

65269

THE REASONER.

EDITED BY G. J. HOLYOAKE.

No. 888.]

LONDON, NOVEMBER 1, 1868.

PRICE 2d.

"I AM by the law of my nature a Reasoner. A person who should suppose I meant by that word, an arguer, would not only not understand me, but would understand the contrary of my meaning. I can take no interest whatever in hearing or saying anything merely as a fact—merely as having happened. I must refer to something within me before I can regard it with any curiosity or care. I require in everything a reason why the thing is at all, and why it is *there* or *then* rather than elsewhere or at another time."—S. T. COLERIDGE.

THE PRIESTHOOD OF SCIENCE: THEIR VISIT TO NORWICH.

A NEW thing has occurred in the history of the old City, which has seen many strange things in its time. The British Association for the Advancement of Science has paid Norwich a visit, and has been as cordially welcomed, as hospitably entertained, and as civilly treated, as in any city into which it has travelled. Indeed Mr. Harvey and Lady Henrietta Harvey, entertained the Members at Crown Point in a Royal way. By day the grounds were resplendent with gaiety, by night radiant with fire, accompanied by a costly profusion which knew no limits, of all that the daintiest appetite could appreciate: and in addition Mr. Harvey made no speeches and asked none in return; so that the philosophic digestion was never disturbed by untimely efforts at coining phrases of thanks. This was a refinement of philosophic hospitality unexampled in my experience. The Mayor's (Mr. J. J. Coleman) final dinner, truly, left upon the minds and palates of the guests, pleasant recollections of the civic hospitality of the ancient city of Churches.

And what a pleasant old city of Churches, Norwich is. Ecclesiastical genius once dwelt there. The old temples, were no bare Bethels, but such as a man of taste could worship God in. Even Dissenting Chapels caught an air of grace which they lack in other places. Still having regard to the prodigious number of Churches in the City, it is hard to resist the impression that Norwich must at one time been as wicked as Gomorrah; and when the population was scanty there must have been a Church to every family. Certainly a grim taste dwelt among the citizens once, when they hung up the Ketts alive—one on the Castle and the other brother on Wymondham Steeple. There must have been a revolting vigour in the pious stomach, which could look up morning after morning and calculate how long the famishing wretch would last in his irons: and go in to pray with the consciousness of that ghastly agony writhing over the altar. Then there was that ugly hole the Lollard's Pit, where they roasted any man who had an opinion of his own, as to the faith which he thought most acceptable to God. Even gentlemen and women were scorched, who declined to enter

NO. I. EIGHTH SERIES.

heaven in the Norwich way, and if any bystander expressed pity for so forlorn an end, the clergy fried him on the shortest notice, until his sympathies evaporated. Even now in the reverberations of the old trees you may detect fragments of shrieks of the writhing wretches. All this took place at the back of the Bishop's palace, and his Grace of that day had the scent of smoking heretic wafted into his breakfast room, and even now in the old carvings and cornices of the Cathedral the dreadful odour seems to linger. We have, however, come on better times now. A series of the best Bishops England has known of late years have filled the see of Norwich, of which the last, Dr. Hinds, has displayed a brave conscience. But whether in the battle of pikes or books, there was always pluck in your Norfolk man, whether Knight or tradesman, priest or rascal.

It is within the recollection of many Norwich men, who inherit the Lollard courage of thinking for themselves, that Richard Carlile who was an occasional speaker to the City, used to pray, especially in the latter portion of his life, that there might arise in England a Priesthood of Science. It seemed then like the distant dream of a prophet; but we have lived to see it realized. The names of Tyndall, Huxley, Hooker, Darwin, Spencer, Grove, Lewes, Lyell are names which rule in the realms of thought, as those of priests did of old, but with a distinction and beneficence no priests ever exercised. The visit of the philosophers was attended with some spiritual perturbations, but they left behind them many blessings.

