

able to allay the distracting doubts inseparable from such beliefs, History also records that many noble men and women have discarded them, and in so acting lost everything but honor, preferring to encounter inconceivable pains, tortures, and cruel deaths rather than subscribe to what they conscientiously considered to be false and deluding superstitions. Mr. Braithwaite gravely informs us that "unessentials of religion as hell-fire, the Church will modify or let go." We are led to ask how a *positive* truth can be modified or let go, and which lies at the very foundation of theological teaching, without the whole structure tumbling down. But it is not true that the Church regards a belief in hell-fire as one of the non-essentials of religion, although from the growing intelligence of the age it is not made so prominent in the pulpit as it was fifty years ago. It is still regarded as an integral part of her *positive* teaching; especially is a belief in it impressed upon the tender minds of children; and their evidence is refused in our Law Courts, unless they are found to be well-grounded in this comforting belief..

Mr. Braithwaite supplies us with a surprising and novel reading of history in the words: "The Church always espouses a new fact, or new version of an old truth when mankind are *ready to receive them*," which would have been nearer the truth if rendered when the majority outside of, and in defiance of, the Church have received and adopted them. What says Professor Fowler, the Professor of Logic at Oxford, in his great work "Bacon's Novum Organum," in explanation of Aphorism, 89, book I.: "A new discovery in science is at first decried as contrary or even fatal to faith; then, after a time, it is grudgingly admitted and incorporated into the received doctrine, till at last no one dreams of calling it in question. But the process soon begins afresh with some more recent discovery, so that a constant warfare is going on between the unwise theologian and the scientific investigator." In Mr. Braithwaite's reasons for withdrawing from the Dunedin Freethought Association there is an implied, if not plainly expressed, failure to remodel it in a "constructive religious sense," with, it may be safely inferred, Theism and Spiritualism for its *positive* truths,—we are afforded pleasing evidence of its strength and vitality in maintaining first principles. There are many other fallacies in the letter referred to, but space will not permit of further references. Holding opinions more in harmony with the Romish Church than a Freethought Association, Mr. Braithwaite appears to be unable to realise the possibilities of a *character* religion progressing with its environment, unfettered by the chains of a theology based upon tradition and unauthentic paper records.

Yours, &c.,

WILLIAM PRATT,

President of the Christchurch Freethought Association.
Christchurch, January 21st, 1884.

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Pending further arrangements, W. Pratt, Esq., the President of the Christchurch Freethought Association, has kindly undertaken to take charge of and distribute THE FREETHOUGHT REVIEW in Christchurch.

Those willing to undertake the agency for places not named are requested to communicate at once with the publisher.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

In consequence of unusual pressure on our space, we are compelled to hold over several communications.

Received from that enthusiastic Freethinker "Blue Pencil" a number of pamphlets, including one on "False Claims," which we shall notice in our next.

We would remind the Dunedin Freethought Association that Freethinkers generally would occasionally like to hear from them through the medium of the usual monthly report under the head of "Progress."

ESQUIRE.—We have heard that the Spiritualist to whom you refer has joined one of the Churches, but we have nothing sufficiently authentic to justify us in mentioning names.

L.P.—The REVIEW is representative of no Association in particular, but of all—our purpose being to make it represent in the best sense the Freethought movement in the colony.

"A RAY OF LIGHT."—You will notice that the movement has taken form in the manner you suggest. We believe there will be a general and favorable response to the action of the Dunedin Association. You must permit us to differ from your friendly proposal that the REVIEW should be formally constituted the organ of the United Associations. It aspires of course to a representative position, and will gain and keep it by being worthy of it. But if any paper more worthy were established, it should and would occupy the first place. The REVIEW is far better untrammelled. We hope to enjoy the confidence of the Freethinkers of the colony on the merits alone.

The Freethought Review.

WANGANUI, N.Z., FEBRUARY 1, 1884.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE ABJECT POOR.

A RECENT article of Lord Salisbury's in one of the 'Reviews,' and a pamphlet headed "The Bitter Cry of Outcast London," published under the auspices of the London Congregational Union, have directed more than usual attention to one of the most difficult social problems ever presented for solution—how to prevent that extreme poverty which is both cause and consequence of a state of physical and moral degradation shocking to contemplate, and rendered all the more horrible by contrast with the wealth, luxury, and refinement existing by its side. "The churches," says the pamphlet referred to above, "are making the discovery that seething in the very centre of our great cities, concealed by the thinnest crust of civilisation and decency, is a vast mass of moral corruption, of heart-breaking misery and absolute godlessness, and that scarcely anything has been done to take into this awful slough the only influences that can purify or remove it." These "influences" are, of course, in the opinion of the Congregational Union, more gospel preaching and evangelistic work, an increase, in short, of "that noble army of men and women who penetrate the vilest haunts, carrying with them the blessings of the gospel." Now I am far from denying that much good has been effected by what is called Christian effort among a class of persons who at present can only be moved by appeals to their superstitious fears and hopes, or at best to moral sentiments which have become so associated with Christian dogmas as to seem identical with them; but this principle applies to any religion, however false, so long as it is *believed* to be true, and military and moral conquests are equally possible under Cross or Crescent, while the indirect effects of an erroneous opinion may be extremely mischievous. Now, if Christianity is a delusion, and if the world, instead of being under a supernatural, paternal government, is simply under "the reign of law," it is clear that all action motivated by "other worldliness" in its countless forms, can only lead to good results by accident. Hence if the purely Positive view of nature and humanity is accepted, Christian teaching does at least this negative harm—it leads men to look into the clouds for means to remedy admitted evils, when they should look for them on earth. "Whilst," to quote from 'The Bitter Cry,' "we have been building our churches and solacing ourselves with our religion, and dreaming that the millenium was coming, the poor have been growing