

The most powerful dredger in the world was launched, for the Melbourne Harbour Trust, at Renfrew on Feb. 17. She will lift 900 or 1000 tons of silt an hour, and will dredge to a depth of 35 feet below the water line.

## Reviews.

*The Old Flag*: Song: Words by Vincent Pyke; composed by G. R. West.

At the present time when "wars and rumours of wars" are the order of the day, the advent of a new and patriotic song is nothing unexpected, and provided that the sentiment is free from "jingoism," it is sure to be acceptable. On this score the above-mentioned composition is not likely to offend. The words are by our versatile friend Vincent Pyke, who has caught the spirit which, we trust, may always be exhibited, as it is now, towards the Old Country. The poetical idea of adding the "Cross of the South" to the three of the "Jack," is very happy. The composition of the music has been entrusted to Mr. Geo. West, the popular organist and music seller of Dunedin. This is by no means the first effort of his pen, and is quite equal to his previous productions. The piece is written in D., in six-eight time, and has a lively vigorous swing. It is further commendable for its simplicity, which places it within the range of the most ordinary vocalist or pianist. We feel sure that it will meet with a favourable reception. Mr. Martin, the late bandmaster of the 23rd has written an arrangement for brass bands. The printing and lithography is very creditable.

*Religion Without Superstition*: By Hartley Williams. George Robertson and Company, Melbourne, 1885.

If "a great book is a great evil," a small book on a great subject is often a great good. This is certainly true in the case of Mr Williams' little book. An attentive perusal of it will show out of what fragile materials the existing structure of Theological Christianity has been built up. Of course this is well known to most Freethinkers, but to those who have accepted orthodox dogmas upon trust, it will come as a surprise. But well as Mr Williams has done his work, the value of his book, as an effective argument, is mainly due to the fact that its author is one of the Judges of the Supreme Court of Victoria. That to a mind trained to estimate evidence according to its real weight, the evidence in favour of Christianity should appear of little value, is not to be wondered at. It is indeed notorious that lawyers and judges are rarely "true believers," in spite of their otherwise conservative tendencies. It may, however, be fairly regarded as one of the signs of the times, when we see Judges in England, India, and Australasia, not only holding but publishing their opinions on religious questions. To our thinking, two facts are indicated by this new departure. First, that earnest men who are competent to form an opinion on the subject, are beginning to regard dogmatic Christianity as a mischievous superstition, and secondly, that they perceive that the educated portion of the community at least has become tolerant of discussion and by no means inclined to follow the lead of its clerical guides. We may be quite certain that a man in the position of Mr. Justice Williams writes with a due sense of responsibility, and that it is not merely for the sake of amusement that he has disturbed the swarm of theological wasps that are now buzzing about his ears. We, of course, do not allude to gentlemen like the Bishop of Melbourne and the Bishop of Ballarat (who we are glad to see are endeavouring to answer Mr. Williams) but to the wretched bigots who are clamouring for the removal of the Judge from the Bench. We shall not attempt to criticise the destructive portion of Mr. Williams' book, with which we are almost in entire agreement. Its tone is admirable, and the writer shows adequate knowledge of his subject. He will probably be declared superficial by those who mistake a parade of learning for learning itself. If, however, truth, lies at the

bottom of a well, there is no need to dig half through the earth to find it. Judge Williams discusses the doctrine of the Trinity on the assumption that "the Bible is the inspired revelation of God" and finds—as most people do who study the Bible apart from Church traditions—"that according to the Bible there is only one God" that "there is no mention of God the Son" or of "God the Holy Ghost," and that "Jesus himself distinctly denies the doctrine of *co-equality* with God," while "the doctrine of *co-eternity* with God cannot be reconciled" with Scripture. These propositions he proves conclusively, and our only wonder is that any intelligent man should, at this time of day, require such proof. Of course it will be said that from almost the earliest ages of Christianity the doctrine of the Trinity was discussed with infinite fulness and settled to the satisfaction, not only of intelligent men, but to that of men of genius, and that now only sciolists and persons very inferior, intellectually and morally, to the Fathers of the Church, deny its truth. To this our reply is that the patristic logic and learning which satisfied past ages, will not satisfy this, and that a dwarf, standing on the shoulders of a giant, may see further than the giant himself. Judge Williams deals with the "incarnation," "the inspiration of the Bible," miracles, "the atonement and advent," partly as questions to be decided by reading the Scriptures as he would statute law, and so finding out what the writers intended to convey, or actually do convey, and partly on critical, scientific, and moral grounds. The result is entirely destructive, and it would astonish those who have only studied the evidences for Christianity and not those against it as well, to find how much of their faith is derived, not from the Bible, but from tradition and the unsupported assertions of theologians. To Judge Williams, the doctrine of the atonement appears as morally iniquitous as it does to most persons whose consciences have not been perverted by ecclesiastical teaching. He quotes with approval the remark, that "the doctrine of sacrifice or vicarious punishment is the most universal, and yet the most absurd of all religious tenets that ever entered into the mind of man. That there should be any manner of connection between the miseries of one being and the guilt of another; or that the punishing the innocent and excusing the guilty should be a mark of God's detestation of sin; or that *two acts of the highest injustice* should make *one act of justice*, is so fundamentally wrong, so diametrically opposed to common sense, and to all our ideas of justice, that it is astonishing that so many should either believe it themselves, or impose it upon others." This will no doubt be met, as theologians are accustomed to meet similar remarks which they know laymen feel to be true, by the usual evasions which thinly disguise doubts they are more than half conscious of themselves. But those who are sufficiently cultured "to know" even a little of "the best that has been thought and said in the world," to use Mr. Matthew Arnold's phrase, can no longer be imposed upon by this sort of thing. At the same time, Judge Williams' attempt to purge religion of superstition but to retain Theism, is an excellent illustration of the truth of the shrewd observation made by Mr. Leslie Stephen in his 'History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century,' that "the most unflinching sceptic carries "with him far more than he knows of the old methods of conception." Certainly Judge Williams does not while "giving up hell admit that hell is the only sanction for morality," but he seems to think that conscience is the voice of God, and that its existence, together with the indications furnished by science, are sufficient to prove "that there exists throughout space, and has existed throughout all time, some force—some life—some will—some power—some master mind—some cause—such as theology calls, and we for the sake of convenience, call 'God.'" This is certainly almost as vague as that "sort of a something" over which Mr. Frederick Harrison made merry a short time ago, when discussing the suitability of Herbert Spencer's "inscrutable power" to form the basis of a religion. We fear Judge Williams has only raised another of these "ghosts of religion" which go roaming