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REFLEXIONS
ON THE
BLASPHEMY PROSECUTION.

A Letter
TO
THE HON. JUSTICE NORTH
BY
A HINDU.



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REFLEXIONS ON THE BLASPHEMY PROSECUTIONS.

TO THE HON. JUSTICE NORTH,

SIR,

Private communications from British subjects in the Eastern portion of her Majesty's dominions professing the respective faiths of Brahmanism, Parseeism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Islamism have recently been received in this country, denouncing in terms of uniformly intense indignation the despotic and fanatical bias animating your judicial procedure, from the beginning to the end of the trials of the three men condemned to imprisonment on the charge of "blasphemy." The incoherent definition of the law on the subject expounded by you, and the totally inadequate legal evidence on which you demanded from the jury the conviction—especially of Mr. Foote—has filled many of my friends in India, and several Indian gentlemen at present studying law in England like myself, with blank amazement. In refusing bail for the alleged culprits after the discharge of the first jury, and angrily interrupting the above-mentioned gentleman in his defence, your zeal for Christian orthodoxy completely eclipsed the judicial dispassionateness and impartiality Indians have been accustomed to associate with the administration of law by a modern English Judge. Unwittingly you exchanged the functions of a dispenser of justice for those of a vindictive prosecutor and a bigoted theological partisan. The travesty of biblical narratives, conscientiously believed by the defendants, rightly or wrongly, to be fictitious, and morally as well as intellectually mischievous, was openly regarded by you as a service rendered to the Christian "devil," and consequently on a level with a flagrant offence against essential morality. In the pious homilies you uttered in "summing up" and delivering sentence, you confounded theological polemics with law, and most uncharitably

assumed that true morality was impossible apart from Christian belief. In so doing you prostituted your position to the level of a vulgar and superstitious "drum ecclesiastic," ignorant of the primary elements of the science of comparative religion.

Writing of the features of the trial purely on its merits, I have no concern with the æsthetic aspect of the caricature of Christian doctrines which in your judgment seemed to constitute the *gravamen* of the prosecution. I have no personal knowledge of the defendants, nor of the writings and pictorial representations attributed to them. But it may fairly be stated, in passing, that as the creed you so piously championed consigns the unfortunate victims of your religious malediction to the fires of an eternal hell hereafter, some more conspicuous exhibition of commiseration with them under the circumstances would have redounded more signally to your credit, both as a sincere orthodox believer and as a humane man. The Christian God, who is represented in the gospel narrative as welcoming back with fatherly tenderness his prodigal son, could, I fear, hardly view with complacency the relentless inhumanity in which you, a professed Christian judge, displayed such eagerness to inflict on those you could at most regard as theological errants condign punishment, while denying them opportunities for preparing their defence which you would have readily conceded to seducers of women or fraudulent bankrupts. To your vision the open ridicule of what was honestly believed to be a mythological development is a graver crime than theft or wife-beating. The impression conveyed to the minds of my Indian friends by this notorious trial—to say nothing of other cases in which we heretics think we have lately been denied justice—is that vigilance has become quite as imperative in this country to ensure that judges shall not abuse the prerogatives with which they are invested as to check wanton obstruction in Parliament.

Again, your contradictory exposition of the law of blasphemy—as if you were striving to protect from legal risk learned and scientific sceptics while venting ill-disguised bitterness upon a rougher type of opponents to Christianity—was extremely marked. At the first trial you defined blasphemy as a denial of the existence of God or ridicule of the Trinity. In this you agreed with Mr. Justice Stephen,

in his "History of the Criminal Law of England," that "blasphemy consists in the *character of the matter* published, and not in the *manner* in which it is stated." But at the second trial you effected a sudden and clumsy change of front—possibly endeavoring to place yourself more in accord with the New Criminal Code introduced by the present Government—and represented blasphemy to be "any contumelious reproach or profane scoffing against the Christian religion or the Holy Scriptures, and any act exposing the Holy Scriptures and the Christian religion to ridicule, contempt, or derision." The latter definition evidently implies that the mere attacking of the sacred books and dogmas of Christianity with elaborate argument is not in itself blasphemous, always provided the *manner* in which the controversy is conducted is free from all tendency to ridicule. When to these shifting and incongruous definitions of the law is added the doubtful nature of the evidence on which the men were convicted, and the barbarous treatment they suffered by your direction between the two trials, there is room for the suspicion that their conviction was on your part a foregone conclusion.

Can there be any pretence to justice in the distinction involved in your *second* definition between a blow dealt to Christianity in a cultured volume published by Longmans or Williams and Norgate, and the same act done through an obscure penny sheet known chiefly to a limited section of the artisan class? In fact, if the damage done to the fashionable creed is to be measured by the publicity given to the hostile opinions advanced in these respective instances, and by the extent to which educated minds are influenced by these opinions, it must be obvious that the prosecution of the authors and publishers of the more scholarly works is by far the more urgent *desideratum*.

