

Passing Notes.

It is stated in a telegram that Mrs. Besant will shortly leave London for America on a lecturing tour. She would meet with a hearty welcome in every English-speaking country in the world.

A commission was sent by Japan to give a report of the influence of Christianity upon morals in England. After eighteen months of enquiry the decision was that Christianity had less restraint over crime, and especially drunkenness, than Buddhism or the religion of Shinto, so the public religion of Japan will remain unchanged.

The test applied by Mr. Labouchere to Mr. Irving-Bishop, the Thought Reader, was that the *subject* who knew the number of the note, and whose thoughts were to be read, should be a man of undoubted honor. This very necessary condition quite upset Mr. Irving-Bishop, who took cover under the transparent subterfuge that the holder of the note might be Mr. Firth, M.P., or anyone else, but that the *subject* should be appointed by a committee. From this it will not be difficult to read the thought of the conjurer.

The Hon. J. C. Richmond, in a recent lecture in Wellington on Communism, contended that "Communism in its main idea was more humane and nearer to Christianity than any other system of freedom." There is some truth in this, but also a fallacy. The village communes were suited to an age of rude cultivation of the soil. Does that imply that they could exist in a time of steam and manufacturing activity? If Mr. Richmond is going back to the polity of bygone ages, let him, if he can, harmonise the conditions. Let him, for instance, apply village communism to London and its commercial system!

A new journal is to appear, entitled *The Present Day*, edited by Mr. George Jacob Holyoake. Its avowed object is "to discuss agitated questions without agitation, and to show that the foolish day has passed when men could be shocked into the truth by sensation or kicked into it by outrage." It takes for its motto the words of Cardinal Newman—"False ideas may be confuted by argument, but only by true ideas can they be expelled." [This programme looks very like a cheap and ungenerous manufacture of capital out of the imprisonment of Mr. Foote and his friends for blasphemy.—ED. F.R.]

A correspondence has been passing between the Secretary of the Wanganui Freethought Association and a Minister of one of the Churches. It was thought by the former that there would be no objection to its publication, as it was in no sense private in character, but discussed the objects of Freethought and Christianity, and the moral ends each is the best calculated to promote. It appears, however, that the reverend gentleman objects emphatically to the publication of his communications; and thus terminates the discussion. Why, in the name of common sense, should a religion claiming to have the hosts of heaven on its side, object to the light of day being shed on its reasons?

The Bright-Spicer Debate is a very sad affair. There was not only no attempt to answer the arguments put forward by Mr. Bright, but the Reverend Mr. Spicer went on declaiming about the audacity of arraying Science against Genesis—the question they had met to discuss. But worse than this, the clergyman was coarse and slanderous. The debate is the sorriest specimen of dialectics we have come across. Mr. Bright had nothing to answer at last. The following incident will illustrate the champion of Genesis. He asserted that Celsus lived about the middle of the seventh century. Mr. Bright pointed out he ought to have made him live 400 years earlier. Mr. Spicer replied that Mr. Bright had found him out in an error, but he was referring to the time when Origen replied to Celsus. Mr. Bright replied that they were nearly contemporaneous. Mr. Spicer was silent. Mr. Bright, though logical and well-informed, wants a little more cyclopean vigor. He seemed to sympathise with his opponent's weakness.

Figures were used by the Arabian Moors about 900, and were introduced into Spain in 1000, and into England in 1253.

Mr. Stout's recent visit to Melbourne will have the effect of establishing more intimate relations between the Freethinkers of the colonies.

A slight reference to the religious opinions of the late John Richard Green, by the Rev. Mr. Haweis in the *Contemporary Review*, would indicate that the brilliant historian had abandoned Christianity. It is not improbable a biography of the author of a "History of the English People" will shortly make its appearance.

The Freethinkers of Paris appeal to all Freethinkers of France to help them remove the remains of Diderot, their favorite philosopher, from his present unworthy sepulchre in the vaults of St. Roch, to erect a statue over his future tomb in some central part of Paris, and to celebrate his centenary in 1884.

Mr. Bradlaugh's great meetings in London show how much he has earned the confidence of the working classes. He is perhaps the most popular man in England at the present moment. His career has been distinguished by splendid courage, endurance, thoroughness, intellectual lucidity, and honesty.

The Rev. Mr. Green, M.H.R., has made the discovery that the Danube and Dnieper have been named from Dan, one of the Ten Lost Tribes. The name of the "Circle-squarers" has been given in England to people with crazes, such as the Anglo-Israelites and and the equally curious mortals who think that Bacon wrote the works of Will Shakespeare.

The Bible as a school book has been questioned on moral grounds in the Napier School Committee by one of its members, Mr. Carnell, who bravely contended, against much prejudice, that as a text-book it would be injurious to the morals of the children. Some mention was made of the sturdy Freethinker being boycotted for taking up such a position. The best reply to this is for the Freethinkers of Napier to organise.

Another Wesleyan Minister has joined the Church of England in the diocese of Dunedin. Has this going over any any connexion with the saying at Home that when a Methodist gets a gig, he begins to feel a desire to join the Church of England? Wesleyanism has quite as respectable a pedigree as any church we know, and its pastors should stick to their corporation until they become Freethinkers. The church of bluff King Hal has nothing in its history to recommend it, and much to be heartily ashamed of.

The 'Liberal,' of Sydney, contained in one of its recent numbers an attack on Mr. Bradlaugh for refusing in the 'National Reformer' an advertisement announcing a lecture by Mr. Charles Watts. The surrounding circumstances are not given. The attack is blunted by two considerations. The first is that announcements of Mr. Watts's lectures are published week by week in the 'National Reformer.' The second is that Mr. Watts is one of the editors of a paper that has treated Mrs. Besant in a very ungentlemanly manner. The "law of resentment" is still a living force in ethics.

The Rev. H. W. Beecher, in a sermon on "Poverty and the Gospel," has the following lament:—"A tendency of our times is towards infidelity among laboring men, particularly so among mechanics. In other words, the first result of a more intelligent education and a more prosperous condition of things among the laboring classes, is to repudiate churches. Of course there are a good many exceptions, and in some communities this will appear much less than in other parts. I have noticed that the working-men who come from Great Britain to this side are, to a very large extent, infidel. I notice this too in our socialistic movements, and in all the questions of political economy. The laboring classes who think are tending to think themselves away from the house of God, from Sunday, and are substituting arrangements of their own. It is fatal." [Yes, "fatal" to theology and the supernatural, but full of promise for humanity. When "laboring men" begin to think for themselves, the true millenium is about to dawn, Mr. Beecher.]