at war, and more than ever was it necessary to do what one could to keep men's heads level, and to see that feelings of common decency and justice were not completely forgotten. Moreover, *Freethinker* readers had not been accustomed to find in the paper only that with which they were in agreement. The *Freethinker* might die, but if it died it would go down with its flag flying, true to both its name and its policy.

Well, the *Freethinker* did not die. Its circulation increased. Very large quantities were sent out, gratuitously, to the armies in France and elsewhere, and many were the letters received from men saying that it was one of the very few papers that retained its sanity. I also made the acquaintance of a large number of officers and men in consequence of what was written. I am glad to say that most of these still remain regular readers of the paper.

Only twice did the *Freethinker* come into conflict with the authorities. I had been writing some paragraphs dealing with the Russian steam-roller, and pointing out that the tales about the wild enthusiasm of Russians for war could not be depended on. The Russians were never enthusiastic for war. I received a communication suggesting that it would be advisable to follow the example of other papers and submit such paragraphs for censorship. I replied curtly that there had never been a censor in the *Freethinker* office, and so far as I was concerned I had no intention of setting one up.

On another occasion I received a visit from two men in military uniform who wished to inspect our subscriber's list. I declined to do anything of the kind. "Did I mind answering some questions?" I said it depended upon what the questions were. "Well, did I send papers abroad?" "Yes." "Did I take any precautions as to whom I sent them?" "Not the slightest." "Did I not exercise care to see they did not go into enemies hands?" "Not the slightest." I said if the Emperor of Germany sent along twopence halfpenny for the *Freethinker*, it would be posted to the address given. If the Government stopped the paper in transit, that was their responsibility not mine. I heard no more of the matter, but I had made what arrangements were possible if any attempt was made to interfere with the paper. Perhaps, as bribery, cajolery, and half-concealed threats had failed, and as it was the *Freethinker* they were dealing with, they decided that the wisest policy was to leave it alone.

My calculations were wrong in one direction. I had kept the paper at twopence because I knew that every increase in price made it more difficult to get new readers, and it was propaganda I had in mind. I thought that when the war closed prices would begin to come down, and stop at a reasonable increase on per-war prices. In that I was mistaken. Instead of decreasing, prices in 1919 jumped up. There was no help for it. The price of the paper was advanced to threepence. It made no great difference to the sales, but it made it more difficult to increase them. Persistent advertising was needed, and funds have never been available for that.

* * *

For very many years a Sustentation Fund, under different names had been necessary to maintain the *Freethinker*. Directly after the death of G. W. Foote, very many wrote me greatly concerned over the future of the paper. Many offered financial assistance, and I was urged to open a Fund at once to make sure of the necessary money to carry on. I declined to do so, but gave the assurance that everyone might rest content the paper would go on, but I would wait until the end of the first twelve months in order to see how we stood.

I did so, and in spite of the advance in prices was able to announce no more than a loss of just over £400. This was subscribed at once. Until 1925 there was a Sustentation Fund, promptly subscribed to, in order to make good the annual deficit. Then in 1925 a happy suggestion was made by my good friend, Mr. W. J. W. Easterbrook. He said, "Many of us subscribe year after year, and are quite happy and content to keep on doing so." Why not adopt a different plan. Let each of us capitalize our annual subscription, give that, and form a trust, the income of which will supply what is required?" The idea was a good one, and when it was broached to a few friends it was readily adopted. A *Freethinker* Endowment Trust was formed. Mr. H. Jessop, an extremely generous subscriber to the Trust, consented to act as Secretary, and Messrs. Easterbrook, Bush and Side, all of whom subscribed handsomely to the funds, formed the Trustees, with the addition of myself.

The Trust was formed in October, 1925, and an appeal made for a capital sum of £8,000. Mr. P. G. Peabody, an American friend of the paper also came forward with an offer of £1,000 if seven thousand was subscribed by December 31, 1927. By the date named the sum was over-subscribed, and no one ever parted with a thousand pounds more readily than did Mr. Peabody. Owing to the suspension of the ordinary Sustentation Fund during the raising of the Fund, a sum of £800 had to be taken from the total amount—as was announced, and the balance duly invested. Further sums have come along since, and it is now the aim of the Trustees to increase the capital of the Trust to a clear £10,000.

No such sum for purely propagandist purposes had ever been subscribed in the space of two years in the history of the Freethought movement in this country, and it was certainly one of the greatest things ever done in the history of Freethought journalism. It gave the paper a security such as it had never before possessed. I felt proud of the result, as I think did everyone connected with it. I may add one other thing. Ever since G. W. Foote became President of the National Secular Society, the *Freethinker* has been its official organ. This has given rise to the belief that in some way the paper shares in the legacies that have of late years accrued to that body and to the Secular Society, Limited. This is not the case. The paper stands absolutely alone. It gives its services cheerfully and generously to the movement throughout the country without making or receiving a penny in payment. I do not expect that this will remove misapprehensions on the subject, but it is only proper that it should be said.

There was yet another reason why I was pleased to see this result. I had no fear that so long as I was able to conduct the paper, and so long as I did nothing to forfeit the confidence of the party, enough money would be forthcoming to meet any loss in running the paper. But one day my editorship would come to an end, and I was anxious to see something in the shape of financial security established while the new editor, whoever he might be, was making good. It was the cause I had in mind, and the cause is greater than the individual. One day I am hoping to see the paper with sufficient funds to indulge in an advertising campaign, and then I fancy we may see some striking developments.

Finally, it may be said that the instant and striking success of the Endowment Trust, bore testimony to the affection existing between the *Freethinker* and its readers. There are many other papers in the country that are liked by their readers, but I do not know any other paper of which the term affection could be so truthfully used. The letters received from week to week, and from all parts of the world, bear testimony to this. It proves the existence of a feeling between writers and readers of which any editor may be proud.

I am proud of one other thing. As I have already said, I wrote my first article for the *Freethinker* at the beginning of 1806. I wrote occasionally for it for the next eighteen months or so. Then I commenced to write articles regularly, with many paragraphs, with an occasional extra article under another name. For three years before the death of Mr. Foote I had been practically editing the paper, and have been the responsible

editor ever since October, 1915. It will be seen that out of fifty years of publication I have been writing for the *Freethinker* for thirty-five years. That is a record of which I feel very proud.

* * *

Looking over the fifty year's issue of the *Freethinker* has been a lengthy task, but an interesting and an inspiring one. A friend of mine once called it the mausoleum of buried genius. In a sense it is true, but in another sense it is decidedly not true. The paper has never had the circulation it ought to have had, one may truthfully say, the circulation it deserved. In that sense the criticism is justified. But it has exerted an influence out of all proportion to the circulation it has enjoyed. On anything that really affected the position of Freethought in this country thousands have looked to it for leading and they have not, I think, been disappointed. It has its readers all over the world, and the letters I have had from India, China, Japan, America, and all over the British Empire saying how much the arrival of the paper is looked for, and with what appreciation it is read, are enough to make those who are responsible for the maintenance of the *Freethinker* rightly proud. I would also like to add a word of appreciation of those who had not written for the *Freethinker*, but who have worked for it. It is the silent help of large numbers of men and women all over the world that has done much to keep the paper in existence. Without their ready and generous help success would have been impossible.

Above all it has been a genuinely democratic paper in the very highest sense of the word. It has never put its space at the service of a man merely on account of his position or his wealth. It has never permitted itself to consider whether an article pleased some or offended others. To go upon that plan is to rob one's work of all character and of all real influence. Its readers do not expect to agree with all that is published in its columns, and there is no reason why they should. The *Freethinker* is a voice, not an echo. And if it can manage to create other voices it will have done its work.

