

its pedigree, and when it changes hands its history goes with it. John Adams remembers the arrival of the first missionary, and told us at length of the changes which have taken place on the island since they came. The natives now are strict observers of the Sabbath, and on Sunday everything is as quiet as a New Zealand village, the natives refusing to sell anything or even exhibit their wares. The Protestant services here are conducted by the English missionaries, who are, I believe, Wesleyans. When the church bells ring all the natives flock to church, so that during the hours of service a village seems deserted. The singing is congregational, and every man, woman, and child knows all the hymns (they have a regular printed hymn-book), and all join in the singing. They are fond of refrains, and different sets of voices sometimes take different or independent tunes, which forbodes disaster to an unaccustomed ear, but they all end together, and in perfect harmony. Some of the Sunday clothes are even more surprising than the music. All their finery is worn to church, but on their way home, as the congregation disperses, many of the women undress or take off their good clothes, so that by the time they arrive at their huts they are in native costume. Every Samoan can read, and it is wonderful how familiar they are with the Bible, and how rapidly they can find any quotation you may give them from the Scriptures. Formerly a man could put away his wife whenever he chose, or have as many as he chose, but there has been an improvement in that respect, also due to the influence of the missionaries.

The lengthening of the afternoon shadows warned us it was time to take our departure, and we returned to Apia. We reached our destination in all the splendor of a tropical moon. The night was exquisitely lovely, the air, heavy with its beauty, touched with lingering breath tall palm trees, whose long and stately leaves bent with swaying motion to the music of the waves. Near the landing on the green were about fifty girls and boys singing, romping, and playing, much as children do at home. As we landed they came running toward us, and in childish glee bade us welcome to their shores, and following a merry chorus of *to fas* (good bye).

Their language has been reduced to a written one by the missionaries, and they now have Bibles and books translated into their own tongue.

Their date is one day ahead of America's, as they use the East longitude. It should be the same date as the United States, but the 180th meridian is only seventy-five miles east, and whoever established the date of the week here came from the east and neglected to drop a day in crossing the meridian.

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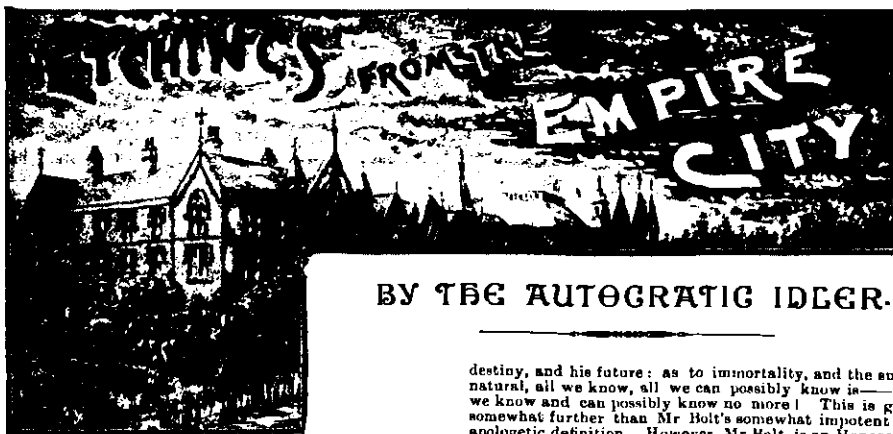
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BY THE AUTOGRAPHIC IDLER.

I have long been convinced that a very large proportion of those persons who think, and don't go to any church, while calling themselves Christians, are, in reality, Agnostics. Also, that at least one half of the people who think, and who do go to church with great regularity and large Bibles, are, really, Agnostics too. But the number of avowed Agnostics in British communities remains small, nor does it promise, in the near future, to grow much larger. To carry a beautifully bound church service into a pew; and to kneel, and to listen, with languor, to utterly dreary sermons, and to be an Agnostic all the same and all the time, appears, on the face of it, at least stupid. More stupid still, however, is it, in the eyes of those Agnostics who swell congregations, to go nowhere on Sunday, and to let the wide world know that they believe in nobody and in nothing. As for the clergy, I won't go so far as to say that some of these, also, are Agnostics. What I do say about them is, that they decline all argument on the subject: they refuse to discuss it: they are deaf and dumb and mute when we know, and desire and hope that they should hear and speak and explain! In this compact and somewhat peculiar little city of Wellington we have, as elsewhere, a few people, a handful of people, who call themselves Agnostics. Perhaps they are wise in doing so: perhaps foolish. On this point I say nothing. They are honest, anyhow. I have been at their little gatherings once or twice, and they struck me as a most sociable, pleasant, intelligent, homely, straightforward set of beings. On Sunday evening there was a packed audience at the Exchange Hall, for a wonder, when the Hon. W. M. Bolt, M.L.C., gave a lecture on Agnosticism. Sir Robert Stout occupied the chair. There were a good many downright workmen in the audience; they looked quite gentlemanly in their Sunday clothes. A number of ladies were there, too: and nicely-dressed children.

