

Public opinion in the colony on the subject of an Australasian confederation of which New Zealand shall be a member, has taken a more decided turn since we first noticed the question in these columns. Sir George Grey's speech at Auckland has reached to all parts, stirring up the people to reflect on the possible and probable consequences of an alliance with the Australian colonies on the basis proposed at the Sydney Conference. We are not sure, however, that his argument touching the introduction of coloured labour can be maintained. It is well to avoid ground which in debate may be proved to be untenable. The real danger, as we suggested, is the inevitable tendency of the federal body to increase its powers at the expense of the provinces, and the weakening of the national instinct. In the November number of the 'Contemporary Review' the Marquis of Lorne points to the continual increase of the central or federal authority in Canada as one of the inevitable conditions of federation. It must be seen that if the proposed Federal Council is to have no larger powers than those drafted in the Bill by the Conference, federation will be purposeless. The most thoughtful perhaps of the English papers, the 'Economist,' takes this view. It says:—"The question is not such an easy one as it may at first sight appear, for two reasons. In the first place, it is clear that as the expense, or some part of it, incurred in carrying out the foreign policy of Australia is to be borne by the colonies, the Central Council must be invested with power to call for and apportion the necessary contributions. Thus indirectly, at least, it will be a taxing authority. And, secondly, inasmuch as the Council will not be able to take final decisions, at least in important affairs, without first submitting its proposals to the approval of the Imperial Government, some confidential channel for communication and discussion between the Home and colonial authorities must be secured." The "power to call for and apportion the necessary contributions" implies that preponderance of the central authority which would reduce the provinces to insignificance!

A little publication, called the 'Agnostic Annual,' just received by the English mail, contains a letter from Professor Huxley in reply to the following questions:—1. Is Agnosticism in accord with modern science? 2. What is its relation to popular theology? 3. Is Agnosticism destined to supplant religious supernaturalism? After stating that he invented the word "Agnostic" some twenty years ago, "to denote people who, like myself, confess themselves to be hopelessly ignorant concerning a variety of matters about which metaphysicians and theologians, both orthodox and heterodox, dogmatise with the utmost confidence," he says:—1 "Agnosticism is of the essence of science, whether ancient or modern. It simply means that a man shall not say he knows or believes that which he has no scientific grounds for professing to know or believe." 2. "Consequently Agnosticism puts aside not only the greater part of popular theology, but also the greater part of popular anti-theology. On the whole, the 'bosh' of heterodoxy is more offensive to me than that of orthodoxy, because heterodoxy professes to be guided by reason and science, and orthodoxy does not." 3. "I have no doubt that scientific criticism will prove destructive to the forms of supernaturalism which enter into the constitution of existing religions. On trial of any so-called miracle the verdict of science is

"Not proven.' But true Agnosticism will not forget that existence, motion, and law-abiding operation in nature are more stupendous miracles than any recounted by the mythologies, and that there may be things, not only in the heavens and earth, but beyond the intelligible universe, which 'are not dreamt of in our philosophy.' The theological 'gnosis' would have us believe that the world is a conjuror's house; the anti-theological 'gnosis' talks as if it were a 'dirt-pie,' made by the two blind children—Law and Force. Agnosticism simply says that we know nothing of what may be beyond phenomena."

It seems that Professor Huxley resented the publication of the above letter, and an angry correspondence took place between Professor Huxley and the editor of the 'Agnostic Annual,' Mr. C. A. Watts. The President of the Royal Society seems to have displayed more heat over a mere misunderstanding than might have been expected from a philosopher, who in this case certainly did not act in accordance with his own Agnostic principles, but, on evidence which was certainly not scientific, jumped to the conclusion that he had been "treated dishonorably" by Mr. Watts, who had published a letter which he knew was a private communication. It looks as if Mr. Watts was justified in saying—"With all deference, we repeat that it is manifest from the tone of each of his letters that the secret of his vexation is the wide publicity which has been given to his direct attack upon Christianity, and to his equally clear avowal of Freethought and Agnosticism." It would be well if all men, and especially men of science, realised the fact that—as Mr. Herbert Spencer says in an eloquent passage in his 'First Principles'—"Opinion is the agency through which character adapts external arrangements to itself—that his opinion rightly forms part of that agency—is a unit of force, constituting, with other such units, the general power which works out social changes; and he will perceive that he may properly give full utterance to his innermost convictions: leaving it to produce what effect it may. It is not for nothing that he has in him these sympathies with some principles and repugnance to others. He with all his capacities, and aspirations, and beliefs, is not an accident, but a product of the time. He must remember that while he is a descendant of the past he is a parent of the future; and that his thoughts are as children born to him, which he may not carelessly let die. He, like any other man, may properly consider himself as one of the myriad agencies through whom works the Unknown Cause; and when the Unknown Cause produces in him a certain belief, he is thereby authorised to profess and act out that belief."

Perhaps Professor Huxley's contemptuous reference to the "bosh" of "heterodoxy" is perhaps partly due to his dislike of a crude materialism which was popular a few years ago and found expression in such phrases as "the brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile," but though he declared on one occasion, "personally I am not a materialist; on the contrary I believe that materialism contains grave philosophic error" (Fortnightly Review for 1869); yet on another he wrote: "If there is anything which is clear in the present progress of science, it is the tendency to reduce all scientific questions, with the exception of purely mathematical ones, to what is called *molecular physics*,