Looking back over these fifty years it is not, I think, too much to say that Freethought in this country would not be what it is to-day had the *Freethinker* never existed. It has been a means of liberation to the religious and a spur to keep the timid up to the mark. If one compares the state of public opinion in 1881 with what it is in 1931 on the question of religion one may appreciate how far we have moved since the first issue of this journal saw the light. I am not absurd enough to assume, or even to hint that the *Freethinker* has played more than a part in bringing about this change in public opinion, but that it has played a notable part no unprejudiced person could doubt.

Just a final word as to the future of the paper. I have had many good friends of the paper suggest to me that if a less aggressive name than the *Freethinker* were adopted, it might make its way into circles from which it is now excluded. And quite recently I received a tentative offer to give substantial financial assistance to a plan for converting the *Freethinker* into a kind of Freethinking *John Bull*, or *John o' London*, and so make its Freethought message less obtrusive than it is. I have no doubt whatever that the circulation of the paper could be increased by the latter plan. But such a journal would not be the *Freethinker*, and I replied that I could only count success in terms of the advancement of the ideas for which it has always stood. There is as great need as ever for this paper, and the future may perhaps show that the need is greater than ever. In the early days of the paper the feature of open persecution acted as a clarion call to Freethinkers all over the country. In later days we settled down to fight a silent boycott which offered no incitement to resistance, and so has sapped the energy of many who needed open persecution to rouse them to effort. The last stage is more difficult to fight than the first one; but we have come triumphantly through both. Religion is to-day more accommodating than it was, but on that account more dangerous. The need for the *Freethinker* is evident, and I am quite convinced that its friends all over the world will see to it that the *Freethinker* remains to meet that need. It has made history and it will continue to do so.

THE FREETHINKER.

REGISTERED FOR]

EDITED BY G. W. FOOTE.

[TRANSMISSION ABROAD,

Vol. I.—No. 1.]

MAY, 1881.

[PRICE ONE PENNY

TO OUR READERS.

We will not bore you with a long introductory address, containing a catalogue of promises that may never be kept. The *Freethinker* is an anti-Christian organ, and must therefore be chiefly aggressive. It will wage relentless war against Superstition in general, and against Christian Superstition in particular. It will do its best to employ the resources of Science, Scholarship, Philosophy and Ethics against the claims of the Bible as a Divine Revelation; and it will not scruple to employ for the same purpose any weapons of ridicule or sarcasm that may be borrowed from the armoury of Common Sense. During the summer months special attention will be given to the out-door advocacy of Freethought. Our first number will give a fair idea of the style in which the paper will be conducted.

Any competent Christian will be allowed reasonable space in which to contest our views; and if fuller opportunity is desired, the editor will be always ready to hold a public debate with any clergyman, minister, or accredited representative of the other side.

SECULAR POLICY.

Our Principles are purely and exclusively Secular; by which we mean such principles of human thought and action as the most critical investigation shows to be true: and the widest, longest, and most enlightened experience demonstrates to be useful to human society. All other principles we may be ready to weigh and to discuss; but we shall not adopt them until Freethought and experience warrant them as true and useful.

Infallibility we do not claim for ourselves, but only for truth. And as we are fully convinced that all other claims to infallibility, whether on the part of persons, books or institutions, are nought but shams; that all "revelations" are false and also useless; that all false and useless things are real nuisances and hindrances to human advancement and happiness; we shall attack to the uttermost of our power.

Our principles belong entirely to the regions known and becoming known to man. What we know, others may know. We have no occult or mysterious sources of information, no profound secrets to hide from vulgar view. No Gods, angels, spirits, or devils have ever spoken to us. Indeed, we have not the remotest conception of what they are like nor who they are. We know only their names, as we know the names of fairies, pixies, peri, and goblins. Michael and Gabriel are no better known to us than Puck or Odin; Satan is as great a stranger as Pluto; and Jehovah as empty as Jupiter. Heaven is unknown to us, and so are Purgatory and Hell. The separate existence of the "soul" and the "future life" are to us inconceivable; and we believe that Christians are just as ignorant respecting them as we.

Since we regard all Theological doctrines as sheer superstition, we cannot draw any principles of thought or action therefrom. For us the "verities" of Christianity are all fables. Regarded as legitimate objects of thought, of hope, fear, and reverence, we ignore them; and merely attack and ridicule them as monstrous myths which have filled the world with fantastic hopes and horrible fears, have lent themselves as instruments and sanctions of the worst form of cruelty and tyranny; have roused the world to most unnatural strife; drenched the earth with seas of blood; and burnt the noblest of mankind to ashes for daring to think and speak as reason dictated.

Shaking off all Theological prejudices, we turn to nature as expounded by Science; to human society in its necessary elements and workings. From these we draw all our principles, freely availing ourselves of all that the world's Workers and Thinkers have secured and exhibited for the use of man. Whatever there is in human life which experience shows to be good and useful, that we adopt, and shall strive to elaborate and illustrate it, to render it better known, and more useful still. Whatever we may evolve by Freethought, from present or future materials and elements, which may be of use to man, that also we shall recommend: as we shall all of the same description found and exhibited by others.

X.

MR. BRADLAUGH'S ADVISERS.

ADVICE can always be had for the asking, and frequently without being asked for at all. No commodity is more plentiful. Every man keeps an abundant stock of it, which he is always ready to dispense; and ignorance of the matter in hand is seldom thought to justify reticence. About their own affairs men are conscious of difficulty; they recognize the necessity of caution; and have to admit that in the complicated problems of life a practical decision often involves a departure from the strict line of principle on this side and on that. But when they deal with another man's affairs they make little, if any, allowance; they demand that he shall adhere to the principle which happens to be predominant in their minds, without any respect to other principles that may predominate in his; and if the following of their advice entails great sacrifice of fame or fortune, they prefer it all the more insistently, and even feel within their bosoms a virtuous glow, as if they had performed the sacrifice themselves instead of enjoying it on another.

Mr. Bradlaugh has just experienced the truth of this. Many highly disinterested persons who have access to newspapers have offered him excellent moral advice, although it does not seem that they are prepared to offer him anything else. He is to carry out their advice at his own cost; a vicarious practice of virtue which commends itself to them more forcibly than it does to Mr. Bradlaugh. He has already subjected himself to monstrous penalties through his adherence to the principle of affirmation, and by pursuing the same course after his re-election he would subject himself to further penalties. Yet this is what his virtuous advisers counsel him to do. Now it is but fair that these persons should be asked what contribution they have made towards the expenses he has already incurred, and what contribution they intend to make towards the expenses he may incur in the future? We are afraid this question would be unpleasant to them and that a truthful reply to it would ill accord with their virtuous advice.

We are all agreed as to the injustice and folly of maintaining the oath; that is, we who think Mr. Bradlaugh is now practically justified in taking it, and those who say he is not. The Parliamentary oath has been so whittled down that anybody with any kind of God may take it. As Mr. Gladstone said, in his splendid speech for which all Freethinkers are indebted, those who maintain the oath "cling to a narrow Theistic ledge;" and their test of legislative fitness is so absurdly devised that it would exclude all the Buddhist subjects of her Majesty and include all the Mohammedan. It is simply a relic of the tyrannous imposition of a dominant creed, and is upheld chiefly by those who represent in the present the worst traditions of the past.

