

THE FREETHOUGHT REVIEW.

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The Rev. Mr. Cameron, a clergyman of the English Church, responded to an invitation of the Wanganui Freethought Association to deliver an address on a subject to be selected by himself—presumably on one involving the Christian and Freethought positions. He objected, however, to the condition that there should be a discussion at the end of his discourse, and preferred to make his own arrangements. His subject was entitled "Truth Wins," and was elucidated in the advertisement by the following syllabus:—"The Spiritual Reveals the Natural—Course of the Natural explaining the Spiritual—The key to whole question—Christ and Darwin—The plan of thought and purpose—The Bible the most brilliant of books—Science and Religion twin Sisters, though long unknown to each other—Cosmogony of Scripture corresponds essentially with the Scientific—Biblical statements confirmed by modern investigation." It appears that the Bishop of Wellington was made acquainted with Mr. Cameron's intentions, for a gentle admonition was sent advising the champion of orthodoxy to confine himself to his parochial work. The recommendation has been taken as a command, and Mr. Cameron has withdrawn his announcement from the papers. It is apparent that the Bishop thinks Mr. Cameron is not a "likely" controversialist, or that the "verities" are best left undisturbed.

Mr. Cameron is an original thinker, and has discovered an universal solvent for the doubts of sceptics. In a letter to a paper, defining his position and announcing the discovery, he says, "Apply the principles of logic and pure mathematics, and you can positively assert that man, even from the works of Nature around him, can 'assert' that there 'is a God.' The Christian has, therefore the positive as regards a God, and the negative as regards a Christ, a Holy Spirit, an after life, and a resurrection." This remarkable electric thesis of negatives and positives is characterised at least by raciness and freshness. The idea of God being positive and Christ negative would hardly have suggested itself to the speculative Freethinker. It undoubtedly has the merit of being difficult to answer, and we know not whether the Christian or his antagonist will feel the more indebted to Mr. Cameron for his "mathematical" investigations. From the historical point of view, the terms would probably be reversed; we mean that the historical evidence is rather in favour of the existence of Jesus, who might have been more appropriately placed at the positive pole of Mr. Cameron's battery. Logically, the Christian's negative, according to Mr. Cameron, appears to be equivalent to a denial of Christ and the resurrection.

Evolution has lately been making converts in strange latitudes. The Rev. Mr. Fitchett, a Church of England clergyman at Dunedin, finds in the God of the Old Testament a being undergoing progressive development, until he emerges from a state of pupilage at the time of Christ, who thinks of him as a *Spirit*. Mr. Fitchett's sermon appears in our columns as reported in one of the Dunedin papers, and it is almost impossible, we think, to have the anthropomorphous conception of the Jewish people more graphically described. This tribal God seems from Mr. Fitchett's sketch to

have been something more than an anthropomorphous deity—a Pantheistic conception of Nature in her various moods. The evolution process went on, until at length "Hebrew thought had made long advances towards a purer and more spiritual conception of God than that formed by the primitive tribe." It is for orthodoxy to account for the imperfect revelation. If the alleged miraculous events of the Old Testament were but the equivalent of "a crude anthropomorphism," the antetypes have no meaning, and the "scheme of redemption" is deprived of the pillars on which it was supported. To affirm that 'God is a Spirit,' is to say the final word, Mr. Fitchett asserts, about the nature of God. But the word Spirit conveys no meaning without a number of attributes, and only suggests a new departure in evolution. The God of the Jews is a being, according to our authority, of the materialistic order, but gradually losing some of the grosser attributes of a crude man-like apprehension. Did it never occur that the Spirit idea was subject to the same law of development? But may we not be asking too much? The treatment of the "primitive tribe" and their anthropomorphous God is so bold and thorough that we may well pause until the reader has recovered breath.

The term "Liberal" in the United States is equivalent to that of Freethought and Freethinker, Secular and Secularist in England and the colonies. In fact it connotes nearly all that the word Freethought does in the idiom with which we are familiar. On one point we feel somewhat uncertain. The word does not seem to include the Spiritualistic *cultus*, if we may judge from the circumstance that in some collections, we have "Liberal Hymns" and "Spiritualistic Hymns," carefully distinguished by name and association from each other. In Sydney, it would appear, the term "Liberal" has been introduced from America by the Freethought party, and is in a fair way of being acclimatised. We hope it will not become a designation of the party in New Zealand, for the following reasons: The term Liberal is already the designation of one of the political parties in the Colony, and it would be impossible to appropriate it to the Freethought movement without creating confusion, and causing in all probability mischief. Freethinkers belong to all political parties, and, though one of their greatest objects is social amelioration by political means, there is no reason why they should not remain in the ranks where, each one judging for himself, they may think they can achieve the greatest good. In a word, Freethought, as such, has no connexion with political parties, and will do well to avoid their terminology. While thus thinking that the term "Liberal" is inappropriate in this Colony at least, we offer no objection to its use by our American brethren, where it may be "racy of the soil," and as expressive of a distinct line of thought and organisation as are the terms Republican and Democrat when applied to the great political combinations of the country.

The late Sir George Bowyer, who since his reception into the Roman Catholic Church was a very strong Ultramontane, addressed to the Duke of Sutherland a protest against the erection of a memorial to General Garibaldi at Stafford House. The letter, which was