

Notes & Queries.

"A Master Mason" has supplied your journal with a paper under the heading, "What is Masonry?" in which he states, "The foundation of the system is Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth." Would that "Master Mason" kindly inform me as to the meaning—in a masonic sense—of the terms "Brotherly Love," and "Relief."—A SUBSCRIBER.

A DEFENCE.

The following letter was sent to the 'New Zealand Times' in reply to a letter of Sir William Fox which appeared in that paper, but it was refused insertion on the ground that the "correspondence was closed." The 'Times' has exhibited so much fairness generally in its treatment of Freethought, that it is difficult to account for this instance of palpable injustice. Mr Stout's defence explains itself, and is too good not to be preserved; literally overwhelming the unchivalric knight:—

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NEW ZEALAND TIMES.

SIR,—I cannot say I am surprised at Sir William Fox's letter. It is characteristic, for in it there is displayed that which has so much marred Sir William's usefulness, namely, a recklessness of assertion not backed by facts.

Sir William first finds fault with me for criticising his lecture as reported. If the report were incorrect this is understandable, but Sir William has not pointed out wherein your reporter was inaccurate. And is it not strange, that what Sir William blames in me he has done himself. He did not hear my lecture, and yet he criticises my remarks. And I need not add that your report did not give the third of what I said. Sir William has not replied to the "points" I made even as reported, but he makes the general statement that, through the greater part of my lecture I was "shamefully beating the air." This may be true, for it was answering Sir William Fox's remarks.

To come to the reiterated slander of Sir William on Mrs Besant and Mr Bradlaugh, I repeat what I said that Sir William's remarks are "false and untrue." Nay, I go further and charge him with repeating a slander he cannot justify, and for which he can have no excuse to offer, for he has read Dr. Knowlton's pamphlet.

First let me notice the reference to Mrs Besant. This is how a knight, one invested with a chivalric order, refers to an English lady of pure life and high culture:—"A female associate, the separated wife of a Church of England clergyman." It is true that Mrs Besant is a female, and that she is a business partner of Mr Bradlaugh, and it is also a fact that she and her husband, because of their religious differences, voluntarily agreed to separate. A stranger to the facts would, however, necessarily assume that Mrs Besant had been guilty of some misconduct that had led to the separation from her husband. And then how shall I characterise the Christian fairness—no, I withdraw the phrase—the unchristian-like bias of Sir William, when, in stating what the jury found, he carefully suppresses the half of the jury's finding. The jury found the following verdict:—"We are unanimously of opinion that the book in question is calculated to deprave public morals, but at the same time we entirely exonerate the defendants from any corrupt motive in publishing it."

I ask was it honest to suppress the latter part of the finding? But that was not all. A person unacquainted with the facts would assume that the conduct of the defendants had been so bad that they were at once fined. The Chief Justice of England (Sir A. Cockburn) speaking of the exonerations of the defendants of any corrupt motive said:—"They (the jury) were satisfied that, under the influence of a strong belief that the evils of over-population were so great that it was desirable to have recourse to means of preventive checks, and that, impelled by this opinion and desire, the defendants had published this work, but not with the intention to corrupt the morals of young or old." And so impressed was the Court with the honesty of the defendants' motives that the Court (Chief Justice Cockburn and Justice Mellor) said they were prepared to "discharge them in their own recognizances to be of good behaviour in the future" if the defendants had undertaken to discontinue the publication. Was it fair to give the one-sided account of the trial that appears in Sir William Fox's letter? The jury and the two eminent judges came, after a patient investigation of all the facts, to the conclusion that Mrs Besant and Mr Bradlaugh had pure motives in publishing this pamphlet; and I ask the most biased whether Sir William Fox's judicial faculty is as much developed as that of the late Chief Justice Cockburn or that of Justice Mellor? Whoever accused Sir William of calumny in expressing any opinion?

