

G5780
241.695 Mos

BIBLE HORRORS; OR, TRUE BLASPHEMY.

BY ARTHUR B. MOSS.

B LASPHEMY is a peculiar offence: only a believer in the being whose reputation is attacked can commit it, and even then time and circumstance have to be taken into account. The Jew cannot blaspheme the Christian God, because he does not believe in him; the Christian may say what he likes against the gods of the Brahmin and Buddhist; and the Mohammedan may speak disrespectfully of all the gods of the nations of the earth save his own. All, however, must be careful that they give utterance to their blasphemous expressions at the proper time and place. The Jew must not attack the Christian Deity in an English church, nor the Christian sneer at Jehovah in a Jewish synagogue, nor either of them ridicule the Mohammedan Deity in a moslem in Turkey; but in their own city, and at the proper season, each may blacken the deity of the other.

Ridicule has always been considered a powerful weapon in eradicating false impressions from the human mind, though some pious persons now declare it to be a crime when it is used to show the fallacy of their own belief. Do not the religious ridicule the opinions and cherished beliefs of Freethinkers? Did they not laugh immoderately at what seemed to them the monstrously absurd notion of the late Charles Darwin, that man had evolved from a lower form of being? Did they not ridicule the Materialist when he declared that he believed that the laws of nature were sufficient to account for "all phenomena without the meddling of the gods"? Then why should Freethinkers abstain from using a weapon which has proved effectual in many a controversial encounter? The statesman uses it,

the historian wields it, the social reformer does not disdain to employ it, and the popular orator knows its wonderful power in exploding false notions.

But real blasphemy is an attack by a believer upon the reputation of his deity. It matters not that he does it to flatter the power or vanity or the capriciousness of his god : the blasphemy is none the less real. Did it never occur to the Christian that his Bible teems with such blasphemy—indeed, is as filled with it as some of the numbers of a blasphemous publication (in the eyes of Freethinkers) called the *War Cry*. The cry of the Christians was always a cry for blood : their appetite for it is much stronger than that of the general occupants of the gallery at third-rate theatres during the representation of a drama in which several murders occur in each act and a frightful slaughter at the end of the play. Look into the Bible, my readers, for the record of human bloodshed. In early times the earth was a slaughter-house and Jehovah a mighty butcher. Take the merciless slaughter of the Egyptians, and see if it finds its parallel in profane history. Not content with depriving the Egyptians of water by causing Moses to turn it into blood ; not satisfied with afflicting an unoffending people with plagues of frogs, lice, and flies ; not satisfied with destroying harmless cattle with a grievous murrain ; not content with supplementing these with frightful plagues of hail, locusts, darkness, and the slaughter of the first-born, this Bible God allowed the Israelites to utterly “spoil the Egyptians,” robbing them of jewels and other valuable property, and ultimately bringing them to the Red Sea to perish in the waves, that the Israelites might exult over their death. And what was the cause of all this? What had the Egyptians done? That God had hardened “Pharaoh’s heart” is the only explanation vouchsafed to us respecting this Bible horror. And so the poor Egyptians had to suffer, not through any fault of theirs or of Pharaoh’s, but through a fault attributable to God alone.

Barbarous deeds recorded in the Bible are of two kinds—those perpetrated by the bloody hand of Deity himself and those to which he gave explicit sanction. The slaughter of the Amalekites by Joshua had the approval of the Deity ; the uplifted hands of Moses, tightly clutching the “rod of the Lord,” was enough to win the support of Jehovah, who was always on the side of injustice and tyranny. This, in

all conscience, was frightful enough. But mark what soon follows. Moses, Aaron, and seventy elders have had an interview with the Lord. From the summit of an exceedingly high mountain they are witnesses of his great glory. They behold the feet of the Infinite God! Moses even receives the Commandments, written by the finger of God upon great tablets of stone. While Moses is thus "interviewing" the great God of the Jews, Aaron is among the people seeking to satisfy their craving for a real god—one they could see and handle, and who could assist them in time of trouble; for their minds were sorely disturbed by great doubts and misgivings concerning the God whom Moses had spoken of so often, but who appeared to be so far above the clouds that nobody could get at him. Aaron, with Jewish simplicity, thought that a golden god was the most appropriate for the children of Israel; he, therefore, beset himself the task of making a Golden Calf. Retribution came quickly; but, as is usual in Biblical matters, it fell on the wrong shoulders. No sooner did Moses discover that the "God in the skies" was doubted than he took a most effective way of removing all scepticism—a method which has often been imitated since his day. "Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come unto me. And he said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel: 'Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses, and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men' (Exodus xxxii. 26—28). Well might Jehovah, in his Commandments, say: "I am a jealous God, who visits the sins of the fathers upon the children." And might he not have added, "The sins of the priests upon the people"?

