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*Price Threepence.*

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## SIGNS OF THE TIMES.

JANUARY, 1877.

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**S**ELDOM has a month passed away so utterly devoid of all ecclesiastical news as that which has just been added to "our yesterdays." In the world political there is news enough and to spare; but in the world religious a great calm prevails—a curious and amusing change from the weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth lately heard from the dignitaries of the Church. Whether the triumphant shouts that—from the sceptical camp—echoed back their plaints, have scared them into silence, they only know, what is certain, is that there is "silence in

heaven," after the trumpet has sounded. As this lull will probably last only for the space of "half-an-hour," we will take advantage of it to rest on our oars, and to look back over what 1876 has done in the orthodox and the unorthodox worlds. Last year opened with a "Missionary Commissioner" to Central Africa, in the person of Mr. Stanley, a native of Bristol, best known in his character of correspondent of the *New York Herald* and discoverer of Dr. Livingstone. Earnest Christians congratulated themselves on the "opened door," and were full of plans for the evangelisation of Central Africa. Last year closed with a chorus of cries of disgust against the Missionary Commissioner for his brutal conduct to the natives. He may be carrying them Bibles; but he certainly smites with the sword of the Lord and of Gideon. He is a missionary that would have gladdened the heart of Moses with his zeal for Jehovah. Unfortunately, he is giving to the natives so unpleasant an idea of the Christian missionary that any who go after him, less well armed, will certainly pay for his brutality. Natives who should, without cause, attack and kill European travellers, would justly be stigmatised as murderous savages, who should be punished for their crimes. What language, then, ought to be applied to a "civilized gentleman" who, without provocation, slaughters harmless natives, and teaches them distrust and hatred of every white man? We all know that Mr. Stanley is only following out the good old orthodox plan of spreading Christianity; but the days of Charlemagne do not need revival, and the nineteenth century ought to be an improvement on the ninth.

Mr. Stanley is not the only missionary who has done but little to advance the Christian cause; that far more august messenger of the gospel, Albert Edward, high Prince of Wales, sorely disappointed the hopes of those who regarded him as "an instru-

ment" for spreading the faith in India. His visit to the East has Indianised England more than it has Anglicised India. Instead of Indian ladies wearing crosses (*Christian* ones, of course), English ladies wear swamies, "abominable little Hindu gods." How lamentable a result is here! In Church matters, India has been most unfortunate. The two new young Bishops of Bombay and of Columbo have set their respective dioceses in flames. They are both ritualists of an advanced type, and naturally clash with the semi-dissenting missionaries of the Church Missionary Society. The special war has taken place in Ceylon, where the Bishop of Columbo suspended nearly all the missionaries, and insisted on their submission to his authority. The laity supported the missionaries whom they knew against the Bishop whom they did not know, and the strife became very bitter. It was taken up in the English Church papers. The *Church Times* talked much of episcopal authority—which it reverences in Ceylon though not in England—and of the duty of all the faithful (Ritualistic) to aid and comfort the aggrieved bishop, and to strengthen him against the rebels. The *Rock* issued fiery articles against the ritualist wolf in episcopal sheep's clothing, and exhorted the missionaries to stand firm, and the faithful (evangelical) to rally round them and help them by prayer and purse. The Bishop wrote home in July and August to the parent society, and in November a committee, appointed to consider "the matters in dispute between the Bishop of Columbo and the missionaries in the island," delivered their decision. This judgment is somewhat elaborate, and is wholly against the Bishop, and in favour of the Society's missionaries; the Bishop wrote asking that the Society should discontinue its connection with the Tamil Coolie Mission Association, should recognise the freedom of chaplains to open schools and hold services for the Coolies, should recall the Rev. W.

