

to resolutions were passed, and the Secretary was instructed to communicate the decision of the Association to the Council.

The hour of our meeting has been changed from 7.30 to 7 p.m., during the winter months.

Yours faithfully,

J. J. BUCKRELL,
Secretary.

MR. ROBERT STOUT AT THE FREETHOUGHT HALL, WELLINGTON.

(New Zealand Times, May 22)

Last night Mr. Robert Stout, of Dunedin, delivered an address at the Freethought Hall on the subject of "Freethought." The address was announced as an answer to that delivered by Sir William Fox at the Athenæum on Thursday last. There was a crowded audience, and the chair was occupied by Mr. J. Robertson, who briefly introduced the speaker, alluding to him as the accredited head of the New Zealand Freethought Association.

Mr. Stout began by saying that, twenty years ago, to have called oneself a Freethinker would have been to court reproach. But this reproach was fast changing; and they had the authority of Sir William Fox, at any rate, for saying that it was an attractive thing to be a Freethinker. Sir William Fox had not approached the question of the truth or falsehood of Christianity by pointing out the arguments in its favour; but the most of the lecture was taken up by a personal attack on certain persons who are not Christians. It was strange that instead of looking at the lives of Freethinkers of the day, he went back to the eighteenth century, and discussed the lives of men of that date who held the same opinions. He did not think that Sir William Fox could have read Voltaire's life, by Parton, which showed that he was a better man than three-fourths of the Christians in the country in which he lived. The question of character should not be introduced into the discussion of questions of religious belief. He went on to speak of the conduct of Christians in the age in which Voltaire lived, and instanced the way in which Quakers in New England had been treated by the Puritans of England. Having referred to Scotland in the end of the seventeenth century, where persons had been persecuted and condemned to death in consequence of not being able to believe in the authenticity of the Pentateuch, nor in the doctrine of the Trinity, he instanced cases of similar persecutions in France. Speaking of Diderot, he said he wished each one in the colony was equal to Diderot, and spoke in eulogistic terms of the value of his Encyclopædia, which he had written for the benefit of his race. It was condemned as being full of atheism, &c., but it was not so. It was true that he afterwards became an atheist, but his life was far more noble in its moral example than nine-tenths of the churchmen of his day. Going on to refer to Sir William Fox's reference to Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant, he said that the statement he had made was false and untrue, as neither of them had advocated free love. And Sir William Fox, should, as a Christian, apologise for the slander heaped on their heads. He would like to know why Sir William Fox passed over the lives of the many well-known Freethinkers of the present day. Some of the most eminent men of science in all nations of the world were men who could not believe the popular creeds of the day. Sir William Fox told them that the French Revolution was bloody in consequence of its leaders being Freethinkers. Now, Robespierre was a theist, and yet he would not be justified in saying that theism was the cause of the Revolution. The real cause of the Revolution was degradation of the lower classes. The Christians had full power over France for centuries, and at the end of that time came—the French Revolution. Touching the civil wars in America and in England, he referred to the fact that more people fell in either of these than in the French Revolution, and yet those were Christian wars—there were no Freethinkers in those days. He alluded to the argument used by Sir William Fox that it was the Christians who had abolished the slave trade. Now he would like to ask who began slavery? It was established by Christians, and was defended by the Bible, and was eventually defended in the House of Lords by the bishops. He maintained that Thomas Paine's "Rights of Man" did more to abolish slavery than anything ever written or spoken by Christians. The leaders in the abolitionist movement in America were all men who had, according to Sir William Fox,

"seeds of a fatal disease." He instanced Theodore Parker, Wendell Phillips, and Harriet Martineau. Even Abraham Lincoln, who signed the emancipation, had a good many seeds of this fatal "disease." Another argument in favour of Christianity was the elevation of woman. It was nonsense to talk in this way, for the elevation of woman had come about by the advance of the human race. Then as to the argument that Christianity gave us hospitals and asylums. Now, there was not much Christianity in China, and yet parents were more cared for by their children in China than in Wellington. Hospitals and asylums were the result of the progress of the human race, and why should not Sir William Fox say that freethought was a product of Christianity?—for the one was just as much a result of Christianity as the other. Christianity had, however, produced many things which were not quite so beneficial as hospitals. He was not aware, for instance, that there were inquisitions before Christianity was introduced, nor bonfires of human flesh. Passing on to refer to the effects of Christianity on savages, as alluded to by Sir W. Fox, Mr Stout said that a true Freethinker—a man who loved his fellows, and who thought that every man had his rights—would not have treated the Maoris as they had been treated. A man who followed the teaching of Christ would not, at a trying time of the colony's history, have gone up and down the West Coast asking the settlers to arm because he feared a Maori outbreak. He wondered whether Sir W. Fox knew who did that. Towards the end of his lecture, Sir W. Fox said that he had been troubled with doubts, but that they had been solved by study of the Bible. He was glad to hear it, but that did not give him the right to throw stones at those whose doubts could not be settled in the same way. What the Freethought Association maintained was that they had a right to come to the consideration of any question without anyone having the right to say that they were right or wrong. True freedom of thought was granting permission to others to do what we think is wrong. With regard to the bible, Mr. Stout said no one could dispute that there were noble, beautiful, and moral things in it, but there were also some things which would be impure, were we to believe them true. Touching briefly on the question of the inspiration of the bible, and the moral lessons that it was said to teach, he asked was there no morality, kindness, or charity, before the Christian era? Morality was part of human nature, and would progress as the race progressed. With regard to miracles, and Sir W. Fox's statement that man could suspend natural laws, he characterised it as nonsense, and said that the belief in miracles was dying out as the intelligence of man increased, just as the belief in witchcraft had died out. In conclusion, Mr. Stout compared the teaching of Freethought and Christianity. He said if the human race were taught the gospel of good physical, moral, and intellectual health, that the race would be placed on a much higher platform. He recognised that Christianity had done much good in the past, as had other religions; but there would be a far higher religion—the religion of the future, when men would have knowledge instead of faith, and when they would see that it was their duty so to act that their action might be, as a great Freethinker had said, "the law of humanity."

Mr. Stout's lecture was listened to with great interest, and was much applauded. At the conclusion a vote of thanks was accorded to the lecturer, on the motion of Mr. Gotch, seconded by Mr. Kelly, and the proceedings closed with a similar civility to the chair.

God was my first, Reason my second, Man my third and last thought. Man alone is, and shall be, our God. Outside Man there is no salvation.—FEUERBACH.

The Holy Ghost is our reason and our understanding.—MUNTZER.

Mind, and the totality of the living active nerve—centres of an animal or human existence are for the unfettered natural investigator perfectly identical conceptions. Outside the nerve centres there is no mind.—BRUHL.

The church says the earth is flat; but I have seen its shadow on the moon, and I have more confidence even in a shadow than in the Church.—MAGELAN.

In practice all men are Atheists; they deny their faith by their acts.—FEUERBACH.