But this is not all—

"On horror's head horrors accumulate."

Turn over the leaves of your Bible, and read how God commanded Moses to war against the Midianites, slaying them without mercy, and preserving only the maidens, that they might satisfy the lustful craving of a brutal horde of soldiers Numbers xxxi. 7—18). Read this for yourselves; con

template these wicked horrors, and say if it is not a libel upon a wise and good God to allege that he ever commanded such wanton barbarity ! And let me abjure you not to pollute your lips with Bible obscenities ; do not allow your children to read them either at home or at school. They were written in a barbarous age by an ignorant people, and they are fit only for brutal barbarians grovelling in a very atmosphere of licentiousness.

The books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings are filled with stories of murders and aggressive wars, to which Jehovah always gave his approving smile. Percy Bysshe Shelley was an Atheist : Atheists are all supposed to be wicked, heartless men ; yet Shelley, in his "Declaration of Rights," says : "Man has no right to kill his brother. It is no excuse that he does so in uniform—he only adds the infamy of servitude to the crime of murder." Was Shelley a greater lover of humanity than the God who is alleged to have made us all ? Is the Atheist more deeply touched by human sorrow and pain than the Christian God ? Or are these records of bloodshed and crime, said to have been committed at the express will of the "Heavenly Father," but a long tissue of falsehoods, written in the dark nights of ignorance and superstition ?

Among Bible horrors the second class of crime is to give sanction to the perpetration of barbarous deeds. This the Christian God has frequently done, so that in all ages the Bible has served as a text-book to which the believer could refer to find justification for the committal of all sorts of horrible crimes. In Leviticus xxiv. 16 we find these words : "And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord he shall surely be put to death ; and all the congregation shall certainly stone him, as well the stranger as he that is born in the land, when he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord shall be put to death." This passage has incited fathers to destroy their own children ; it has induced men to break their fellow creatures upon the rack ; to stone, to imprison, to crucify, or consume them at the stake. No suffering has been too intense for the blasphemer. And yet blasphemy is a priest-invented crime, which no unbeliever ever has, or ever can, commit.

Again, in Deuteronomy xiii. 6—10 we read : "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend which is as thine

own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou nor thy fathers—namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth—thou shalt not consent unto him nor hearken unto him; neither shalt thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him. But thou shalt surely kill him. Thine hand shalt be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hands of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die.” Could wickedness go farther? Under this injunction the bravest thinkers, the most heroic men that have adorned the world, have suffered inexpressible torture. Socrates despised the gods of his time. That noble philosopher suffered death like a hero and martyr rather than be false to conviction. Even though he was broken with age, he had courage enough to bear without a murmur all the tortures to which his enemies subjected him. Bruno, Vanini, and a multitude of men and women less known to fame, have perished under this wicked command. No wonder that human progress was slow while a passage like this could be effectively appealed to; no wonder that while religion was strong science was weak. As long as the Church had power the people were steeped in ignorance. Every martyr and every hero have made the path smoother for subsequent pioneers of progress. Let us remember this, and let the heroism of our tortured and persecuted ancestors give inspiration to our every thought and deed to-day.

Probably the two passages which have wrought the most evil in the world are these: “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live” (Exodus xxi. 18); “Both thy bondmen and bondwomen which thou hast with thee shalt be of the heathen round about you, and they shalt serve thee for ever” (Leviticus xxv. 44, 45, 46). The first passage was the court of appeal in all cases of alleged witchcraft. Learned judges, whose common sense in most matters was keen enough, were, nevertheless, led to believe—upon no other authority than this infamous passage from the alleged inspired word of God—that witches had a real existence, and entered into the bodies of men for evil purposes. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries more than a hundred thousand persons were put to death in Germany alone as witches. In the first year of the reign of James I. in England an Act was

