

The growing conviction on the part of the official representatives of the Catholic Church, that the intelligent and educated members of their own communion can no longer be controlled "like dumb driven cattle," and forced to turn from the broad path of social duty into any narrow little lane that the Church declares is the only road to Heaven, is perhaps the reason why of late such persistent efforts have been made to redress the balance on the side of ignorance. With this object in view, the Catholic priests in various parts of the colony have made use of that perfect organisation which has always characterised their Church, to "work" the system of nominated immigration in their own interests. The plan adopted is to induce as many people as possible to nominate the lower class of Irish Catholics. The men are in a very short time available as electors, who are manipulated as "block votes" at all elections, general and local, throughout the colony. The women are indirectly quite as useful, for where Bridget is Pat soon comes. In this way the relative proportions of creeds and nationalities is being gradually altered, as the immigration returns show. We commend this fact to the consideration of the Legislature and the Government.

It must be confessed that the supporters of a supernatural creed which does not rest upon the solid rock of fact, but upon the shifting sands of popular belief, are wise in their generation when they insist upon having the control of the education of the young. It is only prejudicing the growing intellect, conscience, and imagination in favour of accepted dogmas that in our day gives them a chance of being retained in after life, in spite of the disintegrating influences of modern surroundings. As Mr. Matthew Arnold says, "Our point is that the objections to miracles"—and he might have added to supernaturalism generally—"do, and more and more will, without insistence, without attack, without controversy, make their own force felt." And he adds—"It is the time-spirit which is sapping the proof [of Christianity] from miracles—it is the Zeit-Geist itself. Whether we attack them or whether we defend them does not much matter. The human mind is turning away from them."

There is a fashion in religion as in most other things, and there are not wanting signs, that Christianity of the old definite type is ceasing to be fashionable, and belief in it is coming to be regarded as a mark of intellectual and social inferiority. So far as this change in public opinion is due to increased knowledge and culture, it ought to be welcomed by all Freethinkers, who have long been assured by the orthodox that "society" was against them, and that their ranks were only recruited from the class of the half educated and wholly discontented radicals of the large towns, who as the natural enemies of order, hated Christianity as its embodiment. Now it is acknowledged that the chief danger to the creed of Christendom arises from the fact that while it is attacked by the foremost men of the age, its defence is either official, or is undertaken by those who have no idea of the strength of their enemies' position.

People who have come to the conclusion that the civilised world has, from the time of Constantine at least, been the victim of a huge delusion, and because Christianity embodies many true ideas, has accepted

the myths with which they are associated, on the authority of the Churches, are naturally apt to regard with suspicion many moral and social truths hitherto held with undoubting confidence. In short, the utter collapse of one authority throws discredit upon all authorities, just as one bank failure shakes confidence in all other banks, or the fraudulent conduct of a trustee makes other trustees suspected. Now this is a prejudice which should be carefully guarded against. As Sir G. C. Lewis long ago demonstrated, in his excellent work on "The influence of Authority in matters of Opinion," that the value of authority is at its very lowest in religious questions, just as it is at its highest in those branches of science in which experts are unanimous, such as Astronomy or Physics. Between these extremes lies that large region where the presumption is in favour of the truth which rests upon a wide experience, and is supported by principles which have been carefully thought out by those who have devoted their attention to them. If Freethinkers would carefully consider what *would* should properly attach to any authoritative statement, they would be saved from the risk of discrediting their own cause by being too ready to support any crude project of social reform, which too often resembles the creed they have rejected, by appealing rather to the feelings than to fact and reason.

The practical experience of ages, with which economic science is in complete accord, fully justifies the aversion felt by the majority of thinking men to all the wild socialistic schemes which are so freely advocated in the present day. Nearly all of them are based upon the notion that whatever can be controlled by legislation can be improved by it. Given a parliamentary majority and these "projectors" think they can use it as a lever to move the world. They forget that the fulcrum is wanting if the facts of human nature are left out of the calculation. Were society reorganised to-day on some abstract theory of social justice, it would begin to settle down to-morrow in accordance with the organic forces by which it has been evolved. The legislative dose, or shock, would have produced an illness more or less severe in the body politic, and its various organs would soon resume their normal functions. Such considerations might be thought to imply a contented or perhaps a discontented fatalism, but they do not. On the contrary, they point to the possibility of so modifying social relations as to produce the greatest possible good consistent with the existing state of the society sought to be improved, but to do this demands the care of the skilful political physician, instead of the rashness of the ignorant quack. Still less can we trust to the sentimentalists where tender mercies are generally cruel. Nature is utterly regardless of human wishes that are not in accord with her laws. From the sentimental point of view how admirable were the attempts of Governments to prevent speculators from buying up corn when cheap and selling it to the people when dear, and yet modern science has shown that such interference converted a scarcity into a famine.

Very similar to those sumptuary laws which worked such mischief in the middle ages are all those proposals to interfere with the relations between capital and labour which in the form of "eight hour" bills and "protection to local industry" seem becoming increasingly popular in this colony. Were half the attention