Do you require to be told that the learned professions and the thoughtful among the mercantile and trading classes who read the more costly sceptical treatises are honey-combed with doubts and, in many cases, confirmed objections to the Christian faith? If the highest Christian authorities are to be believed, all sections of the community in Great Britain are already, more or less, hopelessly sunk in unbelief. Last year the Archbishop of York, at the annual meeting of his diocese, told his clergy that "the

battle before them now was not with sects and heresy, but one waged for the very existence of Christianity itself." In August last Cardinal Manning declared that only 2 per cent. of the population of London and Berlin attended any church at all. At the Glasgow Free Church Presbytery meeting of 30th March, 1882, it was stated that "out of a population of 700,000 in the city and suburbs, a census showed that only 135,932, that is, 16½ per cent., attended any place of worship;" and I have good reason to believe that even this estimate is in excess of the reality. One reverend speaker at the same meeting remarked that "a great proportion of the working classes in particular had no practical connexion with the Church—not only the intemperate and depraved, but the sober, industrious, and respectable among them. Though fulfilling in a sort of commendable way very many duties connected with their positions in life, they were yet unconnected with the Church of Christ." In 1878 the Home Mission of the same church reported that "all the agricultural laborers of Scotland live in a state of heathenism." Another religious body in 1877 gravely asserted that "there were not a dozen Christians in Skye, though the population of that island is 24,000!" In the "Journals" of the late Dr. Norman MacLeod we have answers to religious questions addressed by him to intending participants in the membership of his own church, illustrating the amazing ignorance prevailing among people otherwise exemplary, even in educated Scotland, respecting the most elementary Biblical stories. "Who led the children of Israel out of Egypt? Eve. Who was Eve? The mother of God. What was done with Christ's dead body? Laid in a manger. What did Christ do for sinners? Gave his son. Any wonderful works Christ did? Made the world in six days. Any others? Buried Martha, Mary and Lazarus. What became of them afterwards? Angels took them to Abraham's bosom. What had Christ to do with that? He took Abraham. Who was Christ? The Holy Spirit. Are you a sinner? No." I venture to assert that there are multitudes of attendants upon Christian ordinances throughout England and Europe whose acquaintance with the essentials of this faith, if tested by similar methods, would be found not less absurdly deficient. Yet to guard from ridicule tales and dogmas which one large, morally-conducted section of the

community regard with absolute indifference, and another equally large but more cultivated section regard with disbelief, based on prolonged and serious investigation, the law is set in motion, a judge forgets that mental equilibrium traditionally characteristic of the Bench, and men whose lives are reputed to be morally blameless are visited with the loss of personal liberty!

On the other hand, when we pass into the realms of literature and science, deliberate repudiation of the historical and religious authority of both the Old and New Testaments is not the exception, but the rule. The following eloquent language of Professor Huxley is endorsed by tens of thousands of the most cultivated and eminent public writers throughout Europe and America, despite the antagonism of the passage with your recent decision. "Everywhere priests have broken the spirit of wisdom, and tried to stop human progress by quotations from their Bibles or books of their saints. In this nineteenth century, as at the dawn of physical science, the cosmogony of the semi-barbarous Hebrew is the incubus of the philosopher, and the opprobrium of the orthodox. Who shall number the patient and earnest seekers after truth from the days of Galileo until now, whose lives have been embittered and their good name blasted by the mistaken zeal of bibliolators? Who shall count the host of weaker men, whose sense of truth has been destroyed in the effort to harmonise impossibilities; whose lives have been wasted in the attempt to force the generous new wine of science into the old bottles of Judaism, compelled by the outcry of the same strong party? It is true that if philosophers have suffered their cause has been amply avenged. Extinguished theologies lie about the cradle of every science, as the strangled snakes beside that of Hercules; and history records that whenever science and orthodoxy have been fairly opposed, the latter has been forced to retire from the lists, bleeding and crushed if not annihilated, scotched if not slain. But orthodoxy learns not, neither can it forget, and though at present bewildered and afraid to move, it is as willing as ever to insist that the first chapter of Genesis contains the beginning and the end of sound science, and *to visit with such petty thunderbolts as its half-paralysed hands can hurl, those who refuse to degrade nature to the level of primitive Judaism.*" Mr. John Morley, M.P., the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*,

in the revised edition of his work on Voltaire, has uttered burning words on the same side which have lately been quoted in a well-known weekly: "There are times when it may be very questionable whether, in the region of belief, one with power and with fervid honesty ought to spare the abominable city of the plain just because it happens to shelter five righteous. . . . *The partisans of a creed in whose name more human blood has been violently shed than in any other cause whatever, these, I say, can hardly find much ground for serious reproach in a few score epigrams.*" In praising Voltaire's protest against the popular creed, he refers to "*its mean and fatuous and contradictory idea of an omnipotent God, who gave us guilty hearts so as to have the right of punishing us, and planted in us a love of pleasure so as to torment us the more effectually by appalling ills that an eternal miracle prevents from ever ending, who drowned the fathers in the deluge and then died for the children, who exacts an account of their ignorance from a hundred peoples whom he has himself plunged helplessly into this ignorance.*" Defending the attacks of Voltaire on organised Christianity, Mr. Morley (p. 236) says: "He saw only a besotted people led in chains by a crafty priesthood: he heard only the unending repetition of records that were fictitious, and dogmas that drew a curtain of darkness over the understanding. Men spoke to him of the mild beams of Christian charity, and where they pointed he saw only the yellow glare of the stake; they talked of the gentle solace of Christian faith, and he heard only the shrieks of the thousands and tens of thousands whom faithful Christian persecutors had racked, strangled, gibbeted, burnt, broken on the wheel. Through the steam of innocent blood which Christians for the honor of their belief had spilt in every quarter of the known world, the blood of Jews, Moors, Indians, and all the vast holocausts of heretical sects and people in eastern and western Europe, he saw only dismal tracts of intellectual darkness, and heard only the humming of the doctors, as they served forth to congregations of poor men hungering for spiritual sustenance the draff of theological superstition."

