

than the most sober man who doubts the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, or the Evangelical purport of Solomon's Song.

A man is not good for much unless there be something of the heretic in him; unless he has a mind so independent, honest, and courageous as to think for himself, and also to choose his own opinions. And to the man who would not be a heretic, our advice is, Sir, give up your right of private judgment, give up your mental freedom, give up your intellect and moral manhood, shut your eyes, open your mouth, and take and swallow whatever priests and other parsons may give you. Heresy! Why, the Apostle Paul distinctly and deliberately commands us to be heretics; for what else is the meaning of his words when he says, "Prove all things—hold fast that which is good!"

We cannot prove all things, we cannot prove anything, unless we be at perfect liberty to prove an opinion concerning it; and the forming of an opinion is heresy. Heresy is a neutral word; it may be the choice of what is good, it may be choice of what is bad. We hope that we are no less desirous than other men of avoiding the evil choice, the heresy in a bad sense; but we believe that the best way of avoiding it will, in the long run, prove to be the free and honest exercise of individual minds upon all religious questions.—Rev. Hugh Stowell Brown.

THEISM.

The following is a resumé of a paper on Theism, which was read at a meeting of the Wanganui Freethought Association on July 22:—

The affirmation of Theism is, that the ultimate cause and proper explanation of the universe is the existence of an intelligent Being, having attributes analogous to our own. The first argument in favour of Theism is the general consensus of mankind. Whatever men have universally accepted as true must be true; men have universally believed that the universe is the product of a living mind; therefore, it must be true. The value of this argument is that it throws the burden of disproof on atheists. Unless unanswerable evidence for atheism and against theism can be produced, it is more probable that the general belief is right than that the exceptional disbelief is so.

The second argument is that from Causality. Inasmuch as something *is*, something must always *have been*; and this eternal existence must be the cause of whatever else is. We cannot escape the necessity of thinking an eternal First Cause.

The third argument is that from Design. We are obliged by the constitution of our mind to trace up the adaptations of means to ends everywhere visible in nature to a mind like our own in kind, though infinitely transcending it in the degree of wisdom and power. The universe reveals at all points thought and forethought,—purpose and plan; and we are compelled to postulate the existence of a great Being, whose handiwork it is. This necessity is not removed by lengthening the chain of natural causes.

The fourth argument is the metaphysical. The idea of the Infinite and Absolute is a necessary idea of our reason; therefore its existence is necessary. Man himself cannot be the highest being in the universe, since he can think of a higher. Our highest ideal cannot be devoid of reality.

The fifth argument is the moral or practical. We are organised with the distinct purpose of becoming good, wise and blessed; therefore, we must be the creatures of a wise and holy Creator. Our nature demands an object of infinite love and adoration. If there be no God our nature is an anomaly, and we must be the most unblest of all creatures. Further, we are blessed or cursed by conscience, which marks an eternal distinction between right and wrong, and demands obedience to the right. The dictates of conscience have a majesty and urgency which can belong only to a supreme moral personal will. To regard the moral law as a mere abstract idea would bring the moral imperative to ruins, and reduce mankind to rational and moral despair.

The combined force of these arguments in favor of Theism is such as to make absolute atheism all but incredible, and to give to the belief in God the highest degree of rational probability. In view of these arguments, we may firmly plant our feet on this foundation: "God is, and is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

REPLY.

We have been favored with the following reply to the above by a member of the Wanganui Freethought Association:—

The affirmation of Theism sets out by destroying its Supreme Being. Man is conditioned by finite attributes. A Being with "analogous" attributes to man is therefore not infinite.

First Argument.—Neither the major nor the minor premiss of the syllogism is true. Men at one time universally accepted the theory that the sun went round the earth. Nor have men universally believed that the universe is the product of a living mind; the aborigines of Australia, among others, to wit. The burden of disproof, therefore, is not thrown on atheists until at least the two first propositions of the syllogism are established. But they are false.

Second Argument.—The last sentence begs the whole question. The Argument is confused, and may mean anything, and therefore may exclude a First Cause, thus: "The universe is something. Something must always have been. Therefore the Universe

must always have been." Hence, God or the First Cause is got rid of by the Theist's own argument.

