

to investigate obscure phenomena in which they have an intense personal interest. Even a doctor often thinks it is unwise to prescribe for himself.

If we are not mistaken in the identity of "Asmodeus," the writer of those notes on social and other matters headed "Round the Corners," in the paper quoted from above, there is a cause for his dislike to Freethinkers who do not happen to be Spiritualists. "Enjoying the fullest liberty," he says, "those stupid Freethought people are degenerating into license. "But the other day they shrieked and clamoured for "the right of private judgment, and to be permitted to "entertain particular views. Now, having secured "these privileges, they turn round and, kicking up "their heels at all and sundry, disclose the cloven hoof "of the severest dogmatism and intolerance, and openly "sneer at and deride all who do not think exactly as "themselves. They don't consider other people's feelings, not they, but deliberately say nasty things in "advertisements, and wilfully, and of malice aforethought, outrage some of the holiest feelings of their "fellow creatures." Any manifestation of malignity, bigotry, or intolerance of feeling, is undoubtedly wrong, and does far more harm to the cause advocated than to that of its opponents. Considering the example set by orthodoxy in all its forms, it is little to be wondered at, however much it may be regretted, if those who dissent from received opinions occasionally fall into a similar error. It does not follow, however, that all modes of expression, or courses of conduct, which happen to hurt some people's feelings, are wrong. The very existence of Freethinkers must hurt a great many persons' feelings, and if no feelings must be hurt no reforms can be effected. Certainly, Christianity has never shown the slightest tenderness to opponents in this respect. The "churlish priest," at the grave of Ophelia, expresses the attitude always taken by the church and its adherents with regard to human feeling. The rule clearly is that no *needless* pain shall be inflicted, but those who suffer from it are not always the best judges how much is required to produce the desired effect.

Sydney Smith remarks:—"We are a good deal "amused, indeed, with the extreme disrelish which Mr. "John Styles exhibits to the humour and pleasantry "with which he admits the Methodists to have been "attacked; but Mr. John Styles should remember that "it is not the practice with the destroyers of vermin to "allow the little victims a *retort* upon the weapons used "against them." Perhaps the "stupid Freethought "people" have in some cases come to regard "Asmodeus" and his likes among the Spiritualists, much as Sydney Smith regarded the Methodists, and "are convinced a little laughter will do them more harm than "all the arguments in the world. The "nest of "sanctimonious cobblers" routed out by Sydney Smith have their parallel in the gentlemen who form "harmonious circles," and receive the revelations of chairs and tables in a "prayerful spirit," and on the strength of utterances lightly assumed to be those of disembodied spirits—for even admitting the facts, there are dozens of more rational explanations of them—accept so much of the teaching of the Bible as accords with them, and are in fact quite prepared to discard the teachings of science and common sense in favour of worn-out superstitions patched up with new

fanaticism. A text and a table seem of equal authority, and a future state of gibbering idiots affords them the "consolations of religion." Any attempt to examine the question dispassionately is discountenanced, in view of the importance of re-establishing the discredited doctrine of immortality. The oddest part of the whole affair is that the history of spiritism seems almost forgotten, and its modern dupes have gained nothing from past experience. An article in the 'Westminster Review' for July and October, 1857, on "Spirits and Spirit-rapping," might be read by "Asmodeus" and his credulous friends with considerable advantage.

Mr. Joseph Symes in an able article in the 'Liberator' on "The Originality of Jesus" quotes from a lecture of the Bishop of Melbourne the following passage which he says "may very well be taken to describe the position of himself and the churches in antagonism with "Freethinkers." In reading it substitute clergy for "scribes," and an Atheistic lecturer for the Galilean peasant:—"Men looked up to them reverently, "and thought themselves honoured by 'dusting themselves with the dust of their feet.' Conceive, then, "the startled amazement, the ineffable scorn, of such a "learned clique as this when it found a young Galilean "peasant, without its own learning, seizing in his hand "of might, rending away and scattering that sacred "hedge which with ages of toil they had succeeded in "building, and which kept the way of the *true of life*. "It was intolerable insult to them. It implied that all "their learning was useless, and all their pride "contemptible. The scorn and fury of the classical "scholar of the last century, when we heard some "audacious scientist call his making and capping of "verses useless trifling, would be as nothing to the rage "of the Jewish scribe. For the learning of the scribe "was not only his wisdom, but also his religion. It "was the key with which he opened or shut the kingdom of heaven, the authority by which he bound on "men's consciences or unloosed those obligations which "regulated all Jewish thought and life. To deride that "learning, to set it at naught, to cast it out as useless "lumber, yea, as god-dishonouring falsehood, was to "confound thought, to break up society, to let in "heathenism, to bring on the reign of chaos and "ancient night. They had nourished a serpent in "their bosom. Whence had he got his insidious "thoughts, his desolating enthusiasm? He must be a "madman, a demoniac. He must either be silenced "or destroyed. The more clearly we see that to be the "feeling of the Scribes and Pharisees, the more readily "we shall adopt the merciful judgment of St. Peter, in "his second sermon after Pentecost:—'I wot that "through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.'"

When for Paley's simple idea that the New Testament furnishes us with the testimony of the "original "witnesses of the Christian miracles" who required much the same amount of evidence as most men would require to prove the truth of a miracle in the present day, we substitute the proved historical fact, that like the old, the canon of the New Testament was a gradual growth, it is at once apparent that we are not dealing with direct testimony at all, but with hearsay evidence, only taking such definite form as we have in the four Gospels towards the end of the second century. Considering the nature of Jewish tradition, the learned ignorance and gross superstition which prevailed at the