

nature has produced Monotheism from Polytheism, but noble as the completed structure may appear, and great as has been its social, and even scientific utility, we cannot shut our eyes to the inherent weakness of the materials of which it is composed. Like Russian ice-palaces, it has lasted during the long night of superstition, but must gradually melt away in the bright sunshine of modern science. At best, we have but an hypothesis to deal with. A personal God may exist so long as personality does not imply anything contrary to experience, but the mere power to imagine such a being is no proof whatever of his existence. Indeed, a proposition incapable of proof may be logically regarded as false, so that, like any other assumption, its truth can only be decided by an appeal to evidence and reason. As for the metaphysical *a priori* arguments for the existence of God, they invariably break down at the point where it is essential to their validity that relative knowledge should become absolute. Kant no less than Hume perceived this distinctly, and evaded the difficulty by an appeal to the "Practical Reason," which really meant very much what theologians mean when they tell us that without a God conscience and morality are delusions. To this the doctrine of evolution furnishes a sufficient reply. Morality and conscience are growths of the social organism, and Humanity furnishes that ideal which theology seeks for in a divine person. There remains, then, the well-known argument from design, which, though scientific in character, is weak in logical force. It rests upon that imperfect induction known as analogy, and in any case reaches but a very little way towards rendering the existence of the kind of Deity which theology postulates, in the slightest degree probable. The theory of final causes really implies an anthropomorphic God, and such a being cannot be inferred from the order of the universe. Instead of design modern science sees only correspondence between an organism and its medium. Contrivance presupposes fixed laws; given the air and mechanical powers, a man may construct a flying machine, but given a flying bird, all we can say is that wings and the air are necessary conditions of its existence. Apart from the relation of air and wings, there would be no bird at all. Similar reasoning applies to every portion of the universe known to us, including our own consciousness. In short, the principle of relativity applies, and excludes all knowledge of the absolute. In accordance with the law of the "three stages," the gradual recognition of this fact is inevitable. But when we have eliminated the changeable element of the human imagination from nature, we are by no means left, as the theologians tell us, "without chart or compass" for our guidance through life. On the contrary, "that power, not ourselves," the knowledge of which is our highest wisdom, must become more directly regulative than ever. When it is no longer thought possible that the arbitrary personality supposed to rule the world can be propitiated by some quasi magical process, such, e.g., as the "Atonement," men will give more heed to the principles which should guide individual and social life before either can attain its highest good. Science, moralised by devotion to the interests of Humanity, though it may compel us to abandon many cherished illusions, will relieve us from many needless fears, and will furnish a far firmer basis for morality than can be obtained by appealing to "survivals" of a philosophy which has fulfilled its mission.

R.P.

Correspondence.

A WORD FROM MR. BRAITHWAITE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE FREETHOUGHT REVIEW.

SIR,—In last REVIEW you assert I changed my views since 10th November last, and quote in proof from the 'Echo' of that date, wherein I said "Freethought is sure to succeed in the long run, and that the unessentials of orthodoxy must give way before the ever advancing tide of an educated public opinion." Why should I refer to the "unessentials of orthodoxy" if I did not hold the same opinions then as now? Any impartial person can see that my letter resigning the Dunedin Freethought Association and my rejoinder to Mr Stout are quite in keeping with the above extract.

To confirm this I quote from my letter resigning the Association thus:—"I do not doubt that when the Church finds that what I conceive to be the unessentials of religion—as related to the present age—have almost lost their influence, like the belief in a 'material hell fire' almost has, that she will either let them go or modify them in accordance with the spirit of the age, and be all the stronger for it." You also seem to think Freethought inseparable from Freethought Associations. I never thought this. Freethought belongs to humanity, not to any special organisation. And you overlooked the fact that in the "valedictory address" you quoted from I wrote that "that much misunderstood subject, Spiritualism, would form a portion of the editorial policy" of the new 'Echo.' To me New Testament Christianity and Spiritualism rightly understood are the same, the proof of which I am content to leave in the hands of Science. So much for my "change of opinions regarding the future of Freethought since the 10th November, 1883."

The President of the Christchurch Freethought Association, Mr Wm. Pratt, not only misses the drift of my letter resigning the Dunedin Freethought Association and knocks down arguments of his own invention, but makes me say that "the mere right to think for one's self is not only of no value but absolutely powerless of good." I never used such words. They are opposed to the whole tenor of my letter. Besides, Mr Pratt acted most unfairly in placing the words, "the mere right to think for one's self," between inverted commas (as if quoting from my letter), coupling them with "is not only of no possible value," &c., thus fathering an absurdity upon me. I fail to see that misrepresenting others serves the cause of truth. Mr Pratt thinks I "hold opinions more in harmony with the Romish Church than a Freethought Association." How is this when the concluding part of my resignation says: "I shall ever be found standing up for civil and religious liberty and the completest toleration one to another!" Perhaps you and Mr Pratt think neither liberty, toleration, nor freethought can exist outside of a Freethought Association. I think differently. Yet there is no need to fall out because of this. My main contention, which neither Mr Stout nor Mr Pratt touches, was and is, that those who firmly believe in God and a future state cannot work effectively in religious matters with those who do not, and the fact that the Secular and Freethought Associations everywhere are, with rare exceptions, composed of the latter, and that the two parties have had to organise separately in America, England, and Australia, proves what I say.

I am, yours faithfully,

JOSEPH BRAITHWAITE.

Dunedin, February 21st, 1884.

[The resources of Etymology are in this instance only available to support a mental reservation. "Freethought" or "Spiritualism" no more represents Christianity than does Buddhism. We never implied in the faintest way that Freethought was inseparable from Freethought Associations. As Mr Braithwaite believes in the Resurrection, the reference to the "unessentials of orthodoxy" is obscure. Used in a Christian sense by one representing himself as a Freethinker, the phrase was deceptive.—Ed.]

Reviews.

False Claims: An address delivered before the New York Freethinkers' Association, at Rochester, New York, September 1st, 1883, by John E. Reinsburg. New York: Truth Seeker Office.

Lectures, brilliant, logical, and convincing, are delivered from time to time in the interest of Freethought, but the address under notice surpasses all we remember having seen, in its statistical range and the comprehensiveness with which it notices the salient features of Christianity. The address abounds in facts, figures, suggestions and deductions, and is an excellent summary of the arguments against the Christian system. We select one passage as an illustration of the vigour of the style: "The Evolution theory is promulgated. A million priests array themselves against it. From nearly every pulpit comes the cry of 'Darwin' and 'Monkey,' accompanied by an idiotic sneer that more than half reveals the 'missing link.' But Evolution triumphs. To-day the theory is accepted by every eminent scholar and scientist throughout the world. The Church has again been vanquished, and now her representatives are coming forward and declaring that henceforth Christianity and Evolution can dwell lovingly together. With what ease this theological baby swallows an unpalatable truth when powerless in the nurse's arms, unable to thrust the spoon from her mouth! In less than twenty years the Church will be claiming Darwin, Spencer, Huxley, Haeckel, and Wallace as Christians, and pointing to their work as a monument of Christian civilization." For all purposes of ordinary controversy on the subject of Freethought and Christianity, "False Claims" is a perfect armoury of weapons of attack.