

Free Thought Review.

SCIENCE. RELIGION. PHILOSOPHY.

VOL. I.—No. 9.

WANGANUI, N.Z.: JUNE, 1, 1884.

PRICE: 6D. [6s per annum; or, post paid to any part of N.Z., 6s 6d.]

There is no part of Mr. George's book, "Progress and Poverty," more open to criticism and refutation than the chapters on Malthusianism. To tell the Irish people that they may be as reckless and improvident in this one respect in the future as they have been in the past, if they can only get rid of landlordism, is to encourage them to sink into a more helpless condition than they have yet experienced. Whatever increase of wealth or of food may take place in consequence of political or economic changes, it is certain that, unless the prudential or other check be applied, the population will rapidly rise to high-water mark of the means of subsistence. If the economic rent were confiscated to-morrow, and every occupier lived rent free, the enfranchised tenant would be able no doubt to increase his family connexions; though we are afraid we should have to allow for the fact that the rentless landlord might at the same time be compelled to reduce his. The circumstances determining the population a nation may contain are too complex to enable anyone to arrive at an estimate worthy a moment's consideration. But one thing stands out as an indubitable scientific conclusion, that a people who hold it a virtue to bring as many children as possible into the world, will quickly meet with that check included in the Malthusian category which admits of no quibbling over terms—the giant spectre of starvation and premature death.

Mr. Moncure D. Conway conveys to an interviewing representative of the 'Pall Mall Gazette' a vivid picture of British India. "The population," he says, "grows thicker and ever thicker upon the soil, increasing by millions the number of paupers—for they are all more or less paupers—festering and squalid in their misery." The interviewer appears to have been touched by the description, and he asked—"What, then, Mr. Conway, do you think should be done?" "It is difficult to say what," said Mr. Conway with a smile, "unless we are to appoint Mr. Bradlaugh to undertake a general Malthusian apostolate throughout India." A grave word spoken in jest! The rapid increase of population is due to the absence of those checks which before the advent of British rule held sway—the massacre of millions in merciless wars, and periodical famines. These checks are removed, while the prudential one has not been supplied. "In India," our authority further remarks, "the first duty of man is to breed. The women are mere child-producing machines." Christian missionaries no doubt increase the mischief as far as they are able by their idle cant about the "Providence of God." It is in this field science can work out its ends beneficently, and redeem by a gradual process myriads of human beings from national and individual degradation. Mr. Conway observes that all the educated Hindoos he met were Freethinkers, and it is to them we look with the hope that knowledge will be brought home to every village commune.

In a recent number of the 'Melbourne Argus' we find the following words beginning a leading article on certain misstatements of Bishop Moorhouse:—"He stands to this day in the position of having made with regard to an important, and we may concede pious, object, two very definite statements, one of the school class pelting their Bibles and Catechisms at the head of a teacher who proposed to instruct them in religious matters, and the other involving the morality of state school children, the first of which, in spite of frequent demands, has never been verified, and the other hopelessly broke down on inquiry." If a Bishop of "light and leading" to-day is so deficient in the moral qualities of caution and enquiry before making statements affecting the characters of individuals and institutions, what could be expected from the founders of "the faith" in the early centuries of the Christian era, when the temptation was so strong upon them to say, not what was true, but what would advance the cause, knowing how readily what was said would be accepted? The philosophy of history has a vivid light cast upon it by the weakness of human nature. There is a strong tendency in the mind to reach desirable ends by short cuts and forbidden paths—a tendency that accounts for many curious events in history. If Bishop Moorhouse had not been so anxious to make out a case against the Victorian state system of education, he might have taken more pains to be accurate and well-informed.

It has been decreed by the Pope that "the Virgin Mary should be venerated and her intercession implored throughout the whole month of October, by the recitation of the most holy Rosary." It appears that "the Rosary was instituted principally to implore the protection of the Mother of God against the enemies of the Catholic name, and, as everyone knows, has been greatly effectual in delivering the Church from calamities." Poor lady! when she bewailed the religious enthusiasm of her son, and identified it with monomania, she little thought how superstition would supply her want of faith. That a god should need a mother, is the inheritance of the old mythology, and is quite natural to all Nature-worshippers and their modern representatives. What requires to be explained is that Mary's protection should have been only "greatly," and not altogether, effectual in delivering the Church. And why should she require the Dominicans, stimulated by the Fisherman, to make such strenuous efforts to rouse her to perform a duty that love of the Church would suggest she should undertake voluntarily? Further, it does seem a strange conception of her son's godhead, not to speak of his consistency, that he should require his mother's intercession for a cause that he had made specially his own. Further comment might excite more ridicule than we ever desire to cast on a mythological survival.