Mr. Bradlaugh, of course, has no wish to take the oath, nor abstractly could he be justified in taking it. But practical life is not an abstraction, and public men

have often to reconcile contending duties. If Mr. Bradlaugh were attending to his private affairs, and were gratuitously demanded by authority to swear an oath, he would be morally bound to refuse and to take the consequences; and we have no doubt that he would do so with as much alacrity and fortitude as could be displayed by his present advisers. But that is not his situation. The problem he has definitely settled for himself is not so simple; on the contrary, it is very complex; and any decision he might form would certainly do violence to some public principle. He has wisely determined to adopt the course which promises least injury to any public interest.

From the list of Mr. Bradlaugh's advisers we select first the *Pall Mall Gazette*, a journal ably conducted by Mr. John Morley. It remarks:—

"Mr Bradlaugh says he hopes 'in this great battle I shall quit myself as better men have done before.' If he intends that, he should imitate their example, and refuse to take the oath. His refusal to comply with what he regards as a degrading formality and an unreal mockery would do more to abolish the oath than the Bill which he may introduce, but which, in the present state of public business, cannot be passed."

Now there is much exaggeration in this. Mr. Bradlaugh considers the oath "unmeaning" so far as its reference to God is concerned, but not otherwise; and he has never described it as "a degrading formality." The old oath "on the true faith of a Christian" was a degrading formality to Jews, because it implied a profession of faith which they had not; but the utterance of such words as "so help me God" has no more moral significance to Mr. Bradlaugh than saying Abracadabra or repeating the alphabet backwards. The degradation of his taking the oath lies entirely with those who prostitute religion by insisting on its terminology being used by unbelievers. The objectionable phrase is sacred to them, not to him, and they are responsible for its sinking to a "degrading formality." Since the question was first agitated they have had ample time to prevent this by passing a Bill to allow all objectors to the oath to affirm, instead of taking it. But they have not chosen to do so, nor have they evinced any disposition to do so in the immediate future. Mr. Bradlaugh's course is therefore plain. He has cleared his conscience by the most emphatic statement of his convictions; and if the House of Commons insists on retaining the oath after all that has happened, he may take it, and his seat, with no more violation of conscience than if he had said "so help me Mumbo Jumbo" instead of "so help me God." The words are simply nonsense to him, and further protest against them at present is not worth the cost of time and money it would involve. Most of us have to put up with a good deal more nonsense in the course of our lives in order to avoid much smaller sacrifices.

The *Christian World* follows the same line of objection. It pays Mr. Bradlaugh some handsome compliments on his forensic ability, and then says that his latest decision "has lowered the whole discussion." It speaks of his "lending himself to a solemn farce," and says that he resolves to "submit to the ordeal for the sake of his seat." It does not occur to the *Christian World* that Mr. Bradlaugh owes a duty to the electors of Northampton as well as to the principle of objection to oaths, and that the course he has resolved on may appear to him the only practical solution of the difficulty. But even if he submitted to a little farcical procedure for the sake of his seat, who except a mere *doctrinaire* could censure him? The fruit of thirteen years' striving is not to be lightly risked by him who has won it, however much other people may regard even its total loss with perfect equanimity.

Another critic whose name we refrain from mentioning, as he labours under a horrible dread that he may be suspected of personal rivalry, recommends "consistency and honour, however much it may stand in the way of our interest or advancement." But we have clearly shown that Mr. Bradlaugh's personal interest is the smallest factor of the problem, and that if it be set aside altogether, his decision to take the oath may be justified as the only practical way of reconciling the principles at stake. The same critic is unable to see how Secularists will manage to hold up their heads after Mr. Bradlaugh's defection. This again is exaggeration. Our heads will not droop much, and we do not think the posture of the critic's cranium will be greatly affected.

The last critic we have space to mention says that "Mr. Bradlaugh's clear course was to have quietly sat

down outside the door of the House until it was opened to him." What an eminently practical solution of the case! Mr. Bradlaugh squatting there would afford a comical sight to the members passing in and out. How he would obtain his meals we are unable to perceive, unless Mr. Sullivan brought him buns and Sir Wilfrid Lawson lemonade. Mr. Bradlaugh has fortunately avoided that alternative. He has resolved to take the oath as his last practical resource, and we fail to see how he could have reasonably come to any other decision.

G. W. FOOTE.

ACID DROPS.

THE Chicago Sabbath Association has undertaken to enforce Sunday law in that city. Its circular characteristically says: "The complaint is not so much that people work on Sunday, but that they play." Re-against sinful recreation that we are moving." Religious bigots are always incensed at seeing the profane enjoy themselves. Macaulay says that the Puritans abolished bear-baiting, not because it pained the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators; and the Chicago Sabbath Association is clearly animated by the same spirit. Should it ever issue a hymn-book it will of course include that delightful song, "Let us all be un- happy on Sunday."

SUNDAY play, however, is just what the Bible does not forbid; it only prohibits Sunday work. Cobblers may play the fiddle on the Sabbath or dance a jig, but they mustn't mend boots. We are free to do whatever we like. The Bible does not condemn. Scripture does not say we mustn't eat on the Lord's Day, so all good Christians may eat. In like manner, it does not say we mustn't dance on the Lord's Day, so all good Christians may dance.

THERE'S nothing like faith. Dr. Hammond, in the *International Review*, said that he gave water from Lourdes to a pious patient, saying it was something else, and her symptoms were at once aggravated, but when he used common water, telling her it was from the miraculous spring, she at once improved. "Such tricks hath strong imagination," as Shakespeare says.

THE revised version of the New Testament will be the joint property of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. No doubt it will bring them in a handsome sum. If copyright were perpetual, as some insane authors wish, and Jesus Christ had secured the copyright of the Gospels to his own family for ever, what a splendid property it would be! Rénan originated this "happy thought."

THE new version will, it is said, differ materially from the old in numerous important passages; and it will be found that many people, perhaps the majority of every generation since the reign of James I., have entertained radically false ideas as to salvation, and have been going to hell without knowing it. The only consolation is that Hell is to be softened by the revisers into Hades.

MR. HARRY LONG, the rabid leader of the rabid Orangemen of Glasgow, is reported to be persevering in his efforts to form a secret society of 2,000 "Knights," who will vote according to his instructions at the next School Board election in the city, in order to secure Protestant ascendancy in educational matters—in other words, to place Harry Long at the head of the poor Humble Harry!

LORD CAIRNS is a pious Christian and a riotous Jingo, and no doubt he has a profound belief in the injunction of his great Master that everybody without a sword should sell his clothes and buy one. He appeared on the platform of Exeter Hall, when it was inaugurated as the head-quarters of the Young Men's Christian Association, and delivered a "very solemn" address to the members and their friends on the transcendent importance of "individual personal knowledge of Christ as their saviour." And that very same evening he made in the House of Lords his memorable Jingo speech, in which he actually "blushed" for the honour of England because the Government had concluded a reasonable peace with the Boers, instead of "vindicating the honour of our flag" by killing a lot of them before negotiating.

His lordship's sermon in Exeter Hall and his shout for more blood in the House of Lords are edifying when taken together. Sceptics know what it all means as well as his lordship. They remember, as of course he does, Gibbon's gravely satirical statement that in Pagan times religions were held by the people as all equally true, by the philosopher as equally false, and by the statesmen as equally useful. A religion useful to statesmen is almost sure to be pernicious to the people.

THE REV. C. BULLOCK, editor of *Home Words*, after spying horrible blasphemy in hot-cross-buns, proceeds to rebuke a number of his readers who have answered "Bible Questions" in an heretical spirit. "Most of the writers," says he, "seem to think it is open to them to pronounce an opinion on the Church's doctrines, forgetting that the Church is a divine institution, and that all divergence from her teaching is heresy, and all separation from her order is schism." This divine institution should support itself on miracles instead of annually consuming ten millions of our national wealth. The only infallibility about it is the dead certainty of finding most of its ministers fanatics or fools.

