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REPORT
OF A
GENERAL CONFERENCE
OF
LIBERAL THINKERS,

FOR THE

“DISCUSSION OF MATTERS PERTAINING TO THE
RELIGIOUS NEEDS OF OUR TIME, AND THE METHODS
OF MEETING THEM.”

HELD JUNE 13TH AND 14TH, 1878,

AT

SOUTH PLACE CHAPEL,
FINSBURY, LONDON.

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THE CONFERENCE OF LIBERAL THINKERS.

At the Annual Meeting of the Members of South Place Chapel, on January 27, 1878, it was suggested that further use might be made of the Society and its organization, by inviting to a General Conference all those liberal thinkers in this country who could unite for unsectarian work, and assist in the promotion of truth wherever it might be found.

The following Resolution, proposed by Mr. Moncure D. Conway, and seconded by Mr. Alexander J. Ellis, was carried unanimously :—

“That the Minister and Committee of the Society be authorised (if on consultation they find it expedient) to hold a Conference of advanced Thinkers, at any time and place thought convenient.”

In the month of April the following circular of invitation was issued :

“SOUTH PLACE CHAPEL,
“11, SOUTH PLACE, FINSBURY,
“LONDON, E.C.

“THE Minister and Committee of the Religious Society meeting at South Place solicit your attendance at a General Conference of Liberal Thinkers, to be held here on June 13th and 14th, 1878, from 12 to 5 p.m., each day, for the discussion of matters pertaining to the religious needs of our time, and the method of meeting them.

“In assuming the initiative in this matter, our Society has no disposition to commit any one who may accept this invitation to any opinions held by its minister or members. It is actuated by a desire to promote the unsectarian and liberal religion of the age, now too much impeded by isolation and by misunderstandings among those really devoted to common aims, and to utilise its building and organisation for that purpose.

“At the proposed Conference it is hoped that persons may be gathered who, though working in connection with particular organisations, yet, acknowledge no authority above Truth, and are interested in the tendency to that universal religion which would break down all partition-walls raised by Dogma and Superstition between race and race, man and man.

“It is believed that light and strength may be gained for each and all by earnest and frank consultation concerning such subjects as the relation of liberal thinkers to the sectarian divisions of the world; their duties of negation and affirmation; and the practical methods of advancing their principles.

“The proposed meeting will be informal in its constitution, no regular representation being at present in view, the assembly being thus left free to adopt any practical course for the future that shall appear desirable.

“A careful report of the proceedings will be printed.

“Your reply, which it is hoped will be favourable, together with the names and addresses of such persons as you believe would be interested in the proposed Conference, may be sent to Mr. MONCURE D. CONWAY, Hamlet House, Hammersmith, London, W.”

The response to this circular was on the whole satisfactory, and about 400 persons attended the sessions, many different parts of the kingdom being

represented. The Conference met on Thursday, June 13, at twelve o'clock, and the following is the official report of what took place:—

Mr. MONCURE D. CONWAY: On behalf of our Committee, I have great pleasure in welcoming you all to this meeting; we trust that you will consider yourselves quite at home here, and we hope that you will forget entirely that this building is for the present other than any building in your own town, or belonging to your own society. We meet for frank and kindly consultation as to the great cause of liberal thought and progress in the world; and on our part, as our circular says, we have simply utilised our machinery and our building for what we hope will bring about a better understanding and a larger co-operation among liberal elements. We bid you all, therefore, cordial welcome, and if any of you have not received a formal invitation, and it has almost been impossible to know just where to send them, there are some on hand, and we shall be glad to distribute them. For the facilitation of our work, we have requested certain gentlemen to act as chairmen. I have no doubt the cordial assent and satisfaction of those who are here will go with our Committee in having secured the kind services of Dr. George J. Wyld for this morning. I will therefore request Dr. Wyld, without any further ceremony or formality, to take the chair.

The CHAIRMAN: Ladies and Gentlemen—I am very gratified at the honour you have done me in electing me to the chair, and I can only wish that some person of more social importance had been chosen to fill this position. I am always very glad to do all I can in aid of any cause of this description, and I most heartily congratulate Mr. Conway and the Committee of South Place Chapel having inaugurated such a movement as this. When they come to look back upon it in future years it may be that then will be the first step in a movement from which great things may grow, and they will then have cause to be very proud of what they have done. In any case, I am sure we all of us have cause to be very grateful indeed to them for having started such a movement as this. As you know, speakers, without a very great degree of practice, are apt to be diffuse, and therefore I have prepared a few notes, which, if you will excuse me, I will now read.

I have long felt that the great want among liberal religionists at the present time is unity and visible combination. More markedly among them than among any other body of thinkers, everyone has hitherto seemed to be playing for his own bat, to be beating his own drum, and intent only on calling attention to his own favourite point of view.

It is not at all surprising that it should be so when we consider how recent is their development, and from what widely divergent sources sympathisers with free thought have originated—from various Nonconformist churches, from the Established Church, from the ancient Jewish religion, and even, to a larger extent than is sometimes thought, from the carefully-fenced Roman fold.

It certainly, however, seems to me that this state of disintegration has lasted long enough, and that it is time this very loose order should be somewhat consolidated. And all, I think, must at any rate so far agree, that it is at least desirable that the various bodies of freethinkers, and individual freethinkers, should be brought more within hailing distance of each other, and should have some common means of communication, so as to be able easily to combine in case either individual or general interests are threatened.

Upon the general benefits of combination it would be trite to remark. But more and more at the present day everything shows that co-operation

and organisation are the secrets of success, and that through these the weakest and seemingly most unlikely causes often gain their ends. As a recent remarkable trial shows, even the veriest, and one would think most transparent, swindle, if really well organised, will hardly fail to succeed, and may keep going for years.

But on the other hand the best causes, through the want of organisation, have often never got beyond their first start, or after a little success have come to nothing.

In our own special case, the amount of discouragement caused by this want among nascent freethinkers is very large. I have good grounds from personal knowledge for saying that it is very considerable. Many persons, whose sympathies have been awakened in the direction of rational religion, are chilled and driven back. And sometimes those, who thus go back, become more zealous on the side of the traditionalists than ever before. For they think, however mistakenly, that they have found by experience, that outside the old order of things there is nothing but a dreary waste, without shelter, or sympathy, or a warm hearth to take refuge by, where no friendly hands join in hearty grasp, where is nothing to be heard but hollow echoes of uncertain sound, and nothing to be seen but melancholy ghosts, each wandering his own way with only too much speculation in those eyes that he doth glare with.

If free religion is ever to attain any great development, and do any permanent good in the world, it must be by attracting and holding the younger generation: I do not mean mere children, but those who are entering active life. Now the mere aspect of energetic organisation is very attractive to most minds at this age, and the want of it awakens hesitation and distrust. Indeed nearly all have a bias to what looks like a winning side, and has some spirit and life in it. Few can take a stand quite alone, and study the abstract merit of things in a dry light: they must have some party to take sides with, some sympathetic comradeship to cheer them along. We should not, I think, leave it to the traditional churches to reap all the advantage of this natural *esprit de corps*. It would be foolish to count among our dependable recruits that large number of young persons who are merely indifferent about serious matters. So long as thoughtlessness and ease last, such may be classed and may even class themselves as freethinkers; but they are not free in any true sense of the term, they have never thought out their own emancipation. What seriousness there is left in them, is still connected with the old order of things; the power of superstition has not been broken in them,—and when at last, through misfortune or other cause, their grave time comes, they revert at once to the old delusions which soothed their mothers and grandmothers. A better organisation among rational religionists might, I think, surround some of this floating class with strengthening associations, and attach them permanently to the body. And really everything nowadays depends so much upon the popular vote, or may have to fear so much from an ugly popular rush, that it is all important that freethinkers should increase their dependable members as well as their means of consolidation.

For it is not at all impossible, if we do not increase our force, before the next generation, that a great season of reaction may set in. Many signs seem to me to point this way. All the lovers of traditional faiths, those who tremble for the security of property and rank, and all those who are for quiet at any price, have to a great extent learnt to tolerate one another, and under the influence of mutual fright are ready to combine for the purpose of—if

not absolutely crushing—yet very inconveniently compressing their common foe; as they foolishly imagine their best friend, the rational thinker, to be. Their emissaries and wire-pullers have been working very quietly these few past years, and not without effect either in the political or religious world. They have immense organizations ready to their hand, and they have begun to learn more how to use them and keep up their vitality.

It is important to recollect too, that *all* the apparent advances that are made towards freethought in the old churches, are not real advances, or made from true sympathy or with a view to conciliation; but are simply temporary shifts to better their logical position, to throw dust in the world's eyes, and enable them better to bring weak freethinkers within their net.

There are many points in the orthodox creeds which their professional defenders would be glad to slip out of or explain away, could they do so while preserving any character for consistency.

There is nothing I would venture to caution our younger associates more against than being put off by that loose make-shift rationalism in which some of the quasi-orthodox are beginning largely to deal, and with which they think as the common phrase is, to take the wind out of the genuine free-thinker's sails. For these gentlemen the most appalling difficulties that can be proposed are perfectly easy of explanation, by the aid of some of the modern ingenious methods of accommodation; either the case has been misconceived through a mistranslation, or it is an allegory, or there has been a mistake or transposition of transcribers, or there is a figurative or spiritual meaning, or it is an instance of the *argumentum ad hominem*, or an oriental idiom, or some other ingenious solution is resorted to, till at last the mystified hearers can hardly make out whether these expounders really believe the supernatural origin of their religion in the main, or whether they are simply anxious to show that notwithstanding they have subscribed creeds and formularies they are men of learning and acuteness. They remind one of nothing so much as the accommodating spirit of the excellent peep-show proprietor, "Wellington or Blucher, whichever you please, my dears;" so long as you only enter the show and pay the showman. By the really honest enquirer this method of trying to put new wine into old bottles will assuredly in the long run be found illusory, and satisfy neither the mind nor the heart.

Some people, however, who have abandoned fixed beliefs, say that there is no ground for combination among those who have no specified system of doctrine. They conceive, and practically assert, that when you deny a supernatural revelation, and reject the authority of churches, that there is nothing which can be properly called religion to be maintained or observed.

I believe this notion to be altogether mistaken; though I can quite understand the feeling out of which it often arises.

I, myself, am one of those who believe that science is the only revelation, understanding by this, not only physical science, but the study of man's past history, his social development, and the growth of the human mind. Men of the ancient world found in these things some ground-work of religion. "The heavens declare the glory of God," said the Psalmist. And whether we of modern times call that invisible and mysterious something which is behind phenomena, "God," or "Force," or "Spirit," or "the Power without us," or by what other name you will, it is a mere matter of fact that we can detect the working of a system, and an irreversible law, which it is our highest interest reverently to learn and implicitly to obey.

Here, then, you have ample scope for a life of reverent observation and faithful obedience; what more do you want on which to base a religion?

And it may be a religion which will not only furnish a field for the reverent exercise of the intellect, but supply nourishment to the heart, being fruitful of motives calculated to quicken our highest aspirations and emotions.

For when we consider that this mysterious law, within which we are all bound, not only regulates the stars in their courses, and makes to spring blossom and fruit for all creatures' sustenance, but also that it binds man to man with the chords of sympathy—it is the source of that fire which makes our hearts glow at the sight of noble and unselfish deeds, it animates the lover's sigh, the mother's kiss, the poet's longing, the scholar's brain-toil, as well as the hard-handed work of craftsmen and labourers, "For all these worketh one and the self-same spirit;" when we consider the manifold relations which are thus only shadowed, who shall say that in tracing their connections and development there are no lessons to be found to kindle hope, to inspire the struggle for good, to purify the affections?

I cannot allow, then, that there is no room for a very high and real religion, after we have rejected all supernatural revelation and the authority of all churches.

But surely this very rejection of supernaturalism and authority is of itself a very good argument for co-operation among the different classes of liberal thinkers.

For we have rejected them not lightly, but for solid reasons and through weary study, and many of us, by painful experience, have become convinced of their baselessness and their evil effects. We know that in the past, and by means of the sacerdotalism which has been, and is still, built upon them, they have been the great obstacles to human improvement, the standing bulwarks and excuse of every kind of tyranny and unfair privilege, and the fruitful parents of superstition, ignorance and misery.

We are not only anxious, therefore, as much as in us lies, to shorten their remaining reign, and weaken their still predominant influence,—but the necessity of combination is forced upon us, in order to prevent their return in full power, to hinder the fresh development of those ruinous principles which have hitherto been only slightly checked.

And here we think we have a fair ground of appeal to those who consider themselves pure scientists, and who dislike to concern themselves with anything having any connection with religion. I said above that I could very well understand that feeling. I can readily sympathise with their impatience of theology as a pseudo-science, which after years of study discloses nothing except its own nullity—and their repugnance to that delusive religion which has filled the world with strife and folly, and fully deserved the well-known objurgation of the poet Lucretius. It is a mistake to confound religion founded on the laws of the universe and man's life with the superstitions and theologies which usurp its name. It is rather to preserve and extend this emancipated truth that the efforts of wise men should be directed. I quite agree with Professor Müller and others that the mass of men must have some religion, and therefore it is the interest of all to make it as good as possible: since corrupt religion involves the continual hazard of the recrudescence of superstition, and the return of arbitrary government or anarchy. Corrupt religion puts power into the hands of those the least fit to use it. This power is secret in its action, and it is difficult to trace its extent. It may be mining the ground under our feet when we least expect it, and suddenly bring the wheels of State to a deadlock when all looks smiling. It is the tendency of all the religious bodies of the present day who cleave to the old supernaturalism, to become more and more

subject to ecclesiastical ideas, and more imbued with the priestly spirit. And as long as priests of any sort remain in the world they will never cease to strive for power, and aid directly or indirectly the cause of reaction: their theory pledges them to endeavour to subject men to a false standard of appeal, and an unwarrantable species of authority, thereby as far as possible mystifying men's intellects, stopping the progress of sound education, and filling the world with bugbears.

I cannot but think, therefore, that it is the duty of every enlightened man to aid, as far as he can, those organisations which aim at counteracting their widespread influence. There is scope for combined action in many directions; but I would especially indicate vigilance as to the insidious moves of the clerical party at school boards. Of middle class education, too, a great deal might be said, and I hope some speakers may touch upon the subject. But, above all, I think enlightened men should aid organisations which strive to propagate purer views of religion, for nothing will ever exorcise the false religions of the world, but *the genuine article*. And as long as false religions retain such immense preponderance, it is certain that neither science, nor philosophy, nor free government are absolutely secure.

Calm philosophers in the cool suburbs of the Metropolis or in rural shades may persuade themselves that they will for ever pursue their lucubrations unmolested out of the reach of general warrants or howling mobs; and it may seem a long time since crowds paraded the streets and smashed windows to the cry of "High Church and Dr. Sacheverell for ever!"—or when a band of piously disposed roughs gutted the house of Dr. Priestley—but what has happened before may happen again, and supine indifference on the part of thinking men is the way to court attack and defeat.

There must be yet for a long time a residuum of rowdyism and stupidity in every nation, and political and ecclesiastical gentlemen of reactionary tendencies are showing that they know how to manipulate them for their own ends. Ten thousand men were marshalled by priests in Hyde Park on Monday last, though then I confess for a good object; but it is an ominous sign of the power they might come to wield. In short, all the signs of the times point to the necessity of watchfulness and combination, and a disposition to sink minor differences among liberal thinkers of all sorts, and I can only sincerely trust that the organisation, the inauguration of which is now desired by Mr. Conway and his friends, may effectually contribute thereto.

Mr. CONWAY said: I have received a considerable number of letters from distinguished persons who, for various reasons, cannot be with us, most of them, however, sympathising with the objects which have brought us together. Some have indeed, though in a kindly way, expressed misgivings as to the utility of a Conference of this kind. Dr. James Martineau, who regrets that he is prevented from being with us by absence in Scotland, adds, however, his belief that "Negation supplies no bond. It has its work to do—a legitimate work, which I am far from depreciating—but, in my opinion, this work must be individually done; and, beyond it, a good deal must happen before religious combination becomes possible." Mr. Matthew Arnold says, "I am strongly of opinion that the errors of popular religion in this country are to be dispersed by the spread of a better and wider culture, far more than by direct antagonism and religious counter-movements." The Duke of Somerset and Lord Houghton write somewhat in the same tone. I must remark, however, that these misgivings or hesitations have been very few. About 200 letters have been received, representing a great variety of minds. Mr. William Rossetti, who, from the first, has taken great interest in this meet-

ing, believes the time has come for protest of literary men against being supposed to have any sympathy with orthodox dogmas. [Mr. Rossetti was present at the Conference.] Professor Max Müller, who took an interest in it, writes that he finds himself with so little strength since his Hibbert Lectures, that his attendance is doubtful. From Oxford, also, I have letters indicating interest in our movement, from Professors Sayce, Rolleston, Pater, &c. The Rev. Silas Farrington, of Manchester, writes: "Perhaps nothing concerns me more than the loosening of the bonds of human sympathy and co-operation which, it has seemed to me, has attended the vanishing of the old creeds out of our liberal congregations," and he welcomes this Conference as a sign that the Liberal particles are not to remain for ever in solution. John Cunningham sends us a message, which he calls that of a "dying man," in which he says, "Let everything be done in a spirit of love!" I can, of course, at present give but a sentence or two from these letters. There are some absences which are unexpected. Professor Andrew Wilson, of Edinburgh, who was to have addressed us, has, at the last moment, been prevented by an alteration in the time of his college examinations; the Rev. Frank Walters, who meant to help us, has been unable to leave Glasgow; and Mr. J. Allanson Picton cannot give us the address we hoped for, having left London by doctor's orders. He writes: "I wish you would say how much I wished to be present, and how much disappointed I am to be out of the way." Several cordial letters have come from liberal clergymen, among others, one from the Rev. J. Shortt, of Hoghton Vicarage, Preston, Lancashire, who says: "I cordially sympathise with the objects of the Conference, and heartily wish it every success. No one can be more interested than I am in the cause of freedom of thought." No doubt we might have hoped for a larger number of Unitarian ministers, had it not been for an unfortunate collision, in our day of assembling, with one of the anniversaries of the Unitarian Association—a collision which, on our part, we took pains to avoid.

From "The Knoll," Ambleside, Mr. W. W. HILLS writes:—

"I heartily sympathise with any movement which is likely to draw men of liberal views on religion, into closer union and more active co-operation in promoting the welfare of the race. It is the latter object, I think, which can alone find men in permanent religious union—mere agreement in opinion, whether ignorant or enlightened, being almost no bond at all, and tending to divide men into narrow and ever-narrowing sects."

Mr. Karl Blind regrets that he is prevented by his engagements from being with us.

"As to my own views," he says, "philosophically speaking, I am so much imbued with a sense of the impenetrability of what will for ever remain the unknowable, that I must needs refrain from taking part in any organization. At the same time I fully appreciate the desire of thinking men to draw together for the discussion of such subjects; and I am convinced that, as regards general emancipation, your conference will do a right good work."

If, unfortunately, we should not have Professor Huxley among us, it will not be because of any lack of interest or sympathy on his part, but because of the persistent and dangerous illness by which his family has just been afflicted. Compelled to leave his attendance an open question, he has been careful to write me on the subject, and says this "Conference is sure to be interesting, and I think it is likely to be useful." Not the least grateful to myself for one, and no doubt to many among you it will prove the same, has been a warm word of encouragement and sympathy from the veteran general of liberal thought, Thomas Scott. It is much to feel that he is with us in

spirit. His best co-worker, Mrs. Scott, writes that by reason of loss of power in both hands his response must come through her, and that we may rest assured of his and her "heartly sympathy with our efforts in endeavouring to free man and womankind from the unhealthy superstitions with which they are at present surrounded, and which tend to bar enlightenment and progress."

Some of the letters express the hope that this Conference may lead to some practical result, perhaps to the formation of something like the Free Religious Association in America, one of whose founders we are fortunate enough to have with us. Whether as the eloquent defender of Theodore Parker in Boston, or the gallant defender of the liberties of the negro race on the field of battle, Colonel Wentworth Higginson will meet with honour wherever the principles of physical, intellectual, and religious freedom are honoured. One letter I must read in full, a wise word from a wise man, the venerable and learned Jewish scholar and author, Dr. M. Kalisch. He writes :—

"The state of my health will unfortunately not allow me to attend the proposed Conference of Liberal Thinkers, but I will not omit assuring you that I shall follow its proceedings with the keenest interest, and express my earnest wishes for its success. It ought not to be impossible to find a common ground on which the various liberal societies may meet, in order, on the one hand, to counteract with united force the persevering efforts of traditionalists, and, on the other hand, to call into life the many latent germs of religious liberalism, which are scattered everywhere beneath a surface of perplexity or hesitation. It ought to be possible to establish such a centre without the least approach to any fixed formula which might imperil absolute freedom of thought, or bearing the remotest resemblance to, or involving the slightest tendency towards an unalterable dogma. Trusting that the timely step you have taken will prove fruitful of the best results,

"I am, dear Sir, yours faithfully,

"M. KALISCH,"

With which cheering note, whose significance coming from such a quarter, will not, I am sure, be lost on this audience, I close a summary from which time compels me to leave out many interesting and satisfactory messages, which are carefully filed and will be remembered.

The Rev. C. VOYSEY: The promoters of this Conference may be well congratulated on the selection of the subject to which our attention is now invited. Every thoughtful person must be aware how intimately this question of religion is bound up, not only with each man's individual happiness and well-being, but with the safety of society and the welfare of the community at large. Religion is scarcely less of social importance than of individual interest. In speaking of "Religious needs," it is implied that in matters of religion we are in a state more or less unsatisfactory: that something is wanted which we have not got; that what we already have is deficient, if not pernicious. And nothing can be more true; and they have done wisely who have made a practical effort to bring these "Religious needs" into open discussion. In venturing to bring before the Conference my own views as to those needs and how to meet them, I disavow entirely the dogmatic spirit, or any unwillingness to have my views corrected and improved by others. But inasmuch as this Conference will depend for its usefulness almost entirely on the clearness, reasonableness, and absolute sincerity of the various readers and speakers, I will do my best to say exactly what I mean, however much or little it may be approved.

The religious needs of our time are extremely various; all attempts at generalization must be qualified by a mental reservation that there are varieties of condition which cannot be included in our categories, and cannot be met by our suggestions of treatment.

These needs may be roughly divided into the intellectual, the emotional, and the æsthetic. Time was when so long as the emotional and æsthetic needs were satisfied, the intellectual needs of religion—so far from being supplied—did not even exist. Men and women were content with their faith and their worship, without any demand on the part of their reason for a share in the control of religious thought. Now, to a large extent, all this is changed. Vast numbers of really religious souls either demand some rational foundation on which to rest their faith, or at least demand that the terms of their creed, and the forms of their worship shall not do outrage to their intellectual convictions. Theology to exist at all must be of the nature of science, based on induction and ruled by logic. Religion, as distinct from Theology, must be in harmony with already known facts, or it will rapidly cease to occupy the hearts of people of common sense. All this, you will say, is mere truism; and to most of us here it may be so. It is, however, still to be widely learnt out of doors by the religious world at large. The growing demand is for a reasonable creed, and because it is not generally forthcoming, because that which is glaringly unreasonable, if not also incredible and revolting, is still insisted on by orthodox churches and sects, still stands on our statute books as the only creed recognised by Crown and Parliament, thousands have become secretly atheistical, and tens of thousands are utterly unsettled in their religious convictions. It is to be borne in mind that this is not purely a State Church question, but one which goes down into the roots of our common humanity. The Church, it is true, has for the present its Act of Uniformity and its stereotyped Prayer Book and Liturgies; and these contain the obnoxious dogmas against which the religious instinct and religious intellect of modern thinkers revolt. But we also find the very same dogmas maintained with an equally obstinate pertinacity among the Free Nonconformist Churches and sects outside the pale of the Establishment. Wesleyans, Congregationalists and Baptists, with a hundred sects behind them, are not one whit better, or more enlightened, or more free from irrational dogmas, for being emancipated from State control. I allude to this in order to show that the separation of Church and State would not be of the slightest value in meeting the intellectual religious needs of our time. In all probability it would aggravate present dogmatism and put off the day of enlightenment further than ever. What is really wanted is the disestablishment of the Creeds and Articles, and the repeal of the Act of Uniformity, so as to leave all clergymen free to speak their honest minds; and a similar freedom must be given to the Nonconformist ministers. This, indeed, seems to me the great need of the hour—to give free speech to those who have something really reasonable to say about religion. There is an abject dread of new truth abroad, not from any native dislike to it so much as from a terror of social or pecuniary pains and penalties, which, indeed, more closely threaten the Nonconformist minister than the clergyman of the Established Church. The laity, who, as a rule, look up to and confide in their religious teachers, would, with few exceptions, heartily greet the endowment of the pulpit with absolute liberty. Surely the right-minded amongst them would infinitely prefer that their preacher should proclaim his real conviction rather than that he should lie, as he now lies, under suspicion of dissimulation and insincerity. In brief, intellectual religion can only come by calm and perfectly independent thought; independent, *i.e.*, from all interference by dictation, by threats, by fear of consequences, or by dread of the conclusions to which it may lead. The chief religious need of our time is intellectual correction, the getting rid of what is

unreasonable, and the getting hold of what is reasonable : and this I maintain can only be met by endowing the professed teachers of religion with absolute freedom and independence, that they may give free play to their own thoughts and free speech to their tongues. Till we secure this liberty, the hungry souls will be sent empty away, only stones will they have given them for bread, and the insincerity and moral cowardice of their teachers will descend upon the people, and wrap them in hypocrisy and dishonesty. I wonder they do not see this. I wonder that it is not perceived that the decay in morals, the lowering of the standard of truth and equity in common dealings, the abject lack of moral courage and public spirit which the Juvenals of this age deplore, are not entirely and distinctly traceable to dishonesty in religion. If a man can dissemble before God, he will not scruple much to dissemble before his fellow-men. If a man can go and solemnly pretend to believe things which his whole soul denies—at the hour and in the place of what men have by common consent called Divine worship, the integrity of his whole life is thereby undermined, and he may thank the grace of circumstances, and not his own virtue, if he do not become, in the ordinary affairs of life, a liar and a rogue.

Turning from this, the greatest and most widespread of our religious needs, we come to that class who are dissatisfied with the creed and worship in which they have been brought up, and whose minds are nearly a *tabula rasa*, ready for the inscription of any faith or conviction which the reason will admit. Very many, having given up orthodoxy as quite effete, are nevertheless still uncertain as to what to believe or what to put in the place of the religion they have cast away. With them the intellectual is not forgotten, but somewhat in abeyance ; it is the emotional part of their religious nature which needs satisfaction.

