

Quite unconsciously, apparently, Sir Julius Vogel draws a distinction between religion and "faith or creed," and had he kept this distinction steadily in view, he would not have laid himself open to the charge of inconsistency if not of insincerity. Deep down in the human consciousness there is a clear perception that this distinction is real. We all of us know people who in spite of their creed or want of creed we instinctively recognise as "religious" in the best sense of that much abused term. On the other hand, we all know people who have the most thorough belief in the whole scheme of Christianity, whose faith indeed is as a grain of mustard seed of the most pungent kind, whom we as instinctively perceive not to be properly religious at all. Not to take extreme cases it is evident that the phrase "a religious person" which would include a Watson, Bishop of Landaff, and exclude a George Eliot, must have a very indefinite meaning. To minds not rendered utterly distorted and unhealthy by a long course of theological tight-lacing, religion still preserves so much of its original character as being that which binds men together, not that which divides. It has been well defined as "morality touched with emotion." The religion which Sir Julius really meant, when he said it would not conduce to the happiness of the country to be "without religion," was of this kind. It includes the love of truth and right and that clear perception of common interests and common duties which, based on positive knowledge and actuated by sympathy, grows up in a free state to be a very real and powerful "religion of humanity."

Theologians, and statesmen, misled by conceptions due to theological survivals, are naturally alarmed at the prevailing anarchy of opinion which they regard as dangerous to the social order. That it is so is unquestionable, but the path of safety is not to be found in any reactionary attempt to return to theological and metaphysical methods, but in pushing on boldly in those of positive science. To do otherwise—to depart from the secular system, for instance, in the case of State education, in the supposed interests of that mass of moral sentiment which is alone worthy of the name of religion—is only to prolong that mental and moral anarchy which is deplored. For in what does it essentially consist but in the conflict, often in the same mind, of modes of thought between which agreement is impossible. The man who is quite sure that he knows the will of God about any particular subject, or is quite sure that his conscience will reveal it to him, or that at the lowest his own mind is an infallible guide, will not greatly trouble himself about facts and reasons. The man to whom fact and reason stand in the place of God finds himself in constant discord with the other. To agree means for one of the two to adopt the method of his opponent. As a temporary expedient this is constantly done. To ensure a permanent peace either the theological or the positive method must triumph. When the right happens to be also the strong side, compromise is folly.

The importance attached to religious sanctions, so far as their influence on morality and social order is concerned, has always been much exaggerated. As a matter of fact, supernatural rewards and punishments which are a long way off and may be forfeited or evaded, do not exert much direct influence on the mind of the average man. Even when that belief in

the supernatural, which is now dying away, existed in full force, the private lives of the Popes were a scandal to Europe. As Dr. Draper says, "The signal peculiarity of the Papacy is that, though its history may be imposing, its biography is infamous." That a time came when the Catholic Church effected a great moral and social reform, only proves that theological beliefs are not an essential element of progress. In the course of his discussion of this question, Comte makes the profound remark, that "the moral power of Catholicism was due to its suitability as an organ of general opinions, which must have become the more powerfully universal from their active reproduction by an independent and venerated clergy; and that personal interest in a future life has had, comparatively, very little influence at any time upon practical conduct."

Freethinkers should glance through a little book called "Father Lambert's Notes on Ingersoll" if they want to see the lengths to which a certain class of theologians are prepared to go in the direction of sophistry and misrepresentation. It has lately been reprinted in Dunedin, and is regarded as a complete defence of the faith by the more ignorant among both Catholics and Protestants. The writer quotes a large number of garbled extracts from the reply of Colonel Ingersoll to an article in defence of Christianity by a Mr. Jeremiah T. Black, of Washington City, and comments upon each in a spirit of vulgar self-sufficiency which educated members of his own Church will surely be among the first to condemn. Father Lambert concludes his "Notes" in these words:—"We have said enough to convince our readers that Mr. Ingersoll is profligate of statement; that he is not to be trusted; that he is unscrupulous; that as a logician and metaphysician he is beneath contempt; that he is ignorant and superficial—full of gas and gush; in a word that he is a philosophical charlatan of the first water, who mistakes curious listeners for disciples and applause for approval." A good deal must depend upon the "readers" who are to be "convinced." For our own part, after carefully reading these "Notes," we have come to the conclusion that the above quotation very fairly describes Father Lambert himself. Our only doubt is whether he ought more properly to be regarded as ignorant, or as impudently dishonest and extremely cunning.

We notice that persistent efforts are being made by the various denominations to introduce the thin end of the wedge (which they hope will destroy the secular character of our system of State education) in the shape of reading the Bible in schools. Now as Freethinkers we have no more objection to the Bible being read in schools or elsewhere than any other book, though there is at least as much reason for wishing that an expurgated edition should be used as there is in the case of Terence, about which so much has been said lately. What we object to is, that this venerable collection of ancient writings, containing as they do much false history, much erroneous science, and much imperfect moral teaching, should be read as the word of God and therefore be regarded as absolutely true and of divine authority. We say that the State has no right to put its educational "Hall-mark" upon what so many regard as base metal, or at best pure gold mixed with a large amount of alloy. One Church