THE *Christian* warns all ministers of Christ not to steep themselves "in the fallacies of Matthew Arnold or the speculations of Herbert Spencer," lest they should let some of it out on Sunday. "Let us," adds the *Christian*, "have able ministers of the New Testament, and we can do without refutations of infidelity." That sagacious bird, the ostrich, sticks its head in the sands, but it leaves other vulnerable parts sufficiently exposed. Death overtakes it all the same, and the only result of its strategy is that it dies not with its face, but with a more ignoble part to the foe.

CHRIST, says Mr. Spurgeon, has not only undone all the mischief wrought by Adam, but he has done more; he has secured to us the freehold of a heavenly Paradise, which is infinitely better than the precarious tenure of that earthly Paradise enjoyed by our first parents. Yes, that is true enough for the elect; but how about the non-elect and damned? Christ hasn't done much for them. In the great theatre of the next world, Mr. Spurgeon has a seat booked among the gods, or at least in the upper circle. He ought to be thankful for his admission to such select company. But it is rather absurd for him to expect the same thankfulness from the unfortunate crowd stewing in the pit.

THE REV. ARTHUR MURSELL is a lover of very small jokes. He recently filled a column of the *Christian World* with a quantity of the dreariest little witticisms we ever saw. For instance, he opined that "the Corporation of Northwich must be lineal descendants of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram," because their houses, being situated over salt mines, have a constant tendency to sink into the earth. The joke is infinitesimal, and below the mental level of a pious tea-meeting. But its blasphemy is simply atrocious. Here is a professed believer in the Bible who makes fun of one of its most startling instances of divine retribution. Arthur Mursell is a Baptist, yet he allows himself to crack a feeble joke about dip candles. How can such men expect others to believe in their sincerity when they thus make light of what they represent as sacred? We advise Arthur Mursell, if he must perpetrate small puns and jokes, to speak them and not print them. He is in his proper element when discoursing to a Birmingham crowd on a sensational subject like "Whispers to Wives," but beyond that we reckon him as very small fry. Let him stick to his last.

"WERE you ever a Pantheist?" enquired a correspondent of Thomas Carlyle. "No," replied the sage, "never was; nor a Pot-Theist either."

THE *Church Review* says that "for the dunce and the dullard the Church is materially and commercially as good a career as he could choose."

"WILL you walk into my parlour?" said the spider to the fly. The same sweet tune was sung by Mrs. Fletcher, a Spiritist medium, to Mrs Hart-Davies, a lady anxious for tidings from her dead mother. With wonderful celerity the victim was fleeced; her jewels, rare lace, and other valuables were transferred to the disinterested medium, who conveyed messages of advice to

that effect from the spirit-world. Judge Hawkins has sentenced Mrs. Fletcher to twelve months' imprisonment with hard labour, and however potent the spirits are, we don't think they will succeed in getting her out of gaol before the term expires. The revelations made during the trial were highly edifying. The "brotherly hugs," the "scrunching kisses," and other endearments between the plaintiff and the defendant's husband, combined with the fraud which was so daringly practised, sufficiently indicates the moral atmosphere in which all the parties moved. Modern Spiritism is a strange compound of credulity, fraud, and sensuality. "Sex," as the Spiritists call it, is always coming to the front; and is there a medium who hasn't been condemned by the law or by rival practitioners for trickery and cheating? We recommend all persons in the incipient stage of Spiritist disease to read Robert Browning's "Sludge the Medium." If after reading that wonderful poem they still show a disposition to be duped, they must e'en go to perdition in their own way, for nothing short of a miracle could save them.

PROFESSOR FISKE has a very poor opinion of Joseph Cook. In the *North American Review* he says that Joseph's books contain "little else but misrepresentation of facts, misconception of principles, and floods of tawdry rhetoric."

A WESLEYAN minister of Sheffield has invented a Torpedo-boat Exploder. He is a proficient in the blowing-up business. Perhaps he wants to people heaven a little faster.

THE Rev. Canon Clarke has contributed some Jingo doggerel to the *St. James's Gazette*. He tells us that "England's flag and 'scutcheon
Are covered with disgrace."
This is because our Government wouldn't murder more Afghans and Boers. Canon Clarke is a worthy minister of the Prince of Peace.

SECULARISM in Edinburgh has a good deal of bigotry to contend with. Mr. Alexander Orr, the Society's secretary, secured a book-stall in the Waverley Market some time ago, and did a roaring business in Free-thought literature, until the authorities became alarmed and turned him out. The Sunday lectures used to be advertised in the *Scotsman* among the Church Notices, but the clericals resented this, and they now appear among the Public Amusements. Quite recently the editor refused to insert one of Dr. Aveling's subjects, "The Wickedness of God," which, it must be admitted, is pretty strong for such a pious city as Edinburgh. The Doctor, however, threatens to post it on the walls in the biggest letters next time he goes there.

THE *Leeds Mercury*, edited by that pink of perfection, T. Wemyss Reid, makes a great boast of its Liberalism, but it persistently refuses to advertise the subjects of Free-thought lectures delivered in that town, although it is not above taking money for announcing where and when they may be heard.

PROFESSOR BRUCE, of Glasgow, has just delivered at the Presbyterian College, London, a series of lectures on Revelation. In one of these, speaking of the miracles of Christ, he said that they "were all useful, morally significant, and beneficent works." Now, we should just like Professor Bruce to show us the utility, moral significance, and beneficence of the following miracles:—First, the cursing of the fig-tree for not bearing fruit out of season; second, the turning of a large quantity of water into wine at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee after the guests were already well on; and third, the casting of those devils into the herd of Gadarene swine, without compensating the owners whose pigs were drowned. When Professor Bruce has shown the beauty and holiness of these miracles, we will supply him with a few more.

TALMAGE says that the welfare of your father, mother, wife, children, or friends, is nothing compared with your own salvation. Yet this clerical mountebank tells us that Christianity is the pure Gospel of love.

JOHN STUART MILL once sneered at pious people who couldn't teach the multiplication table without reference to the number of Jacob's sheep. What would he think of the idiot who wrote the following rubbish, which we cut from a Christian paper of wide circulation?

"Now, have you got down the number of Baal's prophets? Well, subtract from these the number of people on board the ship that was cast on the island of Melita. You know Paul was one of them. Subtract from this number Jacob's age when he died. Add the number of provinces over which Ahasuerus reigned. Subtract the number of parts into which the 19th Psalm is divided. Multiply by the number of men who drew water for David from the well at Bethlehem. Add Abraham's age when he died. Subtract the number of cities that Solomon gave Hiram. Add the number of stripes Paul received on any one occasion from the Jews. Subtract Sarah's age at the time of her death. Subtract the number of prophets whom Obadiah hid in the cave. Add one to the number of times Paul was shipwrecked, and then add the result to the last product. Add the number of men Gideon led against the Midianites. Multiply the age of Uzziah when he ascended the throne, by the days in which Jonah said Nineveh would be destroyed, and add the result to the above. Subtract from this the years in which Abraham was told his descendants should be afflicted. Add one to the age of Zedekiah when he ascended the throne, and add the result of the previous answer. You will then have the number of chapters in the Old Testament." Children who are made to waste their time over such nonsense are certainly being prepared for Colney Hatch.

