

Correspondence.

THE FREETHOUGHT MOVEMENT.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE FREETHOUGHT REVIEW.

SIR,—The announcement of the starting of a journal as indicated, as a vehicle for the expression and publication of the opinions of advanced thinkers, and the encouragement already received, is very gratifying evidence of the progress of liberal views, and the venture should command the support of all truly liberal minds throughout the Colony. Wanganui having taken the lead in the North Island in the successful organisation of a Freethought Association, is, in this new venture in the ranks of literature, affording additional evidence of enterprise and spirit that well merits a long and prosperous career.

I send herewith P.O.O. for annual subscription for six copies, and shall do my utmost to extend its circulation in this part of the colony.

I am, &c.,

WILLIAM PRATT,
President and Corresponding Secretary of
the Canterbury Freethought Association.

Christchurch, September, 17th 1883.

THE FREETHOUGHT REVIEW.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE FREETHOUGHT REVIEW.

SIR—Those in favor of progress throughout the whole of New Zealand must rejoice at the contemplated issue of your Freethought Journal. A paper of the kind is calculated to supply a want that is felt by all advanced thinkers, and your first number will be looked upon as marking an epoch that in the history of Progression will be long remembered. I learn you purpose giving it the title of the "Freethought Review." Under this heading you will no doubt publish some account of the various Freethought Associations that are formed in the large towns of this colony. By this means our strength (intellectual and otherwise) will become known to each other. This and other information (easily obtained) will have a most salutary effect in promoting the cause, strengthening its present adherence, and the public generally will have an opportunity of knowing, through its columns, the liberal and tolerant spirit of Freethought Organisations. I trust your extensive undertaking will receive the support of all liberal minded men and women throughout New Zealand. Kindly place my name on the list of your subscribers.

I am, &c.,

J. J. BUCKRELL,
Secretary Wanganui Freethought Association.

Wanganui, September, 11th 1883.

CONSCIENCE AND DUTY.

A Wellington correspondent sends us the following:—

"Have a word to say about your prospectus, and which is not meant to be in any way ill-natured. You say you will have 'no creed but conscience.' Now I would ask you, whose conscience is to be your creed? Because it seems to me that the individual conscience is indefinitely elastic, nothing appearing too unjust to it when self-interest is concerned. If you take the collective conscience, you will find it just as accommodating.

"You say your standard of Faith will be to 'advocate the Right and True.' Now it does not seem to me that there is anything specially Freethinking about this; it does not seem that you have improved upon the text 'Do unto others as you would be done by,' and its practical illustration, the story of the good Samaritan.

"You can put me down as a subscriber, when I will look for an answer to this."

[Our Christian friend, in misapprehending conscience, falls into a rather obvious error. What "appears" "unjust" to conscience, so far from being a part of conscience, is opposed to it, and is a testimony to the validity of its moral authority. Moreover, if the term "elastic conscience" is anything more than cant or slang, it is a self-contradiction. When through self-interest something is done which the conscience disapproves, the conscience is not stretched but violated. To the query, "Whose conscience" we accept as the moral standard in the place of creeds—we reply, each individual conscience, as the highest moral tribunal to which its possessor can appeal. It may be rudimentary, crude, and uncultivated, yet its sanction to the individual is not thereby weakened. Knowledge is the only means by which the ideal conscience may be approached. Christians appropriate the injunction "Do unto others," though it dates beyond the Christian era, and the thought is not specially Semitic. Nor is it perfect as a moral guide. The persecutor, for instance, was not prevented from perpetrating acts of cruelty on the heretic, since he could not conceive himself a heretic, and therefore could not apply the precept. The Grand Inquisitor might himself say that if he were a heretic, he ought to be burned, and that he was doing to another in burning him, as he would be "done by," if he were in that other's position. As a precept it is devious, and means no more than that one shall not do that which he believes to be wrong. The consciousness of right and wrong is the direct incentive, "do unto others" the indirect, to act uprightly.

Both are fallible, and require the same kind of enlightenment. We therefore think the terms questioned appropriate and valid, though we did not intend them to be exhaustive in marking the distinctions between Freethought and Christianity.]

Science Notes.

Professor Huxley has been elected President of the Royal Society in place of the late Mr. Spottiswoode.

Several interesting additions have been made to the Assyrian collections of the British Museum, including some curious early Babylonian contract tablets, dating from B.C. 2700. They are from the mounds of Tel Sifr, in Southern Babylonia, and each tablet is in duplicate. One is smaller than the other, and contains within it a bull's head about 4in in length and depth and 2in wide, carved and chased with great skill and finish out of some hard white wood resembling ivory, which suggests a comparison with that found at Mycenæ by Dr. Schliemann.

By the evaporation of ethylene in vacuo, Messrs. Wroblewski and Olszewski have obtained very low temperatures—as low as 136 below the centigrade zero, or 213 below Fahrenheit's zero. By this means they succeeded in freezing absolute alcohol at—130.5 C., equivalent to—203 F. It forms a white solid after passing through a viscous state at—129 C. Its solidification thus resembles oils and fats. They also easily obtained liquid oxygen and nitrogen, both of them being colorless and transparent. It will not be long before these difficult operations are brought within the pale of lecture experiments.

Dr. G. Decaisne has submitted to the Society of Public Medicine the results of some interesting observations concerning the effects due to the use of tobacco among boys. Thirty-eight youths were placed in his charge, whose ages varied from 9 to 15, and who were in the habit of smoking, though the abuse of tobacco varied in each case. The effects, of course, varied, but were very emphatic with twenty-seven out of the thirty-seven boys. With twenty-two patients there was a distinct disturbance of the circulation, bruit at the carotids, palpitation of the heart, deficiencies of digestion, sluggishness of the intellect, and a craving, more or less pronounced, for alcoholic stimulants. In thirteen instances there was an intermittent pulse. Analysis of the blood showed in eight cases a notable falling off in the normal number of red corpuscles. Twelve boys suffered frequently from bleeding of the nose. Ten complained of agitated sleep and constant nightmare. Four boys had ulcerated mouths, and one of the children became the victim of pulmonary phthisis—a fact which Dr. Decaisne attributed to the great deterioration of the blood, produced by prolonged and excessive use of tobacco. Treatment with iron and quinine gave no satisfactory result, and it seems tolerably evident that the most effective, if not the only cure, is to at once forswear the habit, which to children in any case is undoubtedly pernicious.—Lancet.

L'Astronomie says:—On a beautiful summer's night, August, 22nd, 1704, Jerome and Lefrançois de Lalande noticed a star in Aquarius, which they estimated of the 7½ magnitude. Six years later they thought it of the 8 magnitude. In appearance it resembles a star which is not exactly in the focus of the telescope. Herschel had observed it in September, 1782, and recorded it as an admirable planetary nebula, very brilliant, small, and elliptical. Lord Rosse and Lassell perceived that it was surrounded by a ring, which gives it somewhat the appearance of Saturn. The spectroscopic observations of Huggins indicate that it is a gaseous mass, in which nitrogen and hydrogen predominate. Most of the other planetary and annular nebulae give similar results. In 1871 and 1872 Brunnow, the Irish Astronomer-Royal, measured its parallax and concluded that its distance is more than 40,000 times as great as that of the sun, and its diameter is probably greater than that of the entire solar system. This would make its volume more than 338,896,800,000,000 times as great as that of the earth. We have thus before our eyes a new system, which is probably undergoing the process of condensation through which our sun and its attendant planets passed hundreds of millions of years ago.