

was right as regards our immediate departure to Hell or Heaven at the time of death." He instanced the preaching of Christ to the spirits in prison (as told by St. Peter), and reminded his audience that Christ must have expected to do good by preaching to these bad spirits who had been in prison for four thousand years, since Noah's time. He further reminded his hearers that "we ought to be most careful what we should do or say, as the spirits of our dear friends, instead of being in Hell or Heaven, were actually *near us, around us*, watching and listening to our actions and words." By this last sermon we are led to expect that we have freethinkers doing our work *nobly* at their post, without our paying them for it.

Yours, &c.,

Auckland.

OBSERVER.

WORK AT GREYMOUTH.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE FREETHOUGHT REVIEW.

SIR,—Some of the "orthodox" here, not satisfied with their views being disseminated from half a dozen pulpits, have taken to publishing "sermons" in the daily paper, these sermons consisting of the usual diatribe against Truth-seeking or Freethought. For instance, the believers in that natural faith have been stigmatised as "blatant ignoramuses," "whipped atheists," &c. They also state that they (the orthodox) have been attempted to be crushed by an overwhelming array of scientists—who have only endeavored to teach common sense—who are considered by the orthodox to be the most unholy and unprincipled men in endeavoring to upset some of their pet theories; but, thank God, their ranks are thinning, and orthodoxy has now come out of the fire doubly refined and strengthened, whilst the array of unbelievers are humbly begging pardon for the impious acts of writing or lecturing against "our holy religion." To some of the Freethinkers of this town the audacity of such statements could not be allowed to pass unchallenged. An article was inserted in the same paper showing that Freethinkers were not the vile creatures that they were said to be; that they were increasing daily; and an attempt made to expose some of the obnoxious theories that we are commanded by the orthodox to observe, but which are repugnant to intelligent men. Of course, exception has been taken to the article by some of the orthodox; the old spirit that condemned "The Echo" for being admitted to the Public Reading Room has been aroused, and to prevent "hatred and all uncharitableness" from being indulged in, the editor of the paper has, I think, very properly refused to allow any more "sermons" to appear in his paper. Of course, this has also the effect of closing his paper against the other side—at a loss, no doubt, as all appeared as advertisements—but the Freethinkers of Greymouth have the satisfaction of knowing that they will not be further maligned under cover of a "sermon," and that some very objectionable theories will not be again presented to them in the columns of our daily paper. I think the gentlemen who had the "sermons" inserted thought they were doing good—as they interpret the word—but in this they have made a serious mistake. They were not inserted to convert their own brethren—they have been converted already; it must have been to convert the opposition. But surely they went the wrong way about it.

Yours faithfully,

AN AGNOSTIC.

Greymouth, Jan. 1, 1884.

DOG-VANES.

It is many years since I was a wanderer on the face of the ocean, but amidst all my subsequent wanderings on the face of the earth I have not forgotten the use of the Dog-vane. Like straws on a stream, the little fragile and generally fanciful bit of bunting hung on the back-stay gave evidence of the shifting currents of the breeze. In the present series of papers, I propose to direct attention to such minor events in the social and political progress of the time as appear to me to indicate the currents of public opinion, which, like variable winds to the voyager, alternately hasten or retard the progress of humanity to its goal.

The much hackneyed quotation, "There are stranger things in this world, Horatio, than are dreamt of in our philosophy," receives daily confirmation, notwithstanding the long flight of time since those words were written. Can there be anything stranger than the persistency with which the priesthood of all denominations continues to preach, and their followers continue to believe, or profess to believe, in a *merciful* Divine Providence. So utterly at variance with the daily experience of our race, and the dictates of common sense, does this doctrine appear to me, that all the philosophy I can muster fails to afford me a key to the blind gullibility of the people; the persistency of the so-called shepherds of the human flock is more easily accounted for, although their audacity in the face of facts is something wonderful. To illustrate the cause of my astonishment, it is not necessary that I should ask my readers to go back to ancient history, nor is a long retrospective survey of our own times needed, as numerous events within the memory of even the children of to-day are sufficient for my purpose.

Among the thousands who can remember the sinking of the excursion steamboat Princess Alice* in the Thames, is there one who cannot recall the feelings of horror which the details of that catastrophe excited? Within the limits of this paper I cannot presume to give a complete list of the numerous accidents, as they are generally termed, but which in strict consistency should be called acts of God, which have resulted in the death and misery of hundreds of human beings from infancy to old age. Theatres, crowded with people, have been destroyed by fire; mines have exploded; bridges have broken down; railway trains have dashed into each other, and ploughed a road through throngs of helpless and panic-stricken people; ships have collided in the English Channel, and vessels have been wrecked on our own coasts, as well as in every other known portion of the globe; and lastly, though far from least, earthquakes and eruptions have destroyed whole cities and districts, involving in one common ruin rich and poor, young and old, the just and the unjust, proving most emphatically that God is no respecter of persons or of things, but, like some hideous cannibal, he sacrifices all sorts and conditions of men to his thirst for blood and his delight in human suffering. Banish the idea of an anthropomorphous deity and my impeachment falls to the ground, but as long as the personal interference with the affairs of the universe and man in particular is attributed to a personal God, my accusation is more than justified. War against such a barbarous and humiliating creed becomes one of the noblest occupations of the intellect. In order to assist in the battle against priestcraft and superstition, I have recently turned my attention to improving on the weapons of theology. The most effective means of blinding the reason and dwarfing the understanding has been the excitement of the imagination and powerful appeals to man's emotional nature. High-flown language, the gorgeous imagery of Oriental poetry, the gilded trappings and costly vestments, the magnificently painted windows, shedding their dim, religious light through aisle and chancel, and above all, the heart-stirring and enthralling power of music and the united harmony of the human voice, have all been used with most consummate skill to enslave the mind, and with what success the present condition of society too plainly proves. The tinsel and millinery of ritualism I have no desire to imitate, but music is an element of human pleasure and instruction, and I propose to divorce as much of it as possible from the delusive rhapsodies and incantations of theology, and to unite it with the words of truth and the aspirations of a purer and nobler faith. I therefore offer the following verses in common metre as a humble contribution to the Hymnology of Freethought:—

JEHOVAH'S WONDROUS LOVE!

Behold Jehovah's wondrous love
On Ischia's isle displayed,
Where stately halls and cottage walls
Are in one ruin laid!

Show me the mercies of that God
Who hears the widow's cry,
Who leaves in nameless agonies
The old and young to die.

Has he who marks the sparrow fall,
E'er stretched his hand to save
The hapless crews who on him call,
While sinking 'neath the wave?

To Sunderland turn the eye of faith,
And mark the floods of tears,
Shed o'er the mangled little one,
Crushed on those fatal stairs.

The startling "truth" that "God is good,"
Though earthly tyrants reign,
Is written deep in human blood
On every battle plain.

Millions of tongues in humble prayer
To God for mercy cry;
He only laughs at man's despair,
And leaves the weak to die.

Then ask me not to bend the knee
To such a senseless clod;
Built up by ignorance and fear,
And called by priests "our God,"

CHARLES J. RAE.

Dec. 30th, 1883.