One of the features of the British Association was the Pre-Historic Society, the President of which was Sir John Lubbock. No word was so often pronounced, no placards were so copiously seen, as those of the pre-historic people. Their very name smelt strongly of heresy. Many theological nostrils started at it. To investigate the doings of man before History began was a personal attack upon Moses, and many good souls thought that a Baronet might be expected to set a better example. The British Association commenced its career thirty-eight years ago with only one Christian sign, which nobody desires to imitate—that of “fear and trembling.” It begged permission to have an opinion—it apologized next for having one, and several Presidents did worse—they tried to harmonise the discoveries of Science with the dogmas of Religion. Of late years, Presidents have put on more of the dignity of philosophers, and the independence of thinkers, and have asserted a right to the territory they have conquered. The British Association in my time, has never had a President with so wholesome and impassioned a mind as Dr. Hooker. The tones of his voice were manly and sincere. He spoke like one who cared for Science, and asserted its dignity with intrepidity no President ever ventured upon before. Mr. Herbert Spencer's system of philosophy is as Atheistic as the positive philosophy of Auguste Comte: yet Dr. Hooker did not hesitate to name the author and to praise him. The author of the

"Vestiges of Creation" found it necessary to wear a mask, Dr. Darwin wrote boldly without one, though proving what the other had only ventured to suggest. Dr. Hooker distinguished Dr. Darwin by graceful homage. Though the President holds at Kew an appointment under the Crown, he did not hesitate to avow opinions by the side of which, those of Dr. Colenso, the most honoured and heroic of our Bishops, seems orthodox.

Dr. Hooker, said "Science has never in its search hindered the religious aspirations of good and earnest men; nor have pulpit cautions, which are but *ill disguised deterrents*, ever turned inquiring minds from the revelations of Science." The President knew the ill office the pulpit had often done Science, and he drew attention to its "deterrents." He did more, he pointed out where the Priest fails us and Science serves us. These were his bold words: "A sea of time spreads its waters between that period to which the earliest traditions of our ancestors point, and that far earlier period, when man first appeared upon the globe. For his tract upon that sea *man vainly questions his spiritual teachers*. Along its hither shore, if not across it, *Science now offers to pilot him*." Dr. Hooker then stated the mission and determination of the natural philosopher. "Science, it is true, may never sound the depths of that sea, may never buoy its shallows, or span its narrowest creeks, but she will still build on every tide-washed rock, nor will she deem her mission fulfilled till she has sounded its profoundest depths and reached its further shore, or proved the one to be unfathomable and the other unattainable, upon evidence not *yet revealed to mankind*." The President next drew the line between the work of the religionist and students of nature. "The laws of mind are not yet relegated to the domain of the teachers of physical science, and that the laws of matter are not within the religious teacher's province, these may then work together in harmony and with good-will. But if they would do this work in harmony, both parties must beware how they fence with that most dangerous of all two-edged weapons, Natural Theology—a science, falsely so called, when, not content with trustfully accepting truths hostile to any presumptuous standard it may set up, it seeks to weigh the infinite in the balance of the finite, and shifts its grounds to meet the requirements of every new fact that Science establishes, and every old error that Science exposes. Thus pursued, Natural Theology is to the Scientific man a delusion, and to the religious man a snare, leading too often to disordered intellects and to Atheism." Dr. Paley's never received so scalping a criticism as this before.

Professor Tyndall who so astonished the "bold Duke of Buccleugh," in his famous lecture to the Working-men of Dundee, last year, carried forward this year in Norwich—his demonstrations which no one put more boldly or brilliantly than himself, of the truths which materialism may count as her own. When I last spoke in Norwich, it was in discussion with my friend Thomas Cooper, who was disconcerted, when I

told him, that as an humble student of Nature, I could discern some of the processes of causation, but could not explain why they occurred; and maintained that Theology itself had not imparted any portion of the secret to him. Now the greatest authority upon Materialistic Philosophy—Professor Tyndall—has told the people of Norwich, in the presence of the most competent tribunal in Europe; that where the Materialist is mute the Theologist is also dumb. Professor Tyndall demonstrated, that the Atomic Action of common Salt, is as formative and instrumental of design as the architect of the Pyramids of Egypt—that the growth of thought is the result of processes, as definite as the mechanical growth of the body, and that the agent of development in Matter and Mind “is a power which has feeling, not knowledge for its base.”

