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is proved by the fact that the most vigorous efforts and the most dreadful persecutions have failed to secure it. (Hear, hear). Notwithstanding the cruelties of the Inquisition, the fires of Smithfield, and the imprisonments through the Act of Uniformity, there is now greater variety of religious thought than in any previous period of the history of the world. The present freedom and variety of thought show that the persecutions to secure unanimity have been one huge and cruel blunder ; a tremendous addition to the sum total of human misery for an utterly useless and unattainable object. And so also with the bigotry, sectarian jealousies, and uncharitableness of the present day,—they are all needless additions to human unhappiness arising out of the profession of a religion that was intended to bless mankind. (Cheers.) And suppose unanimity of thought to be attainable, are we quite sure that it is *desirable* ? What message have we from God to assure us that he desires us to think alike ? We sometimes say “actions speak louder than words,” and if we look to the actions of God as manifested in his works, we everywhere see that he delights in *variety*. (Cheers.) On the surface of the globe, in the size and form of the animals, in the colour and odour of the flowers ; and even in the suns and astral systems we see variety. And would unanimity of thought make it either pleasanter or better for us in our intercourse with each other ? Would there be the same charm in conversation, the same exercise and development of the faculties, the same opportunity of manifesting self-control and kindly dispositions ? Unanimity of thought is neither attainable nor desirable, neither is it necessary to a true religious unity. In the midst of diversity of opinion there may be unanimity in the desire for truth, in the love of free thought, and in a willingness to work for the good of others. Any church to justify its existence must be a working church, and there is so much work to do that the churches need not be jealous of each other. Probably each church brings new labourers into the field, and does a work which would not be so well done by any other. (Hear, hear.) Whatever may be the opinions of the church of the future, I am quite sure that, to succeed, it must be a working church. In our

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own characters, as well as in the life of the church, there must be a combination of truth and duty, light and love. Just as these flowers on the table cannot develop all their beauty of form and colour without both the light and heat of the sun; so we, to become complete men and women, must manifest the combined influences of an earnest love of the truth and charity and even affection towards those who differ from us. (Loud cheers.)

The CHAIRMAN: I have now very great pleasure in asking Mr. Moncure D. Conway, of London, to speak to the sentiment,—

The Sceptical Spirit a Reforming Spirit, leading Men to higher and fairer forms of Faith.

When the cheers which greeted him had subsided, Mr. CONWAY said:—I once met with a curious illustration of the notion many people have of what a sceptic, or heretic, or freethinker is. In a picture shop in a town of Normandy I once observed a painting evidently by a clever artist, which was entitled “Un libre penseur” (a free-thinker). It represented a half-dressed man, in an attic, in which each article of the furniture was out of place, and everything upside down. The clock was on the bed, the pillow upon the mantelpiece. (Laughter.) The artist had painted the free-thinker as the genius of disorder. But what does free-thinker mean? Simply that one is not an enslaved thinker. The term, however, is equivocal; for free thought, originally meaning thought emancipated from the dictation of priests, must not be allowed freedom from the laws of thought and rules of logic. Emancipation from priestly dictation and from creeds really means a more complete submission of the intellect to the sway of reason and to evidence. (Cheers.) We leave to the orthodox the monopoly of the other kind of free thought; for in one sense the rigidly orthodox man is the very freest thinker in the world,—he leaps over fact, breaks the traces of logic, kicks aside evidence, and bolts off into the wild forests of primeval superstition with all the freedom of an untamed steed. (Loud cheers and laughter.) After analyzing the word “sceptic”

(meaning *to consider*), and “heretic” (*a chooser of his own faith*), Mr. Conway continued:—A degradation of the human intellect is implied in the degradation of these words which represent man fulfilling his very highest functions—that of doubt, inquiry, by which alone he can be freed from error and attain unto truth. Archbishop Whateley has admonished us—“Misgive, that you may not mistake.” And I hail this movement in Bolton as representing that shrewd, searching, Anglo-Saxon intellect which makes our greatness as a race. I rejoice that you have with you as a leader on this ancient path of progress, a man who will never surrender his moral and intellectual freedom or right of doubting and denying that which he feels is doubtful or deniable. (Loud cheers.) I will further say that while men who feel strongly in matters of right and wrong may sometimes make mistakes, for myself it is refreshing, in this smooth-tongued generation, to find a man, leading a movement like yours, whose blood can boil with indignation when wrong is done and falsehood uttered. (Loud applause.) One of your chief duties, as members of this Free Christian Church, is to promote intellectual progress by means of sceptical inquiry. Already one of the speakers who has preceded me (Mr. Farrington) has alluded to your name ‘Christian’ as hardly wide enough for all the religious elements of the age. That will, no doubt, be examined honestly in time. Then Miss Cobbe had, in her letter read to the meeting, spoken with some warmth against praying for outward benefits such as rain and health—but in favour of praying for inward blessings. Now it is remarkable that an ancient and great Theist has taught the exact reverse of this. Cicero has declared that men might well pray for those outward benefits and fortunes which it might not be within the power of man to achieve; but that no man should pray for virtue or piety, which it was the duty of man to secure by his earnest exercises of mind and soul, and whose whole merit consisted in the fidelity and labours by which they—the inward virtues—were attained. Thus we have Cicero and Miss Cobbe on opposite sides; and it is for each to inquire, and think, and determine which is right. There is no

escape from intellectual any more than physical change and motion. While we have been sitting here the earth has been spinning forward its many thousands of miles in space—'wheeled in her ellipse'—and the atoms of our bodies have been changing. We are dying and being renewed in our frames as is the universe around us. When that circulation and movement ceases it is—Death. And it is the death of thought when it ceases to move and advance. And he who seeks only mental repose and torpor, is as one who cries to the Spirit of life—"Pass on! Let the great flood of life and light play everywhere; let it kindle every star, and beat from pole to pole; let it fill every leaf with sap, and break forth in flower and fruit; but let none of it touch me, let it not fill or thrill my heart or brain, but leave me to rust in a vile repose!" (Repeated cheering.)