The conviction is rapidly gaining ground among grave and independent inquirers that so-called historic religions are just as legitimate a subject of critical examination, and, if mythical, of banter, as the comparative merits of Tory and Liberal

politics. In the political sphere it is happily no longer viewed as incompatible with good government and social order to assail opinions that are deemed false and unjust by individuals or parties in the State, and to employ unsparing invective and ridicule when such weapons are considered expedient, in order to discredit these opinions. A large and growing army of scholars, after bestowing many years of sincere study on the alleged facts and doctrines of Judaism and Christianity, have been driven by the irresistible force of evidence to renounce both these systems, as resting on superstitious legends and contradictory statements which it is impossible to reconcile with verifiable history. It is the conscientious belief of the same class of students, that the practical results of Jewish and Christian faiths have been the very reverse of conducive to the intellectual, moral, and physical advancement of our fellow-subjects. If so, what reasonable grounds have these religions or any others to claim immunity from the "fierce light" of free inquiry, and if believed to be erroneous and injurious, why should they be shielded from the shafts of sarcasm it is esteemed not unlawful to direct against political and social theories and organisations supposed to be obnoxious? The late Professor de Morgan truly said, "Belief is a *state* not an *act* of the mind." "I shall *believe* has no existence," he adds, "except in a grammar." To prosecute and imprison men, therefore, for convictions—the issue of study and reasoning—and for caricaturing the religious notions of opponents which they honestly and intelligently hold to be adverse to the public good, is just as monstrous as it would be for the strongest political party in the country to institute proceedings against an adverse political minority for employing comic cartoons to expose what the latter should happen to regard as untrue and pernicious. There no longer exists any risk of losing one's head in England for constitutional opposition to monarchical institutions, even by the aid of sarcastic cartoons and the advocacy of Republicanism. The time is not far distant when equal freedom will be allowed in striving to put down the established faith.

Indeed, ever since the dawn of history the representatives of rival religions have fought their battles with ridicule and jest as well as with fire and sword; and so far as the veil separating historic from prehistoric times can be lifted in

the tablet inscriptions of India, Egypt, Assyria, and Europe, there is good reason to believe that religious passions were displayed by the Lingaites and the Yonites, with a similar disregard of taste and humanity, in their solemn contentions as to whether the male or female principle in nature was the proper object of pious veneration. It is no longer doubted by scholars that what imparted zest in the eyes of the cultured Greek to the sneering gibes of Aristophanes and the profane inuendoes of Euripides—pointed at contemporary divinities—was that the philosophers of those days had come to look upon the mythological and ceremonial structure around them, so jealously guarded by an ignorant, cringing, and superstitious priesthood, as simply a huge sham to be laughed down. Much the same feeling was doubtless present in the mind of Cicero when he wondered how two augurs could meet and keep their gravity, considering the puerile notions they professed, and the inanities of the Roman temple service, from which their living was derived. Assuming—but only for the sake of argument—the narrative of the prophet Elijah's contest with the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel to be genuine, could any attack upon the religion of the latter appear more grossly insulting or more blasphemous to them than the insinuation that the cause of their prayers not being answered by the Phœnician deity was that he might either be asleep or away on a hunting expedition? Moreover, Jesus is reported in the gospel story to have been actually charged with blasphemy by the Jews of his day.

But although the ultra-Protestant party, with whom you sympathise, had no scruple, in the heat of past controversies with Roman Catholics, about caricaturing the Pope, his cardinals, and their doctrines, in pictures which could not fail to be extremely provoking to conscientious adherents of the Catholic faith, your own co-religionists have ever betrayed a thin-skinned sensitiveness and an air of outraged infallibility when the *lex talionis* has been applied by sceptics in a similar fashion to themselves. When any of their beliefs have been ridiculed by pictorial *squibs* they have invariably taken the highest possible ground, and posed as the privileged recipients of heaven's secrets, and the possessors of a supernatural key of interpretation, of which they claim to have a chartered monopoly. Do you forget that the