But the "point" in Sir William Fox's criticism in the Knowlton pamphlet is that it advocates "Free Love." If this be true he can quote the passage and name the page. I challenge him to do so. He has the pamphlet, yes even he has studied this Free Love Catechism! The preface of Mrs Besant and Mr Bradlaugh explaining their attitude in publishing it says:—"We republish this pamphlet, honestly believing that on all questions affecting the happiness of the people, whether they be theological, political, or social, the fullest right of free discussion ought to be maintained at all hazards. We do not personally endorse all that

Dr. Knowlton says: his 'Philosophical Proem' seems to us full of philosophical mistakes, and, as neither of us are doctors, we are not prepared to endorse his medical views, but since progress can only be made through discussion, and no discussion is possible where differing opinions are suppressed, we claim the right to publish our opinions, so that the public, enabled to see all sides of the question, may have the materials for forming a sound judgment." And, if necessary, I can refer to passages in the pamphlet where early marriages are encouraged and illicit intercourse and prostitution denounced. But again I ask Sir William to name the passages on which he relies in proof of his strong statements. If he cannot, then as a knight, as a man, he should humbly apologise to the lady and gentleman he has slandered.

I do not enter on the question whether preventive checks are or are not moral. This I know, there are now preventive checks that are thinning the families of the poor. Who can read 'Outcast London' and not acknowledge this? Starvation and preventive disease are checking, and that effectually, the increase of the families of the poor. And I look upon these two checks as sad and heartrending. I wonder if Sir William approves of poor people bringing into the world children who, through the poverty of their parents, can get no food, nor shelter sufficient to preserve life. If he does not, what is his remedy? Christianity as yet has not put an end to poverty, or disease, or wretchedness. And are sincere people to be branded as criminals who with a noble desire to save the poor from wretchedness publish a book that in their honest opinion may tend to do so?

I am, &c.,

ROBERT STOUT.

THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE "VESTIGES OF CREATION."

FROM THE 'SCOTSMAN.'

Forty years have elapsed since the first appearance of the "Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation." The book at once attracted attention by the brilliancy and vigour of its style, for its lucid presentation of scientific fact and theory, and, above all, for the boldness with which it attacked the accepted theories and conclusions of science and of theology, and advanced hypotheses concerning the origin and development of life on the planet which, if not altogether new, had never before been presented in so popular a form. Immediately the bigots of science and of theology rose up in anger, and, deep answering to deep, pronounced on the book the greater malediction. The controversy that for a time was fought so hotly round the book has almost "fallen dumb;" the tide-mark of scientific inquiry and demonstration has risen far beyond the limits contemplated in the "Vestiges," and the orthodox of our day must wonder that a work so reverent in tone should ever have been branded as pestilent atheism. Within the larger controversy over the doctrines and facts set forth in the "Vestiges" raged another, bearing reference to its authorship. Many wild guesses were hazarded on the subject, but the general drift of opinion gave the credit of the obloquy to the late Dr. Robert Chambers. What doubt may have lingered in the public mind on this subject has at length been finally set at rest. A new edition of the "Vestiges"—the twelfth—is on the point of being issued by Messrs. W. & R. Chambers, and in an introduction Mr. Alexander Ireland, as "the sole surviving depository of the secret," makes a clean breast of the story of the origin and publication of the work. The guess which connected the name of Dr. Robert Chambers with the book was right; he was, Mr. Ireland tells us, the sole author. It could only, however, have been a guess or suspicion, for, we are informed, the secret of the authorship was entrusted to no more than four persons, all of whom loyally kept it. Three of these—the author's wife, his brother Dr. William Chambers, and Mr. Robert Cox, editor of the 'Phrenological Journal'—are now dead: and Mr. Ireland, being under no express promise to conceal it longer, has hastened to relieve his mind of the secret which he has carried about with him for forty years. He tells us, in the narrative which he has prefixed to the new edition, that up to the close of his life the late Dr. William Chambers was unwilling that his brother's connection with the work should be divulged, and expressed a wish that the matter should be "allowed to lapse into oblivion." Mr. Ireland has taken a different view, and most men will be of opinion that he has judged rightly in deciding to clear away a literary mystery, which perhaps need never have existed, or at least need not have existed so long.