And here I know I am treading on delicate ground, inasmuch as there are at least two great divisions of that large body which has escaped from orthodoxy—one believing in God, and holding on even more vividly than ever to convictions of His relations with mankind which they had always more or less cherished, the other not believing in God, not feeling any emotions of trust towards Him, or able to understand the religious emotions of those who practise prayer and praise. Now whether a religion with prayer, or a religion without prayer is destined to be the religion of the future, I will not be so arrogant as to predict ; my sole object in alluding to these divisions of the unorthodox world is, that I may fulfil my promise, and tell you my honest opinion about the religious needs of our time.

It is my conviction that in the present break-up of ancient creeds, there lies the gravest danger of a total loss of all religious belief, of conscious trust in the living God, as a source of strength, purity, consolation, and hope. The old husks of falsehood have been swept away, and along with them the grains of pure and life-giving truth on which the faithful in all times have nurtured and enriched their souls. Some minds are so hasty that they impatiently renounce every idea once seen to be tainted with error, and will have nothing to do with emotions once proved to be capable of perversion. Thus it comes to pass that No God takes the place of the False God, that silence reigns where foolish or impious prayers were once offered, that an ungrateful neglect takes the place of selfish and childish praises. It is better, they say, to have no God than a false one ; better not to pray at all than to have the old notions of prayer ; better never to sing a psalm of praise than seem to encourage the false ideas of God on which popular worship too often rests. I do not altogether condemn this feeling, but to me it seems somewhat extreme

and morbid, like the refusal to eat because some food is poisonous, and to drink because some will drink to excess.

The loss of what I must call, for want of a better term, personal conscious relations to God, is a dire loss deeply to be deplored. No intellectual accuracy—even if it were any more possible to the unbeliever than to the believer—could compensate for the shutting out of that Light from above which illumines the souls of all who trust in God.

Lord Amberley touchingly describes the barrenness, the emptiness of soul which often follows the relinquishment of orthodox creeds; by all earnest, tender, and devout persons this loss is deeply felt, and if it be not somehow supplied before the feelings are fatally numbed, the mental and spiritual injury becomes life-long, often deteriorating to both the character and the conduct. If the revolt in religious minds against orthodoxy arose out of a higher and intenser religious feeling, out of more exalted conceptions of the universal love of God, out of more natural trust in His good purposes, surely the only religion that can satisfy them must be one that will bring them into nearer and closer relations with God, and not leave or drive them further off than before. It must be a religion of prayer and praise, of more prayer and not less; of more praise, and not less than before. If the old childish notions of prayer have been wisely put away, it is only that a more rational and manly conception of prayer should take its place, not that the soul should be dumb before God, and all communion with the Father of our spirits given up as senseless and impossible. Progress in religion, as in other things, surely means going forward not going backwards; it may indeed involve casting off burdens which impeded our march, and the removal of obstacles out of our path, but all the more that we may advance and come nearer to God, and not that we should turn round and deliberately retrace our steps, turning our back on the Light which, however overclouded, has been luring on the millions and myriads of our race since the birth of the religious instinct.

The religious emotions, as they have hitherto generally existed, have been felt as a thirsting of the soul after God, a longing to see Him, so to speak, and to be assured of His entire friendliness. In spite of modern scepticism, we see no trace as yet of any decline of this longing after God. If some men are weary of a fruitless search in wrong directions or by ineffective means and for a time feel numbed and paralysed by their discouragements, sooner or later the appetite revives, and the heart yearns after the Living God more fervently than ever. The mass of people, however, whose faith is unsettled, who are no longer satisfied with orthodoxy, still retain their religious emotions, and look and long for a *cultus* in which they can find for these emotions a reasonable satisfaction. Mere metaphysics will not do, philosophy fails to warm their hearts, and the more they pursue intellectual enquiries as to the nature and being of God, the less and less satisfaction they get for their religious feelings and aspirations.

Hence it seems to me that one of the chief duties devolving on religious teachers is to combine with their intellectual strictures on the popular mythology, the best expressions they can find for their own religious faith and hope. What is wanted is to show men what we believe, and why we believe; in language better still, Whom we trust, and why we trust Him. We must bring the warmth of pure religious emotion into our worship and our teaching, if we can ever hope to attract or to benefit those thousands of religious souls now outcasts from their old churches and creeds. Without this, we may be able, perhaps, to enlighten their understanding, to quicken

within them the sceptical, even the scornful, faculty; we may even do some good in rousing their dormant interest in social questions, and kindling within them a noble philanthropy; but when we have done our best we shall not have helped them by one straw to become religious, or to preserve from extinction the dying spark of religious faith. I will not here excite needless controversy on the use of the term "religion." I will grant there may be a prayerless religion, as well as a religion of prayer—and by prayer of course I mean *communion with God*. But I will say, with the utmost emphasis, that these two things are diametrically opposed, and therefore neither has the right to bear the name of the other.

If I am told that there is no sense in prayer and praise because there is no one in Heaven or earth, or in the solitude of our souls, who can hear or heed our signs and songs; I admit the logic, but I deny the assumption. If there be no one to hear, or to heed, or to answer by spiritual grace, I will not be such a fool as to let my soul wear itself out in vain aspirations to *Nothing*. But if there be a God, called by whatever name, who is the correlative to the human soul, and who knows and loves us, surely then the instincts of religious emotion are explained, and actual communion between me and Him is not only possible, but indispensable to my soul's life. We have then to preach a God who will draw all hearts unto Himself, and not repel them or terrify them as the God of Christendom.

Far be it from me arrogantly to declare that I must be right, and those who differ from me must be wrong; far be it from me to desire to silence those who cannot speak of God as I do, even were I able to silence them. I condemn no one, so long as each and all are sincere, and speaking from their hearts what they believe to be true. All I have had in view is to make clear and unmistakable the difference between these two ways of regarding God and religion—to show that whichever of them may be right, they cannot both be right; they are mutually contradictory, and that to attempt to ignore this contrast would only add fresh difficulty to our perplexities, and effectually bar the approach towards liberty of thought, of those who are falling out of the orthodox ranks.

I have only time to say a few words on the æsthetic side of religion. The movement called Ritualism, which has had its dim reflection among Nonconformists, and even in the stern Puritan worship of the Scots, owes its success, not to the vile sacerdotalism which was its origin, but to the innate love of artistic beauty which Ritualism gratifies. The old repulsive services of our youth were so wearisome, that we cannot recall them without a sigh of relief. The Ritualists, wiser in their generation, soon saw that if they were ever to get congregations at all, or to attract the young, the services must be made more or less beautiful and interesting. We all know how this feeling ran into excesses, and how even beauty has been sacrificed to superstitious punctilios. Yet, on the whole, the embellishments are artistic and greatly appreciated. It is possible to go to church now without weariness and without disgust.

If we, in our turn, hope to gain the ear of the free-thinking religious people, we must have an engaging service. The music must be of the best, and the forms as free from dulness as we can possibly invent. This matter, though trifling when compared with the intellectual and emotional questions, is still worthy of due recognition in treating of the subject which has brought us together.

I conclude by thanking the promoters of this Conference for inviting

discussion on these topics of supreme interest; and will only throw out one more hint for your consideration: If the subjects I have broached lead, as they possibly may, to the expression of widely divergent opinion, let it be borne in mind that the sole cause of any differences in opinion is, that on one side or on the other, or on both, the full truth is not yet known; that all our ideas of religion, and how it should be fostered, are rooted in the far deeper question—What do we mean by God? And as no one, surely, in this thoughtful assembly would venture to say more than that his own view is at best but an approximation to the actual truth, it will not give pain or offence to each other to listen to opinions however adverse to our own. If we have found any truth, and surely all have found some, we owe its discovery to the clashing of thought with thought, and to the centuries of intellectual strife which have cleared the ground on which we stand.

The CHAIRMAN then invited discussion on the paper, observing that they did not expect to involve every one in a long speech, but it was perhaps just as well that the paper just read should be dissected and digested by discussion and comment, and therefore they would be very glad to hear anything calculated to illustrate what had been said by Mr. Voysey, and to listen to objections to the arguments he had brought.

Mr. JOACHIM KASPARY said he had taken a very great interest during the last twelve years in the freethought movement, and he heartily hoped that Mr. Conway, of whom he was a very great admirer, might succeed in forming an organisation of liberal thinkers, whether atheists or deists. For himself, he presumed not only to believe in the existence of a God, but he was also able to know and to prove it. He heartily agreed with most of the sentiments of the paper, but he would like to know whether Mr. Voysey by prayer meant begging prayer or religious prayer. What freethinkers wanted was a basis for their freethought. All superstition arose because men had not hitherto had a basis for their ideas; supernatural religions were merely religions built by men upon their own opinions. He thought religion ought to be built upon an infallible criterion, upon a criterion now which knowledge was derived. All men differed, and who should decide between them, if there were no infallible invariable criterion by which they could be judged as to right and to wrong. There was but one infallible criterion by which they could judge of opinions and thought, and that, if he might use an expression, was what all knew to be the natural laws. According to these laws matter was changed; and, according to thought, sentient beings were either rewarded or degraded whether they knew it or not, or whether they liked it or not. In the universe there was nothing unchangeable except the mode by which changes took place, and therefore he thought religion ought to be built upon Nature's laws. These natural laws he called the laws of God. Within the last twelve years he had made great discoveries which he wanted to publish, but that he had not the time or the means to do so, by which he could prove whence men came and where they would go. Although they might smile, he hoped every one would see what he would be able to prove. He would not detain the meeting further, except to say that he wished it great success.

Miss DOWNING said she had listened with great interest to the paper. Mr. Voysey remarked that thousands were becoming atheists, and tens of thousands were without religious affections altogether. It struck her as accurate, and very true. What she wanted to ask was, Could anyone there at that meeting give them some certainty and show them some path to follow? She was not in the position of those who doubt all religious doctrines, and took up a negative position. Indeed she was brought up in the strictest of all

churches of orthodox Catholic religion. Mr. Voysey himself had formerly belonged to the Established Church, and probably other gentlemen there had come out from their sects. It had always been a puzzle to her to understand how people could give up their convictions, their thoughts, their beliefs, their truths, if she might call them so, and accept others without any doubt or difference. She had gone to hear nearly every Liberal speaker upon religion. She had come constantly to that place, where she always heard Mr. Conway with the greatest delight, and she was still as unconvinced as ever of the path to follow or how she was to choose. It seemed to her that they must either give up all belief in supernatural religion, the belief in a God, of any agent, just as much as the Trinity, the Incarnation, Transubstantiation, and Confession; or they must, if logical, become members of the Roman Catholic Church. She spoke with some difficulty, for she was extremely nervous, and besides, a state of doubt was not a pleasant condition to be in. She would be glad if anyone there would point out how it was possible to hold by one belief any more than another. She often came to South Place. She heard Mr. Conway's admirable lecture, she enjoyed the anthems and the hymns, and she always went back with her mind elevated, and with a feeling that she would like to do something, not for God, but something more for humanity. With regard to religion, the belief in God brought them at once to a stand, and she did not see how they were to agree upon that point at all; they could not define the meaning of the term. If Mr. Voysey had contented himself with dealing with the Almighty as an emotional thing, or as an ecstatic thing, she could understand it; but when he went further, and asked for some intellectual belief, the question arose, was there a bit more intellectual truth in the belief in the Divinity than there was in the belief in any creed or dogma of the Church whatever? John Henry Newman was an instance of one great thinker who had felt these difficulties, and had ended them by going to the one church which did claim to be divinely founded, and to have infallible truth. His deductions carried him to that church, and she could not understand how any ladies and gentlemen who held one single belief in the Divinity at all, did not go there at once also. It was not one whit more difficult, as an intellectual problem, to swallow the whole camel than to swallow one portion of it. She was speaking on this subject to one of the ablest men in Oxford, and she said what good had he done by his long life? "You have upset the old landmarks, you have given us nothing in their place." He replied that, after sixty years' experience of human life, the knowledge he had gained taught him to believe what he saw, to believe what came home to his own reason, and not to go one step beyond that. He added "Nobody knows anything about it; you cannot say that it is or it is not; you cannot take the absolute denial of the atheist or the theory of the Deist. You must simply make the best you can of this life, and take the chance of living; all the rest is insoluble as it was left to us all before."

Captain PRICE said he was a great admirer of Mr. Voysey and of his teachings, and as Miss Downing seemed anxious to know his opinions as to a personal Deity he was bound to say a word on the subject. He would not be standing there at all if he for one instant believed or thought that any of them imagined he had the slightest feeling or wish for the continuance of the old orthodox religion. He was a pure Deist, and believed that there was one Supreme Being; how he was constituted he knew not, and nobody had been able to describe in the smallest way. The constitution of the world alone would almost convince him that there must be some Supreme Being, call him what they would, who governed and ruled the

universe, and who brought the world out of what they knew not what. He believed that there was this supreme nature in everything, ruling everything. As to prayer he looked with wonder and astonishment on those who begged for favours from Him, and he did not for a moment believe that prayers or praises could in any way detract from or add to his grandeur or importance. More than that he did not believe, and Mr. Voysey did not believe.

The CHAIRMAN next called upon Mr. S. Teetgen, whose card had been handed to him, and had some difficulty in pronouncing the name.

Mr. S. TEETGEN: Mine is a very peculiar name, I cannot pronounce it properly myself unless I make a very ugly face. (A laugh.) Our German friend would give it to you very nicely. I do not happen to be a German, but I am of German descent. I came here through seeing an announcement in a public paper that there was to be such a meeting as this, and I thought I would like to come. I think of free thought, religious free thought; and since I have been sitting here I have seen the outcome of free thought. One does not know one thing, another does not know another (a laugh); how you will be able to make a combination you don't know, and the difficulties will be so great that there will be no coming together. You want to know how to come together, but there is the difficulty: I have seen that all along, I have had to do with free thought in all directions. When I take the Bible I never allow anyone to dictate to me, but I take it as an authority from God for my guidance and instruction; what is the outcome of it? I look back on the past and see this England of ours, this noble country, in a state of wretchedness, misery, and pollution, but there are no religious persons that have done it any good. Your presence, your congregations, have all been wrong, so I have been told this morning; one reader made some very kind remarks about letting all be done in love, and when I listened to the Chairman's address, I thought, now, there is want of love there. He condemns everybody, and all the ministers and congregations are condemned together. Of course, John Wesley was amongst those condemned. He spent £30,000 among the people, and only allowed himself £28 per year for keeping him. He thought he was selfish and intended to do wrong; and also he has been condemned very wrongly. I take Whitfield, a man going out with his life in his hand, as it were, who might be stabbed at any moment among the thousands of roughs that he goes amongst, and what is he doing? Seeking to help those men and women, to bring them from drunkenness, from dissipation, to bring them from their tendency to murder, to bring those poor and degraded ones upon a purer level with himself, if they will only seek to reach it,—but he was wrong (a cry of "Question"). I thought the Chairman dwelt upon the point, and if I am dwelling upon what the Chairman said, I cannot do wrong; if he says I am wrong I will accept it. These men, whatever they were, were men who had the well-being of their species at heart—(hear, hear)—and were prepared to give up life, if necessary, that they might bring them up from their low condition and raise them to a higher platform. I am not going to tell you that all their views are correct, but I tell you that they were seeking the interests of their fellow men, and when you tell me that these ministers thus bound together, and working together, have for their object only the doing of wrong, and that it was selfishness, I say you are wrong. (Cries of "He did not say so—you are wrong.") I am waiting for the chairman to put me right, and when he says he shall put me down I will obey. Of course he is a free thinker—I am a free thinker; he says he has a right—I say, I have

to say—(a voice : “ We are not bound to listen ”)—not at all ; then walk out. I have come to occupy the platform—you are not bound to listen, and it is not for me to direct you. [The speaker, while taking a glass of water, remarked that his throat sometimes required water.]

The CHAIRMAN : One remark—I think it is necessary that all speakers should confine themselves to the argument ; I think a great deal you have said was not strictly to the argument.

Mr. TEETGEN : Very well, I shall be guided by you, but not by the meeting. I maintain that the preachers of the Gospel have gone forth and struggled against all kinds of difficulties, have gone to the lowest dregs of society, have brought them out from their positions, and have changed them. Does that deserve respect ? (Hear, hear.) Then you ought to speak of them in a respectful manner, especially when you remember that the free thinkers were not the men to do it. They sat by their firesides and enjoyed themselves on their sofas, and left these men to struggle with these difficulties without coming to their help, but now they find fault with them, and say that it is simple selfishness. That is a very great wrong done to them. I think free thought to be altogether misnamed, I think and will think for myself ; I shall cling to the old books.

Mr. MONCURE CONWAY rose to order, and asked the Chairman whether the speaker was not wasting the time of the meeting. He had told them details about his name, and the state of his throat, and other things entirely irrelevant and uninteresting to them, and was trying to occupy their time and to interfere with the purpose for which they were gathered ; he therefore moved that the meeting should not hear this gentleman farther. The speaker evidently came there simply to insult the meeting, and had no thought or concern with the serious subject which occupied them. If this were a serious speech and meant anything genuine whatever, he would be the last to interfere, but it was unfortunately not so, and they could not allow any man to defeat the purpose for which they were gathered.

A GENTLEMAN in the body of the meeting said he was not a member of South Place, but he fully sympathised with the remarks of Mr. Conway, and he heartily seconded the resolution.

The CHAIRMAN put the question and it was carried unanimously.

As Mr. TEETGEN was leaving the platform an Indian gentleman in the body of the hall rose and said he was an atheist and a freethinker, but he protested against the way in which the speaker had been treated. If he had not been interrupted he would have gone on, probably, and he felt an injustice had been done him. He had no sympathy with his views, but he thought he should be properly treated and allowed free scope.

The Rev. WILLIAM BINNS (Birkenhead) : I hardly expected I should be able to attend, and I had no intention of speaking but I heard a portion of the able address of Miss Downing, and I could not help feeling that something should be said from another standpoint. Looking over the circular, by which the meeting was convened, I see you will include in the deliberations anyone who may choose to come, for you dwell on the fact that your desire is to promote an unsectarian liberal religion. And you propose to consider the affirmations and negations which men may make. Miss Downing seemed to imply that there was no medium between the absolute authority of the Roman Catholic Church on the one hand and what she understood from an Oxford Professor to be a belief only in what was revealed to us directly through our senses. She herself, therefore, was not able on purely rational grounds to agree to the moderate affirmations made by Mr. Voysey, or to the still more

moderate affirmation made by Mr. Conway. For my own part, I feel at liberty to make all the affirmations that Mr. Voysey makes, and a few more too, and consequently all the affirmations that Mr. Conway makes, and rather more. I must therefore try to meet the difficulty which Miss Downing experiences, for I cannot accept either of her alternatives. I would put in a negative towards these various conceptions of religion which militate against the development of the higher nature of man and tell against the desire we have for illimitable progress. I should not feel at all inclined to put any negation on those ideas which it is not possible for us clearly to explain and adequately to define, because I know by experience, and suppose that most of the people here know, that many of our highest religious ideas and emotions cannot be accurately and adequately defined. I have preached from this platform when the platform was a pulpit, and have said something of that kind, and W. J. Fox for whom this place was built, and who exercised such a healthy and, I may say, such a divine influence in the development of religious life in London, would often say much in the same spirit. First of all, as to the affirmations which we are justified in making in religious matters. Are we justified in venturing on the affirmations, I will not say of God, because in one way or another, except the atheistic gentleman who just rose, and two or three more, all would be inclined to admit God in some general and undefined way. It is when the definition comes that the difficulty crops up. Are we justified in making an affirmation of God as a personal being? I call to mind what a very clever and argumentative and liberal man, Mr. Matthew Arnold, has written upon this subject, and how he has tried to make out that the whole thing is unintelligible and undeclarable. And I remember too how I have often heard my friend Mr. Holyoake say that these ideas of God are beyond our power of sight and knowledge. But I say we can venture to affirm the personality of God. What, however, do we mean by that? I will give a definition which is rather a leaning towards the truth than an exact statement of the truth. I would say we mean that the personal power in ourselves is after all but a very small portion of the boundless intellectual and moral energy to which creation testifies. We mean that the moral sense that there is in ourselves falls very much below the moral force that there is at work in the universe, and which moral force we find and feel as an imperfect echo in our own conscience. Conscience is the deputy of God dwelling in man. We feel, too, as Descartes points out, the idea of perfection that inhabits every man's soul; how it gets there we do not know, and it differs in different men. It differs in Mr. Holyoake's mind in the form which it takes from the form which it takes in my own. And yet there is one characteristic which always belongs to this idea of perfection that we have; it is an idea of something higher than ourselves, and that will continue to be higher and better than ourselves still, everlastingly, however high we ourselves may ascend. In the presence of this idea of perfection

“The increasing prospect tires our wandering eyes.
Hills peep o'er hills and Alps on Alps arise;”

And so far as the personality of God is concerned, I affirm that it follows as a necessary explanation of the facts of consciousness. It alone explains this sense of moral authority, this universal feeling of dependence and aspiration, and this idea of a perfection ever more before us, which we all possess. The personality of God is the infinitude of intelligence and will; all ideas are centred in Him; the unity is there, we say there are there multifarious manifestations, more indeed than we can describe or we can

know. I don't think that I could venture to define the personality of God more closely. When we say God is a personal being, we mean that God knows what he is doing. If there be any whom this does not satisfy, if people say they want to have the personality of God put into some more definite form, then I should be inclined not exactly to say no, but simply inclined to say, well, I personally must stop there, so far as I am concerned. If Mr. Voysey or Mr. Conway ventures on a more or less detailed definition than that which I have given, why, you are at liberty to accept it. I remember I was discussing the subject with some Scotch Presbyterians, good friends of mine, sometime ago, and one of them said, we "must believe in the personality of God." I said, "How?" He said, "God is a person in the same way in which I am a person." "Well," but I said, "I see the way in which you are a person; you are a middle-aged Scotchman, 5 feet 6 inches high, with grey hair and a sandy complexion, and you wear spectacles. Do you mean God is a person in that way?" Of course, that would not do, and thus a very definite definition could not be given. Still endeavouring to meet Miss Downing's difficulties, I venture to say also that we may affirm immortality. Immortality, some of you think, is beyond experience, and that it is not and cannot be verified. I would not say that it is *beyond* experience, but only present experience has not attained to it. I certainly would not say that because it is not yet verified, it never can be verified. For the fact is, when you come to examine what your knowledge really amounts to, you find that it is very limited. If you study John Stuart Mill, and people of that kind, you would not venture to be dogmatic on any subject. You would be sceptical about yourselves sitting there, and my speaking here. The whole external universe on grounds of pure reason is doubtful, and matter is moonshine. Let us look at the subject then in another way. I say that immortality is the affirmation of a legitimate belief and a natural and justifiable faith. But we only really know and are sure and certain of the present moment, and the facts that are present to our immediate consciousness. What I know and I feel here and now that I am certain of. It is part of my present experience. Beyond what I know and feel here and now as contents of my present consciousness, all belongs to the region of speculation and inference. So far as the past is concerned, that is all a matter of memory, and memory is belief and inference and speculation. Very few people's memories can be trusted, and when you go back historically for hundreds of years, great uncertainties creep in. So far as the future is concerned, how are we situated? Why, to-morrow is a speculation; we believe in it, we take it for granted, and confidently expect that it will come, but experience has not attained to it, it is not verified as yet, it is possible that it never may be verified. However, one hopes for it and thinks it will come. Then we affirm immortality on the strength of this natural tendency of reason to believe that conscious personal life continues indefinitely. We all believe in to-morrow, and we who affirm immortality, believe still further in the prolongation of to-morrow, and of to-morrow's to-morrow. If one to-morrow comes, or two, or three, I see no reason in the world, either of sense or thought, why constantly fresh to-morrows should not come. Of course I do not know even about the very next to-morrow, but I like that sentiment Mrs. Barbauld expresses in the words—

"Life, we've been long together,
Through pleasant and through stormy weather;
'Tis hard to part when friends are dear,
Perhaps 'twill cost a sigh, a tear.

Then steal away, give little warning,
 Choose thine own time,
 Say not 'Good night,' but in some brighter clime
 Bid me 'Good morning.'"

I like that everlasting good morning which has to be given us. I may be told this is simply agnosticism in another form, but I think it is belief, and rational belief also. I would say further, that the way in which ideas of this kind prove their truth is not so much that we can satisfactorily demonstrate them to the intellect and adequately define them, but when they are uttered out of the depths of trust and love in the mind and heart, somehow they exercise an enormous power in quickening our own intellectual and moral nature, and the intellectual and moral nature of all who are able to any extent to sympathise with them. If they be true, and I maintain they prove their truth by the influence they exercise, we have a boundless horizon, a horizon so wide that we cannot fix its limits, a limitless horizon of the boundless love and infinite perfection of God working on the side of our own finite intellects and aspirations. We have also the looking out towards an eternal future, conscious that there is something in us that will go on growing and flourishing and working for ever, and the more it grows and flourishes and works the richer will be the joy it gives to us and the more powerful it will make us as efficient agents in the amelioration of the social condition of our fellow men. Passing through Fleet Street yesterday morning, and smoking a cigar after breakfast—just before preaching the annual sermon to the British and Foreign Association in Essex Street, Strand,—I passed a window where the *Secular Review* was exhibited for sale, and I noticed in an article on the first page a quotation from Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, that seems to me to fairly and substantially represent the affirmations that we may venture to make. It was this—

"Thou wilt not leave us in the dust ;
 Thou madest man ; he knows not why,
 He thinks he was not made to die ;
 And Thou hast made him. Thou art just."

Well, sustained by the logic of the moral sentiment, I make these affirmations.
 [At this point the Congress adjourned for refreshments.]