Third Argument.—Design in evolution shows for one adaptation myriads of misses, and seldom if ever perfect adaptation. The "Great Being," therefore, is deficient in forethought or power. To postulate such a Being need not be seriously objected to. He would not be of much account if he did exist. But as the Being himself would show "purpose and plan," by the same argument he would require another Being to make him, and so on *ad infinitum*. The design argument therefore leads to a whole Pantheon of Gods creating each other in an endless chain.

Fourth Argument.—Here again we have the major proposition destitute of proof. The atheist does not think of a higher being. Nor can the finite mind have any just idea of infinity. Ideals are often imaginary, and at best are but a shadowy substance out of which to shapen gods. But the argument fails for want of the *universal* thought; and this is sufficient reply.

Fifth Argument.—This argument appears to be more rhetorical than logical. If the "purpose" is that mankind should become "good, wise, and blessed," a "wise and holy Creator" cannot have the power to fulfil the purpose while millions are perishing through not being good, wise, or blessed. And thus we have wisdom and holiness out of all proportion to power. The attributes destroy one another. The existence of moral evil contradicts either the benevolence or the omnipotence. Conscience has no standard of right and wrong, but varies according to tendency and environment. Here it may be observed that if the Designer is reflected in the design, he must be a compound of good and evil as these qualities exist—in other words, the theistical moral argument leads to the conception of a Demon-Deity.

Finally, "the combined force" of the arguments in favor of Theism is the equivalent of several minus quantities, showing no positive advance towards the proof of the existence of the Being shadowed forth. It may be added that the Atheist does not deny the existence of God. He simply has no conception of the thing expressed by the word. It is for the Theist to demonstrate the existence of what he wants to prove. His efforts above will indicate how far he is from satisfying the demand.

Notes & Queries.

INTRODUCTORY.

The conductors of this Journal have resolved upon a department under the above head. It is necessary for us to explain the purposes it is intended to serve. It no doubt often happens that many wish to be enlightened on some point or other, yet have not the time nor opportunity, perhaps, to obtain the desired information. And, on the other hand, it is also as certain that an equal number are not able to give an answer at once to any particular inquiry. This being the case, the purpose intended to be served is to bring these two classes—those who want to know, and those who do know—together, by the simple procedure of a note with the query clearly stated, and by a note giving the required answer. Scientific, literary, and historical questions we expect to be the most prominent, though the line need not be rigidly drawn at these. In local history, for instance, there is an immense amount of good historical material which is treasured up by mere tradition, and which tends to die out gradually. And upon other subjects, many persons not gifted with the power of doing much in the way of expressing their notions may be able, in a short paragraph, to put forward a really original and seminal idea, which, falling haply on good soil, will produce abundantly.

QUERIES.

1.—In the course of his lecture before the Wanganui Freethought Association, on "Theistic and Anti-Theistic Theories," Mr. G. Grant quoted from D'Holbach's (?) "System of Nature" to the effect that that writer *denies* the divine existence. I have carefully read that work—especially Chapters 4 and 5, Part II., wherein he so ably examines the proofs of existence of the divinity as given by Descartes, Malebranche, Clark, Newton, &c.—And I have been unable to discover anything so unphilosophical.—Y.

2.—Can any of your readers briefly state the distinctive teachings of Mohammedanism respecting a future existence? I recently read that the Koran refuses all hope of reaching heaven to the female portion of mankind!—EXQUIRER.

3.—Some years ago Charles Southwell came to New Zealand. I have been informed that this once able and fearless worker in the Freethought movement in England joined the Wesleyans of this Colony, became a preacher, and also edited a paper in connection with that body. Any particulars will greatly oblige.—A FREETHINKER.

4.—What is Odylism?—TYO.

5.—Dr. William B. Carpenter, who has considered Mesmerism, Spiritualism, etc., historically and scientifically, over forty years, is said to have at last acknowledged the truth of the phenomena. If this is a fact, can any of your readers give Dr. Carpenter's reasons.—T.