establishment of Christianity is very largely indebted indeed to the aid of ridicule and abuse which it applied to other faiths? Milman, in his book on "Latin Christianity," says that religious pictures with a strong dash of both these qualities in them were used alternately with bloody persecution in converting the Bulgarians. It is principally by pictures of ideal "Holy Families," "Crucifixions," "Madonnas," of the burial and resurrection and ascension of Jesus, of the various alleged miraculous exhibitions of his power in turning water into wine, conversing with Moses and Elias on the Mount of Transfiguration, preventing Peter from sinking, agonising in the garden of Gethsemane, etc., etc., that the adhesion of the priest-ridden and the credulous has been gained to the Christian faith. I venture to believe that in the dissemination of Christianity the art of the painter and the sculptor has played quite as powerful a part as the preacher's tongue. It is the confirmed persuasion of Agnostics, Comtists, Secularists, and men of science in our day that all the Bible representations of miracles are the creations of superstitious ages. If, then, the inculcation of Christian beliefs is so widely due to the influence of pictures, can there be anything intrinsically wrong in answering and ridiculing pictures, or the teaching these convey, believed to have no groundwork in nature and authentic history, by pictures designed to expose a wild delusion, by which the minds of millions are enchained in darkness, and their lives rendered cheerless and unprofitable?

I may here take the opportunity of stating, from personal knowledge, that Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries, in India and China, spend a considerable portion of the time redeemed from their mutual denunciation of each other's churches, in flagrantly misrepresenting the true significance of the ancient religions they vainly seek to displace by their own conflicting and repulsive dogmas.

I respectfully ask, as a subject of the Queen, and as a native of that portion of Her Majesty's Empire which is immeasurably the most populous, if blasphemy laws, framed in a benighted age, are to be revived in England for the purpose of silencing a few poor men without social importance, who have presented ludicrous pictures of miracles attributed to the days of the Hebrew patriarchs, prophets and kings, and to the lifetime of Jesus—miracles, the incredibility

of which is proclaimed no less distinctly, if in a style more in accord with the canons of refined taste, by scholars and men of science—is no protection to be afforded by British rule in India and Ceylon to the feelings of Brahmins, Mahometans, Parsees and Buddhists, which are outraged daily by the vulgar onslaughts of half-educated Christian missionaries, who so far from having the most elementary acquaintance with Eastern faiths, do not in any competent manner even understand their own? The profound intimacy of many of the natives in India and China, according to their several creeds, with the Vedas, Zenda-Vesta, Tripitika, Taotseekeng, Lykeng and the Sastras, and the earnest dependence the mass of Eastern people place on these and other sacred books for spiritual strength and guidance, render them peculiarly sensitive to what they hold to be the blasphemy of true religion in the preaching of an upstart, intolerant, and persecuting faith like Christianity—a faith, moreover, not only the junior of some Indian systems by thousands of years—but only indorsed, even nominally, by a small minority of the inhabitants of the world. To give some idea of the light in which educated natives in India view the faith that is guarded by the penal enactments of the blasphemy laws in this country, it may be mentioned that many Hindus have for years openly defied Government influence, preached against missionary teaching, and circulated broadcast placards cautioning the people against Christianity. Here are extracts from one of these mural prints: “Leave these fanatics . . . they cannot answer a simple question seriously put to them in connexion with what they say; THEY SENSELESSLY ABUSE YOU AND YOUR FAITHS *without having studied them at all*; they are hirelings working against truth and common sense, and against the dictates of conscience for a paltry piece of earthly bread. . . . You know well that their harangues cannot stand discussion. Do not waste time with impostors; serve the God of the universe heartily; He alone will save all who so serve Him.”

These words exhibit an attitude of the higher order of native mind—becoming daily more conspicuous—towards the religion which silences those who ridicule it in England with imprisonment; and which is at the same time impudently obtruded upon cultivated Hindus under the patronage of Church of England dignitaries and Nonconformist

missionary societies. If the long-suffering Brahmins were to show their resentment by sending propagandists to sneer down Christianity, through the press in London, in the ribald tone often adopted with impunity by unlearned Christian advocates in the East towards the older faiths, the hospitality of a gaol would be promptly provided for them. The accustomed opponents of Christianity in this land of social, political, and religious anomalies, are mostly met with an imputation of base motives or an ebullition of unreasoning and fanatical sentiment. Sober and honorable argument, derived from first-hand historic sources, Christians—apparently from conscious weakness—as a rule, studiously avoid. But in the name of even-handed justice, if there are to be blasphemy laws so appropriately administered by judges of your own calibre in England against foes of Christianity, why should my fellow-countrymen in the East be denied laws to put down Christianity which appears to them as blasphemously repugnant as the grotesque representations of Bible tales in the *Freethinker* can possibly be to English Christians? Are you aware that out of a total population of 1,474 millions on the globe *considerably less than one-third are in any sense whatever Christian?* After 1700 years of proselytism by the pulpit, the missionary, the press, by wholesale slaughter—as in the Crusades and the Thirty Years' War—by imprisoning, thumbscrewing, choking, quartering, drowning, and burning enormous holocausts of martyrs throughout Europe for the sin of sincere heresy, this is the entire external result. General Forlong, in his recent learned work on the faiths of mankind,¹ remarking on the religious statistics referred to above, says: "It especially behoves the *Protestant* to be undogmatic and humble, for though assisted largely both by the secular and spiritual arm, and with all the most approved machinery of sectarial combination and discipline, *only some 71 millions out of the total 1,474 millions have even nominally joined his churches*, and from none is the falling away becoming more prominent, and in none is half-heartedness more the rule than in the best Protestant communities." In presence of these incontrovertible facts the enforcement of a blasphemy law—especially