On resuming—

Rev. J. C. STREET (of Belfast) said : I regret very much that the debate of this morning was not kept within the limits of the very interesting question raised by Mr. Voysey. We are summoned here to consider whether it is possible to establish a union of liberal thinkers in which every kind of thought shall have expression and shall have a respectful hearing and consideration. Now I live in one of the most bigoted places in Christendom, and I am surrounded by the most dense orthodoxy that the world has ever seen. I have to fight a very uphill battle for the cause of what I consider liberalism in religion, and I am impressed with the feeling that there is great significance in the words that fell from our Chairman, when he said that though we know that to-day the liberal thinker need not be afraid to utter his views, yet that we cannot tell how soon the day may come when freethought may be placed under such a ban as he has described. I am painfully conscious of that fact, and I want to see if it is possible to organize some movement by which there shall be an aggregation of these scattered elements of freethought, a consolidation of the atoms, of men who are working together for the maintenance of it. Our platform this morning has been

most comprehensive, and with one single exception we have heard with respectful attention all who have spoken ; I should have been prepared under other circumstances to give careful attention even to that speaker, but, as he seemed to be playing with us, there was not time for him. The question is, is it possible so to form an organization, that here and throughout the country there shall be a body of men who will stand by the liberal thinker when he is trying to utter himself in the most remote part of the empire ? Most interesting questions have been raised by Mr. Voysey in his paper as to what are the religious needs of the age. Passing from the question as to whether it is the disestablishment of the Church we want, he said we wanted the disestablishment of the creeds of the Church. Then he came to the direct questions which we have to consider. He said that there were thrown off from the orthodoxy of the churches a large body of freethinkers, divided into two sections—those who are represented by the ladies and gentlemen, who, by their very presence here, raised a protest this morning against the dominant orthodoxy, but who cling to the essence of religion while yet they do not recognize the personality of God or the need of prayer ; and the other section, also thrown off orthodoxy, who recognize the personality of God and the necessity of prayer. Mr. Voysey raised the question as to whether it is possible to have a free religious association which will include those various sections of the great heterodox party. I think it is possible, and it is our business to reduce it to actuality to-day. I would much rather then have heard speakers rising to tell us how to do it than that they should have wandered into the abstruse metaphysical questions that have been raised. I think it is quite clear the basis of the association must be utterly undogmatic, must recognize the largest liberty to every man amongst us—must take care that atheism as well as theism shall have a standpoint ; it is necessary also that we should not only have a platform on which these two can stand, but there must be a clear understanding that this undogmatic basis shall recognize not merely the right of the atheist or the deist to speak here, but shall enforce upon him the duty of utterance. We want to get at the thought of the atheist, the thought of the deist, in order that it may be fully and fearlessly expressed, in order that it may be canvassed, and not merely canvassed but dealt with, amongst those problems of nature and of men which we should constantly have under consideration. I would respectfully urge upon this meeting that the problem suggested by Mr. Voysey's paper is—Can we have such an organization ? Remember, there are a number of men, some here, some in other and various parts of the world, who are bearing the burden of a great weight put upon them by the orthodox churches. There are some men who still stand within the limits of the church, who are fighting for liberal Christianity : there are some of us who are fighting for liberal religion, whether within or outside of Christianity, but we are very few, scattered and almost isolated, and it would cheer us immensely if we could find gathered here in the metropolis of the world an organization which would throw its great shield of strength over the isolated workers, and make them feel they were not working alone, but that brave, earnest, true men were banded together ready to sustain and afford these isolated fighters their help. I hope to have the pleasure of being present at the meeting to-morrow, and I hope if to-day there is not submitted a basis of some organization, that at least to-morrow we shall have such a basis laid down, that we may not go back feeling that we have been here in vain. I heartily wish success to the movement, and express my own personal thanks to Mr. Conway and his congregation for having summoned us from all parts of the country to attend this meeting.

MR. HOLYOAKE: I had no ambition, nor intention whatever, of taking part in a conference of this description, and had I not been seduced by the blandishments of my friend Mr. Conway to come, I certainly should not have been here. I understand that what you want is some brief, explicit statement of opinion on the part of as many persons as care, I suppose, for unity of action.—I care nothing for unity of action. There were two phrases in the circular which seem to me hopeful—one was that which deplored the isolation of which Mr. Street has just been speaking, and another expressing a hope that there was some universal state of things that it was possible to realise. Now, I suppose that a few facts will be of as much relevance as many theoretical arguments. I can say that all my own experience shows that men are arriving at greater unity of action than I ever expected to see attained in my lifetime. This is so marked that this seems like a new world to me. I can testify that for the past twenty-five years it has not been possible to get upon any platform in England any responsible minister of religion who would discuss any of the questions which before that time they would discuss without ceasing. It is because the old orthodox questions, which agitated me when I was a youth and acted on my compeers of that time, are now dead in men's minds, dead as the cities of the Zuyder Zee. Nobody cares to revive them, nor is it possible to have a discussion upon them. We used to agitate about eternity, perdition, and about the advisability of their being such a place: everybody is now agreed about this—that the eternity of the perdition shall be quite dropped out. Most persons remain still of the opinion that there is some use for this place, with this mitigation, that there are a great many people who certainly ought to be there. I never cared much about it myself, but the personality of the devil was often discussed about me, and we were told what an active agent he was; but everybody now sees that there is no business so badly managed as the devil's, for we know the people who ought to have been in his hands long ago—It is apparent to everybody, so that one might imagine there is some satanic trade union in existence, and that the persons whom he employs have struck, and don't do their work. I used to debate with my friend Thomas Cooper about the doctrine of the resurrection; but now there are a few persons who are so foolish or so insensible to the privileges they now enjoy, which were purchased for them by the sacrifices of their forefathers, and which they don't care to question, that when they die, if they were to be raised again, it would bring resurrection itself into discredit. Upon all these points the opinion of the public has so widely changed that there are certainly greater grounds than ever for hope that some day there may be practical unanimity of opinion about theology. I suppose it is no use going about the world looking for what you want; it is much better to open your eyes and see what you find there. Therefore it seems to me that a conference which seeks to reconcile opinion is perfectly delusive. What you want is a congress which shall seek to recognize opinion. It is much too soon to attempt to reconcile it. Why, you have not got half the contrary opinions you will have in a few years in this country. What is the good of beginning to reconcile when you have not got all the projects before you? We may expect almost infinite diversity of opinion. Well, I am in favour of that. At a meeting of the Congregational clergy the other day I said I was a friend to sects and to diffusion of opinion. I heard my friend, Mr. Voysey, speak very eloquently about his conception of Theism, and I listened to him with great interest. I find many people speak earnestly on behalf of their own particular opinions, and instead of effacing individuality of thought I would rather it were increased. The effacement will come by

time and by argument; it will never come by logical reconciliation of innate differences. Therefore, I like this controversy, this individuality of religious opinion. Why, is not the world full of people of the most divers kind of opinion? As to these opinions that I have called secular, I never pretended that I was an apostle of them, only a propagandist of them, addressing myself to hundreds of people whom I knew, who were to be impelled in right paths by secular inspiration, and could be impelled by no other way. All the world is full of this diversity of opinion, and you want every form of opinion to impel men into the right path. With respect to theology, the question was often referred to this morning. There are two kinds of minds in men, the emotional and the intellectual. There are people who wish to believe, who believe what they wish, and who wish to believe what they like. There are also people who simply want to know what they ought to believe, and these people are perfectly different. You never can connect them or reconcile them, and the best thing you can do is to give each fair play, and endeavour to see whether it is not possible there should be some small connection between them on which they could agree. Intellectually they will never agree. There are people whose minds are like water. They refract, and if you put the plainest statement of logic and mathematics into such minds they would immediately seem bent. There are people whose minds are inverted, and the millenium will never come to these people until the world is turned topsy-turvy, and then things will seem straight to them. This diversity of mind you cannot extinguish. These people never vary: you cannot alter them, and all you can do is to recognize them, and to give the freest play to their individuality of conscience and views. I have no doubt the nursery rhymes are quite true which say, slightly altered,

"For all disunion under the sun
There is an agreement, or there is none.
If there be one, you will easily find it,
But if there be not—why never mind it."

There is another unity which is possible, and that is the unity of action. I am sure that in all the schools of free thought I know, and of practical thought with which I have become acquainted, the moral aims of their members are very nearly the same. You might propound objects of attainment of a moral nature, objects such as the advancement and the recognition of individuality of thought, and of religious thought. I do not myself believe in the multiplication of atheists to which some speakers have referred. The atheist is a creature of very slow growth, and requires as much discipline and understanding as science itself. These persons are very few, and do not increase so fast as you imagine. It is one of the easy and absolute opinions of theology to imagine that people are created continually of the most advanced type. I am sure of this, that there are very few who are atheistical from necessity, but the name covers the most extreme forms of opinion. There is a community of moral aims and endeavours, and the only possible ground of unity which we can have for the present is a conference of persons recognizing differences—not asking people to come to explain them and reconcile them—but recognizing them and seeing how much common work they can do, how far they will act together, and how far they can contribute to the perfection of each other, and to the maintenance of the right of conscience and free thought, upon which all progress depends. What Mr. Street spoke of is exactly the thing that is possible. It is possible, I am sure, to have a conference and to get unity of action for objects of a moral nature upon which we are all

agreed, leaving out entirely the religious opinions—leaving persons to have their own way about that and to accept them if possible. That I would do all my life. Ever since I was what the world calls a heretic I never refused to subscribe to a Methodist or a Catholic chapel if I found my neighbours wished to worship God in that way, and had no other way of expressing their convictions. I would just as readily assist them as persons of my opinion, because I know that this world is a great well, and truth is very low down in it, and I do not believe in any one sect drawing it all up. It wants the combination of good will of the whole. I have no doubt that that is where the line of unity lies. I am sorry I have spoken at such length, but I thought it would be unfair to accept the invitation and not tell you my opinions on this subject. Your line of unity will not lie in endeavouring to reconcile opinion. That will reconcile itself if you will encourage this individuality of action and give free play and fair play to all, irrespective of their views. If you summon a congress in which all opinion every where shall be recognized you will find that when the members come to act together, they will lessen their differences by contact, and by knowing one another they will discover with surprise how people they thought the most diverse in opinion from them have really all along meant the same thing. I know that unity will come one day. It will not come by giving up your opinion, but by advising and forming a corporation shall recognize all, and shall give strength to all who care for the truth and who desire to act together for the common ends of humanity about which we are all agreed.

MR. MARK H. JUDGE: I should not have ventured to send up my name but for the fact that before the adjournment the Conference appeared to me to be taking a direction which was not really desirable. The Conference was not called together, as it seems to me, to take up particular religious questions, to discuss abstruse problems as to the personality of God, or matters of that kind; but we are here to endeavour to meet the religious needs of our time which are felt by liberal thinkers. It seems to me that, for this purpose, we have nothing to do with the particular opinions which may be held by us as thinkers. The discussion before the adjournment was what we might have expected at a meeting of perplexed thinkers, rather than at a meeting called for the definite purpose of strengthening our position in the country. What we want to aim at, I think, is not to attempt to define true religion, but to get free religion. If we attempt to define true religion, we ought to stand by our definition, and then we become sectarian at once. If I understand the meaning of the Committee who issued the circular convening this Conference, they wish to found some such body as the Free Religious Association in America, and I do hope some such organization will result from this Conference. What we want is an association not an agreement. We need not be agreed upon particular problems. For instance, I think the Chairman was somewhat illiberal in his opening address—unintentionally so, I am sure; for while we might agree with the views he expressed, the address seemed to me to be more sectarian than it should have been under the circumstances. I may have misunderstood him but I thought he assumed that this was a meeting opposed to revealed religion, and that he would not include in the community of freethinkers those who believed in the Bible or in the orthodox theology. Now, the Free Religious Association is not so constituted. I, myself, do not believe in the Bible in the sense in which the gentleman does who unfortunately failed to obtain a hearing; but I think that, if this Conference is to be of any utility in creating a broader feeling on religious subjects, it should not be limited to such a basis. What we want to do is to

get together a number of men prepared to listen to each other, whatever their diversity of opinion; and to me it is very illiberal as well as unwise to refuse to receive those orthodox people who are prepared to come and associate and exchange opinions with us. Recently I have had an opportunity of seeing a practical application of this principle in a club in a provincial town formed of both political parties. It was organised by the liberal agent, but he refused to limit it to party purposes. It seems to me that spirit ought to animate us—that we should have freedom of thought, whatever it may be. I don't at all share the view of the Chairman that the time may perhaps come when we shall be in the position we were some ages back. I have more faith in my principles, and believe that they have a stronger hold on the public mind, and that they only want a free platform to make greater progress. If orthodox people do come into an association of this kind we need not fear that our principles will be overruled, we should rather expect to leaven those who come amongst us.

Mrs. ROSE: Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to be with you to-day. When Mr. Conway kindly sent me the invitation, I was very glad to see that a conference was to be held in which an interchange of opinion or discussion would take place, for free discussion is like the air we breathe, if we have it not we die. Particularly so is this true of a discussion on the subjects made known in that circular. In thanking Mr. Conway and the Committee for sending me the circular I informed them precisely of my opinion—namely, that I belong to no religious sect; I profess no religion; and I have long ago discarded even the name. It is too indefinite and misleading, and is only calculated to divide the human family instead of uniting it. Well may we exclaim "Oh! religion what crimes have been perpetrated in thy name." We have been told by some of the speakers that God cannot be defined. Nor can the term religion be defined. The orthodox church gives it one meaning, the heterodox church, if I may call it so, another. The liberal church gives it another, entirely different. Now, if you want to form a society for practice, you must give it a practical name. (Hear, hear.) I would take the liberty of suggesting a practical name. I know we have a society in the United States under the title of "Free Religion." Free is all right. But what is Religion? That term is indefinite and undefinable. If you mean by it morality, say morality. If justice, say justice. If wisdom, say wisdom. But if you want to have a term that shall unite all, no matter of what sect or to what branch he belongs, then adopt a name that shall be definite and strong. Do you want unity, not upon speculative matters, but where all could be practically interested in working for the benefit of human race—then take the name of the "Friends of Progress." You ask to what would it lead? To everything that is grand and noble in society—progress in the arts, progress in the sciences, progress in social reform, progress in the social sciences. That would elevate man from the lowest to the highest as far as human nature is capable of being elevated. Any individual might belong to this association, and yet have any opinion he liked with regard to all speculative notions of God. I am a free thinker to the very fullest extent. I have never yet heard a definition of God that comes up to my conscientious conviction. In none of the gods that have been proclaimed can I conscientiously believe. If there are any others I will examine them and see whether they come up to my highest conviction, and then say whether I can assent to or dissent from them. Our beliefs and disbeliefs don't depend upon our will, but upon our convictions, and even if we wish it we cannot believe that of which

we are not convinced, but we could all believe in progress, in progress of thought and of action. But we can have no progress without liberty of thought, and liberty of thought is not enough. The liberty to think exists in Rome, for the Pope cannot prevent any one from thinking, but we want more than Rome gives, we want liberty not only to think, but a liberty to express our thoughts. That is a part of progress irrespective of opinions. Let us then unite in a Society of Friends of Progress, aiming not only to think but to express our thoughts. The Christian, the Mahometan, the Jew, the Deist, and the Atheist—for the Atheist has the same right to his opinion that the Methodist has to his—all have an equal right to their opinions. There, my friends, you see a wide field open for union—a union to reform the laws so as to have perfect freedom of conscience, the right to think and to express our thoughts on all subjects. Progress opens as wide a field as the human race—it endeavours to remove the obstacles that prevent our growth. We have remained as pigmies in our thoughts, because we have not had the right to express them, even if we had any thoughts, and we must work for the right to teach what we believe to be true, the right to work for and to allow a more rational, consistent, liberal and more glorious state of society than we now have. In all these things we could join hands. The Rev. Mr. Voysey and the Rev. Mr. anybody else, unless they are too fixed in their bigotry, or too much impeded in their religious views, as well as the more rational and liberal Christians, could all unite with us to form a union which should give us strength, strength not to injure any one, not even to prevent the irrational views that some of the religionists have of their god, but a strength to take care that as long as they have them they should have a perfect right to express them—a strength that shall enable us to assist each other to improve the world, to obtain rational and consistent laws, laws that will not deprive a mother of her child—(loud and continued applause)—as has been done to Mrs. Besant, simply because she thinks differently from the judge; laws that will not incarcerate an innocent, respectable man, simply because he sold something that he conscientiously thought beneficial to society. We should work to get rid of irrational laws based upon sectarian opinions, and to replace them by laws standing upon rational knowledge. We ask only the right to investigate everything, to throw it free and open, and to see if after examination we can arrive at something we can say we know. Now, Christians acknowledge they don't know what God is, except that everybody ought to believe as they do. I say every person has a perfect right to believe as he or she is forced to; and among the laws that ought to be altered, and altered by rational and consistent means, are the laws that are based upon sex instead of upon right. In my heresy, if I liked, I might call it my religion, all I want is that woman should have the same rights as a human being. I may be wrong, but I have a conviction and really believe that woman is a human being. If I am in error, Mr. Chairman, please to correct me. As a human being, I want her to have precisely the same rights as a man. Now, when a judge says that if this woman had been the father instead of the mother, the child might have been left with her; I think that is one of the laws which should be altered. In all practical views, then, I think we can agree, and it is not astonishing that while we can agree upon practical subjects we cannot agree at all on theories based upon speculative opinions about some man in the moon.

Colonel HIGGINSON: I have sat with profound interest during this session. Of course, having a good deal of human nature, I have felt the same great desire to come upon this platform and put my little questions, that so

many others have felt to come up and propound theirs, but I have been restrained up to this time by a sense of that becoming humility which is so especially characteristic of an American. Perhaps I should not have alluded to that beautiful trait, but that my dear old friend Mrs. Rose, whom we used to be proud for so many years to claim as an American, while her sonorous eloquence filled our halls, and whom you, I suppose, now try to claim as an Englishwoman, though she is not, has spoken. When she came forward I felt the result was that the Atlantic was, so to speak, crossed, and that the other side might venture to put in a claim to be heard. I suppose we have felt that somehow or other, from the moment of the adjournment, whether it was from the interval of meditation, or the remarkably good flavour of the sandwiches with which our benevolent friends here have supplied us, that the whole discussion has taken a new impulse and concentrated itself upon more definite purposes, and that in short, the real work of the meeting has begun. This morning's discussion was of the greatest value, for it was unavoidable. I speak from a good deal of experience of just such efforts, for, as my friend said this morning, I have been long connected with the Free Religious Association of the United States. I have found you always have to begin in that way, always to blow off a certain amount of steam, always to listen to a certain amount of persons who come here thrilling with something they want to say, or some question they want to ask, or some objection to make, or some objection that somebody else has made, to answer. There must be that, and that has to pass off before the real serious work begins. I don't know whether any native-born Briton felt impelled, in addition to the sandwiches, to imbibe a glass of the national fluid with his luncheon—it is a practice I deprecate, and I introduce it here only for the purpose of scientific illustration. If he did, he unquestionably watched with pleased interest the incipient foam which marked the rising of the beer; but it was not for the sake of the foam that he ordered the drink—he drank the beer of whose excellence and strength the foam was the symbol. In any liberal movement, even in a movement for union, there must be in the early stages the foam. It is only after the foam has disappeared that you come to the actual flavour, and if the actual flavour of the beverage—the liberalism—seems bitter, why it is the bitter of the beer that is considered by Englishmen wholesome after all. We have come now, this afternoon, to the solid stage of the proceedings, and if I rise to speak it is partly that I know there are those here now who will not be here to-morrow. The Free Religious Society of America, whatever its faults and shortcomings, did at last come together in precisely such meetings as this, it met just the same variety of opinion, had to withstand just such obstacles, and even down to the last eloquent appeal of Mrs. Rose for a larger scope than the founders of the movement aimed at or succeeded in establishing, the exact counterpart of the earlier stages of the movement. I think it altogether likely, in view of the different circumstances, the different elements, the different prejudices, the different ways of life from those which prevail amongst us, that your movement may take some different form. I must say I think that, in some respects, and in some details, a change might be desirable amongst us, but I do think we can claim this one thing—that a great many of the doubts expressed to-day we have solved by actual practice, and a good deal that is here stated in the form of a vague yearning, stands with us in the form of a definite association, which, if it has done nothing else, has at least lived eight years, and is certainly no weaker than when it began. I should say, in reference to the demand put forth by a

gentleman this morning, that the most important thing was to have a place where persons of different opinions could stand, that so far he has stated something perfectly reasonable and perfectly practical. It is one thing, however, to find a platform where persons of a dozen different opinions can stand, and quite another to find one large enough for all to walk upon, especially if it is to include the doing of everything that ought to be done. If our experience has proved anything, it has been this, that when you come to put a thing in working order, it is absolutely necessary to limit your aims a little, and not to expect to do everything at once, and with one organization. It is on this point, and almost on this point alone, that I should dissent from the position taken by my old friend Mrs. Rose; and not only should I dissent from it, but I am absolutely sure that if, under the influence of her noble aim and generous oratory you planned your organization upon the vast basis she recognised, that if in five years your organisation lived to bring you together, it would be to repent that you were not content with a smaller and therefore more definite aim. In saying this, I am not impeaching her object, but accepting it. I am only raising a mere question of how you are to do a certain thing. In the old novel of "Ten Thousand a-Year," which used to be very much read when I was young, the first great English Reform Bill was always spoken of as "the great bill for giving everybody everything." Now I am not saying that her views were as wide as that, though her heart is wide enough for it; but I do say this, however, that if, after forming an organisation in which persons of different religious opinions may meet and compare notes—about that there is considerable difficulty—you are also to attempt an organisation which shall carry out in all the details of practical action all those sublime purposes which all these different persons aim at, you will have an effort with which Englishmen are not able, any more than Americans, or Europeans, or men and women anywhere, to cope. You will be endeavouring to embrace in one organization all the work of reforming all the evils, changing all the laws, and obtaining all the wise improvements that dozens of societies in London are separately trying to produce. When I first came to London, I went on successive days to the Sunday Closing Society, the Prison Reform Society, and Woman's Suffrage Society, and they began to accumulate so fast, that I finally received a letter urging me to attend a meeting of a society which it was said was, to many people, carrying on as great a movement as the great anti-slavery movement. It turned out to be a society to oppose compulsory vaccination. Now, if these societies which merely represent an infinitesimal portion of the immense philanthropic work of London, have all to be embraced in one organization, well you will have an organization in one body, and in one limited hall, and consisting of merely a few remarkable and able minds, which undertakes to accomplish what all the judges and all the lawyers, and all the bench of bishops, and the House of Lords and the House of Commons, and Lord Beaconsfield, and all the army of Indian troops he has brought to Malta together, would not be able to decide, and would not be able to settle. Friends and fellow-citizens—I will not say, my lords and gentlemen, which I have noticed in public meetings to be the way here—whatever we undertake in this organization let it be very calmly planned and very fully stated in our own minds, so that if we err we shall at least err on the side of undertaking rather too little, for otherwise we shall fail and the thing will have to be done over again by those of more moderate expectations. This is what I have been impelled to say, and if my old friend has heard it with reluctance, as I know she has, and her smile of dissent only convinces me to the contrary, she must thank for that her own

eloquence which has displayed the defects of the plan and made me try to guard the meeting against a programme so magnificent as the sublime—but I think, impracticable—aim which she laid before us. Now just briefly to say what has actually been done in America, and what I think might be done, and better done, here. We had to meet at the outset this question of the word religion and the objection to it. I am glad to say we found amongst the atheists of America no such reluctance to the actual word religion as might have been feared, and none such as I think has existed here. The organization had from the very outset the hearty co-operation and very early help of Mr. Seaver, the editor of the *Investigator*, who should be well known to all old radicals as one of the most faithful and heroic of men, who never compromises, however acceptable the compromise. He came to the early meetings and has taken part in it since. We had the actual co-operation of Mr. Underwood, who is one of the most eloquent as he is one of the most able materialists of the United States. Both these men, and men and women like them, have accepted the organization in America, although it called itself religious, partly because a great deal of attention had been directed to the definition of religion given by a prominent member of the movement at a very early period, a little before we began—Mr. Francis E. Abbot, of *The Boston Index*. At the very beginning, in his fifty affirmations, which were in a manner the groundwork of his faith, he defined religion as simply meaning the effort of man to perfect himself. Whether the definition holds water or not, it unquestionably furnished a basis on which any atheist as well as any Deist might stand. With this meaning given in the beginning to the word religion it was easy to see that the word religion produced no great antagonism as part of the title of the proposed society. On the other hand the word Theism which was persistently put forward by our rational friend Chunder Sen, and which was the basis of his great movement, was always definitely objected to. We always took the ground that it might do for them; it was not the thing for us. It was found that the Anglo-Saxon mind tends to the practical, and that the word religion furnished a platform wide enough to satisfy all we had to deal with, and no narrower word would have come in. I think, therefore, we saved ourselves by the use of the word. Then when we came to the question of organization, it was plain enough that the secret of our success there must be to attempt very little, not to attempt any wide action, any very systematic propagandism, and to bring about those by way of a modification of what our Jew friend said to-day so well, by which you can furnish a platform on which persons of very widely different views can meet. It is essential to your success that the platform should contain but very few planks, and you should use it for but very few things. You can have annual meetings and speeches—brave, heroic speeches;—you can, within certain limits, issue publications, but these should urge rather the necessity of union and religious freedom than anything more definite. When it comes to action in other forms you cannot make such a society the medium of a very great deal of definite action, for the reason that when we come to the actual we come to the difficulties which Mr. Voysey described. When you come to the difference between those who on the one hand believe and think they have ground for belief in God and a personal immortality, and those who disbelieve, or think they do, between those two you not only cannot form a creed, but they cannot co-operate with one another—cannot sustain one another beyond the very moderate and definite point of getting freedom of action, and getting reforms in the laws so far as religious liberty is concerned. For all that concerns the

principle of liberty you can form such an association, but when you go further and undertake any system of religious propagandism, when you take Mr. Voysey as one of your active members, and help to circulate his views, and when you take Mr. Conway, Mrs. Rose, and others—when you come to the details, then you come upon difficulties, and then you find that the aims of an association like this must be limited. In short it all comes back to this. With a very plain illustration of what I mean I will close what I have to say, it comes back very much to this. Reformers have the strength and heroism and self devotion to witness to the truth of their extreme views. Organization on the other hand belongs to the conservative side, belongs to the region where men suppress themselves and become, as they are in the Jesuitical organization, each man *perinde cadavera*, like a corpse. You never get such an organization as that out of radicals. What is the strength of radicals? The individuality, the enthusiasm, the rush, the ardour, the willingness for self-sacrifice, that throws itself upon the bayonets, the prosecution of a belief with a strength compared to which the mere negative martyrdom of the Roman Catholic seems only as a childish thing. (Applause.) That is the enthusiasm that is got from the radicals. To get that you must drive a radical with a very loose rein and leave him much untied. The simple illustration that conveys it is drawn from our northern regions and the way in which the Esquimaux harnesses his dogs. Esquimaux dogs are sagacious. Each dog has its place and has a fair chance for action, but experiments have told us that if too closely harnessed they will turn against each other and eat each other up. Twenty-five dogs are attached to the sledge, each by a separate thong, and there is no more trouble. So with radicalism, it is not like the Roman Catholic Church, it has its own organization and its own strength, and so in no way in exerting its own strength ought it to be disturbed, but it should pull by a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull altogether.

Mrs. ERNESTINE ROSE: I am not a Radical dog in the least, but it is just as well to know, in the cause of freedom and expression of opinion, that "we may aim at the sun and at least hit the moon."

Col. HIGGINSON: That was quite what I was afraid of.

