

the State had no right to interfere with the religious beliefs of the citizens. That was all that Freethinkers asked for, and surely they had a right to obtain it. He had been led to make these remarks in consequence of something that had been done by the New Zealand Parliament at its last session. A criminal code had been prepared by the Statutes Revision Commission, and had been copied almost entirely from the English criminal code. This code, he might say, created two or three new crimes in New Zealand. Section 135 was headed "Crimes against Religion," and according to it anyone was liable to a year's imprisonment who published any blasphemous libel, and whether it was a blasphemous libel or not was to be a question of fact—that was, that it would be left to be decided by the jury. Hitherto there had been no such thing as blasphemy in New Zealand, for the obvious reason that before there could be blasphemy there must be some religion recognised by the State. This was clear from the case of *Regina v. Gathercole*, in which Baron Alderson said: "The point is whether there is only a libel on the whole Roman Church generally, or on Stouton Nunnery. In the former case the defendant is entitled to an acquittal. . . . A person may, without being liable to prosecution for it, attack Judaism or Mohammedanism, or even any sect of the Christian religion save the established religion of the country; and the only reason why the latter is in a different situation from the others is because it is *the form established by law*, and is therefore a part of the constitution of the country. In like manner, and for the same reasons, any general attack on Christianity is the subject of criminal prosecution because Christianity is the established religion of the country. It might be said that in New Zealand a person charged would have the benefit of a jury, but he would undertake to say that if a Freethinker were prosecuted for blasphemy, the prosecutor would take good care that none but orthodox people should be on the jury. The proposed criminal code would create for the first time in this Colony what were called crimes against religion, and this of itself showed the need of watchfulness on the part of all who valued individual liberty. If a man acted wrongly to his neighbour he could be punished, whatever his religious or irreligious opinions might be; so that as the State could deal with questions of conduct or morality, and provide for public peace and order, there was no need to import into their legislation this question of religious opinions. He did not think the code had been introduced with the idea of favoring any one sect; it had been, like a great many other things, slavishly copied from the English Act. But if Parliament meant to maintain in the Colony true religious liberty, it would not allow to stand on the Statute-book such a thing as a crime against religion. He would propose, in order that the meeting of Freethinkers in conference assembled might protest against the creation of a new crime—"That in the opinion of this meeting of Freethinkers it is unwise, unjust, and unconstitutional to create what are termed crimes against religion in New Zealand, and this meeting protests against the passing of the clauses in the proposed criminal code which purport to create such a crime."

MR. R. RUTHERFORD seconded and spoke in support of the resolution.

MR. I. N. WATT also stated that he cordially agreed with the motion, which, on being put, was carried unanimously.

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As in our lives, so in our studies, it is most becoming and most wise to temper gravity with cheerfulness, that the former may not imbue their minds with melancholy, nor the latter degenerate into licentiousness.—PLINY.

It is sometimes urged that to deny the immortality of the soul is to reduce man to the level of the beast, but it is forgotten that mankind are not quite on a level. Take the savage with lower jaw projecting far in advance, and compare him with Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, or Voltaire. Take the Papuan and Plato, Esquimaux and Confucius, and then ask whether it is possible to contend that all human beings have equal souls.—"Has Man a Soul?" by C. Bradlaugh.

## THE CHRISTIAN BATTLE FIELD.

"Think not that I am come to send peace on Earth; I come not to send peace but a Sword." *St. Matthew XI. 34.*

There are some extraordinary contradictions in connection with the Christian faith; according to one testimony the advent of the founder of this wondrous creed, was heralded by Angels, who proclaimed "peace on Earth and good will towards men." But it appears to me that in this case as in the Charge at Balaclava "somebody blundered." In the earlier ages of civilisation it might have been right to say of the people:—

"Their's not to reason why;  
Their's but to believe and die"—

and like the brave and devoted slaves—the gaudily attired human machines employed by crowned tyrants—to waste their blood and sweat for the aggrandizement of the privileged few. The spread of knowledge has however changed the state of things, and though humanity still suffers from innumerable woes, not the result of physical causes, but the direct products of ignorance and crime, the Pioneers of Freethought are continually asking "the reason why." The professed attitude of the Christian Church was for many generations aggressive, against paganism, ignorance and tyranny, at first; subsequently against Science, liberty and truth, but still aggressive. "Peace on earth and good-will towards men" was a myth. The sword, the dungeon, the stake were realities. Though to-day the church is not strong enough to wield the sword, nor to drag its victims to the stake or the headsman's block, the keys of the dungeon have not yet been entirely wrested from her hands, and the desire to persecute those with whom she differs is as strong as ever; but the Army of Progress is now the invading force, and Christianity has to stand on the defensive. Now and again she singles out some advanced picket from our ranks, on which to vent her wrath; as the post of honor is necessarily one of danger, our brave comrades have at times to suffer. The most recent examples of these are Messrs Foote, Ramsay, and Kemp, and though last not least, Charles Bradlaugh.

While on one hand we mark the ferocious spirit displayed by the disciples of this "religion of love," it is also well to observe how the professed defenders of Christianity are compelled ever and anon to make concessions to the spirit of the age. In the same issue of a local paper—the 'Star' of March 12th—I read news from both camps. The Freethinkers of New England, U.S.A., are reported to have formed an Association with the following ends in view: "that Churches be not exempt from taxation, that judicial oaths be abolished, that all laws enforcing the observance of the Sabbath and Christian morality (?) be repealed, the Bible removed from public schools, and government aid refused to sectarian teaching." If this report be true our American brethren have sketched out a tolerably broad programme, sufficiently comprehensive and aggressive to meet the views, I should think, of the most advanced Freethinker. My attention was next drawn to the following facts which I summarize from a paragraph in the paper named. At a meeting of clergymen and Sunday-school teachers presided over by an Archdeacon, a minister of the Church read a paper "on the best method of making Sunday-school work effective."—"He advocated teaching children as little of the dogmas of religion as possible, and the inculcation of the more important principles of Christianity"—whatever that may mean—in the minds of the children as being the best means of training them for an age when there was so much *questioning and scepticism* (the italics are mine). He also advocated the improvement of Sunday-school buildings in country parishes; where, we may presume, ornamentation is not too abundant; and further suggests the "making of children's services as bright as possible," which in my opinion will necessitate the elimination of the terrors of Hell. A discussion followed as a matter of course, and it was finally resolved that the editor of the 'Church News' be requested to publish the essay in question. The next column to which I turned contained a brief report of the Freethought Convention sitting at Dunedin, who passed a resolution sympathising