¹ "Rivers of Life," etc. (Quaritch), vol. ii., p. 590.

in a country where *not more than one-eighth of the adult population attend any place of worship*, where the State Church is virtually disowned by more than half the worshipping community, and where a fervent religionist is often regarded by the multitude as one to be treated, in common worldly transactions, with suspicion, amounts to intolerable insolence. But your bearing as an English judge representing the Inquisition spirit of the dominant faith, and partially usurping the functions of a Protestant pope, in lecturing and condemning the editor, publisher, and vendor of the *Freethinker*, becomes still more objectionable when it is remembered that your judgment and sentence *de facto* include 1,074 millions out of 1,474 millions of the human race, since the estimated number of Christians of all descriptions only amounts to 400 millions. By the definition of the English law of blasphemy you consign, in spirit, to prison in the persons of these culprits 550 millions Buddhists, 240 millions Mahometans, 180 millions of Hindus, 2 millions Seiks, 8 millions Jews, and 94 millions of other and nondescript faiths, who reject with scorn and contempt the special Christian doctrines fenced round by the blasphemy laws. Nay, the dimensions of your devout audacity have not yet been adequately measured. At least one-third of the 400 millions set down as Christians openly or secretly repudiate orthodoxy, and these also are potentially included in your judicial excommunication and sentence of imprisonment. Even the venerable Lord Shaftesbury—himself an acknowledged stickler for Christian “Evangelicism”—shows a vastly more intelligent appreciation of the teaching of religious statistics on this head than you seem to do. When Lord Redesdale brought forward his Bill a year ago for the imposition of a Theistic test in the Upper House, the former peer frankly urged in opposition: “A law of this kind passed in our day would be in absolute and unqualified discord with all the opinions, feelings, and tendencies of men around us.” He added that “those who allowed the existence of a First Cause, *but deny his intervention in the affairs of men, who admit no revelation of a future state, or any system of rewards and punishments, may be counted by myriads.*” This is strikingly attested by an examination of Max Müller’s estimate (1871—78) of the world’s religions, corrected to date by General Forlong.

Against 648 millions, or 44 per cent. of the population of the earth (including Christians, Islamis, Jews, etc.), who believe in a personal god, a soul, and immortality, there are 826 millions, or 56 per cent. of the entire population of the earth, who deny or doubt a future life and the existence of a soul apart from matter. Among the latter unbelieving or agnostic element there are many millions who have reached the convictions to which they cling after prolonged, anxious, and learned inquiry, and all such—branded by you as blasphemers in *posse* or in *esse*—who hear of your judgment and the pious harangue which accompanied it, must take your words as a personal affront, in so far as these non-Christians concur with the victims of your judicial bias in rejecting Christianity as a historical illusion, a philosophical anachronism, and a misleading scheme of morals.

By your indiscreet zeal for the faith dominant in England because established by law, you and your co-abettors of a resentful orthodoxy have defeated the end ordinary prudence would have sought to attain by totally opposite means. You have dragged into notoriety an obscure print, the very existence of which was only known to an extremely restricted circle, who had already been long alienated from popular creeds and churches. The *Freethinker* was never advertised, as learned sceptical works usually are, in the great publishers' lists, in the daily press, and in the cultured weeklies, monthlies, and quarterlies, sold at railway book-stalls and obtainable in public reading rooms. This ill-starred prosecution, with which your name will be as imperishably associated as that of Jeffreys with the "bloody assize," has done for the spread of the *Freethinker* precisely what the malicious and unconstitutional persecution of Mr. Bradlaugh by Mr. Newdegate, Sir Henry Tyler and other morbid religionists in the House of Commons, has done for the victimised junior member for Northampton, in increasing his power as a teacher and his popularity as a leader among the toiling millions of the land.

Again, the most deplorable aspect in the exposure of Bible faith to scorn by the three defendants immediately in question is not only the supposed discord between unsophisticated reason and many of the contents of the Christian sacred books on the one hand, and the evidence in support of the authenticity on the other, but it is the melan-

choly and senseless inconsistencies in the creeds and practices of Christians themselves.