Mr. LESLIE STEPHEN apologised for not reading a paper which he had prepared. He thought that it was calculated to promote discussions upon abstract questions, upon which there had already been enough, instead of leading to any practical result. He wished to know more distinctly what was contemplated by the proposed association, and what interests it was intended to protect. Debates upon general principles only distracted the attention of the meeting from this important question. It had been suggested that the association was needed to protect freedom of discussion. For his own part, he had not the least desire to be protected by anybody; he had always said what he thought, and had published the most heterodox opinions without incurring the smallest inconvenience. He therefore wanted no association for his own protection. If other persons were less fortunately situated, it was most desirable that their case should be known, and any measures adopted which might secure freedom of discussion. Let the dangers be distinctly pointed out, and the nature of the proposed remedy set forth. He would have been glad to have a fuller account from Colonel Higginson of the association already existing in the United States. He might supply useful hints for action in this country. Hoping that the attention of the meeting might be directed to such practical ends, he would not distract it by reading a paper upon different topics.

MR. CONWAY: I move that a committee be appointed which could lay before this meeting something like a practical suggestion as to whether they think it possible or feasible that any kind of result may come, or an association be formed, from our deliberations. We are all desirous to seek the truth, and we are anxious to know what the truth really is. There is nothing in this world more worthy of being cherished, cultivated, and fostered, than knowledge of what is true and what it is right to do. We do not want a cut-and-dried scheme; and if the Society is to grow it cannot be maintained by one or two people; there are many interesting features and aspects in it, and there must be, if possible, a general help. It is my desire that a committee should be appointed, and you may nominate it as you please.

MR. STUART GLENNIE seconded the motion; which having been unanimously carried, the following gentlemen were appointed by the Conference: Messrs. Conway, Higginson, Ellis, Stuart Glennie, Russell, J. C. Street, Wyld, and Miss Downing.

PROFESSOR GARRISON (of Chicago): I must thank you kindly for the opportunity afforded me of expressing my sentiments. I come from the United States, from the exemplary City of Chicago, a city that never does anything by halves, and I have formed my opinions very largely from the general spirit that pervades that metropolis. Within the past thirty years there has been a wonderful change of opinion in the part of the United States with which I am familiar—namely, the Western States. Up to a time I did not know a single “infidel” there. I call you all “infidels,” because you do not believe the whole of the Bible; I think that everyone who picks out a passage here and part there, and says, “I cannot believe that,” is an “infidel,” and so nearly the entire church are infidels. In my early boyhood I did not know a boy who did not swallow that pill; and it would hardly have been safe for him to declare himself an “infidel.” They believed what they were taught, that God could punish sinners eternally, and perhaps if one of them could have heard Mr. Conway preach, if they could have got a good chance at him they would burn him eternally. If that were the case he should be scorched a little bit here. A little while ago the negroes killed a man on account of his infidelity; they thought he was not fit to live. But now a change has come over the American people, and I scarcely know an intelligent person who professes to believe all the Bible. Some of them in a certain sense make the profession by going to church and supporting the church, but they do not understand anything about belief. I think it is worth while to enquire what has brought about the great change which we recognize in America, and which you recognize here. In the first place we have a free press, perhaps the most wonderful development in the world. In Chicago alone we have half-a-dozen morning dailies of sixteen pages each, as large as your *London Times*, and I have seen articles in our very best papers worse than Thomas Paine ever wrote. Another thing, we have now free schools and good ones. In the days of our forefathers, only reading, writing and arithmetic were taught in the common schools, and in the colleges little else besides the classics. Now, you have branches of education that will make a philosopher of a boy; you include chemistry, philosophy, geography, and geology. You make philosophers. The pupils begin to think for themselves at once, and as soon as they begin to think they become “infidels,” especially when they study astronomy. These sciences are now taught in every part of the United States, and any preacher would do well not to tackle such students without

due consideration. But there have been some drawbacks to the spirit of free thought. One is indifference. The fear of hell has been one of the main props of the church. If I was afraid that after death I should go to hell unless I did certain things before death, I would be quite certain to do those things, if it were possible. But as soon as you take that fear away from me I become very lazy and very indifferent, as folks generally do; and that is one reason why Unitarian and Secularist churches have not succeeded. Our Protestant churches have got "hell" very nearly knocked out of them now. Beecher decided to discountenance hell, and his utterances have very much succeeded in tempering theology throughout the world. We have a great many others that are very prominent, such as David Swing, Robert Collier, and Dr. Thomas. All these men preach religion without hell in it, and yet Dr. Thomas is a Methodist of high standing. Methodism is gradually falling away from the idea of hell, whilst free thought, liberalism, and infidelity are gaining ground. Hell is too hot a place for us to swallow, and slowly and surely we go on until we become fully liberal. There is a vast amount of superstition called religion. Some people believe that the world was peopled after the flood from descendants of Noah, but when America was discovered and later on Australia, Noah had not sons enough to go round. You have in South Kensington Museum a map, drawn some centuries ago; Jerusalem is represented as the centre and apex of the world, and it has Damascus and other model cities located around it. God Almighty is seated a little above the world, just as this organ here is placed above the church, and he is lassoing sinners and taking them down to hell. Now let me remind you that the map I refer to was purchased thirteen hundred years after Christ! When the telescope was invented we began to see how insignificant we are, and how a little drop of dew is to our globe something like what we know ourselves to be to the universe. Chemistry has shown us that we have not the compositions stated by the Bible. We are not made of dust; our bodies contain a great many things not found in dust. It shows us also that the resurrection of the body is an utter impossibility. Chemistry has shown us that this world cannot come to an end; that the earth is a cinder. Science has shown us the impossibility of a flood. There is no place in the atmosphere for such an amount of water to come from; and, on the other hand, there is no place for it to go to. "Providence" has been a hobby of man, and it has been a great friend of the doctors; it helps them out of many a scrape. A great many people still believe you may try to avert the wrath of God here, and may perhaps succeed, but depend upon it you will catch it in the next world. Divine Providence is simply the working of natural laws. The prayer test has never been brought to a trial, and it never will. Before man was dissected, it was believed he had one less rib than a woman, and millions have gone into their graves believing that. The world must be infinitely older than anybody supposes it to be—at least six hundred millions of years; and the deposition of strata is very different from what possibly can be inferred from revelation. The science of evolution is beginning to be studied more generally, and, to my mind, it will annihilate modern Christianity. "What will you give us for the faith which you destroy?" That is considered to be the poser. "We will give you the truth, as far as we know it, in the place of a lie." Suppose a man were to begin to dig through your Silurian rocks for coal, spending all his money and time, and bothering his family, and a geologist should come along and say, "You need not dig there; there is no coal below those rocks." That is precisely the position Christians are in; and we are under no obligation to give them anything but the truth. Let everybody go on digging for

coal where there is none, if they enjoy the pursuit; but I only ask that they shall not compel me to dig for it where there is none.

The Congress then adjourned for the day.

FRIDAY, 14TH JUNE, 1878.

(Mr. ALEXANDER J. ELLIS, F.R.S., in the Chair.)

The CHAIRMAN, after observing that the Committee of the Chapel had considered it advisable that one of the elder seat-holders should preside at this day's meeting, and had requested him to undertake the duties, proceeded to read the following remarks:—

It has often been thrown in the teeth of rationalism that it is many, whereas truth is one. In certain attempts at religious conversion, this very remark has often been made the basis on which the most effective arguments have been raised. But it is entirely delusive. So long as we have not got to the bottom of things; so long, therefore, as we only see in part, and from that part, as is inevitable, speculate on the whole, there must be diversities of opinion, there must be words which are misunderstood, because they unconsciously cover different areas within different minds; there must be arguments, good in themselves, but actually fallacious from the want of some unanticipated, and hence unallowed, but important factor, and nothing seems more likely to supply the want so well as discussion. A word, nay a tone of voice, may often lead us to reconsider a whole line of argument, and very considerably modify our former opinions. We thus advance towards a goal which we are ever dimly forefeeling, though we are unable to shape it distinctly to our intellect. To disallow this, to erect one form of words into an obligatory expression of opinion and call THAT uniformity, agreement, oneness, is the most melancholy farce which can be enacted. It is, indeed

“To make a solitude and call it peace.”

We hope and trust, then, in such meetings as the present, and the experience of yesterday confirmed such a hope, to hear conscientious diversities of opinion from conscientious thinkers, who feel themselves indeed, like Horace, to be

“Not bound to swear in any master's word,”

but at the same time know themselves to be

“Bees of one hive, bound to one common weal.”

We meet here to-day in the full belief that the laws of England condemning heresy, and rendering penal any expression of thought which is contrary to that of not only the Established Church, but even of Christianity or any acknowledged religion, will not be put in force. We consider them as actually dead. But are they so? Are they not rather merely asleep, capable of being awakened to sting by some Suppression of Heresy Society, such as the Church of England itself must be considered? Let me take an instance alluded to yesterday by Mrs. Rose, but so striking that it will bear further consideration. We have seen quite recently a judge, himself the member of a religious

society which but a few years ago was most unjustly excluded from all participation in government, declare that it was not only "reprehensible but detestable" for a mother who professed to have no religion, to endeavour to bring up her own daughter without any teachings commonly called religious, until the child had sense to comprehend the nature of such instruction, and the same judge judicially alleged that this was in itself sufficient reason to cause him to make out an order to remove that child from her mother's care. He alleged indeed a second sufficient reason, with which we have no special relation at this moment, except in so far as it was based upon the publication of a book in which practices were advocated that in the writer's opinion were calculated greatly to promote the happiness and morality of mankind, but that clashed with the judge's own limited views of the great question of social morality. With the particular opinions advocated we have nothing to do now, though we may admire the moral courage which led to their publication, but with the principle of silencing the expression of opinions on matters which are vital to social existence, merely because they are opposed to the views of any one section of society, we have much to do. Our own Milton wrote once on the liberty of "unlicensed" printing. We still want his pen, as recent trials and present imprisonment shew. We cannot advance morally and religiously, while the conscientious expression of opinion on moral and religious subjects can be forbidden or rendered penal, while a judge can shut up an elderly orderly bookseller with common criminals for selling a book written with the strictest moral intent by an American Senator, and more than thirty years before the world, or legally tear a child from its mother, because she avows atheistical opinions. There was a third ground alleged by the judge which is still more pertinent to ourselves. He deemed it to the worldly interest of the child to give her to her father, a clergyman of the Church of England, and take her from her mother, to whom the father had assigned her by legal deed. He founded his opinion on the supposition that the mother would be sent to Coventry for her opinions, would be a leper in society, avoided by all those of good repute, and that the child would share in that exclusion. Now this, on which it so happened in this case that the judge's sole legal authority was founded, forms the tyranny of society upon opinion. When I was young it was enormous, and even now we see that it is enough to influence a judge. More than this, in Ireland and England it has quite recently led to the excommunication of the French Freemasons from the British Lodges, owing to the withdrawal of a clause recognising the existence of God and the immortality of the soul from the constitution of the Grand Orient of France. To the isolated thinker this tyranny might prove crushing. To the thinker who is aware of large numbers that also think freely, and are banded together into an association, where liberal thinking is the principle, this tyranny would cease to have any moral power. It might, however, still tell greatly in respect to their worldly interests, as in election and appointments, where speculative opinions, instead of moral and active efficiency, too often guide the electors and appointers. To this all here are still liable, and from this the sole hope of escape is in enlightened education. Nevertheless we are present to-day, as we were yesterday, for the free expression of thought on religious and connected social subjects. As the established forms of religion throughout the world, with wonderful minuteness of detail, enter into all social subjects and especially into marriages, births, and deaths, it is difficult to say what part of social economy is not religious, while not an inconsiderable section of thinkers claim that there is no religion apart from sociology. But with the view of dividing up a great subject we generally

agree to defer the consideration of particular social subjects to especial bodies, at the Social Science Association, and such was yesterday unmistakably the view of this Conference. Some subjects are, however, so intimately connected with views of religion that they should be ventilated freely, more especially that one on which I have already quoted Sir George Jessel's most subversive opinion. It is a problem which must have occurred to every one who entertains liberal views and has a family, how far children can or should be educated without any instruction or education which can be called religious in the usual acceptation of the term. Godless and irreligious are terms readily used, and, like all dyslogisms, they are apt to stagger and frighten. It was something, however, that last month within the walls of Westminster Abbey a voice was raised in glorification of Atheism. "In the opinion of the Brahmins, Buddha was an atheist. In the opinion of the Pharisees, Paul was an atheist. In the opinion of the Athenians, Socrates was an atheist. Atheism is the denial of the gods that be, in obedience to nobler aspirations." Such was the upshot of the conclusion of one of Prof. Max Müller's most striking Hibbert lectures. In the last of these lectures he showed a curious state of society in India, where three generations may be living under one roof, the lad still learning the sacred books of the Vedas by heart, his father carrying out the Brahmin system of sacrifices to the most minute detail, and the grandfather released from all the trammels that bind the other two, aware that their gods are but names, and given over to philosophic contemplation. This is a solution of the problem we can none of us desire. Why should a man up to my age live through a state which a man who is past my age knows to be transitional, and doomed to disappear? Are we to be merely insects in thought, passing a long apprenticeship of creeping caterpillar and sleeping grub, before our wings of freedom grow? And are we finally to use our wings of freedom merely to roam idly over the fields of philosophy like any other "painted butterfly"? A thousand times, no! From first to last we must bear our part in the great drama of life. We must learn to be, to do, and to suffer. That is, we must be taught from the first those social relations of each to all, which my revered namesake, William Ellis, so successfully shewed could be impressed upon the youngest school children, and which, let us hope, in time to come mothers will learn to impress upon their offspring in the little world of the nursery. The society of brothers and sisters is the first practical lesson in the laws of social existence; the society of schoolmates the second; the society of fellow-workers the last. There is here nothing dry and abstruse, and nothing frightful, if the horrors which common religion conjures up be left out of consideration. Children can be taught morality in relation to fellow-children of all ages without impressing on them that there is a constant spy on their conduct in heaven—a veritable evil eye, such as used to be drawn in old prints—belonging to a God, who would have sent them to everlasting fire—a fire always burning but never consuming—if the blood of a lamb had not been shed, and who will nevertheless send them there, if they are not very sorry for all the bad and wicked thoughts which they are told are rising up in their minds, although the little innocents cannot make out what they are. To *teach* this—not to *omit* it—might much more reasonably be termed "not merely reprehensible, but detestable," and has certainly the worst effects upon children's minds, whether they accept such fearful doctrines, and with infantine simplicity act up to them according to their lights, or simply pass them by as a lesson to be learned and neglected. To realise or to neglect such things, when solemnly told, is equally pernicious.

Beyond moral education of children without direct reference to old religious notions, we have to consider intellectual, and especially physical education. The latter forms a large part of many religious systems. Certainly it ought to form a part of all liberal religion. We should learn how much neglect of physical life partakes of the nature of moral delinquency. We, as members of the body common, should do our uttermost to be ready when called upon, and the call always comes at the most unexpected times. I merely hint at these things. Time would fail me if I attempted to enlarge upon them, but I hint at them with a view to giving a partial answer to the question with which Professor Max Müller opened his lectures, and which was often asked in this room yesterday :—“What is religion?” Or, to put it more definitely as respects ourselves, “What is liberal religion?” I reply : “A profound sense of duty ; that is, a profound sense of the relations of ourselves to every part of the universe which comes within our ken, animate or inanimate, mundane or extramundane, and of every part of the universe to ourselves, together with an invincible determination consciously to act in harmony with these relations so far as we are able to perceive them.” To carry out to its full extent such a religion requires numerous theories, some of which I have endeavoured to indicate in several printed discourses delivered in this room, and in some pieces bearing my name in the hymn book of this Chapel, which it would be waste of time to recapitulate. But such a religion does not need the preservation of the old imperfect and exploded theories—exploded by philosophers at any rate, though more or less living among priests of all nations. Such a religion in its highest form is the acme of thought reached by the greatest minds after the greatest struggles through many generations. But in its simplest form it can be accepted and felt and acted on by the child that begins to move consciously, even before it can speak intelligibly. It may be objected, that such a religion is no religion at all, as it contains no mention of God, personal or impersonal, of the efficacy of prayer, or immortality. But in so far as these are known to exist, or known to be unknowable, they are certainly included within those parts of the universe, mundane or extramundane, and our relations to them, which enter into the above definition of liberal religion. In so far as they are mere conjecture they can enter into nothing but dreams, with which mankind in general is too busy to have any concern, or are at best but those subjective theories which lead thought to subsequent objective results. Among the latter I would class the “affirmations” made yesterday by our distinguished visitors, Mr. Voysey and Mr. William Binns, “affirmations” for which, as they admitted, there is no proof. On the contrary, another speaker conceived that he had a means of proof, which, if examined, might probably be found to rest ultimately on another affirmation, for in all argument we are led to some ultimate principle which must be simply affirmed, and can be at most “verified” by contrasting conclusions with observations. To this class, however, the “affirmations” alluded to were admitted by the two speakers whom I have mentioned, not to belong.

Towards such a liberal religion as I have indicated, which is essentially growing and progressive, all can and should contribute by word and deed. And to this end we must all think, and express what we think, and not be afraid of doubt. The man who is certain is generally ignorant. He sees but he very surface of his subject, and is unaware of all the difficulties which grubbing below the surface would reveal. We doubt in order to know. And we trace out our doubts in words, in order to render precise what would otherwise be vague. And we discuss these matters with our fellows in

order to gather hints beyond the circle of our own experience. We are satisfied if we help on the train of thought ever so little.

“Thought unexpressed is thought but half thought out;
The first step made towards certainty is doubt.”

A working engineer told me lately that while driving a tube for a so-called Abyssinian well, into hard concreted gravel, in the neighbourhood of Hackney, three hundred blows with a monkey of eighty pounds weight, only sufficed to make it penetrate a quarter of an inch. But he persevered; and after passing through six feet of such unpromising material he came to the water stratum, into which the tube descended freely, and whence gallons on gallons of water were readily pumped up. We are a long way from the living waters yet, and many blows are still required to drive our intellectual tube through the unpromising soil of actual life around us. But we have no reason to despair. If not ourselves, at least, through us, our successors may quaff the glorious stream, and certainly will quaff it, if every liberal thinker does his duty by liberal thought. And one way of doing that duty will be to form part of that Association of Liberal Thinkers which I hope that the Committee appointed yesterday will enable us to organise to-day.

Mr. CONWAY introduced the following communications: Professor Clifford, who from the first took a warm interest in this Conference, writes to me from the steamship “Morocco,” *en route* from Fiume to Malta, May 23rd, that he had hoped, since the failure of his health prevented his taking part personally with us, that he would find strength and opportunity to write a paper for us. But a relapse at Venice, from which he is just recovering, prevented that also. He sends me the notes he had made of the points on which he meant to write, and no doubt these will be interesting as indicating the view which that vigorous and learned thinker takes of the subjects we have met to consider. I therefore quote them.

Catholics, ~~he says~~, are fond of saying that an age of atheism is approaching, in which we shall throw over all moral obligations, and society will go to ruin. Then we shall see what is the true effect of all our liberal and scientific teaching. As a matter of fact, however, even themselves admit that the public conscience is growing in strength and straightness, while the catholic dogmas and organisation are more and more repudiated. We may see reason to believe that the former of those facts is the cause of the latter. Part of modern unbelief is no doubt due to the wider knowledge of criticism of the so-called “evidence of Christianity,” but in all ages sensible men have seen through that flimsy structure. Intellectual scepticism is not really more rife than it has been in many past periods. The main ground of hope for the masses is the *moral* basis of scepticism,—1, its revolt against mythology; 2, its revolt against the priestly organisation of churches.

As to the mythology, the dogma of eternal damnation is being quietly dropped, as not in the Jewish part of the New Testament; but it has been practically taught by the Christian organisation for sixteen centuries. Therefore the Christian organisation ought to be thrown over with it, for it is not “an opinion like another,” but a wicked thing to believe.

As to the priestly organisation, Professor Clifford meant to contend that the practical effect of the Christian organisation, “the church,” has always been adverse to morality, and is now. The clergy is everywhere making more pronounced its revolt from the great principles which underlie the modern social structure. There is a strong antagonism between the Christian organisation and the Jewish ethical literature, which our moral sense approves. And, in conclusion, Professor Clifford believes that so far as the Christian organisation is concerned, the time has come for heeding again the ancient warning—“Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.”

Although no attempt was made to give our Conference an International character, some invitations were sent to the Continent and cordial responses were received from M. Litre, Prof. Hugenholz (of Holland) and others. From

M. Fix (who has come from Belgium to be present with us) I have received the following paper with reference to a liberal movement in France and Belgium and its new review, "La Religion Laïque":—

We have neither founded a church nor invented a religion: we have created a review (*La Religion Laïque*) of which the object is:—1. To open the eyes of those whose vision is obscured by ignorance or superstition; 2. To encourage hearts that really love humanity, and minds convinced that the progress of civilisation lies in the moral improvement of individuals; 3. To unite men of good-will who, in this world of struggle, are seeking after their sister-souls, who, though distributed in different nations, continents, or degrees of existence, are yet in the bosom of the same humanity.

1. We believe in an only God: truth, goodness, justice. We believe in immortality of the soul. This soul, born imperfect but free, must, as a duty, always improve itself; so it is necessary it should live, that it may approach without ceasing nearer God: Perfection. Happiness we must all hope is there—in that perfection—not elsewhere. Did all men consider as certain that which we believe, humanity would adore one God. The children of this father would really have for their first duty, chief advantage, and greatest happiness: to love him and love each other. One religion should exist. The grand aim of religion is not only to bind us to ourself, to our family, mother-country, and to humanity, but also to attach our own being to terrestrial nature, to the universal life; to all beings known and unknown, visible or invisible; to all which is, was, or shall be. The historic world opens with war. The testimony of history is that religions have invariably divided mankind. They have sundered families, classes and states. The reason is that men, families, classes and nations, have always been aroused and agitated, not by the tolerant religion which unites, but by the intolerant religions which divide. The first religious duty is brotherly love to our neighbour. If I see a man about to be drowned, shall I save him, or inquire from him what his faith is? Why then those fratricidal wars provoked by fanaticism? Why those human sacrifices ordered by rough priests? Why such miracles praised by miserable speculators? Is God greedy of blood, domination and money? Let us not confound these words—Belief and Religion. A belief may be a faith particular to a people; religion includes the belief common to all men and all nations. A belief may kindle the faggots of inquisition; religion proclaims all men brothers. A belief leads to the triumph of an idea, of a man or of a party; religion wishes only the triumph of truth. A belief raises a caste to rule over a country; religion requires free consciences and men equal by their right. A belief tries to establish some kind of hierarchy over humanity; religion dreams only of the universal fraternity. A belief lasts only by egotism; religion means universal solidarity. Such are the reasons why our review is called *La Religion Laïque*; though our religion is nothing else but the universal religion. Such is its true name, till it is called *Religion*, one word for one thing. In calling our review *La Religion Laïque*, we mean the religion which is for the people (*laos*), whose basis is the people, and whose plane is above the interests and passions of sects. In the past, religious revolutions have been marked by numerous and terrible sacrifices of men; we hope that the religious renovation which we who gather here contemplate, will be and can be only peaceful. It will be peaceful, because it relies on the goodwill of free men. Good-will prepares for those future ages of which Goethe used to call himself a citizen, the universal religion of which each of us is meditating. Sacerdotal intolerance has built between individuals and nations separating walls. Human reason will cause these divisions to cease, will make brothers of enemies, will prevent international injustices, will end religious persecutions, will kill war. Such is the religion we recommend—a religion we must all love, hope for, encourage, fraternally working for its triumph.

II. What is to be done? 1.—Conceive and practice religion without miracles, without sacerdotal body, without confession of faith. 2.—Govern ourselves and walk on towards perfection, while helping others to get all we have acquired: comfort, instruction, and morality. Those principles involve instruction, education, liberty, responsibility, moral improvement, tolerance, duty, fraternity, reciprocity, helpfulness, self-help, solidarity, and that intimate and deep conviction on which lies human dignity. Religion, as we understand it, is a general bond which unites all, excludes none. It is therefore necessary that the religion of each man shall depend on his conscience entirely, allowing him to have his own aspirations, opinions, and belief; progress made in each of us will cause our union to last. Admitting a confession of faith to be imposed on the members of the same association or religious congregation, we would stay intolerant, and deserving not the advantages of union. We must then place the religious bond in the will; not in the law, as under the *régime* of the Old Testament, nor in faith, as during the reign of the evangelical system according to St. Paul's dream. It becomes useless to demand of religious men—

united by worship, teaching, or charity—if they believe such and such dogma; but we may ask if they are willing to work together for their own and for human improvement. Among free and thinking men there no longer exists any question about orthodoxy or heterodoxy, and so there can be no exclusiveness or intolerance. Our detractors say a religion of that sort is but a dream or a negative. Nothing, on the contrary, is more positive and of an easier realisation: good-will only is necessary. We declare, as a principle, religious doctrines to be matters of learning as much as the theories of science and philosophy. In religion, as in any other branch of the human inquiry, there will always be things we know, things we believe, and things we know not; but after having put aside miracle, and all idea of a supernatural revelation, we learn and teach facts, ideas, theories belonging to the religious kingdom, as we learn and teach phenomena, laws and theories of other branches of knowledge. At the summit of science, God is. Going to God through science, is going there when knowing what we are doing. Is not the scientific revelation as good as the one they praise in their temples, and before which our spirits cannot but doubt—the so-called revelation that makes fanatics, religious parties, which has invented this monstrosity—the God who revenges, the God of armies? We judge ourselves according to our actions, the good accomplished; our degradation or our improvement resulting from our efforts and struggles. Our free will imposes that duty on us, in an existence where human pride as well as injustice and personal interest are no more. There God's justice reigns according to the eternal law of continuity. Prayer leads us nearer to God; it obliges us to conform our thoughts, aspirations, moral needs and the discipline of our existence, to that law of continuity which is the same for all. Otherwise, what would God's justice be? We cannot admit he uses two kinds of weights and measures. We then may say, like Jesus, we do not wish to destroy the law, but to confirm it by working for its triumph. The kingdom of our dearest aspirations is not of this world, for life has not for object any paradise where the satisfactions of this world are to be continued. Sensuous religions have invented those fables, in which absurdity joins materialism. We do not aim at a place of rest, for we know the soul always progresses. We do not look for looming splendours. Happiness, according to us, is in the midst of the divine light, plenitude of existence—that is to say, in entire knowledge of goodness and the conscience to deserve it. Why should identity, so dear to us during our life, be lost? God is goodness, God is justice. He cannot deprive us of the benefits acquired by our merits, perseverance in virtue. We trust that, beyond the grave, we do not abstract ourselves in contemplation, according to the Buddhist faith; we think we are not absorbed in the supreme unity, according to the Christian mysticism. Our conviction is, that the aim of life is to multiply more and more our relations with the universe, without losing anything of our identity. Our God has neither created the torments of purgatory, nor kindled the furnaces of hell; no more has he invented the pleasures of the Moslem or the Catholic paradise. He causes suffering to lie in imperfection, and happiness in moral perfection. To suppose something else would be to lower God; for a pure spirit cannot find eternal felicity in an ideal which ceases to be the ideal even of human beings in the proportion of their culture. I sum up by quoting a few lines of our director and friend, Ch. Fauvety:—'It is in the family that the human "I" finds the first degree of its religious faculty. In fact, family appears to us, in history, as the cradle, and, in some way, the first step of religion. Mother-country, humanity, universality only come after. Thus, living with one's family in a sweet communion of interest, thought and feeling, is already being religious. We become more religious if we identify our interests with those of our native country, loving her, serving her, always ready to die for her. A man becomes religious in a yet higher degree when he feels himself living within humanity; so that he suffers in its pains, vices, barbarisms, ignorance, miseries, and works constantly at its delivery from them; when he neither desires nor seeks for himself any good, any progress, any enlargement of his being, without wishing to make others profit by them. At last, we elevate our religious ideal to excellency, when conceiving it adequate to universalism; when hoping for plenitude of existence, endeavouring to live for all that exists, and setting as the aim of our life the supreme perfection, we impose on our "I" the obligation of realising that aim.' This general conference will stay as a very important fact in the history of religion. At the outset, it shows what priceless liberty enjoys that beautiful and grand country, England. At the same time, it points out the good we are deprived of, in France, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Germany, Russia and Turkey. Nowhere on the continent do they value the power of that liberty which is the safe-guard of peoples, that liberty which is the precious promise of future times."

