

PROFESSIONAL LECTURERS.

The value of professional lecturers to the Freethought cause is worthy of consideration. A gentleman acquainted with the condition of thought on the Continent of Europe, particularly in the Germanic portion of it, informs me that Freethought—thought at variance with Christian dogma—is more prevalent there than with us, yet no lecturers propagate it. There are, however, schools and magazines in which science is taught, and thus a real, though neither nominal, nor ostensible, war is carried on against Christian dogma. However, the facts that in Britain and its colonies and amongst our American cousins there are lecturers and periodicals and associations unmistakeably directed against Christian dogma must be accepted as proof that this directness of treatment is the treatment most acceptable to English-speaking people. In this treatment printed matter is very serviceable to the studious and reading public, but a large portion of the public read little besides the news in the daily papers, and are entirely indebted to the Freethought lecturer for what ideas of the principles, positions, and theories of Freethought they obtain. The lecturer is the awakener, the revivalist, the missionary, who pricks curiosity, excites doubt, stimulates enquiry, research, and study, and is simply indispensable in the dissemination amongst the unreading population of views of whatever kind. But there is no unmixed good. The lecturer, if a professional lecturer, is also a paid one; here the defilement enters, and the purity of his thoughts henceforth incurs the risk of adulteration with personal considerations. He lectures for money and it is almost impossible for him to escape from the desire to speak to please those who pay the money—to speak so as to draw a good house—to speak up to the educated or down to the uneducated according as he thinks the one or the other preponderates in his audience—to coincide with the Materialist and yet sympathise with the Spiritualist—to round down on the Old Testament and pat that softest Christian “fad,” of which the people are not yet nauseated, the Jesus of the New. This agreeable kind of dissimulation is by no means confined to paid lecturers: other and unpaid speakers are often, from a desire to place themselves in a harmonious relation with their audiences, tempted to dissemble, but to the lecturer being paid, is an additional temptation. To many, thinking is a labour and a trouble. Belief and obedience is all that has hitherto been asked of them. Already fully occupied with the other duties of life, thinking, except in relation to these duties, seems to throw a superadded task, and what is specially to be deplored, it seems also to them an unrequiting one. A lecturer suits these people just as a parson probably before suited them. He does the thinking and they passively accept his thinkings. From a large portion of society as now conditioned nothing more than this could be expected, but, if the Freethought movement does not aim at something more, it will merely accomplish a change of dogmas, and a change of parsons, and the actual intelligence of the people will be little affected. That which is of supreme importance is to get the people to read for themselves, think for themselves, essay and discuss themselves. If Freethought views are not grounded and rooted in the minds of the people in this manner there is no security for this performance. A continued dependence on lecturers by indulging natural indolence stands in the way of the people by their own efforts educating themselves in the philosophy and literature of the cause. Mr. G. J. Holyoake, impressing the usefulness of literary essaying, remarked, that no one is certain he understands a subject until he attempts to make another understand it, when he may chance to find he does not quite understand it himself and will require to give it further study. Any one who has taken the trouble carefully to read up, and think over, and write an essay on any given subject receives from the exercise more intellectual benefit than he is able to convey to any of his audience by reading his essay. He puts before them his finished structure, but he only is cognisant of the details which he has manipulated in

composing that structure, and which will make the subject ever after familiar to him. So far then as professional lecturers arouse attention and electrify audiences they are a benefit, but so far as they take the place of permanent teachers and disincline the people from the more important work of teaching themselves, they are an injury; and where they cease to be itinerant, and become localised and permanent teachers, they become pastors of sects, whose mental characters become fashioned after the mental idiosyncracies of the pastors. Freethought sketches far beyond such pigmy realisations, beyond even Freethought sects, beyond sects of any kind. Its aim is a broad, thorough, rational, personal education. Such an education can only be effected by the people themselves, and by each for himself. While therefore no one should neglect instruction which may be obtained by listening to professional lecturers, still less ought he to neglect the cultivation of his own mentality, by reading, by study, by writing essays and lectures and by meeting together and discussing. Without the last—meeting together and discussing—there is little incentive to, or benefit from, the other. Whether due to our mental vanity, or to a desire to benefit our fellows, or to both, it is a fact, that few will give a subject thorough study unless they have an opportunity of communicating to others in an assembly or through the Press the results of their study; and therefore, whatever reduces these inducements to study necessarily reduces study, and makes man the less a thinking, reasoning, self-judging creature.

C.

JUST RECEIVED.

FATHER LAMBERT'S "Notes on Ingersoll." 1s. ; posted, 1s. 2d.
 Judge Williams' "Religion without Superstition." 4s. ; posted, 4s. 4d.
 "An Agnostic's Progress, from the Known to the Unknown," 6s. 6d. ; posted, 7s.

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TO FREETHINKERS.

The successful carrying on of a Freethought paper, in a small colony like New Zealand, is a matter of considerable difficulty. Were it not for the perseverance of the publisher, the REVIEW, although it has been fairly well supported, would have fallen through, and latterly various means have been suggested by friends of the cause by which the paper may be made at least self-supporting. The FREETHOUGHT REVIEW ought not to be allowed to lapse, but those who favour the cause must give us the assistance required to maintain it properly. One friend has suggested that the various societies in the colony, the greater number of which owe their existence, we believe, to the REVIEW, should donate small sums from time to time, as they may be able to afford, for the publication of the REVIEW. This idea is, we think, with all due submission to our readers and friends, a very fair one. It is obviously unfair that those to whom the production of the paper is undertaken as a labour of love should have to bear the whole burden. Profit is not looked for. So long as the paper supports itself we are satisfied. There are other means by which our friends can help us, those who can afford it and those who are not members of any local association could, by small donations (which would all be acknowledged through the paper) help us to spread the REVIEW where at present it is not known. Subscribers can try to induce others to take the paper, and societies can do much to help us. We are always pleased to receive their reports, and in return they should assist us by pushing the journal. Advertising is said to be the secret of success, yet we do not get anything like a fair show in this way. Christian papers are exceptionally well supported by advertisements, and surely Secularists can do the same for a paper specially devoted to them. In concluding this short appeal we do so with the assurance that in the future, as in the past, no efforts shall be spared by us in making the FREETHOUGHT REVIEW readable and well worthy of the support of all Freethinkers in the colony.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

J. SEXTON.—While we agree with the sentiment expressed, the verses are hardly up to the standard which we require. We trust that you will make further efforts in the line of showing the inconsistencies of many of the tenets of Christian belief.
 MORTIMER.—We regret having to hold over "Random Shots," but will endeavour to get them in next month. Would be glad to hear from you occasionally.