In one of the opening "sentences" of the Morning Service of the Church of England Prayer Book the clergyman reads: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But as the same Service proceeds reason is staggered by the unexpected announcement that confession of sin is not enough to secure forgiveness: "Whosoever will be saved *before all things* [*i.e.*, notwithstanding above, beyond and before repentance, confession, and the turning away from evil ways] it is necessary that he hold the Catholic faith, which faith except everyone do *keep whole and undefiled without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.*" And what is this faith? The bewildered penitent must believe that "the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God;" yet "we are forbidden by the Catholic religion to say there be three Gods or three Lords"! If these metaphysical propositions were found dissociated from religion they would be looked upon by the bulk of sane men as simply nonsense. Again, one of the articles informs us that the true God is "without body, parts, or passions," while the Church commands that Christ, who was a man with "body, parts, and passions," is to be *worshipped as God.* A passage in the Old Testament, adopted by the Prayer Book, tells us that "the Lord is a man of war," and in another place the same book declares Him to be "the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." Jesus is referred to in the New Testament as the son of Joseph, and almost in the same breath is represented as owing his physical existence solely to conception in the womb of a virgin, "by the power of the Holy Ghost." How a *spirit* could possibly be the parent of a human being, brought into the world by the ordinary parturition of a pregnant woman, however, remains totally incomprehensible. The prayer perpetually ascends from Anglican priests: "Give peace in our time, O Lord." Nevertheless, the Church is incorporated with the State, and the state is engaged at intervals in sanguinary encounters with foreign tribes and governments, and is most frequently actuated by flagrant worldly ambition in making war. But the flexible and accommodating piety of the clergy and their credulous followers, who do not pause

to contemplate the iniquitous inconsistency thus practised, is ever ready to petition the Christian deity, whenever war is declared, to destroy and "confound" the foes of their sovereign, whether these foes be Christians or Pagans. In seasons of excessive drought, "bishops and curates" with a preposterously selfish, ungrateful and unscientific disregard of the unalterable laws of nature, implore God to interfere—he can only do so by a miracle—and, at more than a risk of the serious disturbance of natural forces, and of inconvenience to dwellers in other parts of the globe (which an answer to prayer renders inevitable) pray that sufficient moisture should fall to nourish the crops. A corresponding violation of physical law is similarly demanded by the ecclesiastical authorities when the watery element in the sky unduly preponderates, and fair weather is asked for. The same line of remark applies with equal appropriateness to "prayers for the sick." These irrational proceedings might be excusable in times before the principles of science were understood. But for a body of instructed men to continue so ludicrous an outrage on reason, looks very much, in these days of popular scientific education, like the deliberate and hypocritical perpetuation on their part, from interested motives, of a childish delusion. The mummeries connected with "baptismal regeneration," "partaking of the body and blood of Christ," with the rites of "Confirmation," and the "Burial of the Dead," are only fit to be relegated to the same category of effete superstitions. The mystery-mongering forms gone through in "consecrating" bishops with *nolo episcopari* on the lips of the candidates for office, and the passionate hankering after palaces, princely incomes, and episcopal dignities, in their hearts, constitute the most revolting form of sacrilege and blasphemy that could well be imagined. We are taught that God "before the foundation of the world hath constantly decreed, by his counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation as vessels made to honor." At the same time, with transcendent theological incongruity, the Christian preacher charges upon his unbelieving hearers the entire responsibility for not complying with the invitations proffered to them, to enter the "kingdom of God," and to cultivate a spiritual and moral

life. The inference deducible from these contradictory dogmas is, that God is either *unable* or *unwilling* to overcome the obstacles of salvation presented by the declared indisposition of the human will. If he is *unable*, he obviously cannot be omnipotent. If, on the contrary, he be omnipotent and is *unwilling*, he is chargeable with cruelty in not devising suitable means to ensure the adoption by mankind of the appointed course leading to eternal happiness. But the injustice of the supreme being in permitting a single member of the human family to perish, is rendered still more apparent by the consideration that a complete "atone-ment" has been actually made for the express purpose of propitiating divine justice, and removing the moral barriers said to be opposed, by the governmental character and relations of the deity, to the deliverance of transgressors from the penal consequences of sin. There is here involved, consequently, a further imputation on the divine perfections. Although a vicarious substitute has been provided and accepted for sinners of all time, a certain indispensable condition of mind is, nevertheless, required on their part. To the attainment of this condition the vast majority seem utterly unequal, and heavenly wisdom has strangely omitted to make the necessary provision for supplying this lack of moral power in those who die unsaved, to enable them to take practical advantage of the sacrificial merits of the innocent victim—the second person of the godhead—who underwent the full measure of suffering needed to expiate their sins. I defy any reasonable person to ponder these repellent doctrines without feeling contempt and disgust for the tyrannical and capricious character in which they exhibit the Almighty. For the honor of those very idealised attributes of justice, kindness, and truth, to which all rightly constituted minds instinctively do homage, we are bound to loathe and scout the portraiture of an immoral God enforced by orthodox Christianity, and even the coarsest caricatures are not to be despised, if by their aid reverence for so odious a deity can be dislodged from people's minds and aversion inspired instead.

The highest accredited authority on Christian morals, Jesus himself, forbids *swearing* under all circumstances whatsoever: "swear not at all." Yet the clergy and adherents of the National Church are at the present moment

moving heaven and earth to obtain signatures to memorials addressed to Parliament, begging that the *un-Christian* method of swearing allegiance, by members preliminary to taking their seats, shall be retained. In the fervor of clerical zeal to enforce a religious test—for the sole purpose of excluding a certain legally-elected representative who happens to disbelieve in the unintelligible tenet of “a personal God,” but who in preferring affirmation to an oath is more Christian than Christians themselves—they are madly flying in the face of the plainest Christian precepts, and justifying their conduct in so doing as promoting the “greater glory of God”!