Professor Th. Bost, of Verviers, writes:—

"Many of our old ways of thinking, many of our ancient forms of worship, are gone

for ever, left behind by the onward march of mankind. To attempt to revive them is a most desperate enterprise, and seems to me to go against the clearest indications of the Spirit of God. Why should we distrust His guidance? Is He not as living and powerful in our days as He was in the days of St. Paul, or Luther, or Wesley? Have we not been taught that the Spirit of Truth shall guide us into all truth? It is our intimate trust that our apprehension of the fallacies of ancient creeds is due to His influence. These creeds are very often monuments of dogmatic nonsense and of human credulity. To put them aside is an act of faith in the God of truth—I would almost say an act of filial respect, of loyalty—to Christianity, for people who think, as we do, that the religion of Christ has nothing in common with the prodigious aberrations of our theologians, or the servile credulity of so many *believers*.

“But if we are accomplishing in a spirit of faith the work of destruction which needs to be carried on, we cannot say that we have found as yet the means of raising with its form and beauty the religious life in the souls of our contemporaries.

“Truly, that work does not depend on us. ‘The wind bloweth where it listeth.’ God’s power is not at an end, so that it might not raise out of our actual world great fiery souls to shine like beacons in the darkness of our night. Only it seems that if we were to see any movement like that of the sixteenth century, those who would take the lead in it must be much larger-minded than were or could be any of the great reformers of past ages. They must be men of unlimited freedom in their minds, of broad sympathies, ready to accept as the very thought of God, as a revelation, any truth which has been proved by scientific researches, were it ever so much in (real or apparent) opposition to the Bible. What is true, is true, is of God, whether it is found written in the Bible or in the least ecclesiastical of our modern authors.

“To conciliate in our minds these truths which may seem contradictory to one another, is no very easy task, but is the very task which the providence of God lays before our hands. Let us hope that our generation will not shrink from it.

“Your purpose, if I understand you rightly, is to promote those researches, to investigate with your friends the best conditions to be fulfilled in order to make possible a religious reform congenial to the want of our time. May you be blessed in your enterprise. May the Spirit of the first days of Christianity inspire all your assembly, so that, living in more advanced times, we may come to do greater things than even the apostles. The same Spirit which formed then a St. Paul—one of the most marvellous men that ever existed, a conqueror of souls as very few have been—will form in our days men able to present to the actual world the unfathomable riches of God in Christ, of God in our souls, of God in the moral and spiritual world.

“May we only be faithful to our task!

“Accept, dear Sir, this expression of my wish for the success of your Meeting, and transmit it, if you think fit, to your friends, from an unknown friend and brother.”

M. Emile de Harven writes from Antwerp:—

“SIR,—

“By convoking an International Congress all earnest-minded men caring for the moral wants of humanity, you take too laudable an initiative for your appeal not to be heard. Therefore, however feeble the light which I may be able to shed upon the interesting questions which occupy us, I do not wish it to be lost, and I deem it my duty to contribute my grain of sand towards the religious edifice which the future will erect upon the ruins of established churches. I beg leave therefore to announce my views upon this important subject.

“In order efficaciously to break down the absurd dogmas which divide men, it is needful, above all, to replace them by something better. The French Revolution, on proclaiming the religion of Reason, failed in the attempt, through not having taken this principle into account. All religions, and especially the Roman Church, have blind faith as a fundamental basis. More matured in the present day, thanks to the immense progress of science, reason begins to claim its rights and rebels against those who would despise it.

“In our days the struggle is no longer upon dogmatical grounds; it is only carried on between the torch of truth and the clerical extinguisher; it is circumscribed between thinkers, on the one hand, and on the other the clergy, dragging in their train the crowd of simple and timid minds, with those who are, or think they are, interested in the maintenance of the sacerdotal power.

“Between these two elements floats the great mass of idle or indifferent minds. The indifferent ones are only so because their intelligence rejects dogmas, and no rationalist notion has happened to enlighten them. The idle ones fall in with ready-made doctrines and deem that everything is for the best in this world. In politics as in religion, they

are Conservatives. It is this category of men, who are becoming more and more numerous, especially in Catholic countries, that we ought to strive to interest in our work.

"That the study of the exact sciences, the utility of which is only felt by a few, should not move the masses, is easily conceivable; but it will not be so if we succeed in making them understand that the search after psychological truths concerns the happiness of each one individually, and only requires common sense, with which often the simplest men are amply provided.

"It is easy, by the help of sensible arguments, supported by examples drawn from the concordance of material facts, to prove that the phenomena of the soul are explained in the same manner as the former, that is to say by deduction, and thus to establish hypotheses as logical as that of undulations uniting together the laws of optics.

"Hitherto all those who have taken an active interest in these questions have remained in the higher spheres of philosophy, consequently only addressing themselves to converts, or to detractors of talent.

"Now, we know by experience what it costs to deny one's whole past studies, and after many labours to acknowledge that we are mistaken. Hence it is that proselytes are rare. Let us then strive to demonstrate that we base our faith on reason. Is it not the criterion which distinguishes from animality? Those who impose upon us dogmas which reason reproves are impostors seeking to perpetuate their domination by ignorance.

"Whom should I believe? The one who, in the name of an imaginary authority, pretends to impose a blind submission on my reason, or this same reason with which nature has endowed me assuredly that I may make use of it? We might as well affirm that our arms have not been given to us for working, our feet and legs for carrying us, our stomach for digesting, and that there is merit before God in remaining in a state of inaction and in allowing ourselves to die of hunger.

"Let us found schools, free from all dogmatical teaching; let us teach in them the philosophy of history, and let us shew to our children and to those who may listen to us, that in fighting against superannuated creeds we respond to the divine will, which is that every thing should progress. Let us say that religious faith and its manifold forms have always followed the development of the aggregate intellect of humanity. Our forefathers were idolators, and so are still the uncivilised peoples of the globe. The Mosaic law did not proclaim the immortality of the soul. 'Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land.' It left aside charity and did not mention the forgiveness of offences: eye for eye; tooth for tooth.

"Buddhism, and afterwards Christianity have answered the aspirations of their time. But man emancipates himself as he advances, the old doctrines no longer suffice for him; science has dethroned the absurd, and reveals God to us in the magnificence of his works.

"At the present day, when we know the immensity to be peopled with innumerable and gigantic worlds, of which our ancestors were unaware, we may proclaim the solidarity of worlds with each other, as logically as that which unites the countries and continents of our sphere. The immense space which separates the stars is perhaps not, relatively, more considerable than that which separates the molecules of the body. Teaching men to make use of their reason, such is the first object to be attained. He who sets about thinking, very quickly perceives that the first efforts of his intelligence are followed by the desire to know, and, finding before him a field to be explored, the limits of which extend in direct proportion to his efforts, he is all the more ardent in extending the circle of his knowledge as he recognises that it is ever extending.

"The sentiment of free examination makes rapid progress; it is a fresh want that is in the air and which is manifested on all points of the globe at once. Let us avail ourselves of it; let us spread light in profusion and, above all, let us strive to make ourselves understood, by using language within the reach of every one.

"Let each of us bring forward his ideas! Along with inevitable errors, will be found a particle of truth. These scattered rays gathered by the most learned, will give rise to sound and consoling theories and will furnish a luminous centre destined to shine on every side."

The CHAIRMAN said they would now take a debate upon the subjects which had been opened, which would last until luncheon time. In the afternoon opinions as to the proposed association would be brought forward. Their time was now rather short, and there was much to discuss, so that he would ask the speakers to limit themselves to ten minutes.

Mr. JOHNSTON RUSSELL (Limerick), then read the following paper:—
In the ten minutes allowed to each speaker to-day, it is impossible to even

briefly review the whole of yesterday's discussion. The speakers to-day can only deal with the remarks which principally attracted their attention. I have therefore selected three observations made yesterday regarding which I would like to say a few words.

One of the speakers (a lady) said:—"I want proof of the existence of God." No subsequent speaker, although I believe there were a good many clergymen present, gave her the reply that she required, and I would not presume now to touch so great a subject, only that I feel that an answer should be given by somebody to what was certainly a demand, if not a challenge. I assume that our enquiring friend does not demand *direct ocular demonstration* of the existence of God, because she knows that it is not in our power to give her any such proof, and if any proof short of that would do, she ought to have stated what kind and what amount of evidence would be sufficient to convince her. If she had thought the matter out—if she had worked it out in her own mind—and saw distinctly what she wanted, and put it simply and clearly in writing, it would, I think, have been much easier to give her a satisfactory answer than it is to deal with the question put in so vague a manner.

It is obvious that we cannot have for ourselves, nor give to others, direct ocular demonstration of the existence of God. That kind of proof is withheld from us for apparently the very purpose of inducing us to *search for God*, and no one who searches earnestly will ever be disappointed. The desire to see God is largely gratified, and in the way that is really the best for us. To the exact extent that we qualify ourselves to see God, to that extent we do see him.

We who desire to see God, just as eagerly as our enquiring friend does, and who reverently say as Moses said, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory," receive the same answer as Moses: "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, but my face thou canst not see." We are not permitted to see the face of God, but his goodness—the rays of his glory—we are permitted to see. In answer to the question, "How and when and where can we see God?" we are told, "In his goodness you can see God." We can read the rocks and question the stars—we can enquire of the seasons and talk with the flowers. They all tell us about God. Let our gifted friend look again at the order and beauty and goodness around her, and if that is not enough, let her look in her own heart at the noble qualities which are folded up there for endless development, and if all these do not give her the proof that she requires of the existence of God, then, indeed, it must be hard to convince her.

Another speaker (Mrs. Rose), denounced religion, and would not even retain the name.

The lady was very eloquent, but very illogical. She condemns the service of God, but she advocates the service of humanity. She seems not to perceive that serving humanity, as she proposes, is the truest and grandest way of serving God. Every exercise of pity, and charity, and mercy,—of love, and courage, and self devotion, are exercises of goodness, and goodness is the glory of God. What Mrs. Rose calls the service of humanity, and what others call the service of God are identical. The names are different, but the goodness is the same.

As to having no religion at all, as some of you advocate, we must have a system of belief and morals, and if all that is included in the word religion—even an inferior religion is better than the unbelief which is spreading so widely now. Who have been the benefactors of the world? Were they the

men who taught that there is no God, and no hereafter, and no retribution, so that men may do evil with impunity? No. The benefactors of mankind were the men who preached goodness, who said, "Be good and do good," who taught that there is a holy God, and a life hereafter, and a sure retribution, where every man will receive according to his works.

We are told that science is opposed to religion, but that cannot be, for true science is the handmaid of religion. There are false religions. Against these let science do its worst. Science means knowledge. The man of science is the man who knows. What does he know? What does the wisest know? Ask him, and he will say, "I know nothing absolutely. I only stand picking up a few pebbles and shells on the shore of the great ocean of truth, which stretches away into the infinite."

A good deal was said here yesterday about religious differences, and one of the objects of this Conference is to try to harmonize them; but, constituted as men are, differences are inevitable, and they are not altogether disadvantages, for they have their good as well as their evil uses. We may make the differences fewer and less marked, but we can never get rid of them entirely. Men's minds are different. Some men, like creeping things, creep upon the earth, still looking downwards; while others mount up to the heaven of heavens and breathe imperial air. Religious differences mean liberty—liberty of thought and liberty of speech—and as we must preserve liberty, we must have differences.

Although countries are separated by rivers and seas and oceans, yet the separation is only on the surface of the earth. Beneath the flowing river, and the dark blue sea, and even the deep ocean, we find the adamant rock which joins all countries together and binds them into one. Religions are like countries. Their differences are only superficial. If we go deep enough we shall find that essence of religion which underlies all religions and which at some not distant time will bind them altogether into one. Why should men disagree so much about religion when religion is so simple a matter? If there is only one Supreme Being, why should there be more than one religion? There is indeed only one true religion, viz.: "The Religion of Goodness." It is the goodness in it which gives every religion whatever vitality it has. Why should not all religions adopt the essence of religion as their bond of union, and agree to differ about the small matters—about creeds and rituals, and the mere husks of religion? Here is a platform on which all religions can unite, but especially the three great religions which are so closely related to each other, viz.: Judaism, Christianity, and Mohamedanism. Men have followed too much after Moses and Jesus and Mohamed, and too little after God. If Moses, Jesus, and Mohamed were here now, would each of them say, "I am the messenger of God, follow only me, and be ye called only by my name?" No! Each would exclaim, "Perish me,—Let God be all in all." In this way the religions of Moses, Jesus, and Mohamed could be reconciled and be amalgamated into one universal religion—the religion of God.

Can nothing be done to bring about so desirable a state of things? Can we not give some help? That question brings me to the third of the observations made yesterday, to which I wish to reply. The speaker (Miss Downing) said, "I want a path to follow; I want something to do for humanity." In those few words the speaker touched one of the great religious needs of the time. There is an abundance of goodness and intellect in the world, but the people have no purpose and consequently their powers are wasted. The sects and societies of religious reformers have

neither union, nor plan, nor purpose. They will neither lead nor follow, but each goes its own way, and as there is no earnestness in them they can produce but very little effect. Somebody has said, "I would to God that the men who have the truth were as firm and resolute in spreading it as are the men who spread the error." People need a path to follow, and something that they themselves can do for humanity. The religion that will provide all its professors with good work to do, will attract to itself all the earnest and most valuable people in all the sects and all the churches. I expected that something great would come out of this Conference, and perhaps it may come hereafter, but nothing will come of itself. There is work to be done and every one should help.

The religion of goodness, which is both the service of humanity and the service of God, is just the thing that we all want. It is a religion that all men *can* believe, and that most men do already believe. There is nothing higher than it for man, and nothing holier for God. It is a religion that will refine men like gold and raise them nearer and nearer to God. In the religion of goodness three words shine like the stars. They are—God, immortality, retribution. These are the three essentials of belief. This is the Faith that the world needs.

In their prayers to God many millions of people daily pray, "thy kingdom come." But what are they themselves doing to cause this kingdom to come? Do they mean what they pray? Do they expect to be introduced into a kingdom of God, ready made for them, while they are to sit still and wait until it comes? If they do they have quite mistaken the matter. God has long ago done his part; men have to do theirs. The kingdom of God is here already. The kingdom of God is within you, but it has to be brought out. It is an idea—the dream of every noble mind—but it is not always to remain an idea. It has to be realised—to become visible and tangible. The kingdom of God, when it comes, will elevate mankind materially as well as morally, and deliver men from the bondages under which they groan. But when shall this kingdom come? If we might give the answer, what would our answer be? Would we say *now*? And why not now?

We need a *new Reformation*—religious, political and social. Nothing less will cure the great evils of the time. What if this religion of goodness, which each of you is invited to take up and spread, is to be the means by which these great reconstructions are to be effected? What if this is to be the grandest work of any age? These may seem to be only the words of an enthusiast—a dreamer. Perhaps so; but everything great is only the dream of a dreamer at first. Who can tell what may happen? These are eventful days. Around us are portentous signs of coming changes. Already the fateful writing is on the wall. It says, "The time has come."

Mr. HENLEY said he should not have addressed that meeting if he had not delivered a lecture in London some time ago, in which he suggested the formation of an association of this kind, and requested co-operation to assist him in forwarding a copy to the ministers of the various religions in London and its neighbourhood, in order that afterwards a meeting might be arranged to discuss this question, and to see if it were not possible to form some association of this kind. At that time he proposed a short creed, which he suggested for the adoption of that meeting. Amid some interruption, he went on to say, that he was going to make a statement which nine-tenths of the meeting would think him a fool for making, but he would make it on the authority of

Mr. Crookes and Professor Varley, and others. It was in Spiritualism that they would have these questions thoroughly explained. It was Spiritualism that brought before them the matter, as a truth that could be proved, of the existence of life beyond the grave. He had studied that for seven years, and he knew what he was talking about. Spiritualism proved to the Christian, the orthodox Christian, that what he had been teaching Sunday after Sunday he was now able to prove. What nobler thing could there be than that which proved the truth of immortality? He would not say more than except that if he had time he would be bound to convince every man there of the truth of what he was stating.

Mrs. LAW: Mr. Chairman, gentlemen, and ladies—We have met here yesterday and to-day for a specific purpose, that of discovering, if possible, if we can make a platform sufficiently broad to hold on it speakers and thinkers of various denominations. We heard yesterday a number of opinions expressed which were truly valuable in themselves, but few of them of real practical importance for the object we have in view. This morning, we have heard some excellent papers which have not, in my opinion, had those necessary elements that we require in order to come to some definite conclusion. Yesterday we had a number of what I should call cardinal ideas offered by different speakers, which I think seemed as though they could not possibly be woven into one piece. I want to show there is something we can do. Mr. Voysey started yesterday by affirming what I know to be the lamentable fact, that there are thousands of men in the church who are theological atheists, and yet profess to be other than they are. That is a terrible state and condition of affairs. He said if you place men in positions where you oblige them to dissemble before God they will ere long dissemble before men. He believed this, and he believed that the hypocrisy of the churches is sapping the morals of the people at large. Mr. Street very clearly expressed what he knew to be necessary to be expressed, and which ought to be, I was going to say, spoken by the tongue of an angel, if there is an angel and he has a tongue. It is a fact that there are great thinkers who stand in a position of isolation. We want the people to assist them, and we want public opinion to assist them in the great work they are attempting to carry on. Mr. Holyoake gave us one practical direction, when he said that it is perfectly useless for us to attempt to form a platform where we can hope to reconcile the opinion of speakers or that of thinkers. What we want to do, and this is one thing we can do, is to recognize these differences of opinion. I would just add one sentence to that. We want not only to recognize these differences, but we want to see, if we can form a platform upon which we can tolerate these differences. It is the result of many years' experience, I dare not say how many years' experience on the subject, that if you commence by giving definitions you will have definitions upon definitions, and that will not result in anything practical. We don't want to know whether Atheism or Theism is true, but we want to recognize the fact that there are Theists and Atheists in existence, and Christians, Mahomedans, and Jews in existence, and that the great thing to determine is, is there any possibility of bringing these people together and bringing them to do some effective work? Is this conference then Utopian? I say emphatically, No! I look upon Mr. Conway as having done a great work in this respect, only in bringing us together. A gentleman whispered in my ear just now that it would be rather a broad platform whereon the last speaker and myself could stand. But it is something, sir, to bring us under one roof. I believe this Conference is not merely practical in its efforts but that it is thoroughly opportune

in its convenement. I look upon Mr. Conway as a central figure holding out the right hand of fellowship to Christians and the left hand to the extreme infidels, trying to bring them altogether in unity. Mr. Holyoake said wisely that what we want to do is to put these various thinkers on to the platform and make them more acquainted with each other, and then their differences of opinion would be modified. Undoubtedly they will, but by what means, what practical means are we to do this? Mr. Conway has done something in bringing us together. What are we prepared to do in the matter ourselves? It is a practical settlement if we can recognize differences of opinion where they exist, and at the same time can start some scheme and lay down some principle by which we can bring thinkers of various kinds together in order that they may compare notes, discuss subjects, and tell each other the different opinions they are holding. Our friend who just sat down, the spiritualist, said he could convert every man in the hall if he had the opportunity of speaking to him. I am not here to contradict that, and I may think, indeed, that if I had the same opportunity I might do the same. We are not anxious to convert you all to spiritualism or to atheism. What we want to know is this, can we so affect you by any means as to make you tolerant enough to hear every man and every woman express their own opinions? How far can this be effected? We have the elements present to a great extent already. We were told yesterday that this liberal movement is not confined to England, but that it stretches throughout Europe and America, and affects all kinds and conditions of men, that it pervades all thought. Secondly, it seems to me that there must be something in the times in which we live, in the way in which men are looking at things: so peculiar are the views people are taking: that is introducing this subject to public attention. What we want to do is to listen to each other without haste, without heat—yes, even not to suspect each other of having some bad motive—not to be afraid of sitting down with each other, and to have no man feel “I am more holy than thou.” Mr. Conway has done a great work in having invited us together to be more cordial and more tolerant; and a greater work for us to do is to utilise his work and his connection with this place. Recollect I am speaking as an outsider, having nothing to do with this place. I am simply speaking my impressions as I received them yesterday. I say this is what might be done, and I think it is a practical step. This building from time to time might be utilised by persons representing different phases of thought so that we might each have a chance of meeting as many friends as possible, and modifying each other’s opinions, of proving that persons of the widest diversity of thought have a sufficient amount of humanity, of common sense—some will call it Christianity, and I don’t object if you like it—to enable them to look upon all as brothers and sisters. There seems to me to be this difficulty in the matter, that we have to deal with human beings not only as thinkers, but as creatures who feel as well as think. Mr. Voysey said we want a religion intellectual in its character. Now, directly Mr. Voysey attempted to make any portion of religion intellectual, or to make the existence of a God logical, a lady got up, and as I consider very logically said, to accept the being of a God, unless his existence was proved to you, was just as much a piece of superstition as to accept any other dogma of the Church. We cannot satisfy people’s feelings, but this much we can do. We can show them that they must admit that persons may accept the being of a God, although they cannot prove his existence. It is with them a matter of feeling. If any lady or gentleman says to me, “I feel that a God exists; it does me good to know that that is so,” I am glad of it; but their

feeling his existence does not prove it to my intellect. I only ask that you go on believing that he does exist, and allow me the privilege of thinking that he does not. The practical step that we might take would be to try and bring the different thinkers nearer together. Then, of course, we have a difficulty that Mr. Conway must have felt; that whilst the most radical heterodox, like myself, are always willing to unite with the orthodox, the orthodox are not always willing to unite with the heterodox. The position is a most difficult one. I am quite sure Mr. Conway can get Atheists, Theists, and Socialists upon this platform, but how is he to make the Extreme Right meet with them? I don't know how it would work, but I would suggest that among the representative persons who are here to-day, as many as think it desirable, should propose to hire this building for a certain number of evenings during the year, to explain their opinions. I would make one, and would undertake to hire it two or three times a year to explain my own peculiar views. That would establish a free platform. It would bring together various elements, and out of those elements we might form a society comprised of a number of men and women, perhaps of literary, scientific, and artistic repute, who would prove to the world that it was possible to found and to form a bond of union independent and separate from the belief in any church or any divine revelation whatever. My time has passed. It is an affliction natural to woman, that she forgets time. Of course you will excuse the weakness of my sex on account of the importance of my subject. I thank you for hearing me, and I would urge that after luncheon we should throw ourselves into practical work, and that we do not discuss anybody's God or anybody's religion, or anybody's heaven or hell, but that we should accept those phrases and see how we can work together to form an association.

The Rev. J. D. HIRST SMYTH said: I don't think I should be tempted to trespass on the limits of time, as my principal object in coming upon the platform is to express the great sympathy I have with the movement inaugurated here yesterday. I am glad to hear there has been no attempt to form or found a basis of belief, however wide, upon which people might come together, but that it has been recognised clearly that there are already particular organisations, each doing its own particular work in this way. Because such people belong to these individual organisations, that is no reason that they should be kept apart in the discussion of the most important subjects, but rather a reason that they should be brought more frequently together. Of course I am very glad to escape the necessity of making any reference to any person's idea of God or of immortality. After all I do not know that the distinction between Atheism and Theism is not a vanishing one. It is like the line which used to be drawn so clearly between animal and vegetable, and which is drawn still between organised and unorganised matter, when really, if we had instruments that were fine enough to detect it, we should probably discover there were no lines at all. It is a very difficult thing to assert a negative; and when a man says he is an atheist he does it because something higher than himself binds him to say it. In that then he represents all the elements of religion. Let me say a word here for Christianity. I am an historic Christian, and I should like to say a word for it. Professor Clifford says as it has so long taught not only an erroneous thing but a wicked thing, that he believes it ought to be cast overboard with the wicked thing. I am sorry to say there is a good deal of truth in that. I believe those who represent what he has written, so far as that it has taught a wicked thing, or that those who represent it have done so. I once heard Mr. Bradlaugh discussing Science and Faith, and I burned with shame as

he repeated the horrors done in the name of Christianity. All I could say was, it was not Christianity that did it, it was theology. And what we have got to do here is to get that put on one side and to get some basis of religion to go back upon. Even as to those things that were done in the name of Christianity, it was not men who perpetrated these wickednesses, it was churchmen. As a fact now, the curse of us all has been the men who hold the church above everything, who think it necessary to take care of the church first of all, forgetting that the interests of one living man are better than the interests of all the recognised churches that ever were. That is what we have to do—to find out what will best help man to grow towards all perfection in every way you like, whether in reference to wisdom or to meekness or to love—what you will, but to grow towards all perfection, disregarding what may come to the churches. That, indeed, will be the best thing for the churches.

After the usual interval for luncheon, the meeting was called to order by the CHAIRMAN who said:—The most important part of the Congress is now about to commence. We have had a great deal of theoretical discussion. That must now give place to a practical debate, from which we shall hope to get at some result. First, Mr. Conway will bring up the report of the Committee, and speak to it generally. Then another member of the Committee will move its adoption, and will explain the different points in it; and another member of the Committee will second it. Of course, the minister of this place is the proper person to bring it forward. It was felt it should be brought forward by someone in connection with the chapel, who should take the initiative; but while he thus takes the initiative which belongs to him, it is also proper that the report should be explained and enforced by members of the Committee.