Hitherto it had been thought the “respectable and proper” thing for Scientific men to follow the policy of suppression; no allusion to the Atheist was ventured upon. If anything told in favour of the Materialist it was thought better not to mention his name. Scientific men did not call him gross or defame him, as a person whose liberal principles proceeded from a loose morality; but they never admitted in high places, places of public notice, that he had an existence which could be recognized or principles that must be taken into account. Professor Tyndall however, is not one of this order; he did justice to truth, regardless of “propriety.”—He said in his opening address to his Section: “In affirming that the growth of the body is mechanical, and that thought, as exercised by us, has its correlative in the physics of the brain, I think the position of the ‘Materialist’ is stated as far as that position is a tenable one. I think the Materialist will be able finally to maintain this position against all attacks.”

Two memorable Lectures were delivered in Norwich, one by Professor Huxley and the other by Mr. Ferguson. A miracle of audacity was Mr. Ferguson’s Lecture upon Buddhism. Stolid as an Assyrian Statue, bronzed with the sun of every clime, Mr. Ferguson told the story of a great religion which arose ages before Christianity, and disseminated nobler sentiments, and maintained a career by the side of which that of Christianity seems poor and petty. This religion which existed ages before Christianity, taught how pain might be avoided and life made happy. The great object of the religion was to inculcate kindness to animals, and above all to establish thoroughly, love and kindness among men. One of the edicts of this religion was called the edict of toleration, and it was one which Christians might with much propriety follow. It was to the effect that a man must honour his own faith without blaming that of another, and that there were circumstances under which the faith of another should be honoured. This Prince preached the doctrine all over India, and it was by persuasion alone that it was propagated. There was not a single instance of religious persecution on the part of this people, although they had to endure much persecution themselves. Their faith and doctrine was good-will

to men, and they never sought to obtain converts to it." Mr. Ferguson very quietly said that Christianity might learn a lesson of toleration from [its memorable and nobler] predecessor. Mr. Ferguson told us of an old religion, that of the tree and serpent worship, which once covered the earth, the proofs of which (the best accessible to us) were locked up forty-five years in a stable, in Whitehall Yard. After demonstrating the prevalence and antiquity of this extraordinary Faith, he said in the quietest manner possible, looking the Bishop of Norwich (who sat near him) in the face. "If this kind of worship had been a mere local superstition of India, it would be hardly worth his while to devote so much attention to this point, but I believe that it had prevailed in the world from the earliest times. The history of the tree and the serpent in the book of Genesis, I believe, was a remnant of that old worship, and the curse of the serpent was a curse of that impure religion." Then arises the question! Why, said Moses nothing about it? Was Moses ignorant, or why was Moses silent? The author of Genesis dropped both ages and nations out of his narrative, and told us nothing of his stupendous omissions. But more wonderful than the matter, was Mr. Ferguson's manner. He announced these revelations, new to the World and wondrous to the Norwich mind, which takes Moses to be a reliable historian—in the quietest manner of fact way, as though each knew that Moses would be nowhere in his facts, if he read a pre-historic paper at the British Association.