As for these last, I felt rather sorry for them. For years I have been an Agnostic myself, but I always sent my little ones to the Sunday-school. Little children cannot reason. Religion is a source of pleasurable awe and wonder to them, and we know perfectly well that those of the present rising generation will soon enough have their faith eclipsed: and the darkness, whenever it does come, brings no comfort to anybody. Therefore, my idea is to let little children go to the Sunday-school, get what they may out of the things taught there, and take them to the grave with them—if they can. If they can't—as in these days is more than likely—they are no worse off for having passed the best years of their lives in a pleasant dreamland. However, this is a digression. Sir Robert, as I say, took the chair, and his imposing, and I may say striking and handsome presence, was the signal for a burst of applause. Applause on the Sabbath evening would have had the whole lot of us burnt at the stake in John Knox's time—but that's neither here nor there. Sir Robert read a poem, by a Dunedin composer he said; when he gave out that he was going to read a poem by a real New Zealand poet I felt sure one of my own poems was coming. No such luck, but the poem was a capital one, and full of thought—deep thought—all the same. I did not catch the author's name; nor, strange to say, was the poem familiar to me. Sir Robert Stout, it is needless to say, read the poem correctly. It takes a person of culture to do that much with a true poem.

Then we had music, not exactly the church organ, but something better, or worse—just as you like. I won't express my opinion one way or another, as to the music. Mr Bolt is a small, active, elderly, grey gentleman. He does not in the least look like an Agnostic, nor does he strike one as at all resembling a Lord of the Upper House. He happens to be both. I am afraid his lecture on Agnosticism was a good deal over the heads of many of the people listening to him. Nor do I think the description he (as also Sir Robert Stout) gave as to the position taken up by the Agnostic was an absolutely happy one. "The Agnostic simply said," remarked the speaker, "there are many problems we cannot solve. Agnosticism goes further than this. John Stuart Mill, I think, gave the fullest and the best definition of Agnosticism. As to the why and wherefore—the whence and thence—of man; as to his

destiny, and his future: as to immortality, and the supernatural, all we know, all we can possibly know is—that we know and can possibly know no more! This is going somewhat further than Mr Holt's somewhat impotent and apologetic definition. However, Mr Holt is an Honorable; and that makes a great difference, even in definitions. He gave a very good lecture: too much statistics perhaps: too much Spencer and Professor Clifford: too little of Goethe. Goethe put the whole matter into a few majestic words. As the grandeur of the 'Dead March in Saul' strikes one as the sublimest of melody, so does Goethe appear to utter, most musically, the very honestest and the loftiest truth when he says:—

Then, solemn before us,
Veiled, the dark Portal
Goal of all mortal:—
Stars, silent rest o'er us,
Graves under us, silent—
While earnest thou gazest
Comes boding of terror,
Ghosts phantoms and error
Perplexing the way:
With doubt and mingling.

When one wants to conclusively demonstrate any proposition whatever, the easiest way to do so is, to go into statistics. Legislators know this fact so perfectly that whenever they wish to establish anything they just move for a return on the subject to be laid before Parliament—and the thing is done, when the return is laid on the table of the House. It is one of the most interesting properties of numerals that you can do what you like with them when you get a number of them together. There is no one that understands the wonderful capacities of figures in this respect better than Mr George Fisher, M.H.R. for Wellington city. I can't exactly say how many returns George Fisher has had prepared during his legislative career, but a dozen at least are credited to him during the present session. Having had a hand in a particularly humble way, I hasten to add, at starvation wages—in the preparation of some of these returns, I can honestly say that I have cursed Mr George Fisher as often, perhaps, as Sardan or any other man has, during the last three months. I have got into more rows, I may say, through Mr George Fisher, than ever I did through anybody else: not because I don't understand how to marshal figures in proper order to prove the thing to be demonstrated, but simply through a cursed carelessness and an absentmindedness, which only those persons who know me well could excuse. The week before last I was again full of trouble through Mr Fisher. He had called for another return. I forget whether it was to prove that the brilliant ability of W. P. Reeves had saved the Lunacy Department £10,000 during the time that he—Reeves—presided over it, or whether it was to show that the Department lost that sum in consequence of the incapacity of Reeves, when that gentleman was at the head of Lunacy affairs. Anyhow, whichever it was, the thing was done in arithmetical tables; there is, in fact, nothing that can't be done that way.

But, as usual, in transcribing a beautifully clean and neat copy of the return that was to annihilate Reeves, or elevate him on a pinnacle of financial fame from which nothing could henceforth drag him down, I placed a sum of £27,268 18s 11d on the Dr. side, instead of the Cr. side, or on the Cr. side, instead of the Dr. side of the account. Well now, in a sense, this was excusable. I was thinking, at the time, to tell you the truth, of a most delightful and charming vocalist; and wondering how it was that the people of Wellington flocked in thousands to hear an older, and less graceful and inferior singer, and only came in limited numbers to hear a true English songstress? And, after all, £27,268 18s 11d is a small mistake—under such circumstances. The tables looked just as well, and as puzzling and incomprehensible (that's the great beauty of them) when printed with the mistake in them as any other way. Nor would one person in 10,000 have seen that there was any mistake in the tables at all. In fact, these figures could have been banded down to posterity as authentic, were it not for the fact that there are three or four members of the House who, rightly enough perhaps, believe they are Heaven-born arithmeticians. They take a positive pleasure in adding up columns of figures, and a childish delight in a discovery that they do not tally. In this way my little mistake was laid bare, and Miss Julie Albu has a great deal to answer for, although nobody knows it. But I do wish those Heaven-born Treasurers to be weren't so awfully clever! They get a whole lot of people into trouble beside the real culprit. Some six or ten members come down on the Minister and accuse him, sir, of having done all sorts of wickedness. The Minister comes down on his Under-Secretary, and the Under-Secretary comes down on the accountant, and the accountant comes down on a poor devil like myself. But all this time Miss Julie Albu is preparing to sail away to the United States, and I do hope and believe that the people of the great Republic will recognise her extraordinary merit, and give the graceful young English singer the hearty welcome she deserves!