MR. MONCURE CONWAY: What I have to say in reference to the simple report which our Committee has prepared will be very brief. We have had a very long and earnest consultation since we last met together yesterday evening, and as the result of our labours I am authorised to lay before you the following report:—

1. This organisation shall be called the Association of Liberal Thinkers. Its objects shall be (1) the scientific study of religious phenomena; (2) the collection and diffusion of information concerning world-wide religious developments; (3) the emancipation of mankind from superstition; (4) fellowship among liberal thinkers of all races; (5) promotion of the pure and universal religion—the culture, progress, and moral welfare of man.

2. Membership in this association shall leave each individual responsible for his own opinions alone, and in no degree affect his relations with other associations.

In bringing forward these resolutions, it is difficult indeed for me to express my feelings about them. Those feelings are very strong. I have laboured for many years in this place, well supported by a sympathetic congregation, and on pleasant relations with a great many people in London who are not members of this society at all. During my labours I have seen how much strength, how much character, how much religious and Christian fervour are scattered about London; and have come to know in part how largely the same are also distributed and dispersed throughout the nation. I have sometimes

had a happy vision of all these scattered and distributed rays brought into some great focus which should burn up all the remnants of priestcraft, and set the heart and brain of this noble nation free for some great human task—free to labour and to serve in removing the superstitions and wrongs which afflict and degrade the people, especially the ignorant and the poor. At last I felt there were so many people who believed with me that there was a strength of this kind abroad not thoroughly utilised, that, with a certain timidity and misgiving, yet with a certain assurance that there was such unity possible among liberal people and independent thinkers,—among all who are emancipated from mere authority and tradition,—I determined that some move must be made. I said so to friends not only in this society but outside it; I met with almost one voice and feeling,—that such a step ought to be taken—that we had no right, feeling the responsibility and the duty cast upon us by our thought and our freedom not to try in some way better to fulfil our duties to these people and to all people. I do not for a moment agree with all the talk that goes abroad about the necessity of pulling down nothing and denying nothing until you have got something ready built to put in its place. I believe the great movements in the world have been the times of magnificent negation. I believe the great working eras of thought, religion and power have been not when Constantine was building up, but when Christ was pulling down; not when people were defining in ecclesiastical councils the exact clauses of creeds and saying precisely what a man must believe, but when John the Baptist and Mohammed and men like them were laying their axe at the root of some evil tree, cutting it down and clearing the path for the universal religion which always is and always will be, and will sow itself wherever the field is cleared from the errors that would kill and the briars that would choke it. If we take Luther and his great comrades at the time when they were destroying the ancient wrongs of the world, cutting down all the evil growths that lay between the people and the light, when their movement was a great negation, a great pulling down of wrongs and oppressions, we find these men—Luther, Melancthon, and Erasmus, and the rest—all joined together in one great unity, with one heart, to accomplish one great work. It was when they began to build their theories—to be constructive—that they flew apart into fragments. I believe that true religion consists in the order of the Universe,—in man, out of man, and around him,—that nobody has got to build it up, but that it is already built and created; that just as I deny that two and two make five, because it already exists that they make four, so I cannot pull down any dogma except because something already exists in its place. Where the truth is, there denial of its opposite is. It is a statement of something already built up in the mind and heart, in the world and universe. It is a sentimental fallacy that you must never deny a thing until you have something to put in its place, for every clear negation is the other side of an affirmation. There is a positive affirmative work in the intellectual and moral emancipation of man, a work in which Mrs. Law and Mr. Voysey are alike engaged. I am sorry to say that I have a sad letter from Mr. Voysey this morning, in which he complains of some speeches he heard yesterday, and regrets he will not be able to co-operate with us any more. There is still a platform to be made by clearing away things that this one and that one know perfectly well to be false, oppressive, superstitious, and wrong. Whatever may be true, these are false, and they lie in the way. It is a very positive thing, too, this superstition. A superstition which can bring an old seven-day theory of creation from an ancient Persian cycle to shut up every museum and art gallery in London, and

practically deprive the people of enjoying the arts and obtaining culture, all because of an ancient zodiac, is a very powerful thing. These "survivals" are terribly practical; and to emancipate man from superstition, to open the windows and unbar the doorways, and bring culture and refinement to the people, is one of the most positive and affirmative tasks a man can work at in this world.

I have spoken of only one of these paragraphs—emancipation of mankind from religious superstition; but I believe also the fellowship we wish to promote are quite possible between persons of different religious views—as I would call them—or moral views as others would say. Whatever the name the fact is the same: self-denial, devotion to truth, willingness to believe and stand by that truth firmly at whatever cost,—to devote unto it one's labour, to think and endure for it in order that it may be furthered, to forget self-interest in serving it,—that is the only religion I, for one, care anything about. Is there anything more holy in this world than earnestly thinking and studying with one's whole heart to find the true and right, carrying out what a man believes to be true, fostering what he feels to be right? There are many men who would not say "I believe in God" at all; and who yet are living for the highest truth they see; they are burning the midnight oil that they may discover some nobler star of truth either in the outward or the inward world, and bring out some purer ray to enlighten mankind. They are giving up the joys of sense and animalism for that pure devotion to truth and humanity, which I believe will shine far brighter in the eyes of God himself—assuming him to exist—than any mere assertion of his existence. There is more real religion in such faithfulness than in the servile following of either orthodoxy or heterodoxy—following with the crowd and getting into the fashion by using the watchwords of Christianity, now become mere titles of party and self-interest. What we want is the true heart, the earnest religion, the warm and hearty devotion to the right and true. That I call religion. If anybody chooses to call it by any other name it will smell just as sweet.

We seek this true heart, this self-devotion, earnestly seeking after truth, and utterly disregarding what is merely fashionable and popular. It has become so easy now, my brothers, to be a Christian! A poor negro once learnt this in Liberia. He was asked what religion he belonged to, and an independent Sceptic there said to him, "If you want to be a good man you had better be a Mahommedan in this neighbourhood; if you want to make money be a Christian." It has come to be almost a disability of Christianity that it cannot meet the highest wants of our time. It has come to be a fashionable and a wealthy thing; to believe in it and promote its success requires no self-denial, but is even a good investment. It is the watchword of all those timid thinkers who wish to avoid an honest expression of their opinions. It is a phrase by which a person may deceive everybody as to what he does really think. The Christian name is also, as I think, one that will always be impossible to a large number of earnest and thinking men, because, to a certain extent, it turns our eyes backward instead of forward. It gives an impression which we know to be false, that in some way or other religion culminated in its largest knowledge 1878 years ago; that the world then got nearer to the supreme light, and higher and closer to heaven than we are ever to expect again. Hence, according to Christianity, we are never to look for any greater man than Christ to appear on earth, nor to the attainment of any higher degree of religious knowledge than he possessed. In art, in literature, and science, the world looks ever forward

expecting the coming of men who shall lead on the truer generalisations, the finer developments and grander achievements. In so-called religions only is the world is made to look backward and find in crude antiquity its highest point.

There are many other reasons why Christianity can be no longer the watchword of a great and united progress. Men have been sundered and weakened by such sectarian divisions throughout history; and we have come to a loftier conception, that of fellowship among all earnest people, whether they see fit to name their highest interpretations and anticipations "Christian" or "Mohammedan," "Brahman" or "Buddhist," however they may be named. Whether they call themselves by this or that title, or by none at all, really does not matter, if their hearts are joined with all who are trying to seek truth, rectitude, the advancement and welfare of humanity, the union of all hearts on earth and of all honest minds for the same grand purpose. The apotheosis of man, the exaltation of thought, the elevation of virtue as the true principle of humanity and fraternity,—these are the great aims which rise together as an Ideal above our sects, our selfishness, and our passions. In its all-inclusive light men are brothers, and nothing shall separate us the one from the other.

MR. STUART GLENNIE: Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, I have much pleasure in moving the adoption of this report. I suggested at our meeting yesterday, that one of the chief objects of our Association should be the collection and diffusion of information on the extraordinary contemporary development of religious movements throughout the world. The suggestion was approved, and you did me the honour of appointing me a member of the Committee charged with drawing up the report now before you. My suggestion of yesterday stands second on the list of objects which your Committee submit for your seal and sanction. And I now move the adoption of this report on these three grounds: First, because it recognises facts hitherto quite inadequately recognised, and yet facts of which the importance cannot, I think, be exaggerated; secondly, because of the general interest and practical character of such an aim as the collection and diffusion of information on religious developments throughout the world; and thirdly, because of the consequences that cannot but follow from the accomplishment of this aim, consequences in which all the other objects we propose to ourselves will assuredly be realised.

First, as to the facts we recognise. We should have, I think, to go back to the sixth century before Christ to find a movement at all comparable in its universal and revolutionary character, to that indicated by the new religious developments of this nineteenth century after Christ. In that sixth century before Christ, the break-up of the old heathen religions and civilizations began in the preaching of new moral religions, of which Buddhism may be named as the chief and representative. This great moral revolution was continued by Christianity, which originated five hundred years after Buddhism, and by Islamism, which arose half a millennium after Christianity. The contemporary religious developments are revolts against the dogmas in which the new moral religions, new moral transformations of the old heathen religions, have become rigidified. The chief cause of these religious revolts is everywhere the same—the new knowledge brought by the intercommunications of commerce, and the discoveries of science. Another characteristic these religious revolts have everywhere in common. Everywhere they are connected with, and are indeed the soul and inspiration of movements of national reform, and national independence. And yet a third characteristic everywhere distinguishes these universal religious revolts. There are two parties in every one of these move-

ments, one completely rationalistic, the other only partially so, and endeavouring somewhere to transform rather than to destroy the old faith, whether Buddhism or Brahminism, Islamism, or Christianity. To prove or illustrate these affirmations were here out of place. Not out of place, however, is it to make them. For not the studies only of years, but extensive travels, in which the state of religious development has ever been the chief subject of my inquiries, give me, I think, some right to make these affirmations. And it is the facts which I thus affirm, our imperfect knowledge, and inadequate recognition of them, that give, I think, justification, nay, urgency, to the foundation of such an association as is this day inaugurated. The new religious development about which we propose to collect and diffuse information, have not only such common characteristics as I have just stated, but extend over the whole zone of civilization, from the Eastern Island, Empire of Japan to this Western Island, Empire of Great Britain; and beyond both the Western and the Southern oceans they are continued in the new worlds of America and Australasia.

The second ground on which I move the adoption of this report, is the general interest and practical character of such an aim as the collection and diffusion of information on contemporary religious developments throughout the world. Of the general interest that such an aim is calculated to excite I have already had several proofs. The circular convening this Conference was necessarily vague, and necessarily therefore aroused but languid interest in many of those who received it. But when informed that we proposed such a practical object as this, I have found the whole bearing of men change towards our association, the strongest interest and approval expressed, and support cordially promised. Nor will this interest be by any means confined to those only who wish well to these new religious developments. Knowledge of the state of the army to which oneself belongs is interesting; but of even greater interest is knowledge of the state of the enemies' forces. And to illustrate the practical character of the information we propose to give, let me point out that liberal writers would thus know where, besides in England, their works were likely to sell. We would show them that the public they address is immensely larger than they imagine. What keeps up the old theology are its endowments. You may get anything preached if you give it a comfortable parsonage. But by such an extension of the area of sale as would be the consequence of the information we should give, the liberal writers would not be so heavily handicapped as they are at present in the great race of which the prize is the direction of opinion and the government of conscience.

Finally, I move the adoption of this report, because by the accomplishment of such a practical object as that which stands second on the list submitted to you, not only will the other objects named be realised, but encouragement given to all in the great work of progress. The collecting and diffusing of information on contemporary religious developments throughout the world will stimulate that general study of religious phenomena, which is the first of the objects we propose to ourselves. Nor could, I think, any better means be suggested of realising our third-stated object—that of combating the spirit of superstition, than the collection and diffusion of information about movements, which, in all their vast extent and variety, have this common characteristic, opposition to the spirit of superstition. Again, how more hopefully realise our fourth-stated object than by giving that knowledge of which sympathy and fellowship is the fruit. And lastly, I know not what better means can be suggested of giving a practical character

to our fifth-stated object, than the collection and diffusion of information on universal religious movements. But further by the knowledge thus obtained of the universality of the movement in which we are engaged, we shall all gain both enthusiasm of impulse, and catholicity of aim. In our parishes we are small and inconsiderable minorities. Too many are overpoweringly tempted to sophistical dishonesty, and lose their souls through falsehood. Let us, however, but lift up our eyes, and behold the battlefield in all its vast length and breadth. England itself is then seen to be relatively but a parish, relatively but a corner of the battlefield. And if the call of a dozen Sepoy regiments to Malta gave Europe a new notion of the military force of the British Empire, with infinitely greater reason may the recognition of Asiatic, as well as of European and American movements similar to our own, give us a new notion of our conquering force and triumphant future.

To give, in conclusion, but one or two illustrations of the practical political importance of such knowledge as your Committee recommends it should be one of the chief aims of our association to collect and diffuse. How few in this country know that "Nihilist" is but a nickname first attached to the Liberal party in Russia by a character in one of Tourgueneff's novels, and that the text books of Russian Nihilism are the works of our own Darwin, Spencer, and Buckle. Again, in the discussion of this Eastern question, one hears constant talk of the opposition of Christians, Jews, and Muslims. But what a new light is thrown on the subject when one finds, as I have in fact found, that the educated Jews and Muslims, and a very large proportion of the educated Christians of the East are all Rationalists, and all of one creed, so far at least, as that all equally acknowledge the prophetic character of Moses, of Jesus, and of Mohammed. How instructive also it is for our political views, when we find that theological dogma is, in Eastern Europe, and in the East generally, but a badge of nationality, and a badge which could nationally otherwise be asserted, would be dispensed with. Let it be unnecessary for the Pole and the Armenian to assert his nationality against the Russian by his national theology, and both will be again the leaders of a new and greater reformation. Let it be unnecessary for the Greek to assert his nationality against the Turk by his Orthodox Christianity, and both will—no longer oppressors and oppressed, but independent nationalities—both will find themselves of one creed, and brothers. The Eastern Question, very far indeed as yet from a settlement, will, I venture to predict, more and more be found to be, not merely a political, but a religious and social question. Our undertaking to collect and diffuse information on contemporary religious developments, will therefore, be found to be an undertaking to collect and diffuse information on the most important features of the Eastern Question. Knowledge leads to sympathy, and sympathy to assistance. And thus, though we begin with but the humble task of collectors and diffusers of information, we may end with nothing less than a world-wide religious revolution, and social reorganization. I beg to move the adoption of the report of your Committee.

Colonel HIGGINSON: I will at any rate take the precaution to stop here on the floor, because I have always observed that even when a man gets upon what I may call a *raséed* pulpit, a platform that was once a pulpit, he still retains enough of the sort of ownership that clergymen think they have over their congregations to feel that he may talk for half an hour and that they have no right to complain. My own hope is that every body who speaks will have self-control enough to contain himself within ten minutes, and your excellent Chairman set a good example to all speakers in that

respect. I rise to second the motion for the adoption of this platform. I regard it with a little paternal interest as I had something to do with originating that document. I cannot say of it as Talleyrand said of one of the innumerable French constitutions, that it meant nothing and could mean nothing, for he made it himself on purpose. I can say, on the contrary, it was the result of a very interesting comparison of notes by six persons who seemed to have quite different ends in view, and ended by discovering that they could hit on a formula which tolerably represented the case of each and every one. In view of this self-control which they manifested I hope the audience upon whom its adoption will finally rest will practice some of the same well-bred restraint, particularly as it is no easy thing to suit every body in the matter of words. Unless then it is a matter of principle, I hope there will be a willingness to acquiesce in the statement which after all cannot precisely suit everybody. It cannot be improper to hint—as I suppose there are few persons here who are on the side of religious bigotry—that there may be another form of narrowness and bigotry which we sometimes have to guard ourselves against. I am always a little in favour of lecturing an audience I see before me, and I have a belief in practical preaching. Coleridge once said if I were preaching to this congregation, where I suppose there is no smuggler in the whole body, I should not say anything about smuggling, but if I were stationed on a coast where every man and woman did it I should preach against smuggling fifty-two Sundays in the year. I do not suppose there are ten persons in this audience positively suffering from that form of mental asphyxia known as Christian bigotry; but when it comes to the other side, friends, of doing that justice to religious men which we ask then to give us when it comes to dealing with a Christian as fairly as if he were a heathen perhaps the case is different. I remember in the old times—of the Brook Farm movement, when young men and women had new lights given to them—I remember that in some of the more prominent places, especially in Concord, which was the headquarters of the movement, that we got some very singular perversions of the ordinary standards of right and wrong. I remember on one occasion a young man had been away for sometime, and he came back to his parents in the town, where the good people were pretty thoroughly converted to the new faith; and when they had studied him and his ways a little they said, “Why John is quite changed? He went away a good Radical and a promising young man, and now he smokes, and drinks wine, and swears, and goes to church, and he is just like all the other men.” I think it is rather that state of mental prejudice than the other which we need to guard against this afternoon, and I hope that in considering this little form we shall remember that after all we are all very much what our temperament and immediate antecedents have made us. Most of the men I know think in a certain way because their fathers and mothers thought so; or else think diametrically opposite, for no better reason. In each one of us there is a certain temperament, a sort of packing case into which all opinions go, and they take the form of the case. Whatever their form when they went in, they bear these particular creases when they come out. I am reminded here of two little cousins of mine in New England who were going out to pick berries, and they met a man who was or pretended to be a thief, and who alarmed them very seriously by telling them they must give him their money. The elder boy said: “But I have not got any money in my pocket,” and the would-be thief was, I suppose, a little damped by that. But that was nothing to the response of the younger boy, for when the thief made the same demand on him, the little fellow looked up with his

bright eyes and cheerful voice, and said : " But I have not got any pockets." There was a perfectly hopeless case. A boy with no money to-day might be an infantine millionaire to-morrow, but a boy without pockets was as hopeless next week as to-day. I am like him. When I am dealing with people who bring to bear upon me the five points of Calvinism, and all the niceties of their scheme of salvation, I cannot give them an answer. I cannot discuss with them because I do not know the language. I do not know how to begin to refute the extraordinary attitudes they take. All I can say is : " My dear sir, I have not got any pockets for the argument." But you must allow me, my dear friends, with equal frankness to say that when a man comes round from the other direction and says to me : " You cannot prove to our intellects the existence of a God ; therefore you are a fool if you believe in one yourself ; you cannot give us any irrefragable evidence of a future life, therefore you shall not have even the dream that you shall ever see again your dead brother or your darling sister." I can only say to him also : " My dear sir, I have just as few pockets for that point of view as I have for the other. So, I say, we all have our individuality of opinion. I do not suppose there is in London at this moment a body of people of the same size so bristling with individuality as this meeting is. I have no doubt each of us would be willing to make for himself the benevolent offer which one or two have made to you, that " if you will only give us the chance we will demonstrate the truth of our views to every one of you." We cannot all do that, nor can we find anything to suit us all. We have before us, drawn up with some effort by tolerably honest men, differing considerably in opinion, a tolerable basis for this association to go upon. It is not a creed, it carefully avoids it. It is simply a basis on which creedless people, or people collectively creedless, can act together, and we need that joint action. Above all others there are two classes of people who need it, and both were represented among the speakers yesterday. One of these classes consists of those who live at a distance from London, or any intellectual centre—who do not know men of thought—who are not able to get into contact with others who feel like themselves, who are among ignorant or bigoted people, as our Irish friend said, and who will be glad to hear and know that somewhere at least on earth there is a set of people who are trying to think independently, and do not stop to consider whether their teaching is pleasing or not. That is one class of persons. The other class is of those who, living in the midst of all opportunities of contact, are excluded from it, not from necessity or tyranny, but from over-sensitiveness of temperament, and from too great predominance of the literary tone in their minds ; people who while knowing that they are independent and feeling that they are useful, feel also that they do not need contact with others, when really they need it more than anybody else. There is nothing that strikes me more in England than the social and even intellectual stratification which exists, the different sects and atmospheres and circles in which people live, and the amount of benefit they lose by such isolation. You take a man who has his own library to read in, his own independent feeling making him careless of what the world thinks, his recluse habits rendering him indifferent to the frowns of his friends ; that man may go on his work—it may be a magnificent work—for years in quiet and retirement. But I tell you there is nothing in the world which that man so needs to put blood in his veins and to give a larger horizon to his mind as to come here right into a conference of radicals, to meet face to face people whose names he has learned to dread, and whose very statement of their opinions might shock his tastes. Words cannot express how great the need is of that

mutual contact between different minds. One of your own writers, Sir Arthur Helps, said that admirably in the best sentence he ever wrote. He advised a person who writes anything always to read it before some friends. "You must have," he said, "the contact of another mind; you must have the criticism of somebody else." "But," said his friend, and here is the felicitous expression, "suppose the criticisms you get are very poor; suppose they have not even common sense." "That is no matter," he replied, "their criticisms will give you the common nonsense upon what you have written, and that is just as important." It is just as important to any one of you who have thought anything to bring it here, and have it tested, as if the criticism were the best possible. You need to take each other's hands; each need the help of others. There is that difference between my country and the way in which you are working here, that the lines are less closely marked in America, and a man cannot keep himself away from the society of those who, if not his peers in intellect and culture, are at least his peers in the habit of independent thought, and the frankness which speaks its mind. I believe that these two classes of persons especially, and all of us in a subordinate degree, will find the value of what this association will do for us; and I hope when we come to debate the platform laid down by the Committee, it will be at least with as little modification and as little mere hair-splitting as the weakness of human nature will permit.

The CHAIRMAN: We are all very much indebted, indeed, to Mr. Conway and Colonel Higginson for their speeches, and we feel how good has been the judgment of the Committee in drawing up the platform, to use the American expression, or the statement, to use the English one, which is likely to unite thinkers of different classes who are liberal not only in discarding the old formula, but in admitting divers opinions to be expressed. There is one word which I should like to have omitted from this statement. It is the word "the," and it probably was accidentally left in when a little alteration was made. The words are "promotion of the pure and universal religion," I think it should read "promotion of pure and universal religion."

Mr. CONWAY said it was, as the Chairman had supposed, an accidental slip, and the alteration might be made.

The CHAIRMAN: We may take that word out with the consent of the Committee.

A gentleman in the body of the hall said the second paragraph spoke of membership in no degree affecting relationship with other associations. Now it seemed to him that a man's membership could in no degree be affected.

The CHAIRMAN said that they would probably have to take a debate upon that point as upon each of the clauses, but that would come afterwards.

Rev. J. C. STREET: In the few hasty words yesterday, which I spoke before I had to leave, I ventured to plead for the formation of an organization within which the scattered liberal thinkers might be collected, for I was afraid lest in the diversified views which were being expressed during the earlier part of the proceedings we should be—while listening to what was of very great interest to all of us—wasting the golden opportunity then at our command, of finding some basis of union and some bond by which to unite scattered liberals all over the world. I find that after I left the meeting a committee was appointed to consider a basis for union, and that my name was put upon the committee. Unfortunately I did not know of it until after the time the committee met, so that I was not able to contribute anything except a suggestion or two later on. But I may here say that after looking very carefully, during our luncheon, over the suggestions that had been thrown

out, I find myself in all but absolute agreement with the proposals now before us. The only objections I have are of the very slightest matter of detail, and are on the point raised by the gentleman at the back of the hall. The whole question for me will refer to this last part. I think there is some misunderstanding of the paragraph which refers to membership. Of course we do not desire in any degree to interfere with the relations of a member of this association to any other association; but joining this association may cause other associations to feel they are somewhat affected with regard to us, and therefore I think it is better that these words should be left out. The first part of the second resolution is complete in itself. "Membership of this association shall leave each individual responsible for his own opinions alone." Let him then take the consequences of it. If it does affect his relationship with other associations we cannot help it. We do not want to affect such relationship, and nothing we propose to do will actually affect it.

COLONEL HIGGINSON: May I state what was in the minds of the Committee—the more readily that this was taken hastily from the Constitution of the American Free Religious Association. The whole object of that paragraph was to cut off all possibility that any member of the Association might say to some other member—to the present speaker, for instance, who is, I think, a Unitarian Clergyman, "You are a Unitarian clergyman, what business have you here? You ought to resign your position in that body if you come into this." If you are to give this the character of a comprehensive body, there must be many considerable differences, and we do not want that any member should say to any other member, that he should resign his membership in any other body in order to come into this. If our friend, for instance, had become a Methodist, he would simply be transferred himself from one sect to another. Our object was not to place this Association on the platform of a new sect with a creed, but especially to guard against this being regarded as a new sect, and to make it a wider association which persons of any sect might join on their own responsibility, nobody having the right to say "You are inconsistent in not leaving your sect when you come here."

MR. STREET: I quite agree with the thought which lies behind the explanation.

COLONEL HIGGINSON: I do not know that the phrase is at all necessary.

MR. STREET: I do not know that it is. I think the first part or first clause involves all the rest.

MR. HIRST SMYTH: The rest will be useful.

THE CHAIRMAN: May I consider you move that these words be omitted?

MR. STREET: Oh, I have not got so far as that, Sir. We shall see if the Committee will accept my suggestion. With regard, Sir, to the general matter before us, I find myself in harmony with all these five points. You call yourselves according to this organisation, an association of liberal thinkers. You do not presume to define in what a liberal thinker consists? You do not presume to define his relation towards any form of thought, religion, political or social. You simply recognise the fact that all men who feel themselves to be free thinkers, and desire to be liberal thinkers, may have association with you. Therefore, at the outset, we have a basis so comprehensive that Jew and Gentile, Greek and Mussulman, that men who are theists, and men who call themselves atheists, may, if they choose, associate together upon this platform, and be co-workers for certain specific purposes. These purposes are defined to be the "scientific study of religious phenomena."

