

daily papers have published the reasons of a member for resigning the office of a deacon of a Presbyterian Church or a lieutenant of the Salvation Army? I doubt it. If, however, the daily papers are to publish all the letters that resigning office-bearers of churches, associations, or lodges send, I am afraid "leaders" and "locals" may not be much in request. My second reason is that I am in hopes (to use theological language) that your letter and this reply may be "over-ruled" for the spread of truth. Who knows but that they may help some of our fellow-colonists, who do not know what a Freethought Association is, to appreciate the position of Freethinkers? And a knowledge of one another's views is one step towards complete toleration.

I am glad that you have placed in the forefront of your letter the diversity of the views of the members of our Association. We have, as you know, Theists, Agnostics, Unitarians, Atheists, Pantheists, Spiritualists in our ranks, and that you, a Theist and Spiritualist, have been twice elected one of our Vice-Presidents, shows that those who were not Spiritualists could unite with those who were. In fact, we have shown to the churches a *modus vivendi* that may have a beneficial effect when creed subscription is again discussed. And I also appreciate your statement that in a "constructive religious sense" the Association is a failure. If it had been a success our very *raison d'être* would have been destroyed. We never united to form a new theology, or a new religion. Our aim was, and is, something different. We believe that truth is the most important thing in this world, and that none of the race can be benefited by falsehood. We have also recognised that the deeper questions of this life will never be solved by all men alike; and we have united to discuss them freed from creeds, and to teach our children their duties to themselves and their fellows. This, we think, we can do without appealing to a Deity, or invoking the terrors of future punishment or the pleasures of future glory.

On this, as you will remember, we took our stand when we issued the "Lyceum Guide." The preface quotes a pregnant passage from Spencer's data of Ethics, showing that morality requires no sanction from Divine injunctions. If good acts conduce to human well-being, and bad acts to human ill-being, there is a sanction for morality higher than Mosaic commandments or the terrors of Hell. You say that morals are "a farce" unless based on Theism and a future life. Is this meant to be what logicians call a universal? I take it that you mean that no men can be moral who are not Theists and believers in a future state of existence. If you do, then one exception is sufficient to disprove your proposition, and I need not say that there are hundreds, perhaps millions, of Agnostics who are moral men. You complain of the children at the Lyceum not being taught the dogmas of a Personal Deity and a future state of existence. Here again let me say that I believe the majority of the teachers are Theists, and as conductor I never dictated or supervised the class teaching you and the other leaders gave. But, believing as I do that morality is independent of all dogmas—standing on an assured human foundation—I do not teach the children any dogmas. They, however, had as text-books "Codd's Childhood of Religion" and "Codd's Childhood of the World." From these they could learn all about the different religions of the world. When they get to years of discretion they can then choose the religion or non-religion they like best.

And now as to two or three other positions in your letter:—

First—The good the churches have done.

Second—The attitude of reformers towards the race.

Third—The conflict between science and religion.

Fourth—The naturalness of religious belief.

I select these four points, omitting many more which might be noticed, because of the length to which my reply would have to extend.

First: I am not aware that any member of the Freethought Association disputes that churches have done good—nay, are doing some good. Nor does any sane person wish to ignore tradition. Whether he so desired or not, it would not avail him. The past exists. It is one thing to admit the good of the past and to be guided by it now. Our attitude is this—

We had not walked

But for tradition; we walk evermore

To higher path, by brightening Reason's lamp.

For example, the admitting that the Mohammedans did good would not make one become a follower of the Prophet, nor would the recognition of the great services rendered to humanity by the Roman Church make one join her communion. The question we have to ask is, Where is the true? and follow whithersoever we think it is. The truth needs no condiment, and I reprobate to the utmost the canting phrase so often used by church people, "Oh, we need religion for the masses." If religion is true, it is required for all, and if it is not, it is needed for none. Recognising the good the churches have done is no argument for becoming a churchman now.

The second point is the attitude of reformers. I am not aware if the Dunedin Freethought Association have ever assumed the role of reformers. You know how careful we were not to attempt proselytising. We charged for admission to our lectures, and we even recognised that to be a Freethinker something other than an appeal to one's emotion had to be made. I understand your position to be that churches change as rapidly as is necessary, and that until the masses are educated it is unwise to alter the creeds. Of course this means that the churches are always ruled by the ignorant. But you go further, and say that reformers only succeed who preach some positive and not a negative creed. This is partly true and partly erroneous. Every religious reformer that I know has thrown overboard some of the positive beliefs of the church he attempted to reform. Jesus Christ did not preach all the Jewish creed. He thought morality was safe without a belief in all the varied beliefs of the Jews of his day. Martin Luther also was negative as well as positive. And so with the English and Scotch reformers. And if I mention Barclay, Theodore Parker, and others, it will be seen that these reformers thought the world could get along with less faith

than the churches they left required. The whole history of the evolution of religion shows a throwing off of beliefs. The creeds have been pared down, and, as I understand you, you wish them still further lessened. Hell fire is to go.