CANON LIDDON the other Sunday referring to Carlyle, intimated that Christians found a painful lesson "in the bearing of this great and gifted man in the presence of death. In the Reminiscences just published we saw him all through his pages face to face with the terrible mysteries of human existence, and bearing the load with a long-suppressed wail of agony. One could but regret that a man so rightful and true should have thus forfeited the supreme consolation of the simple believer." This style of fastening the responsibilities attaching to dyspepsia and theistic pessimism on lack of faith in the Christian mythus, is ingenious after the clerical fashion, but it can only impose on an audience in St. Paul's. Canon Liddon could not be expected to appreciate the argument that Carlyle's error lay in not carrying his Scepticism far enough. But he might fairly be asked (1) whether he thinks many Christians could support an un murmuring faith during threescore and ten years of dyspepsia? and (2) how he accounts for the fact that Mr. Ruskin, who is understood not only to believe, like Mr. Carlyle, in a future life, but in the redemptory functions of Jesus Christ, has been, if anything, a more miserable man than Mr. Carlyle?

SUGAR PLUMS.

AMERICA is perhaps the freest country in the world, not only in a legal but also in a social sense; and there can be no doubt that much of the world's future lies there in germ. Dr. Darwin approves the Rev. Mr. Zincke's opinion that all the past history of mankind is of meaning and importance only in relation to the great stream of emigration from the old world to the new. Yet in the first of his "Latter-day Pamphlets," published thirty-one years ago, Thomas Carlyle sneered at Americans in a most outrageously cynical manner. "What have they done?" he growled. "They have doubled their population every twenty years. They have begotten, with a rapidity beyond recorded example. Eighteen Millions of the greatest *boces* ever seen in this world before." Yet Carlyle's will, recently published, speaks of them in a far different tone. He confesses to "a variety of kindly feelings, obligations, and regards towards New England," and recognises "with gratitude how much of friendliness, of actually credible human love, I have had from that country, and what immensities of worth and capability I believe and partly know to be lodged, especially in the silent classes there." On the whole, Carlyle's ideas of America approximate very closely to those of Walt Whitman, whose democratic fervour no one will doubt; and it may interest some of those who feel that Carlyle was at bottom a fierce enemy of all remains of the old order of things essentially opposed to the new, that Whitman accounts him "the most serviceable democrat of our age," and doubts if any country in the world has one to show like him.

The *Christian World* pays a high tribute to Mr. Bradlaugh's forensic ability. It says that he "displayed more than his wonted sagacity and skill in conducting his own case, and it is acknowledged that he showed

himself fully equal to the task of grappling even with so able and experienced an advocate as Sir Hardinge Giffard."

In addition to the increasingly wide circulation given to the writings of Herbert Spencer, Matthew Arnold, Professor Clifford, and others whose works have an analogous tendency, Mr. Bradlaugh and the London secularist societies are actively supplying India and the colonies with pseudo-philosophical and quasi-scientific literature intended to promote scepticism in regard to religion. Translations of such papers into the dialects of India are also circulated; the colonial press is being used with a similar purpose, and the ill effects are already apparent.—*The Christian*.

MR. BRADLAUGH has been again returned as member for Northampton. His majority was small, but the victory was signal, for he had to contend against the most unscrupulous appeals to theological bigotry. The vast majority of Nonconformist voters were nobly superior to such appeals, and steadily adhered to the principles of civil and religious liberty. By their aid Mr. Bradlaugh won, as he himself gratefully acknowledges. As for the Nonconformist Whigs who rattled and voted for the Tory candidate, they have done the Devil's work without getting his wages.

COLONEL INGERSOLL is to visit England soon. The Freethinkers here will give him a hearty welcome.

W. L. SUGDEN has already issued a second edition of the Colonel's "What Must I do to be Saved?" The sale of Freethought literature has immensely increased during the last few years.

AFTER one of Professor Calderwood's lectures on religion in Edinburgh last month, Mrs. Harriet Law was permitted to offer some opposition, which was courteously replied to.

CHRISTIAN missionaries in India have to confront a serious rival. At Lucknow there is a large establishment, employing 800 men, for lithographing various editions of the Koran. Another establishment at Calcutta employs 300 men. It is said that an alarm will be sounded at the forthcoming missionary meetings.

MOODY AND SANKEY, who are coming to England again in September, have experienced very great difficulty in San Francisco, owing to the sceptical spirit which prevails there. The inhabitants of that Western metropolis prefer Paine and Ingersoll to Moses and the Evangelists.

THE Rev. Newman Hall says: "Throughout the country, in all denominations, there is the sorrowful mission that the progress of the Church does not keep pace with the population. There is a diminished attendance at public worship; there are fewer admissions to Christian fellowship."

A PIOUS YARN.

THE *Christian Herald* is distinguished for its fine stories about Freethinkers who get converted by little children or some such slender agency; who get ignominiously routed by weak adversaries; or who die howling in despair. Its number for April 13th contains the following yarn:

"An infidel's loss of a sovereign recently happened when a gentleman was preaching out of doors in the City Road, London. The objector frequently interrupted in the most noisy and insulting manner, by declaring that he did not believe in the Bible or in God. A tall Irishman present exclaimed, 'What do you know about the Bible?' (putting his hand in his pocket and pulling out a sovereign) 'I will give you this to repeat a dozen verses from any part of it. You can't; I knew you couldn't! You shall have it for six! Not yet, eh? You shall have it for four! Not that, either? I'll show you up, my boy; faix, you shall have it for two!' But the infidel was speechless, and amid the jeers of the audience, confessed by his shame and silence how truly the Irishman had judged him."

Now we thoroughly believe this to be an editorial concoction. Still, it may be true; and we invite the editor to authenticate it; in which case the sum which the distinguished infidel did not earn shall be handed over by us to the *Christian Herald* circulation fund, or devoted to some equally pious purpose.

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We shall be obliged if our readers will send us any newspapers or cuttings likely to be serviceable.

W. L. S.—Thanks for your subscription for three copies. The gratuitous distribution of a few copies every month will materially aid our circulation.

J. E.—“Acid Drops” and “Sugar Plums” are, of course, not sublime phrases, but there is no harm in them. The public now-a-days is in a great hurry, and you must attract its attention before you can be heard.

The Quarterly Meeting of the Central London Branch of the National Secular Society will be held in the Hall of Science, 11a Street, E.C., on Sunday, May 1st, after the evening lecture. Mr. G. W. Foote will preside. A full attendance of members is desired, as there will be much important business to transact.

BIBLE BIOGRAPHY.

ADAM.—This gentleman was the first that ever lived; his father's name was God (Luke iii., 38), and his mother made the earth or the ground (Genesis ii., 7). Adam was made, or begotten, or manufactured, or born, or produced twice at least. In the first instance he was made the same day with his wife, viz., on the first Saturday that ever dawned; and after this gigantic effort the creator dropped work, “rested and was refreshed” (Exodus xxxi., 17) during the first of Sundays, and has, we believe, done no work to speak of since.

At his first creation Adam found the world prepared for him. As Hood, one of his late descendants sung, he same

“tenderly ushered in
To a prospect all bright and burnished:
No tenant he for life's back slums—
He comes to the world, as a gentleman comes
To a lodging ready furnished.”

There was the earth, in all its vastness of glory, furnished with a crystalline roof (time, alas! has destroyed it long since), in which were fixed the sun, moon, and stars—now, sad to say, left to wander through space as they best can, with no firmament to hold them fast! What would the astronomer of to-day give to gaze upon the world as our first father saw it! Over head that beautiful sapphire vault, roof at once of the lower world and floor of the musicians of the gods! What a pity it was ever permitted to decay! Had it been kept in proper repair the theologian might confound his sceptical foes by merely pointing upwards, and dramatically crying, “Behold!”

