

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS.

A.C.—In our next.

J.G.—It is within the scope of the REVIEW to discuss Politics from the scientific aspect.

T.D.—We have not yet attained the proud distinction of being able to pay for contributions.

M.M.—We are reluctantly compelled to hold over till next month your interesting paper on Masonry. But the subject will keep.

SIGMA.—It is "an open secret" that the author of *Natural Religion* is Professor Seely, who fills the chair of Modern History in the University of Cambridge.

MATAI.—It may be an hallucination, but we have a strong impression that ridicule carried beyond very narrow limits injures the cause.

T.S.—The Maori supernatural power Te Atua was an evil divinity before the advent of the missionaries, who finding him available transformed him into Jehovah, retaining, however, the native name. In other words, the Maoris had a Devil, but no God.

VERAX.—Yes, we have heard that Mr. Grant is to deliver the same lecture before a congregation of the Baptist Church of Wanganui. Although Christians often claim to be Freethinkers also, we do not believe that they would allow the reply by "Y" to be read at a subsequent meeting of the Baptists. However, make enquiries in the proper quarter!

A correspondent writes as follows:—"I am heartily pleased to learn that Mr. Joseph Symes has been selected by Mr. Bradlaugh (according to request) to fulfil a lecturing engagement under the auspices of the Melbourne Society of Freethinkers. I have frequently heard Mr. Symes, and he is well-known in England as a gentleman, a scholar, and a speaker of rare eloquence. It is to be hoped he will extend his antipodean visit to New Zealand."

NOTICES.

The Proprietor begs to return his best thanks for the support given to the first number of the REVIEW, especially to those friends who have obtained subscribers and established agencies. The propaganda will be greatly advanced in this way.

The Editor respectfully suggests to contributors the necessity of condensing as much as possible their contributions, in order that the comparatively limited space may be made to embrace a wide variety of subjects. The object is to make the REVIEW comprehensive in the extent and character of its articles and letters. Of course no hard and fast line can be drawn, but the Editor may be greatly assisted in his task by friends remembering space and object. All communications should be addressed—The Editor of THE FREETHOUGHT REVIEW, Wanganui.

The Freethought Review.

WANGANUI, N.Z., NOVEMBER 1, 1883.

SOCIAL PROGRESS.

Social progress means in our view the happiness of the many. Anything which tends to depress the multitude and raise up a ruling class, is so far destructive of those elements on the free play of which the maximum happiness depends. Yet there will, and ought always to be, a few comparatively higher than their fellow-men. The dead level of Socialism is the opposite state from that freedom in which exists the possibility of greater human powers being evolved. A hereditary titled and plutocratic aristocracy is indefensible, for it monopolises with mediocrity the place of merit. The aggregation of wealth under the existing laws in the Mother Country and her Colonies, is equally opposed to a higher civilisation, for artificial restrictions are placed in the way of its equitable distribution. The right of individual property is to be maintained when it is founded on principles that make for the general good. This is the natural limitation, and it stands on the same level as Liberty, which means the right to do as one pleases only so long as he does not deprive his neighbour of a corresponding privilege. The love of children and home is one of the deepest and noblest sentiments in human nature. But if a law encourages a testator to prefer males to females, and the first-born male to all that are born subsequently, it creates an aristocracy of privilege, and puts it in the place of an aristocracy of merit. Society therefore has the right to say what limitations shall be placed on bequest and inheritance. In this colony we have been retrograding by abolishing distinctions between children and remote relations in the system of legacy duties. A man does not labour for cousins, and if his property reverted to the State in the absence of closer ties of consan-

guinity, his exertions would not be less in consequence. The right of freedom of bequest should be preserved within certain limits, such limits to be determined by the State through the instrument of taxation. When the laws that govern Distribution are framed on a just and politic basis, the incentive to accumulation will not be weakened, but the opportunities of millions multiplied a hundredfold.

The object of the advocates of National Insurance is to prevent that state of helplessness and dependence which we call pauperism. But what has to be proved by them has not even been noticed. If, as we believe, there can be no social improvement without individual effort, what can be expected from men and women who have yielded the product of their industry without saving or prudence, and who, when so much has been wrested from them, are invited to enjoy without further effort? This is a system which brings forth no powers of self-restraint, of forethought, or of skill. It is Socialism of that objectionable type which destroys the essence of individuality. The only argument in its favor is that the sense of independence created would bring along with it that self-respect and prudence which would lead to exertion to increase the provision. There is a grain of truth in this. When men have gone some distance in saving, the desire to go farther is increased. Compulsory saving may implant the habit of self-reliance, but it is infinitesimal compared to those forces which begin in the individual the moment he looks to a future period of his life, and feels the constraint of providing for himself and those for whom he is responsible. Prudence and compulsion are not related terms. The former must be a natural and spontaneous growth to yield its proper fruit: neither stunted on the one hand by unjust laws of Distribution, nor on the other forced by a hot-house system that would deprive it of that native vigor which thrives in the inevitable struggle for existence.

What are the social forces, the action and interaction of which are to give us the higher civilisation? Nothing more or less than the factors men and women—politically equal, exercising all the franchises, no unit to represent more than any other, and no organisation counting for more than the sum of its units. On this basis should rest the superstructure of the State. Then on the activity of the members will all progress, rights, and happiness depend. Every integration will proceed from the free combination of these simple elements. When society has the power—by which we mean the intelligence—to determine its own good, none will be excluded, because there will be no interest but that of the great majority, and no right more sacred than that of the individual. By this we do not mean that subordinate groups will not exist. Liberty does not agree well with Centralism. Municipal liberties must become more valued, important, and sacred. There will only be one brain to effect the larger generalisation we call law. There will, at the same time, be those spinal centres which must be continually legislating subject to the greater generalisation. The work of administration will be performed by the heart, the lungs, and so forth, corresponding to the central executive and the local bodies. The more decentralised is government, the more men feel their individual responsibility.

The result of the continual movement of the elements is what may be termed the highest political and social education. Men, like gunpowder, are only dangerous when they are confined and under pressure. They lose all their explosive force as through freedom they become more social. Intelligence comes from discussion, and the sure sign of the growing intelligence of a nation is the disposition to consider questions in a social light—to ask, Will this law be for the greatest good of the greatest number? Whereupon it will follow that every feature of a proposed enactment will be examined from that point of view. Greater than all nostrums for greasing the wheels of progress must therefore be the freedom of the social units to arrange themselves according to what the general interest demands. Checks are not wanted. The conflict of the elements themselves is the only natural and permissible check; and the inherited tendency to self-preservation will guard against catastrophes.