

Churches. In the Texan society it was not nice for the real names to be disclosed. And if Freethought is deemed not reputable, to be a freethinker will not be proclaimed by many of our weak-kneed fellow colonists. The first use of Freethought Associations is that it helps us to be truthful. Is not this a great moral gain to a community? Is hypocrisy of any value to a society? I doubt it. If then there is any organisation that helps men to be true to each other, surely that organisation, even amongst "orthodox" people, should not be discouraged. Everything that helps to a purer moral life is a gain to a community. Everything that helps to weed out hypocrites and hypocrisy from the world is a good, not an evil.

But Freethought Associations help men to be manly. They inculcate self-reliance. If a man thinks as the Churches think much will be forgiven him. Creedal belief covers more sins nowadays than charity. Let a man be a Freethinker and he is liable to be subjected to many social punishments. And if the new criminal code, introduced by the Hon. Mr Conolly, became law, to legal punishments also. These tend to destroy manliness. The fact, however, that Associations exist amongst men who do not repeat the old creeds makes men look after their self-respect more. They know that if they are persecuted for opinion's sake they will have friends in their trouble ready to help them. This is of immense service in any State.

Then there is another thing that should never be forgotten, namely, that the price we pay for liberty is eternal vigilance. The more sincere churchmen are, the more will their efforts be diverted to get all men to believe as they believe. Their creed leads them to make such efforts. They believe that what a man believes affects him here and hereafter; nay, they who say they believe that if society does not have their "faith" as its guide it must make shipwreck. It is this that explains the frantic efforts made by almost all the Churches to get the State to help them. The effort takes various shapes. Sometimes it is Blasphemy Laws; sometimes Bible in Schools Reading; sometimes cries for State Grants, &c. Every appeal to the State to favour one particular religion is an appeal to destroy liberty. A State has no more to do with men's opinions about God and immortality than it has to do with men's opinions about the rotundity of the Earth or the Anglo-Israel absurdity. All that the State has to do is to preserve equal liberty to all. And if the State's own existence is not threatened and the public peace not disturbed the State must give its citizens the utmost freedom. Even in a monarchy it is recognised that men may be Republicans and advocate Republicanism. This liberty has been won. If Republicans in violation of law plotted to kill the monarch then they have a right to be punished for treason; but so long as Republicans keep to their opinions, and to the expressions of them, the monarchical state even does not interfere. If this is allowed in a monarchy what should be the liberty of the subject in dealing with Religion? And I hope the colonists of New Zealand will never forget that unless this liberty is preserved and watched, there may be efforts made to invade the freedom we have up to the present enjoyed. The thumb-screw of the Protestants and the tortures of the Holy Inquisition may alike be so obsolete as not to be able to be revived, but we may see people denied offices because of their heresies. With strong Freethought Associations in every electorate true freedom could not in a democracy be much threatened.

There are, however, two other reasons why we should encourage Freethought Associations to which I must refer. The first is that they tend to teach men to walk alone. The second, that they tend to the solidarity of society—a sort of parrot cry of—What will you give us in the place of our Churches? often assails one's ears. Unless the Churches subserve a useful function nothing is needed to replace them. Men should be able to walk alone. There are some women who through 'use and habit' like to meet their fellow men and discuss theological questions. To them the Association is useful. And if there are men who dispassionately will review the history of the present-day creeds, and will think of what the future must be,

they will see that the time is not far distant when some of the popular beliefs will soon be as obsolete as that of the creeds of our ancestors. They believed, as Jesus Christ believed, that epilepsy was a demoniacal possession. They believed, as some of the writers of the Bible believed, that there were witches. These beliefs in these subjects are even obsolete amongst all educated people. The time is coming when a belief in an infallible book and an infallible church will alike be as obsolete. And Evolution tells us that men are so constituted that they are helped by aids in shaking off old creeds. The danger, it is said, is an anarchy in beliefs. Will Associations of Freethinkers supply this want. The Freethinkers have a creed. 'They also believe and therefore speak.' They believe that men can be moral without relying on a book. They believe that every good act tends to humanity's well-being, and every evil deed hurts the race. There is a character of morality for them higher than ten or twenty commandments. And if they can 'live the life' in the presence of their fellows without repeating what they do not believe they have learned to walk alone, and they have done more—their example will be as a light to others to guide them in their pathway to moral goodness in the world.

Then Freethought Associations tend to solidarity. One thing we need in the colonies more than another is the feeling of brotherhood. We have come from many lands, and with us we have brought sectional and national feelings. We are of diverse races. We are descended from men and women of different religions—all these things tend to separate us. The very maintenance of peace in a democracy depends upon two things: 'Respect for Law' and 'Brotherhood.' I have put 'Respect for Law' first, but I believe the feeling of 'Brotherhood' embraces it. Let us only have a feeling of Brotherhood and whatever rivalry may exist between district and district and town and town there will be no danger of the destruction of our New Zealand nationality, no dread of ever seeing civil war in our fair islands. Every society formed on a wide basis helps this feeling of brotherhood. Every association that has equal freedom and no special privileges asked as its watchword is helping the solidarity of our nation. Oddfellows Societies, Masonic Lodges, &c., &c., are all helping—but Freethought Associations, aiming at keeping freedom, are doing more—for I take it that it would be the duty of every Freethought Association in the colony to protest against the punishment of a Catholic or a Methodist, on account of his opinions, as vigorously as if one of their own members were indicted for Blasphemy.

ROBERT STOUT.

Dunedin, 16th June, 1884.

#### BROTHERHOOD OF MAN

Ye that weep in sleep,  
Souls and bodies bound,  
Ye that all night keep  
Watch for change, and weep  
That no change is found,  
Men shall do for you,  
Men, the sons of man,  
What no God would do  
Till they sought unto  
While the blind years ran,  
Brotherhood of good,  
Equal laws and rights,  
Freedom whose sweet food  
Feeds the multitude  
All their days and nights,  
With the bread full fed  
Of her body blest,  
And the soul's wine shed  
From her table spread,  
Where the world is guest,  
For no sect elect  
Is the soul's wine poured,  
And her table decked  
Whom should man reject  
From man's common board?  
God's refuse and choose,  
Grudge, and sell, and spare  
None shall man refuse,  
None of all men lose,  
None leave out of cure

—A. C. SWINBURNE.