When Adam first opened his eyes upon the vegetable world no parasites were found anywhere, and a fungus had never a chance to grow. The leaves of the trees grew, but never decayed; the blossoms consolidated into fruit, the fruit ripened; but it never fell. The animals, too, were in a most extraordinary state. The lion played with the lamb, and the cat with the mouse; if the hawk chased the sparrow it was merely in fun; and the veriest cormorant to be found would as soon have dreamt of swallowing a crow-bar as a fish. In those days, all beasts of prey browsed in the meadows; and the whales and sharks grew fat upon nought but sea-weeds. Then it was that tigers had neither fangs nor claws, the wasps no stings, the serpents no poison; mosquitoes had not yet left their eggs, the locusts had never begun to devour, and phylloxera and the Colorado beetle had never cast murderous eyes upon vine, grape or potato.

These were delightful times when our first parents sunned themselves in “Eden's bonny yard,” untroubled by the thought of debt or danger, untrammelled with skirts or pantaloons, big, romping babies, that they were, the very image of their father!

But Adam's second Advent was different. In the first instance he was made, but of what material we know not, when he was made the second time it was of dust (Genesis ii., 7). Whether the dust was moistened and worked up with water, like plaster of Paris, is not said. A modern man consists chiefly of water; Adam's one element was dust. Whether it was stone dust, or clay dust, or saw dust, or gold dust, or diamond dust, or

brick dust, or coal dust or a mingling of them, we cannot say. Divine wisdom has not seen fit to enlighten us further than to condescend to inform us that our first father was made of the dust of the ground and as the dust of the ground differs so in different regions, we must leave the solution of this interesting problem till the Great Day, when the whole of his descendants will, no doubt, rush to him simultaneously and exclaim, “Oh! Reverend sire, out of what dust did thy creator form thee?” Adam's reply must, I am sorry to add, be postponed *sine die*.

As Adam consisted of dust, and as sons and fathers are usually of the same material, I presume it is but logical to infer that Adam's father—or God—was also of the dust. One thing is certain, he has been turned to dust or something less substantial for many ages; and his worshippers can no more find a relic of his than they can one of Eve's hair-pins.

When Adam was made on this second occasion, and the dust was worked up into its required form, proportions, symmetry, and consistency, his maker “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man (Adam) became a living soul.” The result must be pronounced wonderful and altogether different from what might have been expected. It must be remembered that he breathed into Adam, that is, the creator breathed *out of himself* or expired his own breath; and that breath would have poisoned Adam if he had been previously alive, for it must have been highly charged with carbonic acid. So it appears that what would kill a live man will make a dead man live.

Of course, we should not believe this story if we found it in Homer—unless we had been coaxed to believe it by a promise of heaven or frightened to it by a threat of hell; but seeing it is in the Bible, and reflecting that we must be damned if we doubt it, it seems safest to believe it.

When God the second time created Adam, he certainly did not improve upon his work; for this time Adam found the earth bare; he himself was the very first living thing created. When he awoke to life there was nothing to eat, no one to speak to. A little later he saw a garden rise suddenly around him, and then beasts, and birds, and insects crowded into life. But none of them suited him, though the creator seems to have tempted him to amalgamate with beasts. The Lord God thought it not good for Adam to be alone, and so gave him a sleeping draught of extra power, and while he lay in deep repose, proceeded to vivisect him. Opening the side of the sleeper, the surgeon-creator extracted a rib, and then stitched up the wound, leaving Adam a lighter if not a wiser man. Of the extracted rib the creator now made a woman. When Adam's skeleton is dug up it may easily be identified by being a rib short.

Here we face a decided difficulty. If Adam was ordinary man, a rib of his would make but a very small woman, and merely a *bone* woman after all. A woman so small must have been a very poor “help meet” for Adam, even if consisting of bones and flesh and all things human; and a woman of bone, whatever her size or shape, must have been of far less value than one of ivory, not to mention marble or the precious metals.

This, however, is merely a sceptical difficulty, and decidedly dangerous. We prefer sticking to God's holy word, though we cannot tell how a rib, no more than a pound or so in weight, could become a woman, weighing 140 lbs. For if the rest of the material was taken from some other place, then manifestly only one one hundred-and-fortieth part of Eve was due to that rib; and, therefore, the Lord God did not make that extracted rib a woman, as the story avers. It would have required all Adam's ribs and nearly all the rest of him to make a woman of respectable proportions as compared with himself. Still it is better to believe than be damned.

(To be concluded.) J. SYMES.

SHAKESPEARE ON THE OATH QUESTION.

MOST of the great writers of our literature have reprobated oaths altogether, in Parliament and outside; and especially the great poets, who always reflect the truest and humanest spirit of the nation. Beginning with Coleridge, we might give a long list of these; but we shall go at once to our supreme poet, and the master-mind of our race. Shakespeare makes one gentleman a great stickler for his oath. When Portia asks Shylock to be merciful he piously replies—

An oath, an oath, I have an oath in heaven :
Shall I lay perjury upon my soul?
No, not for Venice.

This scrupulous gentleman's oath was to have a pound of flesh from Antonio. His oath was only a minister to his revenge, and it was ultimately disregarded for profit when revenge could not be obtained. Now let us take a very different case. When the conspirators are met at the house of Brutus to determine the death of Cæsar, and Cassius says "let us swear our resolution," what answer makes "the noblest Roman of them all"?

No, not an oath : if not the face of men,
The sufferance of our souls, the time's abuse—
If these be motives weak, break off betimes,
And every man hence to his idle bed;
So let high-sighted tyranny rage on,
Till each man drop by lottery. But if these,
As I am sure they do, bear fire enough
To kindle cowards and to steel with valour
The melting spirits of women, then, countrymen,
What need we any spur but our own cause
To prick us to redress? what other bond
Than secret Romans, that have spoke the word,
And will not palter? and what other oath
Than honesty to honesty engaged,
That this shall be, or we will fall for it?
Swear priests and cowards and men cautelous,
Old feeble carrions and such suffering souls
That welcome wrongs; unto bad causes swear
Such creatures as men doubt: but do not stain
The even virtue of our enterprise,
Nor the insuppressive metal of our spirits,
To think that on our cause or our performance
Did need an oath; when every drop of blood
That every Roman bears, and nobly bears,
Is guilty of a several bastardy
If he do break the smallest particle
Of any promise that hath passed from him.

After this "high-inspired" protest from the august sovereign of English literature, and therefore the spiritual monarch of our race, we may surely dismiss the pretended utility of oaths as no longer credible except to the ignorant and superstitious.

OUTDOOR ADVOCACY.

THE Central London Branch of the National Secular Society intends to carry on the open-air propaganda vigorously during the summer months, and in our next number we hope to give a good account of its work. Two conferences have been held of delegates from the metropolitan societies, one on March 20th, the other on April 17th; and a plan of operation has been agreed on, which is expected to be very successful. Other Conferences will be held from time to time as the need arises. The open-air stations will be at the Midland Arches, Gibraltar Walk, Clerkenwell Green, Victoria Park, and Mile End Road. As the season advances other stations may be included. Societies throughout the country should emulate the example of those in London. During the summer it is often difficult to induce people to enter close lecture-halls, especially when the platform is not occupied by a professional lecturer. It would, therefore, be well to go out of doors, and find the people there, and preach Secular sermons from the mount. The following is a list of the out-door lectures to be delivered during May:—

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.
LECTURERS FOR MAY.

STATION AND TIME.	1	8	15	22	29
GIBRALTAR WALK, . . . 11.15	Grout	Norrish	Fagan	Haslam	Ramsey
VICTORIA PARK, . . . 3.30	Norrish	Fagan	Haslam	Norrish	Grout
MILE END, 11.15	Fagan	Ramsey	Norrish	Thurlow	Fagan
CLERKENWELL GREEN 11.30	Moss	Haslam	Foote	Ramsey	Grout
MIDLAND ARCHES, . 11.30	Haslam	Moss	Grout	Job	Moss

EARL BEACONSFIELD.