Then, the conflict between science and religion. You say some scientists have opposed new discoveries and new inventions. I admit it. But I am not aware of any scientific society having burned anyone for a discovery, nor putting a fellow-scientist in prison for an invention. Because some scientists have denounced new discoveries it does not prove that the attitude of scientists and theologians is the same to new truths. We need not go to the past. Let us take the attitude of Christians of the present day, and in our own town. The most vital Christian organisation, the Y. M. C. A. refused to admit the Rev. A. R. Pritchett as a member because he was an evolutionist, and they selected the Rev. A. C. Gillies as the champion of the popular creed. I am not aware that the Otago Institute ever declined a member because his views on biology did not accord with Darwin's or Huxley's. And the reason of the different attitude is not difficult to understand. To the Christian, Divine revelation has closed. The question then is whenever any new scientific theory is promulgated, what saith the Church? or what saith the Scripture? The scientific men have no closed record and no authoritative guide by which to test a discovery or an invention.

Then you say certain beliefs are natural to men. As I understand, you include belief in Deity and in a future life, and rewards and punishments in that life. I do not understand "natural," unless you mean the majority have such beliefs. I need not point out to you that if Evolution be true, that a majority believe anything is no proof of its truth. In fact, it is just as likely to be false. And at one time there were many beliefs "natural to man that are now not natural." Need I instance witchcraft?

But my letter is already too long. Were it not so, I might point out that you have entirely misapprehended what relativity of knowledge means. As I gather from your letter, you have not changed the views that to my knowledge you have held for years. You are still a Theist and a Spiritualist, and still reject the dogmas of the Trinity and some of the other popular doctrines of the Christian Church. Perhaps with your views and beliefs it may be wise for you to join with other advanced Unitarians in founding a Unitarian Church here. There are I know many in the churches here who hold your views, and possibly, in founding a church, it is necessary that all should have one creed and be animated with one desire. Our Association does not require such unanimity, and I am glad to say that we were never so vital. We are opening a weekly debating class, and our reading room and library thrice a week. Our children's Lyceum library can now number many hundreds of volumes, and the attendance on Sundays was never so great. Knowing your interest in everything that tends to freedom of thought, I mention these details.

And now, my dear Braithwaite, let me personally thank you for the help you have given us in the past. Though you have ceased to be one of our Vice-Presidents, I have no doubt but that with more study you will yet see that every reform of religion, from Jesus's day to the present, has come from those without and not from those within the Church, and that should you join a church and hope to make its members Theists and Spiritualists you will have a more up-hill task than you have had in your efforts to get our Association to accept such a creed.

I am, &c.,

ROBERT STOUT.

Dunedin, January 16th, 1884.

MR. BRAITHWAITE'S SECESSION.

In reference to the foregoing correspondence, Mr. Wm. Pratt, President of the Christchurch Freethought Association, has forwarded us the following letter on the subject, which we have much pleasure in publishing:—

TO THE EDITOR OF THE FREETHOUGHT REVIEW.

SIR,—Mr. Braithwaite has thought it necessary to signalise his retirement from the Freethought party in Dunedin by occupying a column of each of the Otago daily papers with his reasons, and the "Morning Herald" considered it of sufficient importance as to warrant a sub-leader. In acting upon his convictions he has simply exercised the right of private judgment which the Freethought Association with which he has long been connected regards as one of its fundamental principles; but the most singular and contradictory feature of his withdrawal is the statement that he considers "the mere right to think for one's self" is not only of no positive value, but absolutely powerless for good, as offering no principle of union for combined effort, and cites for admiration and example the grand results which have followed the *positive* teaching of the Church. Whether true or false appears to him of secondary consequence; assume the truth, and make belief in the assumptions imperative, and non-belief a crime visited with the severest penalties, as the Church did for centuries when she possessed the power, appears to Mr. Braithwaite to be the *sine qua non* of a religion for ensuring human happiness here and hereafter.

Holding these views, one is led to enquire how, or why, he ever left the Church, or fell into the delusion that he was a Freethinker, when merely "the right to think for one's self" appears to him such a poor and powerless factor for human improvement, as compared with an authoritative and dogmatic theology—for stopping short with a belief in God and a future life—or swallowing the whole formula of the fall of man, vicarious atonement, redemption, heaven and hell, are merely questions of degree; besides, the latter constitutes the *positive* teaching of the Church, which he claims to have produced such grand results.

If the noblest specimens of humanity have held these beliefs, and thereby enjoyed worldly honor and profit, in addition to the comforting assurances of future bliss, always provided they were