MR. J. P. THOMASSON said :—After the very eloquent and interesting addresses we have had the pleasure of hearing to-night, I am sure you will not care to listen to anything I may say. A resolution has been put into my hands which I have great happiness in moving,—it is "That the hearty thanks of this meeting be given to the ladies who prepared tea for us and who presided at the tables." I am happy in moving this resolution; for, as is well known to most of you, I take a deep interest in all questions relating to woman and her position in modern society. (Cheers.) It is a great gratification to me to know that there are so many women—I prefer the good old-fashioned word women to ladies (Hear, hear.)—who take a lively and an intelligent interest in the fortunes of our Free Christian Church. (Applause.)

MR. WILLIAM HART said :—I rise, Mr. Chairman, for the purpose of seconding that resolution. I do so the more readily because I know we are not only indebted to the ladies for what they have done to-day, but for what they have done for us during the past year. To those of us who are earnest in this movement, and who have learned to love it, the past year has not been without its trials and troubles. There were times during the year when it seemed almost impossible the Church could go on. At these times when

the men amongst us seemed to be losing hope and courage, the women were most hopeful and most courageous. (Loud cheering.) They have never once permitted our minister—whom we all love and esteem so much—to be attacked without engaging in a brave defence. They have set an example of sympathy, of zeal, of courage, of determination to make our Church triumphant, which, I sincerely hope, the men may learn to imitate. (Loud applause.)

On the resolution being put from the chair it was, of course, enthusiastically carried.

Mr. D. CORDINGLY said :—Mr. Chairman, I beg to move “That the thanks of this meeting be given to Miss Bromley, Mr. Councillor Bromley, and Mr. Henry Taylor, for the most admirable music and singing with which they have favoured us this evening.” I am in a difficulty, Mr. Chairman, I don’t know which to admire most—the singing or the speaking. I have attended a good many religious meetings in Bolton; and I am sure I never listened to better speechifying nor to sweeter singing in all my life. (Cheers.) An election has been going on in Bolton to-day, and when we leave this hall we may, perhaps, learn who has been victorious (Cries of “Cross and Knowles.”) Well, I hope so; but don’t be premature. (Laughter.) Anyhow, Mr. Chairman, if Cross and Knowles have been successful, what we have heard to-night will enable us the more worthily to rejoice in their success; and if they have been defeated, what we have heard will enable us the more bravely to bear the defeat. (Cheers.)

Mr. J. KERSHAW seconded the resolution.

As a matter of form the Chairman put it to the meeting, for the people had already carried it in their hearts. In this report hitherto we have said nothing about the singing. The speeches were good, but the best speechifying is apt to become wearisome in time. The singing saved the speeches from all danger of being considered uninteresting even by the most uninterested, or dull even by the dullest. The song went with the speech, just as the perfume goes with the violet. The singers are too well known, and too much esteemed by our Bolton audiences, to need any laudation

here. We can only assure them that their services are duly appreciated and held by the Bolton Free Christian Church in grateful remembrance.

MRS. S. WINKWORTH said :—I have peculiar pleasure in moving “That the thanks of this meeting be given to the visitors who have come to us from a distance and spoken to us so well and so wisely to-night.” We are not only grateful to, but proud of the kind and able men who have come so far to speak to us to-night. We are proud also of those noble and sympathetic souls who have sent us their greeting by letter. We have responded to every sentiment which has been uttered, and I hope the words spoken to-night may be in the coming year a good help to us in our endeavours to promote the life and work of our church. (Applause.)

MR. T. RIGBY seconded the resolution.

The resolution having been put and unanimously carried, Mr. CONWAY said :—I am sure, Mr. Chairman and ladies and gentlemen, instead of you thanking us we ought to thank you. For myself I have got a good deal out of this meeting,—material for lots of sermons—(Cheers and laughter),—and when I get back to London I shall preach Bolton for at least a month to come. (Great cheering.)

The CHAIRMAN having vacated the chair, it was taken by Mr. Applebee, who called upon Mr. Alexander Lawson to move a resolution.

Mr. LAWSON said :—I beg to move that the thanks of this meeting be given to Stephen Winkworth, Esq., for his kindness in taking the chair. I need say nothing to you, ladies and gentlemen, by way of commending this resolution. You have already determined enthusiastically to carry it, I am sure. (Cheers). I can't help saying how much I have enjoyed this meeting. (Hear, hear.) It has been verily “A feast of reason and a flow of soul.” (Cheers.) It is the first meeting we have had to commemorate the founding of our Free Church. I hope it will not be the last by a long way. (Loud applause). I hope that we who are getting grey may live years and years to commemorate year after year, by such meetings as the