People may say they do not care for religion at all, and may tell us that they think it all to be simple superstition. Well, then, they will be able to work for the "emancipation of mankind from superstition." There may be, according to their idea, some little tautology here. But they can bear this. We must recognise the fact that religious phenomena are the most numerous and the most important in the world's history. No one can shut his eyes to that remarkable fact—that everywhere, among all races, at all periods, mankind has developed religious ideas; and it is a matter for scientific inquiry of some importance, to ascertain what man has been thinking as regards these matters. So far, then, as these are concerned, without committing ourselves to any of them, we simply want to gather together the facts and to group them into scientific order. Then when we have gathered our facts, and put them into scientific shape and formed our conclusions from them, even those who do not care for religious phenomena will acknowledge their value and will not reject the scientific results we deduce from them. Then, Sir, comes the second plank, "The collection and diffusion of information concerning world-wide religious development." I think this is a matter of the greatest importance. I think even it should be more comprehensive than it is, for there are some forms of religious development which have never been world-wide and which never will be, and yet are peculiarly interesting and of great fascination, while they have a distinct relationship to the wider forms of thought—to those of more general acceptance. It would have been better, I think, not to confine the objects of the association, and I suppose it is not really intended to confine them to the great world-wide religion. There are forms of religion, different developments of it, in odd out-of-the-way places, of singular interest to the thinker, and a man would be sadly wanting in the means of forming a comprehensive judgment on the whole phenomena, if he did not take into consideration these little manifestations, these apparent excrescences which have grown round the original developments of religion. Upon the third platform, I think we shall all be united, and I hope we shall concur upon it, "The emancipation of the world from superstition." We have a pretty well-defined idea what we mean by superstition, a superstructure which has no real basis. It is pretty clear what we mean by that. We are all anxious to clear the world of that great sham. Therefore, I think that Mrs. Law, as well as those most anxious to promote religion, can co-operate to do everything possible to get rid of the superstition that has been, and is the curse of the world. As to the "fellowship among liberal thinkers of all races," that defines clearly enough that what we want in this Association is not merely English scattered thinkers, nor European scattered thinkers, but that we wish to include that humanity which takes many forms of development, and that religion which takes many forms of development also. We want to have upon this platform men from all parts of the world, representatives of all types of thought, who are groping after the light in their peculiar ways—to gather them upon the only platform, where men can meet as brothers, and confer upon these great and sublime questions. Now, I come to what seems to me the most important plank of your platform, and the one which will call forth most discussion. It is "The promotion of pure and universal Religion," which you carefully avoid defining, most wisely, as I think, but which, whatever else it may be, and here every man is left to choose for himself as an individual thinker, to find out what it is, yet does include "the culture, progress, and moral welfare of man." Now, surely, whatever our differences may be with regard to the term religion; whatever our conception as to whether there is or is not a universal religion, and

however we define it, we shall all agree that the something covered in the word religion must include these three, and that the whole previous part of the platform must mean a union of those who desire the world's progress. The world is looking forward and not backwards, except in order to learn lessons from the past to help forward men to prepare for the future. Religion must include the progressive movement of mankind, marching on towards light and towards that improvement which involves the moral welfare of us all. With this programme I find myself in hearty agreement, and so far as it is here developed I feel you have answered the plea I put before you yesterday. I said then there were many scattered thinkers left almost alone in their battle for liberty, and I asked for an Association—perhaps incautiously—to throw some shield over them. I did not mean to say they were cowed and afraid to take their part in the fight, and to meet the difficulties of their position. I did not mean that. But what I did mean was that they should feel that they in distant places, far away from the cheering voice of sympathising brothers, would be able to turn to some body like this, composed of men who would put out their hands and bid them good fellowship, that they should feel that all over the world there were scattered men like themselves who were fighting the same battle, and that so we should create a thrill of communion and of helpful association through our work, and stimulating each individual thinker to renewed efforts. Such an Association, while giving strength to each individual thinker, would give us also a platform so broad, so great and so helpful, that we should go away from this meeting tenfold stronger than we are now to do our work. I, therefore, with the greatest possible pleasure adopt this programme here submitted. I concur with that part of the second regulation which proposes the “membership of this Association should leave each individual responsible for his own opinions alone,” and I should like it to stop there. Else I think the whole of it would be misunderstood. You do not want to be exclusive. You do not want any one to think that, because a man joins you he must terminate his connection elsewhere, but yet you cannot interfere with what other associations might do. You may say that membership should not interfere, but they may say it should, and I think, therefore, it would be better left out, and that the paragraph would stand clearer and stronger if it read “Membership in this Association should leave each individual responsible for his own opinions alone.” On that ground, I think we shall find that every man of us, every woman of us, will go back to the field of labour or thought with which he or she is identified, will be stronger than before, will feel there is a brotherhood and sisterhood of spiritual fellowship—if I may use such a word in such an assembly—that there is a spiritual fellowship which binds us together, that though scattered we are still united, and that though distributed over the surface of the world, we are yet moving together to the accomplishment of the grandest purpose that the world has yet seen.

The CHAIRMAN: I am delighted to find that the gentleman who was absent from the Committee Meeting, so heartily agrees with the work that has been done, but I should like, before continuing the discussion, to know whether the Members of the Committee concur in withdrawing the last words of the second clause. It seems that they may be misunderstood, and one or two persons have already misunderstood them. Besides, the clause is complete in itself.

Mr. CONWAY: If we could gain the thing we are trying for, the language would be a matter of indifference, but it is better that we should secure what we aim at. It is not intended to offer any interference with anybody's rela-

tion to any other association, but what we wish to try and avoid is that at any future time one member should try to expel another member from this association because he belongs to some other. It should not be a ground of attack, and nobody should be able to use it against a member, or to expel him on the ground that he was a Methodist or a Baptist. Therefore I would suggest that words might be modified so as to read "and is not intended in any degree to effect his relations with other associations."

Mr. SMITH: If you alter the whole paragraph from the active to the passive it will carry out what you want.

The CHAIRMAN: As it stands will you accept it, Mr. Street?

Mr. STREET: I certainly should not press an amendment.

The CHAIRMAN: Then this clause, as amended by Mr. Conway, is to be regarded as one of the proposals of the Committee.

Mr. RYLLOTT: I should have preferred that the matter had stood with the second part of the sentence, because if you fear any one member will turn out another because he belongs to some association you immediately make this association responsible for that opinion, whereas, in point of fact, you declare that each should be responsible for his own opinions alone, so it seems to me to get into a contradiction. If it is carried out, you give a member of the association the right to question me where I am coming from and where I am going.

Mr. HIRST SMYTH: As I understand it, the paragraph is not a protection so much against the future action of this association as it is a protection against the action of some other associations. People who join this association and belong to others, and are objected to, can reply, "You have no business to object to me, because the association itself says it does not wish membership to affect anyone's relations with other associations."

Mr. CONWAY: There was the double advantage of the paragraph, but it was first of all meant to suggest that nobody should charge with inconsistency whatever any person might see fit to do; while next it was meant that the paragraph should be something with which a man could stop any discussion, and could say, "You see the people among whom I am say on their platform that each individual is only responsible for his own opinions. If Mr. Voysey hears opinions which shock him or his friends, that is something for which the speakers alone are responsible, and the association particularly declines to have either others or itself compromised. I do not care enough about it, however, to stand by it."

Several of the COMMITTEE: "Nor I."

Mr. CONWAY: If we ever find in any emergency that any amendment of that kind requires to be passed, it is perfectly competent to us to do it then. Therefore I do not think we need take up any time now with the discussion.

Mr. WALTERS: I can give one additional reason why the second part should remain. There is another organisation which answers to some extent the ends promoted by this; which was founded a year ago and is known as the Leicester Conference. In that movement there are, at any rate, two members of the Committee who will be heartily in sympathy with this—Mr. Allanson Picton and myself. Now, I am very anxious that this should not be considered a rival to that movement. The intention of that was to form a religious communion, independent of agreement in theoretical dogma; and this to go further and advocate free and open enquiry on the part of all those who desire to know the spirit of truth in religious matters, and to discuss matters connected with religion. I am very anxious then that the impression should not go forth that this Conference is intended in any way to step in, or

have anything to do with that. I should therefore think that the second part of this paragraph might be allowed to stand.

The CHAIRMAN: I think we will take the debate upon the general subject first, so that the whole platform may be discussed; but I should recommend speakers to confine themselves to particular parts of it. I think it would be advisable to close this discussion at four o'clock, because we must separate at five. When that is done I should put each part of this platform separately to the meeting, so as to take a separate vote on each, and not force the meeting to agree or disagree in the lump, which is often inconvenient.

Mr. FRECKLETON suggested that the platform should be read again, making the third time, as many gentlemen had come in within the last half-hour or so.

The CHAIRMAN then read the platform, and next called on

Mrs. ROSE, who said: I need hardly tell you that I am glad to see so good a meeting come together for the noble purpose described in the paper before you. But although I fully and heartily agree with all parts that have a tendency to diffuse knowledge and benefit the human family, I am placed in a peculiar position, for there are some parts that I entirely differ from, and I fear that when it comes to a vote on such parts that I shall be in a minority of one, and if it should be so, it would not be the first time, and I would much rather be in a minority even of one, for the right, than in a large majority for wrong and oppression. Forty-five years ago it was infinitely more difficult to speak on religion unless you agreed with it. Now it is not so, and yet I had the—whatever you may call it—the moral courage or the audacity to question all religions, as far as I had known them; and I endeavoured to help forward, as far as I could, that object which is expressed in one part of the platform, the emancipation of the human mind from superstition. Superstition indeed is terrible. Like a heavy night-mare it all but crushes human individuality, human mind, and human progress. It has only been by such audacity or moral courage of single individuals here and there in times past, that the way has been prepared for the present congress, or conference, and without that, this meeting could never have existed. I fully agree with that part of your programme which speaks of emancipation of the human mind from superstition, but I am compelled to dissent from that part of it which mentions religion, for in my conviction, in my conscience, I call all religions superstitions, and consider them merely as superstitions. I cannot vote for what appears to me the great curse of the human mind, the great stumbling block in the way of human progress. The religion of the past is the superstition of to-day. The religion of to-day will be the superstition of the future. We have heard a good deal about the different definitions of religion, and of the individuality of what is termed God, and we can draw from it that in all ages, past as well as present, in accordance with the state of society, whether progressive or backward, intellectual or ignorant, moral or immoral, so have varied the definitions of religion and of God. What does that prove? That man makes his religion and his God from his own image. As he feels, and is, so he makes him. As he wants him more or less human, more or less refined, more or less civilised, more or less progressive, so he makes him. In past ages and ruder times they have made him hard, cruel, and savage. At the present time, even those who come to the same book as their ancestors, endeavour to clothe him in a little better and finer and more human attributes. The future will go back upon our present definition and shew its fallacy, its ignorance, its corruption, its superstition. Therefore, I for one,

though I should stand alone, cannot subscribe to this part of the platform. My friend, Colonel Higginson, had no pocket for the old definition of religion. My pocket is so full of humanity alone, that I have no pocket for anything else. I go for man. We were told a great deal yesterday about the refined, the æsthetic, and the emotional, in religion. All the emotion we can possibly possess, all the feeling which human nature is capable, all belongs to man. If there be one God, or ten thousand gods, they do not need it, but man does and woman does, and to me it is stealing from man what belongs to man to give to a god, and to render to him things that cannot benefit him. Humanity, morality, justice to man and woman, the non-interference with each person's private opinions—for these ends we must work. We belong to the same human family, and we must work for it. Our life is short, and we cannot spare an hour from the human race, even for all the gods in creation. Any platform that has religion in it contains a creed. If not it will soon lead to one. You know what a creed is. It is a chain round the neck of human progress, a strait jacket on the mind of man, and I will not have that strait jacket upon me. But although I differ in one or two of these expressions, if your society will allow me to aid and assist, and help them with all my poor powers, and poor they are, for if they ever were powerful to any extent they have been nearly worn out in the service to the same cause. If you will allow me with all my heart to aid and assist you, I can say,—I wanted to say, "God speed!" All I can say is, "Go on, friends; do all you can; remembering this that it is a positive theft from the human race to trouble yourselves about beings, whoever they are, above and beyond man, for they do not need us." I believe my time is out, and still more so my strength is very nearly exhausted, but I am very grateful to the meeting for having listened to such a heretic as I am, who cannot recognise anything here beyond the humanity to which we belong.

The CHAIRMAN: The difference between Mrs. Rose and us is one merely of words, and the society we hope to form will only be too happy to have her name on its lists.

Miss MARSHALL: This is a society of liberal thinkers. At first I thought it bade fair to be a society of liberal talkers. If I waste one minute now, it is to save you many hours in future meetings. Therefore I shall pay no compliments, make no long apologies, but just "go ahead." This society is not gathered together to be a sort of large united Father Confessor to listen to our particular little creeds and crotchets. Therefore it does not signify whether I think the moon is made of green cheese or not. But we come here to compare notes, to say what we have found or felt in our separate circles, what we have seen reflected each in our own mirror, of the growth and stature of all thought with which we have come face to face. To give the diagnosis of our patient—or impatient—and to see if we can help each other to utter aloud what hitherto we have ventured only to whisper. I show I am a social heretic by taking up no time in unnecessary preambles and needless words. We meet here to feel the pulse of the religious or thinking community, and state each our experience as to what we think of the spread of intelligence round us, to see what point we reach from time to time. Have you not been struck by the irrelevant remarks that have been made here as to the question at issue? The time is come when we are not afraid to speak out our opinions in a community like this. It matters little, apparently, about anybody's opinions. That does not prevent, however, the necessity of our being thoroughly real—vital in these opinions. On every side we find vast super-

stitutions existing which some of you would, at a stroke, sweep away. But our duty is to

“ Watch what main currents draw the years
Cut prejudice against the grain ;
But gentle words are always gain,
Regard the weakness of thy peers.”

I have often asked what we call goody people what they would do could it be proved by any means that there was no God, no future life. They answer,—“ Oh what shall we do if you take away the foundation ?” Whatever they mean by this, I know not. Mere reward and punishment for good and bad deeds ? Now I do know that we must not forget initiation ; that is what I mean by watching what main currents draw the years, and yet to remember the weakness of those to whom you proclaim your high doctrines. You dare not go to Whitechapel and cry out, “ There is no God, no future life, no punishment.” The answer would be, “ All right ; then here we will pick your pockets and murder you, and then there’s an end o’t.” You must remember that our superstitions of yesterday are the religions of thousands to-day. “ Milk for babes.” If you force your forms of thought on others, you may but produce a sort of moral indigestion, by making too sudden a change. I stand here and claim gentle mercy for superstition. I am not superstitious, but how much of this may be owing to my life, circumstances, and strong physique, and my not knowing what indigestion means ? Scrooge says to the ghost of Marley, “ How do I know you are not a crumb—a piece of indigested cheese ? ” And Leigh Hunt says, “ Many a young lady’s fit of romantic melancholy is simply pork.” A railway accident might change me from a moderately clear thinker into a drivelling superstitious fool. I have a servant who calls the word stupid-stition, and says, “ I have none, mum.” But there are stupid people, and they will have their stupidstitions. Be merciful to them. Remember that while a little leaven leavens the whole lump, it is no use making it all leaven, as my mother once did. Taunted in fun by her husband, when both were very young, that she could not make a loaf, she said she would try. She had a vague notion as to how it should be done, and took no counsel. She went in for unlimited yeast and leaven, and very limited flour. The baker asked, “ What is this ? ” “ A loaf.” “ Oh ! ” And when he brought it back it was a little brown film at the bottom of the dish. “ Tell your mistress,” said he to the servant, “ that her loaf was so very light, and rose so very high, that it took six men to sit upon it to keep it down.” Now let us take care that we do not rise to such a possible height, or we too shall burst and come down a little brown over-baked crusty film at the bottom of the dish. We want to meet here for sympathy, to compare each other’s conditions of mind, to just say, “ How do you do ? ” And little more than this we did not dare to do twenty years ago. Then we should have been tabooed. That is a capital word. It means being no more invited into jolly society ; it means being dismissed with a sneer ; and to endure a social sneer is very terrible to us ladies. You use the word Liberal in your programme ; it does not mean much ; it merely means progress. Remember free religion itself may be superstition. Superstition and sectarianism enters into everything. Science has its superstition, as you would know had you lived much in purely scientific circles, where you will find more than in all the rest of the world put together. I believe I have known people—nay, I am not sure I would not have done it myself—who would have sold their souls for a dot upon a diatom ! To make this society of any value, it must quit this present condition which is in that of water, which requires,

under certain circumstances, to be shaken before it will crystallize. We must quietly hold hands, and not make a fuss about it. All true growth is silent—makes little or no noise. The ultimate burst of an explosion is but the final expression of foregone, silent work. You will now and then have your little volcanic outburst, a sign of what has been going on beneath, and this continues till a little hillock on a muddy plain rises gradually into Etna, Vesuvius, and greater fire mountains of the world. Avoid offences. They must needs come, but woe unto him by whom they come, because he is an unnecessary man. I have, perchance, my superstition, and other people theirs, and if you want to destroy them, you must insert the thin end of the wedge. See our modern quarry men how they reduce a marble mountain into a heap of *debris*, impatiently blasting the rock into fragments for one single huge block. Not so the old Greeks. They did far better, and if you wander among their quarries of Pentelicus, and other mountains, you see the rocks look as if they had been cut like a piece of cheese. Their work was comparatively noiseless. First they made a *little groove* in the stone they desired to cut. This conference is such a groove. Then they put in a wedge of wood (your conscience), and they poured water on it till it swelled, and they pressed it, worked it down, and so smooth and white, came forth from the quarry the hewn temples. And we want now new temples of human thought, grand, massive, beautiful. Where there is noise and discord in your work, you are doing wrong, blasting the rock, not making perfect pillars, and plinth, and pure moulded forms. Remember this gradual groove of the Greeks, and this society will be then giving true sympathy and encouragement to us all. We shall not be obliged to say to you, in a whisper, "We have been there," and we shall not see people drawing up their skirts in disdain as we pass as in fear of contamination. Only ladies can do this well; you gentlemen cannot make yourselves so disagreeable, simply because you have not the histrionic talent for it. This is all I have to say, save to wish all prosperity to this Society of Liberal Thinkers.

Mr. BINNS: The discussion in connection with this conference has now reached a practical shape, and it seems to me to be drawing towards a tolerably satisfactory conclusion. Pretty nearly all varieties of opinion have been expressed. We have had talk from the atheistic standpoint, the humanitarian standpoint, from what I suppose I must call the free religious standpoint, the Unitarian standpoint, and the undogmatic Christian standpoint, and it is not necessary to put any other standpoint before you. For my own part, to a certain extent, I dare say I should stand more or less on all of them except the first. What then are the practical conclusions towards which we are now drawing. It would seem that the adoption of the report, as presented by the Committee, so far as I can understand it, it is entirely satisfactory from beginning to end. I should not feel at all inclined in a mixed multitude like the present to raise a discussion on alterations of words here and there. When you say an "Association of liberal thinkers" you really have included all these standpoints to begin with; and when you have said you are going to adopt the scientific study of religious phenomena you have included all varieties of religious ideas. Mr. Street's idea for dropping out "world wide" seems to me unnecessary, for "religious phenomena" includes world wide religious ideas, and the merest bit of hole and corner religious development that you can discover. But the point to which I feel I attach great importance, is that which you have stated in the second part. It seems to me very desirable you should insist upon keeping in your constitution this statement

that not only does membership in this association leave each individual responsible for his own opinions alone, but that it is not intended in any degree to affect his relationship with other associations. Of course, all that is included in the first statement, but if you do not go a little bit into detail you do not know where you are. The fact is, everything is included in everything else, but you have got to point out a little bit here and there as to the precise way in which one thing is included in another. All things, Mrs. Rose would say, are included in humanity, but then she must set to work to explain humanity a little. All things, I should say, are included in God, as a Christian apostle said before me, when he mentioned that out of him, and through him, and to him, are all things. But it is necessary in order to set things in a tolerably intelligible phase to go into detail. I do not suppose any association would dream of interfering with me on account of my position, although I did preach the annual sermon at the Unitarian Association on Wednesday. They would not think of interfering with me at all on account of that. I see here a gentleman who introduced the religious service on that occasion, and I see here twenty Unitarian ministers. We all feel perfectly easy ourselves, but then all people are not exactly like us. There may be weaker brethren scattered here and there, and weaker sisters too—I think more weaker sisters, in spite of the strong-minded sisters who have addressed us from this platform, than weaker brethren. I fear then that there are weaker sisters and weaker brethren who would be inclined to draw themselves up in that histrionic way which has been so graphically described by the last speaker; and one does want them to have the opportunity. Nobody should be able to interfere with anybody else on account of their belonging to this association, and if anybody attempts to do so we can only refer them to this clear statement. You may say "But we need not take people of that kind into consideration; let them take the consequences of their action." We shall all have to do that, my brethren, in spite of all our talk, and no sort of qualification will enable us to get rid of the consequences. That divine law of retribution is what, if Mrs. Rose will allow me, I term a godsend to humanity. But let us consider these weak people, and not only bear our own burdens but help them to bear theirs. That doctrine of sympathy which was laid down by Miss Marshall is beautifully expressive of what we ought to be aiming at. I do not anticipate there will be many future meetings like the present. It would not be desirable they should all be like the present. Here we are to a large extent talking at random, beginning sentences when we do not see the end of them, beginning speeches of a certain line of thought, not knowing where we should get by the time we have got to the termination of our ten minutes. If this association is to do any real, lasting work, there must be downright hard, scientific work in connection with it. We must study religion scientifically, not only the various world-wide forms of religion, but the force and nature of religious thought and life here in England. The secularism that widely prevails among the working classes is religious; for in my opinion it derives all its significance from its relationship to religion; and we must study that. Then we have to study to emancipate mankind from superstition. "But," says Mrs. Rose, "the religion of one age is the superstition of another; the superstition that exists now is what people called religion not many years ago." But that applies to every thing. It applies to science. The science of one age is the nonsense and absurdity of another. In proof of which I refer Mrs. Rose or any one else to astronomy before Newton, Copernicus, and Kepler, to geological science before Lyall, to biological science and anthro-

political science before E. B. Tyler and Darwin threw such light on these speculative topics. I do not object to a name because it is sometimes misused, and personally I may say I should not object to "religion" or to christianity in the way in which Mr. Conway and Colonel Higginson seem inclined to object to it. But these, after all, are personal opinions. They take Christianity as they like it, and they let me take it as I like it. The Association is not tied to my views or to their views; but we are an "Association of Liberal Thinkers," and we go in for science and philosophy and progress and the constant growth of man towards the unity of the ideal perfection.

Rev. H. W. PERRIS (Norwich): I should feel much greater timidity in speaking last on such an occasion as this, if I did not feel that that last word, brief as it is, would be a word of real sympathy. After all, we have come together more upon a basis of common feeling than a common knowledge. Indeed, we have had abundant manifestation of it. If I had been able to judge, in any measure accurately of the diversity of views expressed, we had abundant proof to-day of the present impossibility, to say the least, of our arriving at anything like a formal agreement in matters of religious thought. We have shown, I think, as indeed we often do in social and domestic circles, by our sharp antagonism as well as by our incidental agreements, how very much we have in common. I stand here, I will not say at the opposite pole from Mrs. Rose, but very far indeed from her point of view. I am very far from being orthodox, and I allow myself to be called a Unitarian Christian. I do not glory in these appellations. They do not describe me; they only label me with an approximation to correctness. But I can no more rid myself of them than I can rid myself of my parentage and my scholastic training, or of various things which cleave to me, and will cleave to me, like the colour of my eyes or my hair, to the day of my death. Yet, curiously enough—and it will strike Mrs. Rose as extremely curious—I avow myself in substantial agreement with her. The things which she was discussing and condemning under the names of superstition and Christianity and what not, are things which I as a Christian am continually denouncing in my pulpit, opposing in the press, and counteracting by various means of instruction and education, in a tolerably large community in the farthest eastern county of this land—a congregation that was founded long ago and has had a continuously evolving religious history. Mrs. Rose is denouncing a thing which she calls by a certain name, and I am denouncing things which I call by certain other names. But this last word of mine should simply be one of hope and sympathy, and real joy that we have been able to come together in this way, finding aims substantially in common; that we should have been able to express such diverse views on side issues, to exemplify the diversity of our temperament and the difference of our training or want of training, and to prove that we only belong to different climes in this strangely varied and wonderful world, some breathing a very rarified atmosphere and others requiring an exceedingly thick and heavy one, and yet belonging to one race. Having common wants and common yearnings which bring us together. If we did not feel that there were wrongs to be righted, mischief to be corrected, knowledge to be disseminated, truth to be fought for, lived for and died for, we should not be here to-day. Therefore, whether Atheists or Theists, believers in some ideas about God and man and religion, or doubtless about these things, we are all agreeing to seek on this simple basis of liberal thinkers real, earnest—shall I not venture to say a spiritual fellowship—a fellowship of heart and heart, of hand and hand, which will

stand to us for the outline of a great liberal church, as representing that at which all churches are dimly aiming. In this movement there will be the beginning of better things. The Laureate expresses our common conviction from whatever point we regard it :—

“ Self-reverence, Self-knowledge, Self-control,
 These three alone lead life to sovereign power.
 Yet not for power (power of herself
 Would come, uncalled for,) but to live by law,
 Acting the law we live by, without fear ;
 And, because Right is Right, to follow Right
 Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence.”

Let us trust that we who are here to-day may carry away with us a sympathetic feeling towards each other ; and let us resolve that in our various circles we will try to understand each other better, and never again speak hastily as to motives until we get to know how fine is the bond that is put around us and how strongly the currents mingle in this wonderful world. We are drifting often closely together in the great revival of intellectual and moral life that is breaking out around us. May it be vaster and deeper than any reformation of the days that are past.

The CHAIRMAN : I think I must now close the discussion of the report of the Committee, in order that we may take it into consideration, clause by clause, and vote upon it for the purpose of giving it practical life. I should have liked to have said many words myself, but I refrain as there is very much business to get through.

The CHAIRMAN then read the first paragraph, “ This organisation shall be called ‘ The Association of Liberal Thinkers.’ ”

This was carried unanimously.

The CHAIRMAN : Its objects shall be : “ (1) The scientific study of religious phenomena.”

This was put and carried unanimously.

The CHAIRMAN : “ (2) The collection and diffusion of information concerning world-wide religious developments.”

MR. STREET : I will move the omission of the word “ world-wide.”

Col. HIGGINSON : May I suggest that instead we add the words at the end “ throughout the world.”

MR. STREET : I will gladly adopt the suggestion.

The CHAIRMAN : “ The collection and diffusion of information concerning religious developments throughout the world.”

This was put and carried unanimously.

The CHAIRMAN : “ (3) The emancipation of mankind from superstition.”