The three leading sections composing the Church and the clergy profess, in public ceremonial, to be members of one happy Christian family, whose motto is, according to the prayer of their Master, “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.” But if a Ritualist like Mr. Green should trespass on “Low Church” notions of the rubrics, and multiply altar decorations, even though with the avowed object of exalting the commonly acknowledged founder of Christianity, the boasted charity and brotherly love of that religion, loudly maintained in theory, is summarily set aside in practice, and the well-meaning transgressor is compelled to expiate his offence in the same abode with felons and murderers. “High,” “Low,” and “Broad” pastors alike pray for spiritual guidance, to understand the one revelation given in the Bible, and respectively believe the solicited boon to be attainable. But no sooner do they rise from their supplications than they appear to forget the most elementary amenities of civilised life, and indulge in bitter mutual oburgations against each other, as possessed by deadly error. What shall we say of the congregations which stately worship in churches and chapels throughout Christendom? Heaven forbid that those associated with them who are thoughtful, generous, and true-hearted should be ignored; but what are these bodies, as a rule, except centres of bigotry, nests of scandal, hotbeds of envy, malice, worldliness, and all uncharitableness? The history of Christianity has been almost one unvarying record of priestly ambition, division, jealousy, heartburning, and strife, alternating with brutal cruelty. Christian sects have largely degenerated in this country into boundary-lines of

social distinction. People of ancient family, and others of the British Philistine type, who vulgarly aspire to the imitation of the external trappings of social greatness, conform to popular religious appointments rather to escape the suspicion of being odd than from any intelligent conception of the meaning of religion, which has been long since buried from the multitude in dogmatic Shibboleths and the dreary routine of ecclesiastical forms. The time was when, under the Roman Empire, to exchange fashionable Paganism for a religion then despised by statesmen and philosophers afforded some guarantee for earnestness and sincerity. But churches and sects have long been refuges for semi-imbeciles, fanatics, and hypocrites, who suffer grievously in mental strength and noble aim when compared with those elevated and wholesome natures outside psalm-singing institutions, who view Christianity as a huge excrescence abnormally superinduced upon real human interests, and who are perfectly satisfied in following the dictates of physical and moral law written upon the constitution of the universe.

The class of blasphemers most potent for evil to orthodox creeds and churches is not the candid, though sneering, sceptic. The true foes of Christendom are the traitors in the Christian camp. It is the insincere formalists—and their name is legion in all Christian bodies—who openly avow with a light heart most stupendous beliefs which really serious thinkers would deem it appalling to conceive or utter, and who persistently belie their faith by a tortuous and sensual life. How many tens of thousands every Sunday, including the highest ranks in wealth and social position, confess themselves "miserable sinners" not only with a total absence of becoming emotion, but with the fixed intention of returning, when their hollow forms of devotion have been decently gone through, to their gluttony, whoredoms, cheating, lying, their grinding down of the poor, their fighting for unjust "vested interests," their fluttering amidst the jewelled shams of fashionable society, their participation in the organised tricks of finance and trade. The real blasphemers, who are fast undermining the Christian faith, are those shameless self-deceivers who assent to the doctrine that the deity omits from his perpetual and faultless record no thought, word, feeling, purpose, or action attributable to them, who believe in a quenchless hell for heartless wrong-

doers, and who nevertheless live from day to day as if their repetitions of creeds and prayers were an unblushing falsehood, as if God, heaven, and hell were visionary phantoms, and as if their real aim was to draw down the scorn and hatred of rational minds upon the whole fabric of their faith and practice. This is the canker to be chiefly feared, and the one that is ceaselessly gnawing at the root of Christianity. By this insidious influence within its own pale it is destined ultimately to crumble and decay. But the great dignitaries of the church are too busy in warding off the imaginary earthquakes and thunderstorms of Atheism by which they fancy the ark to be endangered, to watch the rapid progress of dry-rot, of intellectual supineness, spiritual insensibility, and moral turpitude, in the very pillars and foundations of the structure. With infatuated blindness the clergy and those who echo their feeble whine of distress about "infidelity," vainly suppose they can avert the impending decomposition of creeds and rituals by sending to prison obscure inventors of lampoons against the faith, by reiterating holy catchwords about "the profanation of the oath," and "blotting the name of God out of the statute-book," by memorialising Parliament to commit the injustice of refusing his seat to a man who has honestly tried, without success, to believe in the *Yaveh* of the Jews and the Trinity of the Christians. The spectacle, though sad, has its ludicrous aspect, reminding one somewhat of the Laputan philosophers on their floating island, soaring in ether above the solid earth, lost in profitless abstractions which bore no practical relation to the sublunary realities beneath them. But the day of reckoning is on the wing, when the laity and clergy alike will be roused, *nolens volens*, from the swoon of delusion into which they have been lulled by a stupifying orthodoxy. They will then be abundantly convinced that, instead of prints like the *Free-thinker* deriving their power to make Christianity ridiculous from any profane love in their editors of bringing exalted realities into contempt, the sting was given to atheistic sneers—whether expressed in words or in caricatures—by the awaking sense of doubt in the heart of Christendom itself as to whether there is not after all something unsound and grotesque in its whole system of doctrine and practice answering to the dreaded homethrusts of the "infidel."