THE great Hebrew-English statesman is dead. His funeral panegyric may be found in the newspapers. Here we have no concern with his politics. In religion he was a professed Christian, but blood is thicker than water, and he always yearned towards the Semitic creed of his fathers. He frequently sneered at Christianity as a *parvenu* religion com-

pared with Judaism, and he attained to the cynical sublimity in his "Life of Lord Bentinck," when he suggested in a footnote that Judas Iscariot deserved a monument instead of reprobation, as without his betrayal Jesus Christ would never have been crucified. No doubt Benjamin Disraeli laughed in his sleeve at the idea of poor Jesus Christ wandering about the earth, old and decrepid, vainly beseeching somebody to kill him for the benefit of mankind, and finally being obliged to commit suicide in order to end the dreary business.

JOSEPH COOK.

BOSTON, as every one should know, is the intellectual hub of the universe. Joseph Cook tells us how the operator at an establishment for the shortening of the hair in that city can discuss, even with him, its most profound philosopher and theologian, the latest article on philosophy; and an authority almost as reliable surmises that the radiation of superabundant phosphorus from the crania of the guardians of the night will in time enable the city to dispense with being lighted by the aid of black cats and sticks of sealing-wax. Boston not only does the thinking for the United States, but is prepared, on short notice, to supply the old world with orators and thinkers who will, for a consideration, solve any problem that demands explication. When, in these days of the minute sub-division of labour, a shop-keeping nation whose thoughts are mainly absorbed in its ledgers and leaderettes, wakes up to the fact that the relations of religion and science are somewhat entangled, it as naturally looks to Boston for their reconciliation as to China for tea or to Egypt for lentils. Joseph Cook had been advertised on the covers of his published Boston lectures as having "carried off the prizes at Harvard as often as his sensitive conscience would allow him to contest them," and as coming forward "as a leader of the religious thought of the nation, and as one armed at all points to resist assaults upon the faith." He was popularly supposed to have quelled infidelity in Boston. Before his prowess Emerson and Theodore Parker had fallen. J. F. Clarke, O. B. Frothingham, and T. W. Higginson began to sing small. Colonel Bob Ingersoll meditated caving in and joining the Shakers, and Parker Pillsbury pusillanimously refused to fight out of a pitiful plea that "You can't strike the ding out of a cow-bell." So the cow-bell was brought over. In other words, Joseph Cook, the new broom specially prepared at Andover to sweep out the on-rushing tide of Agnosticism, was hired to lecture in England. Joseph Cook had told his American auditors how in this country Unitarianism was a bar to a man's getting into Parliament. Yet, at the last election, a notorious Atheist had been returned, and, we are now happy to add, twice returned, despite his Atheism. Evidently something required to be done. Bible Defence Associations, Christian Evidence Societies, etc., notwithstanding their funds and prestige, find the tide swelling higher and higher, threatening to carry away the old landmarks and engulf Church and Dissent alike in one measureless sea of contempt. But, alas! we fear, as far as infidels are concerned, this new great doubt-dispeller has not been able to dispel the doubts of his own pretensions. Infidels found only the same bounce and bluster which they had read in the Boston Monday lectures. They found the same pretentious enumeration of strategic positions, the same disorderly catalogue of inconsequent propositions, the same muster of names in default of an array of arguments; Beale placed before Darwin and Lotze pitted against Haeckel; the same pseudo-scientific expressions and experiments; the same mixture of mist from Germany and offal from the dissecting-room; the same rot and dry-rot too—in short, the same lectures; the tawdry rhetoric now accompanied with histrionic gestures rendering the play-acting nature of the performance more palpable.

Meantime, Professor Fiske has basely taken advantage of Joseph's absence to send a criticism of his performances to the *North American Review* under the title of "Theological Charlatanism," and the Professor finds in the ready acceptance of the charlatan an evidence of the sad straits into which orthodoxy has fallen. In common with many who earn their bread by the wag of their tongues, Joseph Cook has to make a little matter go a long way; so England was not only treated to his Boston lectures, but often to the same lecture under different titles. Now, as THE FREETHINKER means to prove there is nothing like variety to meet the taste of all parties, and as there are certainly a few difficulties remaining in the orthodox faith, we would humbly suggest to Mr.

Cook a few subjects which from their semi-scientific character will, we think, suit the bent of his genius, and may carry out his statement that "it was divinely intended that there should be a sifting of Christianity in this last age and that a defeat of doubt should be the result:—

1. The mean average temperature of the lake of fire and the time it takes to get used to it.
2. The moral influence of the story of Lot and his daughters.
3. New readings from the Song of Solomon illustrated with dissolving views.
4. What Moses saw in the cleft of the rock when the Lord passed by.
5. The marks of design in parasites.
6. How Joshua stopped the sun.
7. Biblical asses, including Balaam's and those that went to Joseph with his brethren.

When Joseph has taken up some such subjects as these we may have something more to say to him.

THE ARROGANCE OF MODERN SCEPTICISM.

UNDER this heading Mr. Francis Peek, understood to be one of the proprietors of the *Contemporary Review*, discourses in the pages of that periodical in a manner altogether touching to the freethinking mind. It is perhaps not unwarrantable to remark that proprietorship is the main qualification Mr. Peek has to show for writing in a leading review. What he chiefly succeeds in proving is that he is very angry; though he certainly does that in a manner that has the not unimportant literary merit of *naïveté*. If Mr. Peek is to be taken as a fair specimen of the orthodox laity, it is to be inferred that—to borrow a religious expression—the iron has entered the soul of orthodoxy. The comparatively new experience of being treated with ill-disguised contempt by men of undeniable eminence, stirs it to wrath which vents itself in excited "protests" like Mr. Peek's. It would be interesting to know, however, what such defenders of the faith hope to effect by protesting. Do they expect that Mr. Leslie Stephen and Professor Huxley will take warning, and hereafter speak respectfully of the occupants of pulpits? It is with pain that we assure Mr. Peek there is little prospect of such a conclusion. He has shown, by quoting Professor Huxley at second-hand, that he is acquainted with that thinker's writings through quotations in other writers' review-articles, but in his general reading he must have met with a good many utterances indicating the arrogance of orthodoxy. He can hardly expect that after Christians have for centuries insulted Freethinkers, the latter, who have never professed to offer the cheek to the smiter, should remain timidly silent when they feel the balance of opinion daily altering in their favour. They have too long endured the contumely of fox-hunting squires, the pity of well-meaning Liberal statesmen, the abuse of un-Christlike priests, and the insolence of itinerating American lecturers. Orthodoxy has had its day of supremacy. If Mr. Peek, like Mr. Tubbs, feels "hurt," he can do his cause little good by announcing the fact. What he had better do is to abstain from reading not only freethinking review-articles, but articles in which Freethinkers are criticised and quoted from. In this way Freethinkers are criticised and quoted from. In this way vexation may be attained an intellectual "Nirvana" free from

THE A. B. C. OF FREETHOUGHT.