Professor CARPENTER : I beg to move that this clause be omitted ; and in doing so I may just say, very briefly, that it appears to me that the word superstitions is essentially an unscientific word. The previous clauses have defined the objects of the Association to be the scientific collection and study of the various phenomena of religion as they present themselves. Now it will necessarily be that among this great number of religious phenomena there will be some that will present themselves to us individually as superstitions. We also know that the term “ Superstitions ” may well be applied to numerous beliefs that many here present would cherish very deeply. It seems to me that the further definition “ the promotion of pure and universal religion—the culture, progress, and moral welfare of mankind ” will necessarily carry with it “ the emancipation of human kind from superstitions,” and that therefore it is not necessary for us to involve ourselves in labelling any beliefs

by an offensive name, as we should by this clause. If I may be permitted one reminiscence, I heard a sermon from the minister of this congregation some years ago, and that sermon left a very deep impression upon my mind. In it a thought was dwelt upon which I will endeavour to reproduce, though I cannot repeat the eloquence which first adorned it. The sermon was a plea for destructive preaching, and the preacher vindicated the right of destructive preaching. He urged that no error is abolished until a new truth is ready to be set in its place, and that therefore destructive teaching is essentially constructive. I venture to turn the thought the other way round. Pure and universal religion, for instance, will include within it essentially the culture and progress of mankind, and by the promotion of pure and universal religion we shall emancipate the human race from superstitions. In view of this fifth article I move that the fourth be not put.

Rev. R. A. ARMSTRONG: I second this, not only for the reason put before us, but because I am anxious that the Association should be of a thoroughly practical nature, and because I am also anxious that persons representing a wide variety of views as possible, should be attracted to become members of it: and I can conceive a case that one person might feel a something as a superstition which another person whom we should be glad to welcome here might regard not as a superstition, but as the heart and soul of his religion. Mr. Binns, for instance, might try to prove that Mrs. Rose has a superstition. Comte has spoken of the atheistic superstition. So long as this has been done accidentally, all well and good, but I do not think either Mr. Binns or Mrs. Rose could fail to go away and to feel separated, the one from the other, if it became an essential and leading object of the society to pursue superstitions. We should all be taking different views, and that would produce a general contention.

Mr. CONWAY: Although I fear the reasons I gave for not calling myself a Christian, may not have been understood, yet I have the greatest desire, while preserving individuality of view in this Association, not to involve others; and, indeed, I would make very great sacrifices to secure anything like a scientific and general discussion and investigation, in a harmonious and fair spirit, on the subject of religion and its phenomena. I observe that Mr. Armstrong and Professor Carpenter—I am sure it is an unintentional mistake—use in their remarks, the word “superstitions” in the plural, whereas, in the programme, it is “superstition” in the singular. Our idea in that was not to encourage members to attack definite superstitions which might be Mrs. Rose’s, or mine, or somebody else’s, but the principle of superstition everywhere, which I take to be a clinging to a belief for which there is no evidence and no grounds, and I think we should all agree in feeling that a meeting of this sort ought to work to emancipate people from clinging to anything resting on mere authority, tradition, or hearsay, which would not bear investigation, and had no grounds to support it. That is superstition. We do not mean that we would necessarily fix on this view or that view, and call it a superstition. So long as a man can believe a thing and give a reason for the faith that is in him, he is not superstitious, although he worships a fetish. If a man believes on the best evidence he can get, he cannot be called a believer in superstition, until I have given him such a reason for throwing it over, as will show that he is believing without reason or fact. It was that principle that was in my mind, and which led me to propose that this clause should be inserted. I cannot see, therefore, if we aim at the liberation of mankind from superstition, if we try to get rid of a thing based on mere authority or tradition, the bad habit of mentally accepting a thing merely

because it is traditional, that we should be doing anything else than justly assailing a bad habit. I do not wish, however, to press the discussion if the feeling of the meeting is different from mine. In this particular I am perfectly willing to leave the point to the good sense and opinion of the majority. I do not wish in any way to dictate, but merely wish to show—not that the Association should hold up any particular opinion or superstition, but merely that we should attack the mental principle of holding anything without sufficient fact or evidence for belief.

Colonel HIGGINSON: I will move to amend the amendment, by substituting the original clause, the words "the spirit of superstition." I do not wish to take up time, but I think this amendment would guard us against the possible misrepresentations which have very properly been suggested, and would also retain the original object sought. It must be observed that throughout this constitution we have been obliged, as people always are, to indicate things in general terms, for you never can go into detail. There is, for instance, the encouragement of the principle of morality. We should greatly err if we attempted to define it, though everybody would say it is a good thing. If there is one thing on which everybody would unite, it is in agreeing that the spirit of superstition is a bad thing. If there is a Roman Catholic at this meeting, he would agree to that. He may differ from us a good deal in what we regard as superstition, of course. I am just as desirous as the gentleman who moved the amendment, to avoid anything like any particular invasion of private rights, and if I remember right, Herbert Spencer lays down several things as superstitions which are as dear to me as life itself. I think, however, the amendment will not run any danger of trenching on individual claims, and if we can afford to do anything, we can surely afford to brand the spirit of superstition.

The CHAIRMAN asked whether that amendment would be accepted?

Professor CARPENTER: I would willingly accept that alteration, for I am very anxious not to disturb the harmonious feeling of the meeting, if it is generally accepted.

The clause was then put and unanimously adopted as follows: "The emancipation of mankind from the spirit of superstition."

The Fourth Clause—"Fellowship among liberal thinkers of all ^{vices} classes," was carried unanimously.

The Fifth Clause—"The promotion of pure and universal religion, which includes the culture, progress, and moral welfare of mankind," was then considered, the words "which includes" being added at the suggestion of the Chairman.

A GENTLEMAN at the back of the Hall, said: What meaning are we to attach to the word "universal"? Does the Committee mean that there is a universal religion which is to be discovered first and propagated afterwards.

The CHAIRMAN: The term "promotion" rather implies "not yet arrived at." We anticipate the existence or thing. It is that after which we are striving and which we desire to make universal, as I gather. We state at the end some of the objects which the pure and universal religion is supposed to include. Perhaps Mr. Conway will explain this.

Mr. CONWAY: I think it was in our minds to represent that in all religious developments, certainly in all important ones, and perhaps in all, there was some element which, if divested of ritual and all particular investitures or additions of localities would be found to furnish some common substratum. We thought it would be found that the corruptions of all churches would be mere superstitions and that there would be found some common

foundation for all the religions in the world, that there was in them all a substantial something which was universal if we could only get at it. We thought there was some common stand-point, something human and pure, something free from mere priestly perversions and mere temporary developments, and that that was the universal purified part of religion, that probably these words pure and universal had the same meaning, and that if you divested religion of everything artificial or sham you would leave a reality that was alike in all; that it would include sympathy, charity, and a good many other things which, like the Golden Rule for instance, would be found in all religions.

MR. LEVY: Is not that a dogma in itself—that the part common to all religions is the pure part, and the part that is not common is the impure part? That appears almost as dangerous a dogma as anything I have heard outside the Society. I do not know that there is anything common to all religions, and if there is I do not know if I could distil it down that I should find it much better than the principles that are not so common. My own opinion is that pure religion is very far from being universal at the present time. Can we not amend the clause by saying, "Promotion of pure and universal religion is the culture, progress, and moral welfare of mankind."

THE CHAIRMAN: That is just what we want to avoid. We want to avoid limiting it. We state certain things which are included in it, and we leave the rest, believing that there is a great deal more.

MR. STREET: I think in the main this expresses my own views. I am more concerned about the reality than the language, but I would propose for your consideration, in order to catch the feeling of the audience before I propose it, to read the clause thus, "The promotion of the culture, progress and moral welfare of mankind." If you say that is religion, you have a reality, and if some people say it is not religion, still they are getting at a reality too. We are an association of liberal thinkers studying religious phenomena, working within the field of what we call religion. Is there any necessity to divide us, even in thought, upon the word? We want to work for the culture, progress, and moral welfare of mankind. Would it not be as well to rest there and not go further? If you get a reality, cannot you be content with that?

MR. HIRST SMYTH seconded the motion, and it was also seconded in several other parts of the hall.

MR. RAPP: I remember hearing Mr. Bradlaugh lecture upon this point shortly after his return from America, and he then mentioned his objection to the retention of the word "religion" by the Free Religion Association. If you get the word "religion" you will be sure to get hostility from secularists, and by this amendment you will do away with that.

MR. BINNS: I think it is undesirable on the whole to debate this. We propose the scientific study of religious phenomena, and we go on to say we propose to examine all widely spread developments of religion; then we propose to emancipate the human mind from the spirit of superstition, and I think after that we are fairly justified in asking that our resolution should go on further to declare that just as we are against the spirit of superstition, we are in favour of what we may call the spirit of pure and universal religion. As to the sense in which the word universal is to be interpreted, it may be taken in various ways. The Chairman interprets it in one way and the Chairman of the Committee in another. We can take it either way. The Chairman of the Committee looks upon it as a thing really existing in all religions; the Chairman of the Conference as a thing to be discovered. Although it is quite possible that by retaining the word religion we might

prevent certain members of secularist varieties from joining us, I should feel pretty certain also, that by dropping the word religion we should prevent a great many people from joining us. It would not affect me personally, but my impression is that it would affect many people who would readily agree to the scientific study of religion, or the examination of widely spread religious phenomena. With all due deference to the secularists, they do not care for the scientific study of religion and its investigation as we ourselves do. Therefore it is really more important that we should endeavour to include this and attach some sort of importance to the undefined religion—more importance than those who consider it does not amount to anything much. It is not however the secularist who objects to it. When a man is a hearty sincere believer in religion I think it is unnecessarily throwing away one who might be a valuable ally to carry this amendment.

Dr. BURDORF: If we get rid of the word religion we shall get confused. I would extend the right hand of fellowship to the honest reverent atheist, be he whom he may, but I would not like to connect myself to any society of irreverent persons. We can study any religion in the world, if it be done in a reverent manner, but I should be sorry to connect myself to this Society if by getting rid of the word you would open the door to irreverence.

Dr. DRUMMOND: I would suggest an amendment which I think will go some way towards what we want. "Culture" is far too wide. Our object is not to promote culture in all ways and in all directions, but the promotion of a certain sort of culture. If we say then the promotion of religious culture, we shall not appear to give any definition of religion, and we shall at the same time limit the word culture to the principal direction in which we wish it to go.

Mr. JUDGE: I have very much pleasure in seconding the proposition. It appears to me this association is to be essentially a religious association. If there are certain individuals who will not be attracted to a religious association, well they are not required. (Cries of No! No!) That may seem illiberal, but if you wish to form a commercial association you would not wish to have as members persons who take no interest in commerce, and I think we ought to seek to attract those persons who are interested in the study of religion. The definition given to the objects of this association is especially religious, and even if we altered this, no person who does not take that interest in religion which we assume members would take, would be interested in this association. I certainly think the statement of Mr. Binns is correct, who openly said that this does not concern persons who take no interest in religious questions, and I say we are not illiberal in making it definitely understood that this is to be a religious body.

Mr. FRECKLETON: I think we may see our way out of this difficulty, and to be unanimous on this point as on the others, by a slight alteration in the framework of the sentence which would take away some of the objections made, if it were made to read "whatever may be found to be included in pure and universal religion."

The CHAIRMAN: Nobody has seconded that.

Mr. LEVY: I have no objection to the word religion personally, but my objection is to the assertion that there is such a thing as pure and universal religion, somehow to be distilled out of the various systems of religion in the world. It seems to me that we are suggesting that by a sufficient abstraction of all the religious systems of the world you could get down to something that is pure and universal. I think that is a statement of dogma that is outside the objects of this association.

Mr. ROWELL: I will second Mr. Freckleton's amendment.

The CHAIRMAN: It seems rather vague.

Mr. FRECKLETON: Whatever is included in that, is what I mean.

Mrs. ROSE: Why not say "whatever can be found good and useful in universal religion."

Mr. RYLOTT: Will you take another amendment, Sir. I should like to move that we omit the words altogether.

Mr. LIEBER: One remark, Mr. Chairman. I think it is a pity that a new society like this should state as one of its objects the promotion of that which nobody can define. It seems to me that the amendment suggested on the left there—the motion leaving the latter end of the sentence and taking out the introductory words—is a practical one that everybody would understand, and would make an end of the difficulty.

Mr. LEVY: Could not we get it by saying "the diffusion and the promotion of religion?" (Cries of No! No!)

Mr. RYLOTT: My amendment is altogether the best, Sir—to leave out the clause altogether. It is necessarily involved in what has gone before, and therefore it seems to me you will be throwing out what may prove to be an apple of discord, when you gain nothing by leaving the words in. The "promotion of pure and universal religion" which is supposed to include "the culture, progress, and moral welfare of mankind," is certainly included in the ridding of mankind from the spirit of superstition. And the collection and diffusion of information relating to the religious developments of the world, must certainly involve the scientific collection and classification of them. With these remarks I would move that it be omitted altogether.

Mr. BUHLER: I would second that.

Mrs. LAW: Before putting any other resolution I should like to have a distinct answer to this question. Mr. Judge has said this association is strictly a religious association. Now the name of the association I understood to be "The Association of Liberal Thinkers." If this is to be a religious association that fact ought to be notified.

Colonel HIGGINSON: It seems to me that two persons, who have moved previous resolutions, have suggested together a mode of putting the thing in the shape we want, and it is a very astonishing circumstance that these two should be a gentleman who claims to be a Christian minister and a lady who would not be complimented by any such imputation. If we take the statement made by Mr. Street and add to it substantially the clause suggested by Mrs. Rose we have something I think which would satisfy ninety-nine out of a hundred of those here. Suppose the clause stands in this form:—"that the objects should be the promotion of the culture, progress and moral welfare of mankind," thus far Mr. Street; "and whatever in any religion may tend towards that end," which is Mrs. Rose.

Dr. BURDOE: I will second this.

Mr. STREET: I am quite willing to accept that. I did not move the amendment without thought. I feel anxious about the reality; I am not concerned about the name. I did not feel I was dropping the name, nor was I at all concerned about dropping any of those who might become members. Mr. Judge seems to think we have a society which by its definitions will exclude others, but I do not want to exclude any man. Therefore I used the words I have suggested. It seemed to me that in the four preceding paragraphs religion had been spoken of clearly and definitely; but I think Mrs. Rose has made a very good amendment, and Col. Higginson, with that wonderful tact which he has shown throughout the whole of this

debate, and which is so remarkable that I wish we could get him to go down and arbitrate on the strike now paralysing industry in Lancashire, has exactly suggested what we mean, to "promote the culture, progress, and moral welfare of mankind and whatever in any religion may tend towards that end." By the first words you imply that you take everything in religion that is good, and you add several words which, so far as I can see, are of no particular value, but I will accept them.

The CHAIRMAN: It is like the difference between proximate and ultimate elements in chemistry. The first three may be considered proximate elements.

Mr. STREET: It will be better still if you reverse the words "the promotion of whatever in any religion may tend towards the culture, progress, and moral welfare of mankind."

Mr. LEVY: I do not think that that is as well, because there may be means outside the different systems of religion.

Mr. CONWAY: Yes; I quite think so.

The CHAIRMAN: Then you do not wish to limit it, Mr. Street?

Mr. STREET: No; I do not in any way.

The CHAIRMAN: Then I may consider the other amendment withdrawn in favour of Colonel Higginson's?

Mr. FRECKLETON: As it now stands the amendment expresses all I want to say.

Mr. HARRISON: Would it not be better to say, "any form of religion"?

Colonel HIGGINSON: I would just as lief have these words. It is not worth discussing.

The CHAIRMAN: Perhaps it is better it should stand as proposed.

Mrs. ROSE: Would it not be better to say "all the good that can be found in any religion"—"all the good and useful that can be found in any religion"?

Colonel HIGGINSON: My amendment was, "or whatever may tend towards that end."

The CHAIRMAN: Colonel Higginson's motion is, "the promotion of the culture, progress, and moral welfare of mankind, and of whatever in any religion may tend towards that end."

Mr. HAYNES: I think it is better as it went before. I will move that the second part of this be left out.

Mr. LEVY: I should wish to move an amendment in another part of it. I should wish to substitute a word in order to make it more logical.

Mr. ARMSTRONG: I would second that amendment that the latter half of the clause be left out. My grounds are that we have been told that this Association is to be as broad as possible, and Colonel Higginson just now ventured to hope that his amendment would include ninety-nine out of every one hundred here. Now, I want to include the other one, and though I have a great detestation of anybody discussing questions, whether religious or sectarian, irreverently, yet I think the tone of our discussion will be sufficient to shut the door against any irreverent persons coming a second time, and I should not like to shut every door against their coming the first time. Therefore I will second the amendment that all reference to religion be left out, and that the clause read, "the promotion of the culture, progress, and welfare of mankind."

Mrs. ROSE: I will accept that.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you accept it, Col. Higginson?

Col. HIGGINSON: I am quite willing. All I want is peace.

Mr. RUSSELL: One question. The principal object of the association has been stated to be the investigation of religious phenomena. To what end are these religious investigations to be directed?

Mr. STREET: The culture, progress and moral welfare of mankind.

The CHAIRMAN: That is not quite a fair question to ask. We have all a different feeling as to what it should be. We have now reached the time for closure, and I must ask the meeting whether we shall go on till half-past five.

This was agreed to unanimously.

Dr. DRUMMOND: I have not withdrawn my amendment, though I do not wish to press it if it is not acceptable to the meeting, but my seconder is very unwilling to withdraw it, and it is very important that the special direction in which culture is to be recognised should be mentioned. I am not altogether satisfied with any of the other amendments proposed, and I therefore will venture to ask you, sir, to put my amendment.

The CHAIRMAN then put the question that the clause should stand, "The promotion of the culture, progress and moral welfare of mankind."

This was carried.

The CHAIRMAN then put the amendment that the word religious should be inserted before the word culture.

This was lost by a very large majority, about eight persons voting for it.

Mr. FRECKLETON asked if Colonel Higginson's amendment fell to the ground.

Mr. BINNS: It comes from the Committee, and of course must be voted on.

The CHAIRMAN: It is now a substantial motion that the clause should stand thus:—"The promotion of the culture, progress, and moral welfare of mankind," and then it is moved that these words be added, "And of whatever in any form of religion may tend towards that end."

This addition was also carried.

The whole clause as amended was then put as a substantial motion, and also carried almost unanimously.

The second paragraph, "Membership in this Association shall leave each individual responsible for his own opinion alone, and in no degree affect his relations with other associations," was also unanimously agreed to; and the whole platform was then read over, and carried unanimously.

Mr. CONWAY: It is necessary now that we should name persons to form a Committee, in order to complete the formal organisation of the association. It will take very few minutes, but you see we have left ourselves without any machinery by which a meeting may be called at some future time. We must also have some means of settling terms of membership and what the subscription should be. All these things will have to be digested by a Committee representing all sides, and it is necessary we should appoint the members of that Committee, and decide what should be a quorum. It will be their duty to frame and submit to the meeting, rules for its action, to propose terms of membership, and the manner of corresponding with members in various countries, with reference to carrying out the objects of the association. This will probably be a peripatetic association, and the committee will have to arrange a good deal in the way of work. Of course we must crawl before we can walk; and we must have somebody to begin and see how many men of ability are ready to come and join us. I would propose that a committee of twenty-one be formed, with power to add to their number. Of course a considerable number of the Committee must be in London, but we should like to have persons in the country also. I should think a quorum of five would be sufficient.

Mr. STREET: Why not make it a committee of all who are willing to serve, with power to add to their number.

Mr. CONWAY suggested the following names: Rev. Richard Armstrong (Nottingham), Rev. Goodwyn Barmby (Wakefield), Rev. William Binns (Birkenhead), Miss Julie Braun (Manchester), Prof. J. Estlin Carpenter (London), Moncure D. Conway (London), Miss Helena Downing (London), Rev. Robert Drummond (Edinburgh), V. K. Dhairyaban (Bombay and London), A. J. Ellis (London), Edwin Ellis (Guildford), H. Garrod (London), J. S. Stuart Glennie (London), Mrs. Harriet Law (London), George L. Lyon (London), K. N. Mitra (Calcutta and London), Miss Sarah Marshall (London), Alfred Preston (London), H. W. Smith (Edinburgh), Rev. J. Hirst Smyth (London), Leslie Stephen (London), Rev. J. C. Street (Belfast), Rev. Frank Walters (Glasgow), George J. Wyld.

Mrs. Rose's name was mentioned, but she replied that she could not serve.

The CHAIRMAN: The resolution is that these be the committee, with power to add to their number, that five of their number be a quorum, that they be appointed to fix on a time and place for the next meeting, frame rules and terms of membership of the Association, and for conducting correspondence with persons in foreign countries in reference to the particular objects of the Association.

This was carried unanimously.

Mr. STREET: I should beg to move that Mr. Conway be requested to act as secretary for the present.

The CHAIRMAN: Of course the whole of the Committee is at present provisional. As the business of this meeting is now terminated I think I may fairly congratulate you on the success of our experiment.

Mr. STREET: Before you leave the Chair, Sir, there is one question to ask and one duty to discharge. The question I have to ask is this. Somebody must have been involved in very considerable expenditure, and we would like to know if there is any possibility of our being allowed to contribute something towards that. The duty we have, if indeed it can be called a duty, is to say—I am sure I have felt as every member of the Conference has felt—that we ought to express our deep indebtedness, not merely to the gentlemen who have so admirably presided over our deliberations, but to Mr. Conway and the Committee who summoned us here together. Perhaps my question might be answered first that we may deal with that.

Mr. CONWAY: Mr. Street, you must rest assured that when we make up our bill we will send it round. Until then you may rest perfectly quiet, and I can assure you that we shall feel entirely repaid any debt or costs we may have incurred by finding there has been such a spirit of liberality displayed on all sides, and so much magnanimity, in these discussions. I, for one, feel extremely gratified and deeply thankful—more thankful than I can express—for the most successful meeting that we have had.

Mr. STREET: I suppose I must accept that answer, but at any rate we must be allowed to discharge the duty I have just indicated. I am sure the congregation and its interpreter here cannot but have felt immensely gratified by the way in which liberal thinkers throughout the kingdom have responded to the invitation. They cannot but further be gratified by seeing one of the most remarkable facts that I have ever observed, that men and women of the most diverse opinions, representing almost every shade of ultra thought, have gathered here together, and have spoken with the utmost freedom, have been heard with the utmost consideration, and yet without any sort of feeling whatever. I think this of itself will be almost sufficient

reward to the committee for their kindness in calling us together. Yet that does not free us from the responsible duty of expressing by our united action our warm and hearty thanks to Mr. Conway and his congregation for summoning us here to-day, and to the two gentlemen who, with so much dignity, discretion, and ability, have conducted the proceedings of these two days.

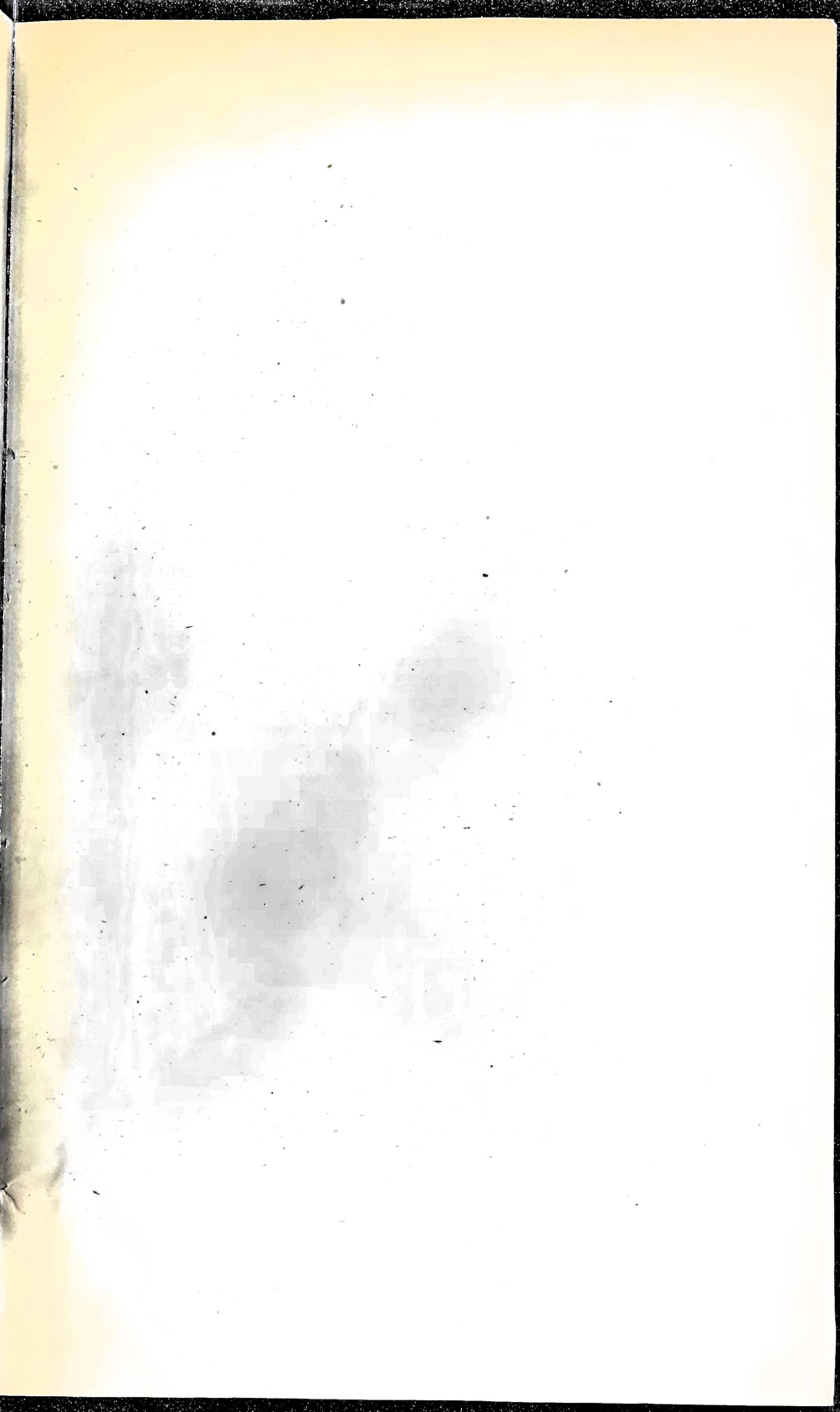
Several gentlemen rose in the meeting at the same time, but they gave way to Mrs. ROSE, who said she wished to second the motion with a great deal of pleasure.

Rev. CAREY WALTERS: May I be allowed to support this resolution as one who stands at the very opposite pole of thought to many of the gentlemen who have spoken this evening and yesterday. I expect I should be considered in my theological opinions exceedingly superstitious and antiquated by many gentlemen present. But still I feel most thankful for having been here, and for the hours I have spent in this place; and the discussion gives me great hope that before long the points which separate a number of earnest thinkers will be broken down and we shall be able to shake hands with frankness, and to feel there is one cause in which we can work together with heart and soul—the regeneration of humanity—the raising it to a higher platform.

The resolution was carried by loud acclamation.

The CHAIRMAN: Our chief thanks are due to Mr. Conway, who has shown the greatest interest and care throughout the whole of this discussion, and to whom the convocation and success of this meeting are mainly due.

The Conference then terminated.



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