Clark—who kept to his work in defiance of the Bishop—and should recognise the Bishop's right to “a veto on the appointment of catechists, and to exercise authority over all congregations as to place, time, and manner of service.” The Church Missionary Society replies, that the Tamil Coolie Association has raised its own fund for supporting catechists, and has placed them under the superintendence of the missionaries, and has further, by careful rules, guarded against “any infraction of Church of England principles in the management of the Mission;” that this arrangement has been carried on for twenty years without any censure from the successive Bishops of Columbo, and that “therefore the committee cannot recognise the right of the Bishop to demand its discontinuance, or to take the work of the mission into his own hands;” the Society, as to the ministration of chaplains, says that it has neither the power nor the wish to prevent chaplains from doing as they like, but it most emphatically declines to recognize their right to interfere with Church Missionary work, or to take “any part in it except by permission.” The Rev. W. Clark has appealed to the Metropolitan, and the Society can do nothing until that appeal is decided; but Mr. Clark has been a “faithful and laborious missionary” for the last twenty-eight years, and did quite right in sticking to his post. As to the Bishop's wish for a veto, and for unlimited authority, the Society cannot see its way “to comply with the Bishop's request.” In addition to these quarrels, which serve as amusement to the watching “heathen,” Free Thought is honeycombing India in every direction; free thought pamphlets and articles are translated and circulated widely among the Hindus, and the keen and subtle Hindu intellect is busy in analysing the creed of Christendom; the Bramo Somaj progresses slowly, winning adherence among the more devotional minds, while forms of free

thought far more advanced are making their way rapidly, and are being disseminated through the three presidencies. On the whole, the prospects of Rationalism in India are most hopeful, and the year's progress is marked.

If we look over to America, we find the army of heresy steadily winning its way, though, as everywhere, arrayed against a mass of superstition. The year is there principally marked by the formation of a National Liberal League, with Francis E. Abbot, the well-known editor of the *Index*, as its President, and among its Vice-Presidents such men as A. B. Frothingham, Horace Seaver, D. M. Bennett, and B. F. Underwood. The League is formed to "accomplish the total separation of Church and State," so that no form of religion or of non-religion may be in any way recognised by the Civil Authorities. It aims at gaining equal rights for all citizens, without distinction of creed, and at eliminating from civil matters all recognition of religion. The League has already received adhesions from every quarter, and bids fair to become a power in America, and to have the most salutary influence. Beyond the establishment of this Union there is nothing during the past year specially worthy of notice in the religious world of the great Republic. There have been some sharp struggles between the Rationalists and the Sabbatarians, in which the Sabbatarians have, unluckily, triumphed, and Messrs. Moody and Sankey have gone on their injurious way, but are happily gradually fading out of public notice. They have at least done one useful thing among all the mischief: they have disgusted a large number of sensible people with orthodox Christianity.

Travelling to Europe, what has 1876 done for us? In Spain, a retrograde policy is in the ascendant for the moment, and the Church is triumphant. Article XI. of the Constitution is so loosely worded as to be

capable of any severity of construction against all who do not conform to the Established Church, and it has been put in force against the Protestant congregations with great rigour. The English Protestants have appealed to Lord Derby to interfere, but as yet nothing has been done beyond "representations." Meanwhile, Free Thought is growing stronger, and Rationalistic works are sold with tolerable freedom; yet, on the whole, Spain is a black blot in the sky.

France is more hopeful, although Clericalism is struggling violently for supremacy, and it will be long before it ceases to be a danger to the State. Its latest effort, however, has been defeated. In the report of the Budget Committee, the grant in support of the Church was reduced, and the reduction has been carried in spite of the bitter opposition of the Government, and of fierce debate in the *Chambre des Députés*. A *mot* of Prince Napoleon's, dropped during his vigorous speech against Clericalism—which he declared to have been the ruin of France in 1870—seems likely to live: "Quand vous semez du jésuite, vous récoltez des révoltés." Gambetta, in the course of the same debate, openly declared himself a Free Thinker, and the whole tendency of the feeling of the majority in the House was distinctly anti-clerical. Even yet more significant, perhaps, was the debate which took place in consequence of the direction of the representative of the Minister of War, that no military honours should be accorded to those over whose remains no religious service was performed. The feeling of anger aroused by this communication was embittered by the non-ratification by the Ministry of an order sent to the *Préfet du Rhône* by M. de Marcère, directing him to repeal some decrees of his predecessor on the subject of civil funerals. It was said that M. de Marcère was menaced with dismissal on this account, small as was the step he had taken towards liberality. By the late *Préfet's* decree it