I have but touched the fringe of the tangled mass of Christian incoherencies. Many volumes might be written, setting forth the "pious frauds," forgeries, inventions, and interpolations in classic and patristic writings resorted to by those concerned under Constantine, as well as before his day, in bolstering up the hollow pretensions of Christianity to be a supernatural revelation. The accumulation of proof in respect of these extensive and varied lying machinations has become, during the last half-century, simply overwhelming, as those who will take the trouble to study the right books on the subject without prejudice may easily discover for themselves. It is now found just as impossible for students who have given the requisite amount of time and attention to the question to believe in the miraculous stories of the Old and New Testament as to believe in the Olympian gods or in the suckling of Romulus and Remus by a wolf. Let the blasphemy laws do their worst, and let their penalties be equitably extended, as they ought to be, to cultivated and University-bred "infidel" writers; the sooner will the disestablishment and downfall of Christianity be accomplished. Let the clergy and the more bigoted among the laity try with redoubled effort to stamp out Atheism at the cost of Atheists being denied their just political rights, and the numbers will be the more rapidly swelled who execrate the fanaticism, oppression, and injustice for which ecclesiastical authorities of every grade and of every age have been notorious. Unbelievers look in vain in the statute-book of this "Christian nation" for any law the protection of which they can invoke against the malicious and wilful misrepresentations of their conscientious convictions by Christian priests and their votaries. But as those enslaved by the popular faith are in so far incapacitated from impartially seeking truth and doing justice, the gross unfairness of this one-sided arrangement is never acknowledged by them.

I only wish to say in conclusion that the blasphemy laws—as every intelligent reader of history knows—are but the relics of a superstitious age. They belong to a time when the doctrine was enforced by rulers on the people at the point of the bayonet, that kingcraft and priestcraft were equally sacred, mutually dependent on each other for support, and must stand or fall together as God-given institu-

tions. Christianity, in some form most plastic to the political aims of the monarch, was adopted and sustained by the State. Ranks of priests, from the curate to the Archbishop, were developed—corresponding to the graduated positions of the people in the social scale—for the purpose of making “the divine right” of sovereigns and their claims upon the absolute obedience of their subjects religiously felt in every class, from the beggar to the peer. Heirs of hereditary titles and estates have always been loudest in upholding Christianity, but particularly that phase of it which happened to form a buttress to the recognised social distinctions in the country. Hence the bitterness with which every description of Nonconformity has—until the power of the latter became a strong political factor—been ostracised and hunted down. The sovereign, for expedient political reasons, assumed the august function of “by the Grace of God Defender of the Faith,” and it became indispensable that those rubrics and modes of service should be appointed by the State best fitted to exalt the monarch in the eyes of the people as pre-eminently “the servant of God,” born to rule and to be obeyed. The alliance between the State and the Church became so inextricably close that it was regarded as equally sinful to cast ridicule upon the monarchy and upon the State faith. The suppression of reproachful criticism, in reference to the political administration of the country, was carried to the last pitch of intolerance by the Stuarts. But now-a-days it appears to be possible for persons of avowed Republican principles to discharge creditably official duties as Cabinet ministers. Proportionate freedom, however, is still withheld by law in opposing the State religion. Monarchy may be jeered at with impunity, but the religion of the State is still guarded from infidel taunts by blasphemy laws, and hard penalties enforced by pious judges enflamed with superstitious and partisan acrimony against jesting critics of the faith. Nevertheless, I make bold to predict, sir, that the days of Christianity as a religion credited by independent thinkers are numbered. It has already been mortally “wounded in the house of its friends,” and the occasional offence of outsiders is that they now and then betray their undisguised satisfaction at the accelerated progress of its dissolution. The resuscitation of your superannuated and expiring religion cannot be effected

by heavy sentences, and sermonic platitudes directed from the judicial bench against rank sceptics, as if such men could or would destroy any true thing in the earth. The convulsed rancor you displayed through the trial in question, and the harsh punishment you inflicted, were alike an unconscious tribute on your part to power in the culprits which you foolishly exaggerated, a painful confession that Christianity was too weak to withstand the sarcasm of its foes without the aid of the secular arm, and without a glaring violation of that charity towards the erring which Christians are never weary of extolling as the crown and glory of their religion. I commend to you the sentiment of Carlyle, at the close of his essay on Voltaire: "It is unworthy a religious man to view an irreligious one with alarm or aversion, or with any other feeling than regret and hope and brotherly commiseration. *If he seek truth is he not our brother, and to be pitied?* IF HE DO NOT SEEK TRUTH IS HE NOT STILL OUR BROTHER, AND TO BE PITIED STILL MORE?"

RA MOHUN BOHGEE.