THE CHRISTCHURCH FREETHOUGHT HALL LICENSING CASE.

('Christchurch Star,' June 27.)

The question of the licensing of the Freethought Hall, which exercised the City Council some weeks ago, was made the subject of three informations heard before Messrs R. Beetham, R. M., R. Westenra, and J. E. Parker. The occasion on which it was alleged that the hall had been used for such purposes as made it necessary to be licensed were the evenings of April 20, 21, and 22, when Mr. Charles Bright gave the three lectures which he delivered on his last visit to Christchurch. F. C. Hall was charged that, being the owner or having the control of the Freethought Hall, he had allowed the building to be used for the purposes of a public performance on the above date without being licensed by the City Council, contrary to Section 323 of the Municipal Corporations Act.

Mr. J. B. Fisher appeared for the City Council, and Mr. Joynt for defendant.

Mr. Fisher called the following evidence.—Sergeant Morice stated that he knew the building which had formerly been the German Church, and was now used as the Freethought Hall. Saw defendant on May 30. He told witness he was Secretary of the Canterbury Freethought Association. Had a further conversation with him on June 13, and he told witness that the Association gave the hall to Mr. Bright for his lectures free of charge, and Mr. Bright was to receive the takings for lighting and cleaning expenses, and that if any person had insisted on coming in he would not have been compelled to pay. Had seen the advertisment of the lectures in the newspapers. Mr. Joynt would object unless the advertisement could be traced to Mr. Hall. Mr. Fisher could not do that.—Cross-examined: Did not know the subject of the lectures. Frank Hobbs, Inspector of Public Buildings for the City Council, said that no license had been taken out for the Freethought Hall. He had asked defendant to do so, in view of the fact that charge was made for admission to these lectures, but Mr. Hall had replied that he did not see why this hall should be licensed more than that of other religious bodies.—H. E. Lonsdale, a member of the Freethought Society, said he had attended the lectures given by Mr Bright. could not recollect the titles of the lectures. Mr. Hall was Secretary, Mr. Pratt President, and Mr. Webber vice-President of the Association. Recollected Mr. Hall reading a letter from Mr. Pratt on the occasion of one of the lectures. There was a band in connection with the Freethought Hall, and they played usually on Sunday evenings. Members contributed 6d. each evening they attended.

This was all the evidence for the prosecution.

F. C. Hall, the defendant, said that Mr. Bright did give three lectures of a religious tendency on April 20, 21, and 22 in the Freethought Hall. It was understood that persons admitted would be asked for 1s, but if they objected the charge would not be made.—Cross-examined: The first lecture was on "What Civilisation has done for Christianity." Witness thought that Mr. Bright proved that Christianity had not done much for civilisation. The second lecture was on "Ingersoll," and the third on "Is the Bible God Worthy of Reverence?" There were more than a dozen people present on the three evenings who were not members of the Society. Witness arranged with Mr. Bright that he should have the hall free if he paid for the gas and cleaning.—Mr Joynt submitted that the information must be dismissed. A lecture was not a "public performance" referred to by the Act. He thought it was absurd in this free age to take exception to a lecture given for the purpose of showing that Christianity had not advanced civilisation. Learned counsel referred to the various views obtaining in society with reference to the use of the Bible, and argued that a lecture on religious subjects, such as this had been, or even any lecture, did not come under the Act. The words of the Act evidently referred to amusing performances. He would draw attention to the fact that the lecture was on a religious subject, and that the payment for admission was voluntary. He quoted Baxter v. Langley, L. Q. 4 C. P. 21, and other cases, to show that such gatherings as the one under consideration could be held in unlicensed buildings.—Mr. Fisher said that the Municipal Corporations Act was passed to enable the City Councils to take order for the protection of the citizens, and section 323 had this intention with regard to the means of egress from public buildings, and he believed that the words "public performances" would, if construed strictly, include religious services.—Mr. Beetham: Then why single this hall out?—Mr. Joynt thought they ought to have begun with the Cathedral. Mr. Fisher was dealing with the present case. If there was to be any exception in favour of religious services, it should be of a devotional character.—Mr. Beetham had understood Mr. Hall that the meetings were for the "devotion to humanity."—Mr. Joynt was prepared to prove that the performance was highly devotional.—Mr. Beetham, after a short consultation with his brother Magistrates, said the Bench were unanimously of opinion that the information would not hold water, and that there had been no "public performance" within the meaning of the Act. He thought it was no more a public performance than that in the Cathedral, which was exempt from license. Case dismissed.—Mr. Joynt applied for a fee, but as the information had been laid by the police, the Bench did not allow it.

FULMINATION AGAINST LIBERTY.

In his encyclical against the Freemasons, the Pope says:—"The sect of Masons aim unanimously, and steadily also, at the possession of the education of children. They understand that a tender age is easily bent, and that there is no more useful way of preparing for the State such citizens as they wish. Hence, in the instruction and education of children, they do not leave to the ministers of the Church any part, either in directing or watching them. In many places, they have gone so far that children's education is all in the hands of laymen; and from moral teaching every idea is banished of those holy and great duties which bind together man and God. The principles of social science follow. Here, naturalists teach that men have all the same rights, and are perfectly equal in condition; that every man is naturally independent; that no one has a right to command others; that it is tyranny to keep men subject to any other authority than that which emanates from themselves. Hence, the people are sovereign; those who rule have no authority but by the commission and concession of the people. So that they can be deposed willing or unwilling, according to the wishes of the people. The origin of all rights and civil duties is in the people or in the State, which is ruled according to the new principles of liberty. The State must be godless; no reason why one religion ought to be preferred to another; all to be held in the same esteem."

THEORY OF LIFE.

The late Professor Faraday adopted the theory that the natural age of man is 100 years. The duration of life is measured by the time of growth. In the camel the union takes place at eight, in the horse at five, in the lion at four, in the dog at two, in the rabbit at one. The natural termination is five removes from these several points. Man being twenty years in growing lives five times twenty years—that is, 100; the camel is eight years in growing, and lives forty years; and so with other animals. The man who does not die of sickness lives everywhere from 80 to 100 years. The Professor divides life into equal halves, growth and decline and these into infancy, youth, virility, and age. Infancy extends to the twentieth year, youth to the fiftieth, because it is in this period the tissues become firm, and virility from fifty to seventy-five, during which the organism remains complete; and at seventy-five old age commences to last a longer or shorter time, as the diminution of reserved forces is hastened or retarded.—Scientific American.