was enacted that the declaration of a death to the registrar should be accompanied by another declaration stating whether or no the burial would be performed by a minister of one of the worships recognised by the State. Except under the most exceptional circumstances, civil funerals might only take place at six o'clock in the morning during the summer, and at seven o'clock during the winter. This circular was issued in 1873, and though it was challenged, the Parliament of the day refused to interfere. The Funeral Honours Bill was rejected by the Committee to which it was submitted, and the rejection was accompanied by a resolution affirming "that the essential principles of modern society require funeral honours to be rendered without any distinction of religious opinions." In both these questions, therefore, the clerical party has got the worst of the struggle. Thus the Burial Question is stirring in France as well as in England, and in both countries the final answer is certain, however it may be delayed. Clericalism is strong, but Humanity is stronger, and before many more years pass away the open grave will be undesecrated by war of words, and the mourners will be left to bury their dead in peace. France is steadily growing more and more free-thinking, but much, very much, remains to be done in the rural districts before clericalism will be really rooted up.

In Italy, Free Thought spreads fast, and the *neri* are more and more disliked by the masses whom they chained down for so many hundred years. The triumph of the Left in the late elections shows how fast their power is passing away, and that a people, gradually freeing themselves from superstition, are "growing towards the light," both politically and theologically.

And of England, watchman, what of the night? The year 1876 has been full of fierce conflict, and

some venerable superstitions have received fatal blows. It has been a year of litigation between the sections of the Church, and the internecine conflict is straining the cords of the Establishment almost to breaking. The Public Worship Regulation Bill has borne its expected fruit; the law has been put in force by various triplets of "aggrieved parishioners," and vigorously enforced; Mr. Dale, of St. Vedast's, is suppressed, and his congregation is dispersed; Mr. Ridsdale, of Folkestone, is not yet done with, as the appeal case is still unheard; many other prosecutions are threatened, and a cry of woe goeth up from the menaced Ritualists. Some announce, parodying Jules Favre's celebrated declaration, probably with as little reality—"not one candle from our altars, not one thread of our vestments"—and swear to fight rather than to submit. Some—very young curates—exclaim that they must not marry "in the present distress," lest they should be encumbered with wife and family when they are "called upon to suffer for the Lord's sake." Some, and these the majority, begin to talk very distinctly of disestablishment as preferable to prosecution, and many glances are turned towards the Radicals, half doubtfully, half wishfully, amid searchings of hearts over the advisability of making common cause with them to destroy the Establishment. It is even rumoured that Mr. Gladstone will, in the session of 1877, lead an assault on the Church of England's connection with the State; but this is scarcely probable, *as yet*. What is certain, is that Mr. Disraeli's Bill for "stamping out the Ritualists" has raised a storm which threatens to wreck the Establishment, so that between the quarrels of the rival sects honest men will have some chance of coming by their own.

The great Nonconformist minister question has been settled by the triumph of the Dissenters. They spent, it was said, some thousands of pounds to



establish their right to the coveted title of Reverend, and when the decision was given in their favour an outburst of petty spite occurred among the clergy of the Establishment, and a long correspondence appeared in the church papers over the all-important subject of discovering a title which the Dissenting rival could not appropriate. When this matter was done with, the Devil made his appearance in the law courts, and he was condemned and disestablished, to the pain and horror of all truly pious souls. The Devil gone, what might not follow him? even hell itself might be put out. With the Devil disappeared also the *Christian Evidence Journal*, its supporters probably thought that with the Devil gone there was no longer any need for Christian Evidences, as the truth of Christianity is no longer a matter of primary importance if there be no Devil to share his lake with unbelievers.

As the months rolled on, the main topic of Church dignitaries — apart from quarrels of "High and Low" — has been "Unbelief." The cry has steadily strengthened, and has been swelled by one voice after another until in the autumn it rose into a wail that drowned all other sounds. While the clergy are squabbling as to the length of a surplice and the colour of a garment, the laity are quietly taking doctrine after doctrine, analysing, testing, rejecting. The clergy fight over crosses and candles, and the laity ask, "What is Professor Tyndall's latest utterance?" or, "Where is Huxley's last lecture to be found?" The people are becoming leavened with scepticism—a scepticism deduced from science, and composed of facts. Vainly, in a few years' time will the clergy sink into peace from utter exhaustion. They will cease from their quarrels only to find their churches emptied of the strong manhood and womanhood of the nation, and their sermons on popular Christianity regarded as full of old Eastern