Dr. Hooker introduced Professor Huxley to the large meeting in the Drill Hall as "a friend of the working-man who was at trouble to instruct him." Without a word of preface, Mr. Huxley said "if a shaft were sunk at my feet, deep into the earth, those who conducted the operation would pass through various strata of earths, but at length they would arrive at that substance of which every carpenter carries a piece in his pocket—and which we call 'chalk ;'" and for one hour and a half, he discoursed in language of perfect simplicity and transparency, of the diffusion, formation, and marvellous age of chalk. The narrative never halted, and was never obscure. It had no brilliant periods which illuminated dark passages. It was all light, you saw all along the line of thought, and over all the vast field through which the Professor travelled, who ended with a simple, single metaphor of such beauty and brilliancy that it re-illumed, in a double sense, all the tracks through which his discourse had extended. He said, "I have now reached the end of my task. If I were to take a piece of chalk and put it into the dull and obscure flame of burning hydrogen, it would, after a while be converted into a substance which would shine like the sun, and which would illuminate on all sides, if these walls were not about us, the darkness of the night without. I have been endeavouring to turn upon this piece of chalk the heat of by no means a particularly brilliant course of reasoning, and by degrees, I hope, you helping me, that this piece of chalk has in an intellectual sense begun to shine, that it has

lighted up the remote vista of the past history of the world, that it has enabled you to get some sort of glimpse into that marvellous and astonishing history of the planet which we men of Science are trying patiently and quietly to unravel. And the most important conclusion of all is that wherever its rays have shone, it has revealed to you, always working without haste and without rest, Natural Causation." A working-man got up and said "they had never heard anything like that in Norwich before; they had all been delighted; many had been instructed; and some, he feared, had been alarmed." It was a simple and worthy speech. For never did Science seem so vast and mere creeds so little, as during Professor Huxley's masterly discourse.

The Bishop of Norwich said at the Mayor's Dinner "he welcomed men of Science as fellow workmen, as fellow students of different volumes, occupying different departments of the one Divine Master." This is an admission that the field of Science is a Divine department. "The great meeting" he said, "tended to show that men of faith should *enquire* more and men of Science *believe* more." It is necessary advice that "men of faith should *enquire*," men of Science are sure to *believe* all that is true. Lamarck when he started the theory of the origin of species was regarded on all hands as an Atheist and was treated as one, and Darwin paused twenty years before he ventured to incur the inheritance of the same odium.

The Rev. J. M. Berkeley, the president of the Biological Section, very generously defended Dr. Darwin—he said "nothing could be more unfair or unwise than to stamp at once this and cognate speculations with the charge of irreligion. Of this, however, he felt assured, that the members of that Association would unite with him in bidding that great and conscientious author, God speed, and join in expressing a hope that his health might be preserved, to enrich Science with the results of his great powers of mind and unwearied observation."

Canon Robinson, who preached at St. John's, Maddermarket, said, very liberally, "that geology teaches us the eternity of God, astronomy His power, and chemistry His wisdom, while the Bible—His revelation—speaks to us of His righteousness." This gives three things to Science—reserving one to Revelation—a considerable reduction of the magnitude of theological professions, to which we have been accustomed!

The Dean of Cork made, in his sermon at the Cathedral, concessions equally remarkable. "We cannot," he said, "demonstrate the supernatural. The demonstration of the supernatural is an impossibility: it is a contradiction in terms. No amount of facts in the world of nature will ever prove the existence of a world above nature. The very facts produced to prove the supernatural are supernatural facts; they are miracles and prophecy. No amount, therefore, of this kind of evidence would demonstrate the supernatural. Between the man who believes only what he sees, and the man who believes in order that he may see, there is a necessary and an endless opposition."

As for not being able to "prove the supernatural," Theologians have been trying to do it all their lives; and have only just found out that they cannot succeed: and the man "who believes in order that he may see" will wear out his faith before he improves his eyesight.

The Rev. G. Gould preached at St. Mary's Chapel the most irrelevant sermon in the Science Week. He, however, admitted that "Science may lead us into the secrets of God's work round about us," and that is more than Theology has done. "But Science," added Mr. Gould, "cannot change the moral nature of man, cannot uplift him of itself from the degradation into which he may have sunken, through his lusts and passions, through the caprices in which he has indulged, and the mistakes in which he has delighted, that nothing but light from heaven can irradiate the gloom in which man has immured himself by sin; nothing but the grace of God, as it is manifested in Christ Jesus, the light of the world, can at once lay hold of the corrupt human nature, and by its very teaching purify that nature;" Theology, however, has been so long in trying to do this, and has not done it yet—that Science is now entitled to a turn. Even the Earl of Shaftesbury admits that Spiritual light cannot be expected to grow out of bad material conditions, and Science which makes possible good conditions may "purify human nature" faster than Mr. Gould supposes.