THE phenomenon of the month of May, 1881, for Freethinkers, as for churchmen, will be the appearance of the Revised Version of the New Testament. No doubt it is rash thus to take it for granted that, after repeated failures of the authorities concerned to produce their handiwork at dates named, they will finally succeed in keeping their word, but a Freethinker may be pardoned an occasional lapse into incompletely justifiable faith. The feelings which this phenomenon excites in the spectator from the Freethought standpoint, will probably be pleasurable or pungent, according as he is Spencerianly philosophical in all his ways or humanly prone to sarcasm. For various reasons it might be questioned whether the former attitude is always preferable on purely secular grounds. What Voltaire, in his brief

narrative of the misfortunes of Memnon, calls "the insane project of being perfectly wise," is really too like the attitude of orthodoxy in this very business of the Revised Version. That is the summing up of it. After rubbing along for all these years with a translation which had what Butler could surely prove to be the merit of being fully in harmony with the very badly-constructed system of religion it embodies, English-speaking Christendom has at length, after much toil, put together a translation which shall, according to the popular clerical phraseology, present the Divine Word unclouded by any of the mistakes of fallible man. Freethinkers have hitherto constituted the bulk of the select few among the millions of English-speaking Christians who knew with some clearness the extent of these mistakes, and they are, therefore, debarred from sharing in that sense of the queerness of the Divine Word in its naked purity, which, it may be presumed, will force itself on a number of Nothingarians who will to some extent read the Scriptures in the New Version under the influence of curiosity. It may not be extravagant to assume that a few persons of that thriving class may acquire, further, two new notions, viz.:—First, the significance of the fact that the Church now admits the existence of untold and vital flaws in the body of writings she has for two centuries placed before the people as the authentic "God's truth"; Second, that the Church is virtually indebted for this purification of her precious Word to the activity of those very sceptics whom she has always regarded as the contaminators of society. Only the Freethinker, however, can take note of that truly instructive proof of the tendency and value of the system—the fact, namely, that generations of orthodoxy have produced a class of intelligences which regard a revised translation with aversion.

Only the Freethinker, too, can see all the unconscious humour of the air with which orthodoxy-made-flesh lays a "revised translation" before a world in which Bishop Colenso and M. Renan, Matthew Arnold and Charles Darwin, Professor Huxley and Herbert Spencer, live and speak. At this stage of progress the act has really a startling significance. It will hereafter be told of ecclesiasticism that it used stone knives in its mummeries when men skinned their goats with metal cutlery, and that it believed it combated scepticism in the year 1881 of the Christian era with a corrected translation of a select few of the heterogeneous second-hand manuscripts pored over by (comparatively) early Christians. Shall we say that the clergy, true to their remarkable function of supplying the community with the very sublimation of human falsehood as the "highest truth," have made a really moral effort to produce the falsehood unadulterated? Shall we say that, in systematically and openly accepting the result of two centuries' grammatical and other elementary criticism they have proved that they have mastered the A. B. C. of Freethought? Or, remembering how thousands of them avow their absolute rejection of entire portions of the Bible in any guise whatever, while they read these very portions regularly to congregations, half of which believe it all blindly; remembering all this, shall we ask ourselves whether our reverend instructors in the "highest truth" have yet learned anything in a sub-department of truth which they specially affect—whether, in short, they have yet mastered the A. B. C. of morality? Well, it is perhaps time to revert to the Spencerian attitude.

PROFANE JOKES.

A FATHER and his boy were looking out of window while the former discoursed on religion. Presently a drunkard reeled by. "Dad," said the boy, "did God make that man?" "Yes Tom."—"Well, dad," replied the boy, "I wouldn't have done it."

AN ironmonger took his boy for a country walk. "Father," said young hopeful, "is hell as big as that field?"—"Bigger my lad."—"Is it as big as all these fields put together?"—"Yes my lad, and bigger than that."—"I say, father, wouldn't you like to get the contract for the fender?"

AN Englishman was boasting to a Yankee that they had a book in the British Museum which was once owned by Cicero. "Oh, that ain't nothin'," retorted the Yankee; "in the Museum in Bosting they've got the very same lead pencil that Noah used to check off the animals that went into the ark."

"THERE is no peace on this side of the grave," said a distinguished clergyman, when preaching at the grave of a

friend, "Well, old chap," said a jolly Jack tar. "You can come over on this side, we are quiet enough here."

AN old sailor, who had visited every portion of the world, was once taken in hand by a pious old fellow who sought to get a few interesting points from him relative to portions of the Holy Land. There were quite a number of ladies and gentlemen present, and during the conversation he asked him, "Mr. Splicer, what were your impressions of Jerusalem?" "Jerusalem? Jerusalem's the meanest, one-horse town that I ever saw. You can't get a drop of good liquor in the whole confounded place."

A COLOURED brother in a Virginia church prayed at the close of a white brother's sermon: "Lord, bress de brudder to whom we has listened to so patiently."

ASTRIDE a log sat Sam and another sinner, engaged in a little game of seven-up, when a minister approached, who, after a solemn contemplation of the game, laid his hand upon Samuel's shoulder and said: "My friend, is that the way to save your soul?" "Perhaps not," answered Sam, who having just played a card, was attentively considering the hand; "perhaps not, but it seems about the best thing I can do to save my Jack."

A MOTHER was explaining the origin of things to her little daughter. Having been told that God made the earth, the child asked, "Who made God?" When her mother hesitated a moment for an answer, the child said, "I suppose he just blistered right out!"

REVIEWS.

The True Source of Christianity; or, A Voice From the Ganges. By AN INDIAN OFFICER. (London: Freethought Publishing Company.) (1s.).—This is a reprint of a very scarce work, and although naturally not abreast with the latest scholarship, is nevertheless valuable to all who are interested in the question which it treats. We notice that the author, in his introduction, erroneously represents the famous Rabbi Hillel, at whose death Jesus was only ten years old as, having "flourished at the end of the second century"; and the work may contain some other inaccuracies. But in the main it is trustworthy, and no one can doubt the author's conscientious spirit. He gives a thorough analysis of the Gospels, and shows how they differ from each other and from authentic history; traces the obligations of Christianity to Pagan and Rabbinical teaching, and the close resemblance of many of its doctrines to the tenets of the Essenes; examines the prophetic claims of the Evangelists on behalf of Christ; and freely criticises, although in no ungenerous spirit, the moral and religious ideas of Christ himself. He does all this with considerable aid from authoritative scholars, and his numerous quotations will be especially valuable to the amateur champions of Freethought in their contests with the representatives of Christianity. We cordially recommend this little volume of 138 pages, which is one of the cheapest shilling's-worths we have yet seen.

What Must I Do To Be Saved? A Discourse by COLONEL ROBERT INGERSOLL. Second edition (3d.). See advertisement. This handsome bijou edition of the great American Freethought orator's humorous, pathetic and eloquent discourse on an all-important question, reflects great credit on the taste and enterprise of Mr. W. Larner Sugden, who is responsible for its publication on this side of the Atlantic. Mr. Holyoake calls Ingersoll "the Voltaire of America." This is the language of hyperbole, and the Colonel himself would be the first to admit it. Voltaires are born about once in a thousand years. "Bob," as his friends call him, is, however, very much superior to Mr. G. A. Sala's estimate of him, and his wit is undeniably fine and trenchant. In this discourse he honours Jesus as a man, and contends that the orthodox terms of salvation were unknown to the apostles, if it be true that three of them wrote the synoptical gospels. Mr. Holyoake considers this "a novel ground," but it is nothing of the kind; for it has been maintained by advanced Unitarians for at least a century, and by many writers and speakers of more pronounced views. Mr. Gimson, of Leicester, has long been hammering away at the same idea, as Mr. Holyoake should know; and he find it singularly effective against orthodox critics. Colonel Ingersoll, however, by his eloquence and his power of witty illustrations, presents the idea with wonderful freshness. His own gospel is one of "kindness, honesty and justice." "To preach less," he adds, "is a crime, and to practise more is impossible." Everybody should read this racy discourse.

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