fables that no instructed person can be expected to believe. 1876 shows us signs of progress at every step, and is full of bright encouragement; more Free Thought in every direction; bolder heresy at every turn; a despondent Church, divided against itself, attacked by a triumphant foe, who only gains strength from diversity of vigorous thought, and who, having carried the outworks, presses on the citadel itself. Lack of candidates for ordinations; growing alienation of the youth and the intellect of the day; every sign shows the same glad fact—the fact of a dying superstition and a living, rising, Humanity. The *Rock* ascribes the changes around us as the work of the Devil himself:—

“Satan doubtless reads as we do the signs of the times, and knowing that the period of his ‘deceiving the nations’ has nearly expired, he is ‘filled with great wrath,’ and, for the purpose of turning men’s minds away from the truth, he puts forth his most consummate powers of falsehood and malingering. What less could be expected from ‘the father of lies?’ And his artifices are adroitly varied according to circumstances of time and place. In Madagascar, or the South Seas, true to his character of ‘a murderer from the beginning,’ he attempts to drown the voice of Gospel-preaching in a pool of blood. In Ceylon and Bombay he strives to trample it down beneath the iron hoof of Sacerdotal tyranny, or to render it repulsive or ridiculous through the instrumentality of monks and friars. On the Continent, where the life-giving stream has not already been fouled with superstition, he makes it muddy with Rationalism. Here, in England, where every one of these evil agencies is actively at work, the great enemy seeks to blend them into a common movement.”

The *Rock* is right as to the great changes now going on; but, instead of seeing in them the work of the evil one, shall we not recognize in the spreading Rationalism the work of the mighty spirit of man struggling to reach after and to grasp a purer and a grander life?

Some curious subjects for prayer have lately appeared in the public prints. A Society has been

formed to pray for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, but *Fun* remarks that a police-officer with a warrant would be a far more effectual preventive of cruelty than prayer. Mr. Spurgeon, disapproving of Lord Beaconsfield's Government, prayed in his Tabernacle on Sunday, "O God, give our senators wisdom, especially at this critical time. Let not the extraordinary folly of our rulers lead our country into war; and change our rulers, O God, as soon as possible." The Tory papers are naturally very indignant at the Liberal party, as represented by Mr. Spurgeon, forming an alliance with so powerful a foreign potentate against the Government; the act is regarded as most unpatriotic. The first Bishop of Truro ought to be a most admirable man, as his future people are busily praying for him; God is requested to grant to the diocese a "Bishop and pastor who shall diligently preach Thy word, and duly administer the godly discipline thereof." After this, who can doubt that a most shining example of prelacy will enlighten the dark places of dissenting Cornwall? If we go to war we shall have a vigorous outburst of praying, and among all the contradictory petitions it will be very difficult for Him who hears prayer, to whom all flesh will be coming, to fulfil his promise of granting their wishes to the opposing parties.

Behold! how these Christians love one another. Mr. J. A. Rouse writes to the *Rock* against the union of Ritualists and Evangelicals, even for the purpose of preaching the so-called common faith. "Evangelical truth and Ritualistic heresy are and must ever be antagonistic—one Christ, the other Belial—the one trusting only in Jesus, the other essentially superstitious, blasphemous, and infidel. How, then, dare a Christian hold out the right hand of fellowship to idolators and heretics?" "Christians" are exhorted not even to receive the ritualistic clergy into their houses. Such gentleness and charity are

the fruits of Christian love. The most amusing controversy carried on in the *Rock*, however, has been one on the meaning of the Cross. A simple-hearted clergyman wrote inquiring as to its origin, and a well-known Free Thinker, seeing his letter, forwarded the real answer to the Editor of the *Rock*, but that, of course, was not considered fit for those very pious columns; since then various letters have appeared from week to week, and the final conclusion arrived at is that the Cross is "the mark of the Beast" spoken of in Revelation—surely a most curious *finale* of such a discussion concerning an emblem wherein Paul gloried, and by which Christians are to be saved. Of all the bitter, unscrupulous, sharp-tongued papers, surely the Church journals bear away the palm.