passed defining the crime of witchcraft with wonderful minuteness. It says: "Any one that shall use, practise, or exercise any invocation of any evil or wicked spirit, or consult or covenant with, entertain or employ, feed or reward, any evil or wicked spirit to or for any purpose, or take up any dead man, etc., etc., such offenders, duly and lawfully convicted and attainted, shall suffer death." Soon after the passing of this Act the popular delusion spread like an epidemic, devastating many parts of England; and under this statute hundreds of men, women, and children were mercilessly murdered with the full sanction of the people, who were completely saturated with superstition. But if the people were ignorant, if the judges' minds were warped by theological prejudice, can it be said that the Infinite Ruler of the Universe was no better able to discriminate between prevailing delusions and eternal truth? Is the wisdom of God the same as the ignorance of man? Did a "God of love" look down upon this earth, and complacently watch the transactions of Matthew Hopkins, the "witchfinder," and his cowardly set of colleagues? Did "our Father who art in heaven" give these deeds of blood his warm approval, as though he had heartily declared "my expressed will is being done"? If he did not sanction these atrocious crimes, done in his name for his glorification, why did he not stretch forth his almighty arm, and thwart the wickedness of his followers?

What shall we say of *slavery*? What of a God who describes one class of men as the "money" of another (Exodus 20, 21)? There are no words in the English language strong enough with which to characterise him if it were true; but it is not true—it is all a libel: it is the believer's blasphemy of a God he pretends to worship. The Christian has yet to learn that his highest conception of Deity is but a reflection of himself; that no God has ever possessed loftier sentiments or grander characteristics than the people out of whose fertile imagination he grew. Indeed, men have in all ages been god-makers, giving to "airy nothing a local habitation and a name."

The New Testament is not exempt from the charge that is here made against the other fragmentary essays which go to make up what in this country is called the "Holy Bible." Jesus, who is elevated by the priests to the position of an Infinite Deity, is recorded to have said: "If any man come

unto me and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters—yea, and his own life also—he cannot be my disciple” (Luke xiv. 26). Can it be true that a God of wisdom and goodness would have us hate those who are near and dear to us, and sever ourselves for ever from them, in order that we might render service or pay homage to one of whom no man has the smallest knowledge? Is it not blasphemy to suppose that a loving God would say to his children: “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword” (Matt. x. 24)? The mission of a Devil could not be more evil in intention. It must never be forgotten that it is in the New Testament where the appalling doctrine of everlasting burning in hell for unbelievers is first announced as the distinct teaching of Jesus. Vindictive women, stirred by the irresistible passion of jealousy, have conceived the wicked idea of torturing and disfiguring their enemies or rivals by throwing over them a quantity of sulphuric acid; fiendish men have, in a moment of madness, pushed a fellow-creature into a vat of boiling oil; and a drunken parent has been known to hold his child’s hand in a fire for some moments. These fearful agonies have been endured long enough in all conscience, though only for a few brief hours; yet the New Testament tells us that there is a loving father in heaven who will suffer some of his children to pass an eternity in hell, ceaselessly tormented by the flames, but never consumed. I will not, I cannot, believe it; and, though my countrymen may punish me for my unbelief, though they may fine and imprison me, I shall still maintain that a God of goodness could never be guilty of such infinite wickedness. To say that God will punish men endlessly in hell has always been considered man’s feeble way of expressing his admiration of God’s justice; to deny that he would perpetrate such a gigantic and unpardonable crime has ever been considered the greatest blasphemy. Number me with blasphemers, from Socrates downwards: it is an honour to be in such company; and with them I am prepared to stand or fall.

That the Bible teems with records of immorality and obscenity, which it is a criminal offence to print in all their naked ugliness, everybody knows full well; and yet this book is read in our national schools, and there are good men and women who declare that they would sooner

have their children remain in the direst ignorance than have them brought up without a full knowledge of the contents of the Bible. Let us charitably suppose that they speak in ignorance—that they really have not diligently perused the Bible themselves. It is readily acknowledged that the Bible is not an altogether bad book, that it contains passages of rare beauty, of lofty sentiment, and profound wisdom; but it can never be taken as a text-book, because it abounds in contradictions and absurdities; and it were far better that man should thrust it aside for ever than that he should accept it as containing “the beginning and end of all wisdom”—as a book written at the special command of a wise and good God. Let the Christians improve their Bible; let them eliminate these barbarous things from its pages; let them proclaim their belief in a nobler God and a loftier creed. The pure, the good, the just, and the beautiful the Freethinker will never attack; but all that is cruel, wicked, impure, and unjust he will always condemn, whether it be said to come from God or from man.

THE SECULAR REVIEW.

A JOURNAL OF DAILY LIFE.

Edited by ... CHARLES WATTS & SALADIN.

THE SECULAR REVIEW is strictly a Freethought Journal, representing all phases of Advanced Thought. It also contains authentic information as to the progress of liberal views in America and on the Continent.

To order, of Newsagents, or direct from 84, Fleet Street, London.
Published every Thursday, price Twopence.