

THE FREETHOUGHT REVIEW.

SCIENCE. RELIGION. PHILOSOPHY.

VOL. I.—No. 5.

WANGANUI, N.Z.: FEB. 1, 1884.

PRICE: 6D. [6s per annum; or, post paid to any part of N.Z., 6s 6d.]

Mrs. Moore's paper on "Spiritualism Considered as a Religion," gives a very fair idea of a belief which has grown far more rapidly than Christianity grew in the first two or three centuries, and is formed under conditions which are in many respects analogous. In each case the decay of the old faith prepared the soil in which the new faith grew. In each case the desire to support the doctrine of immortality by some more direct evidence than that derived from a gradually developing tradition, furnished a strong motive to accept any testimony that tended to confirm it. The writer of an extremely able article on "The Belief in the Immortality of the Soul," in the October number of the Westminster Review, remarks: "Of all the attempts made hitherto to secure a basis for the belief in a future life, the best, in our opinion, is that of modern Spiritists. Unsuccessful as we deem it to have been, it deserves at least the credit of a failure in the right direction, a consistent and a necessary experiment." Their theory is, that the disembodied human being is an organism, so related to this world as to be capable under certain conditions of communicating with its inhabitants. This brings the question within the range of positive science. Spiritists have opened the door to scientific enquiry as to matters of fact. "The next question, however," continues the writer, "is whether they have succeeded in adducing any evidence as to the existence of spirits, and to this the reply, in our opinion, must be an unmitigated negative."

Whatever may be the final conclusion arrived at on the question of Spiritualism—how much is fraud, how much is honest self-delusion, how much is erroneous inference, and how much is due to that religious training which makes credulity a virtue—one thing is clear, which is, that its growth cannot be favorable to orthodoxy. Spiritualism is either true or false. If true, it must directly displace Christianity. If false, it is a strong logical argument against Christianity put in a most practical form, for it is obvious that if millions of intelligent persons have in our own day been the victims of a delusion, there is no reason whatever for assuming that the Christian belief is not the result of a similar delusion. Hence the list of eminent men—such as Mr. Wallace gives in his book on "Miracles and Modern Spiritualism"—who consider the evidence for Spiritualism convincing, may prove to be "shocking examples" of human credulity, showing how little weight should be attached to authority where the supernatural is concerned.

The late Judge Maning had during his life and while still in health imbibed the philosophy of the age, his "faith" growing weak as his reasoning progressed. He fell ill of a disease beyond the power of the physician's art, and endured the summation of human suffering—a slow cancer eating his life away. In this state he wrote the following letter to Bishop Abraham:—"I am scarcely able to write, but make the endeavor

"to thank you most heartily for the kind letter which I have but this moment received. After many a hard struggle against the ideas of the modern so-called philosophers, I have only just now begun to think I have faith in Christ as being both Man and God, and your letter came to help and encourage me. Do pray to God to help my unbelief. My mind is not strong enough nor my body either to write more, only, dear Bishop, pray for me that my faith be helped and strengthened to the last. I am in so much pain I must end here. I will not trouble you to come to see me. I am well read and well taught, and have thought much on the proofs and evidences of our religion, and if I have therefore not faith enough to save me, it is the more fault of mine. I nevertheless hope and trust in God and Christ for mercy on a truly repentant sinner. Pray that my faith be made clear, dear Bishop; your letter shows you to be a faithful shepherd. Excuse incoherence. I am very weak." A newspaper, in publishing this melancholy letter, observes: "If there is anything real and genuine in the Christian religion it will assuredly show itself when death is in full view and certain prospect. The following letter, written by the late Judge Maning, should be sufficient to prove that religion with him was no mere empty profession or insane fancy." The letter proves exactly the reverse. Poor Maning, in the depth of his suffering, says he has "thought much on the proofs and evidences of our religion," and doubts whether he has sufficient faith to save him. The strong man reduced to the extreme point of physical weakness through pain, the once vigorous mind left just conscious of its own "incoherence,"—is a state wherein Christianity is welcome to find testimony to the truth of its creed!

If Christianity is to live it must have better reasons than death-bed confessions. The Freethinker may well rest content with the thought that when the mind is vigorous it grasps the conclusions of science, rejecting myth; and he can afford to concede any advantage to be found in the partial or entire eclipse of reason in the valley of the shadow of death. The strong mind in the healthy body comes to see that the "evidences" are baseless. If perchance this mind weakened by disease should sink into second childishness, fearing the hobgoblins which as a child were conjured to terrify,—what is there in that either to arrest the decay of a faith or weaken the moral self-reliance of the Freethinker?

The Bishop of Melbourne has provided from his armoury an old weapon refurbished in defence of Christianity. In a speech lately delivered he jauntily referred to the association between Indian mythology and Christianity, and strongly advised his hearers when they were met with analogies of the kind to reply—"impossible." So confidently did Bishop Moorhouse rely on this vigorous style of dialectics that he repeated the advice several times. The Pope was accustomed