The Rev. J. Crompton delivered a lecture worthy of a free Christian Church and of the occasion that gave rise to it.

In future Free-enquiry in Norwich will have honourable recognition. The *Norfolk News* which has not usually been regarded as a Free-thinking Journal, wrote upon the subject at the close of the Association in terms which might be fit for the *Reasoner Review* or the *National Reformer*. It said, "we therefore strongly urge on our readers the duty of encouraging the utmost freedom of thought and investigation. Let no such weakness be exhibited amongst us as some miserable 'apologists' for Christianity have shown elsewhere, lest something may be found out, which 'the defenders of the faith' would be unable to answer. They are poor defenders, and that must be a poor faith which has to supplicate gainsayers, not to gainsay, and sue for mercy!" This is boldly and bravely said: it is impossible not to respect Christianity when it assumes this frank, fair and courageous tone.

Norwich has an Ecclesiastical atmosphere. If Churches could save the people the whole county of Norfolk might hope to be translated to heaven. But in the sacred City itself there are poor, ignorant, miserable and unhealthy people. If every preacher were a teacher, every creature in Norwich should be well taught. But there are purlieus no man could wish to see; wretched habitations; courts noisome with disease; dwellings in which Prince Albert would not have suffered his hounds to live. These have grown up with the Churches, and subsist with them. But a Priesthood of Science would purge the City in twelve months and make it as intelligent and wholesome as

it is rich in historic renown. Piety has never given the people a park. Dr. Hooker pleaded for one, but the trust of the people is more in Mr. Harvey than in the clergy, for the possession of it.

Mr. Ferguson told us that before the time of Asoko, 250 B. C. there was not in India a single temple worthy of the name, but he taught the art of gracefulness in such erections. It would be well if the Free-thinkers of Norwich had some Prince Asoko, who would teach them that honourable art, for though the temples of Baal do abound, they have done nothing, as yet, to secure to themselves a place, where the new cause of Science can be adequately illustrated. The books, the aims, the news of Science, its moral and liberalising tendencies, must be entirely unknown to thousands of the inhabitants of Norwich, and a Society careful of things decent, and afraid of nothing true, might open its doors to people who would be grateful for the opportunity of reading and hearing. It is likely that persons of very opposite opinions would carry into effect a plan by which the humbler men of all parties would benefit.

The people of Norwich have now the means of judging of the relative value of men of Creeds, and men of Science. The Clergy save souls—men of Science save lives, and by improving human conditions of existence, save from sin which endangers souls: and the people of Norwich will now see how different is their mode of proceeding. How timid and supplicatory the one—how manly, how confident the other—how commanding in its influence is this Priesthood of Science! Its language how courageous, its tone how independent! The priest begins with a prayer for help, in addition to his own strength, he invokes supernatural aid—he points a collect like a Chassepot rifle at the head of the hearer. The Dissenting minister piles prayer upon prayer, and puts all heaven in a flutter to aid him in his discourse, and creates such a din of Hymns in the air, that no aspiration of the philosopher can be heard as it ascends.

But the man of Science imitates none of these arts of feebleness: he tells his straightforward story, he adduces his facts and trusts to reason to give him the victory. He appeals to no terror, he raises no fear, he scolds no hearer; he does not tell him that he is stiff-necked, or rebellious, or that he withholds his assent from depravity of heart. The Priest of Science is proud and decent in language, and asks nothing from his hearer, but attention. This was a new tone in Norwich, and it will be long before the memory of it dies away.

G. J. H.

The subject of the Next Number will be WORKING-CLASS REPRESENTATION. Published November 15, 1868.

LONDON BOOK STORE, 282, STRAND.