

"CHRISTIAN FREETHOUGHT."

"Prove all things, hold fast that which is good," 1 Thessalonians, C. V. verse 21.

The above heading was the title chosen by the Rev. C. Worboys, for a discourse delivered by him at the St. Asaph Street Church in this city.

It is not often that I venture beneath the roof of a Christian Tabernacle. In the first place I have listened for many years to some of England's ablest "Divines," and I have attentively studied many of the writings of the advocates and defenders of the Christian faith; but I think I must have been born with a critical and enquiring mind, for I became a Sceptic at an early age, and though I struggled with much anxiety of mind and perturbation of spirit to dispel the doubts, I only became more and more convinced of the fallacy of Christian dogmas. For the last twenty years, whenever I have listened to any of the spiritual guides of this colony, I have never heard a single new argument, and but seldom, an old one cleverly put, in favor of theology. This alone might be held as sufficient reason for not going again; but there are other reasons which I think are deserving of consideration. I conscientiously object to putting money into the pocket of the Churches, as I hold that it is unjust and unwise to support error: at the same time it requires some amount of firmness to pass the plate, and be thought shabby, as one would most assuredly be.

Then, like the Parsons, I must have "a thirdly"—I consider it is the duty of every honest Freethinker to discountenance the causes and practice of intemperance. Don't gasp, dear reader; I do not insinuate that the orthodox are addicted to drinking; nor do I believe that they indulge in the use of alcoholic stimulants any more than I do myself, but I find a large amount of what, for want of a better word, I must call *Spiritual* inebriety existing in all Christian society. The moral and intellectual faculties appear to be "muddled" by deep draughts of Trinitarian mystery, and by quaffing at

"The fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Emanuel's veins."

The moral light which should illumine the lines of demarcation between truth and fiction, burns but dimly in the brain saturated with mysticism; and that intellectual activity which should "Prove all things," slumbers sluggishly under the influence of theological narcotics; it holds fast, not "to that which is good," because it has been proved good, but rather to that which is old, and gilded over with the Dutch metal of conventional gentility. And yet, there are thousands who conscientiously disbelieving nine-tenths of the dogmas of Christianity, continue to patronise these spiritual dram shops.

A course of three sermons by Mr. Worboys was largely advertised under a general heading of (I quote from memory) "Faith and Freethought." His first lecture was entitled "Christian Secularism." Ill-health prevented me from hearing it, but on Sunday June 2nd the novelty of his title tempted me to risk some personal inconvenience, and I must say I was considerably disappointed in the quality of the mental pabulum I had to "inwardly digest." The following paragraph cut from the 'Star' of June 2nd is a proof of the way in which things can be veneered, and made to seem what they are not:—"The second of three discourses on 'Faith and Freethought' was delivered in St. Asaph Street Church last night. The Rev. C. Worboys defined thought as 'opinions about facts,' and showed that while personal freedom is limited by restrictions which are necessary for the general good, thought is limited in its freedom by the facts of science, history and religion. He spoke of the benefit accruing to religion from Freethought, even from opponents, and the greater breadth it had given to theology. He urged Freethinkers to have their thoughts free from prejudice and bias of any kind, especially from the bias of moral antagonism, from which the opposition of many arose, and to give Christ a fair chance. There was a good and attentive congregation." Any one reading the above might readily believe that the discourse had been a very able and argumentative one. The exhortation of the text was not so much as referred to after the opening. A few extraordinary assertions were made which would not hold water, were they submitted to discussion: it is in the security of the pulpit that such utterances can live, and only there. For

instance, that knowledge was the boundary of thought, or in other words—man could only think of facts. I mentally exclaimed, whence comes all the fiction? Then we were told that man's personality was a proof of the existence of a personal God; that the instinct of worship was universal, with one or two exceptions, that when a faculty was given, there must be an object for that faculty. After a string of such platitudes Mr. Worboys declared he did not believe in evolution; it required too great an exercise of his imagination to bridge over the missing link; he thought it much easier to believe in a direct act of Creation as taught by the Bible. He said "I do not think with this body." I presume he meant with his brain as part of his material organisation. He "only knew matter by its attributes." I am inclined to the belief that no one else has any other criterion. He then asserted that "God could not do an unrighteous act, that he could not create a man with the preordained intention of damning him." The reverend gentleman's reason for that belief was, that he (Mr. Worboys) had a moral nature. God was his father, therefore God had a moral nature. I must not dwell however upon the nonsense and mere twaddle which culminated in begging his hearers to give Jesus Christ a chance. I thought while listening that if the poor carpenter of Bethlehem had been arraigned at court and had no abler advocate than the Rev. C. Worboys his chance would be but a poor one.

I should have gone to St. Asaph Street Church once more to have heard the last of the course, entitled "What will you do with Jesus?" but ill health again compels me to shun exposure to the night air. In conclusion I would say that it strikes me as extremely pitiable that men should resist the lights of science and cling with a cowardly fear to the rotten old wreck of Christianity, while their reason and the force of opinion around them compel them to let first one and then another of the planks of the poor old vessel drift away. When a man hesitates to admit that Freethought had rendered the Churches more tolerant, and declared that he does not believe that men are born to be damned, the hold that Christianity has on him, or he on it, seems to me of a very doubtful character. In my opinion it is the fear of Mrs. Grundy that has the largest amount of influence; the loss of caste, perhaps of his bread and butter, makes many a man pause; and thus it is that Christianity, or its outward form, is kept up, and continues to receive the adoration of the multitude. While the ignorant know not how, and the timid fear to "prove all things," and others fail to "hold fast that which is good" even when they have found it, the march of Science still goes on; the bulwarks of superstition and ignorance are crumbling away, like Mr. Worboys' belief in hell; and on that benign influence I rest my hope.

THE DAWN OF FREEDOM.

TUNE—*Sunday and Monthly Collection, No. 2.*

There is a light, softly stealing,
Spreading o'er the world afar,
The Truth, that Science is revealing;
Let us hail the rising star.
Oh glorious dawning! can it be
The morn of freedom we can see?
Can see, can see,
Can see, can see,
Yes Freedom's morning we can see.

That brilliant light shall shine on all,
A glorious constellation,
Piercing dark error's gloomy pall
With Truth's pure revelation.
Oh glorious dawning! can it be
 &c., &c.

Press onward then, the gate throw down,
The Halls of Reason open,
Though Priests and Bigots on us frown,
Our ranks shall not be broken.
Oh glorious dawning! can it be,
 &c., &c.

The weak and timid still may pray;
Let us be up and doing,
Linked heart and hand in close array
The work of love pursuing.
Oh glorious dawning! can it be,
 &c., &c.

CHARLES J. RAE.

July 13th, 1881.

Conscience is the voice of Man, ingrained into our hearts, commanding us to work for Man.