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## Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

**A DOUBTFUL GUIDE.** CERTAIN statements that have lately appeared in the "Science Notices," of the *Dublin Review* are such as should give some food for thought to those persons, of whom so many are

to be met with nowadays, and who make of the theories and hypotheses of physical science the Gospel by which they judge of all things spiritual, and according to which they receive or more properly reject the doctrines of religion. The uncertainty of their assuredly infallible guide is for example testified to by the discovery that even the most exact of all the sciences, astronomy itself, is, as the Reviewer tells us, full of uncertainties and problems.—Matters long considered an absolutely settled, we learn, such as the shape of the earth, the length of day and night, and the latitude, are now discovered to be completely doubtful. We have a general idea that the earth is a flattened spheroid, but its exact measurements are unknown to such a degree as to prevent the precise knowledge of the relative distance of one place from another.—There are again, grave doubts as to the shifting of the axis of the earth, resulting in a change of latitude. And, again, "the most serious flaw in astronomical science is the uncertainty of the length of day and night. That there is something amiss in this matter plain from the irregularities of the movements of the moon. We have long been accustomed to claim as one of Newton's most brilliant discoveries that of the lunar theory. It is not so certain that the lunar theory has been mastered. Astronomers have come to the conclusion that either the theory is at fault or the length of our day is uncertain. The shifting of the earth's materials must effect, if only in a minute manner, the times of her revolution. But the effects of the tides must surely be a still more powerful factor in acting as a break upon the diurnal movement. And if such be the case, we are face to face with a most hopeless problem. For the strength of the tides depends upon one most uncertain and unmeasurable force, the strength and direction of the winds. At any rate, at present there is something so faulty with our time-reckoning that predictions of the movements of the moon are full of uncertainties." A matter that has a more direct bearing upon the wisdom of arguing against religion from the objections supposed to be offered by science is the theory newly published by M. Faye, the President of the *Bureau des Longitudes* and who, as the *Dublin Review* tells us, is one of the most distinguished astronomers of the age. In an examination lately made by him into Laplace's Nebular Theory, which he shows to be mistaken, M. Faye incidentally refers to the Mosaic cosmogony. "The creation of the sun and moon on the fourth day, in the account of the first chapter of Genesis," says the Reviewer, "has given rise to many flippant and shallow remarks from our infidel writers. They ask how is it possible for the light to have appeared on the first day when there was neither sun nor moon to impart it? Christian apologists have taken up the matter and suggested that the creation of the sun on the fourth day refers only to the appearance of the sun. They are ready to grant that light is inseparable from the sun, but contend that the sun might have been created on the first day, that its face was hidden from the earth until the fourth day, owing to the mists and exhalations that must have arisen in dense clouds from the cooling earth. If M. Faye's hypothesis be true, there is no need to resort to so awkward a defence. He brings evidence to show that the sun must be the youngest, the last in point of creation of its own system—as far as Saturn inclusively. Uranus and Neptune were fashioned after the sun, but the earth is more ancient than the globe that gives us light and heat. The creation, then, of the sun on the fourth day, far from proving an awkward problem of exegesis, becomes another instance of science offering its homage to religion. Nor is there any difficulty in showing how light could burst upon our earth before our luminary existed. Everyone is perfectly aware when two bodies meet with a sudden shock, the *vis viva* is changed into another sort of energy, fire and heat. The meteorites that dash through our atmosphere create trains of flame and fire. Even compressed air will light touchwood. It is easy, then, to conceive that when the chaotic mass of the first day of creation was put into move-

ment, shocks, collisions, and friction must at once have been set up, and given rise to heat that would increase with the frequency and intensity of such forces. The temperature thus raised would radiate a feeble light, which the condensing masses would reflect from one another 'And there was light,' diffused, glimmering and nascent, penetrating the whole of stellar space." All this we say, then, may well give our small scientific folk reason to pause and shows very plainly the folly of arguing against religion on any such grounds as those they rely on—their standing place affords but a shifting base, and one on which no anti-Christian lever can be supported.

### THE FINANCIAL STATEMENT.

The most interesting feature in the Financial Statement, as delivered in Parliament by Sir Julius Vogel on Friday, is the fact that a heavy increase in taxation is proposed by it. Direct taxation is provided for by means of a revision of the stamp duties, and the increase of the property tax to three farthings in the £—the Treasurer, at the same time, declaring himself in favour rather of a land and income tax, and pointing out that that on property had been adopted instead by way of a compromise. The most important alterations, however, in the way of taxation are those affecting the customs duties, and which must as a matter of course fall on a class not included among those likely to be touched by the direct taxation, that is on the working men and the poorer members of the population generally. Sir Julius Vogel, indeed, speaks of them as "calculated to affect people otherwise free from taxation" and we must admit that by placing import duties on certain articles he has managed the matter very fairly to bring about such an end.—When Sir Julius, however, speaks of these customs as "much depending on the voluntary contribution of the consumers who elect to use imported goods"—and in connection with certain of the articles taxed, we may look upon him as indulging in a little harmless pleasantry or under-hand banter. We can hardly accuse a humane gentleman of laughing in his sleeve at his victims. For example, considering the habits of the colonial people, tea is a necessary of life. There is hardly any electing to use an article that people have been so accustomed to use that to break off the habit would occasion them a very great degree of privation, and yet the tax on tea has been increased by fifty-five per cent. If, moreover, the decrease of the revenue derived from the duties on malt and alcoholic liquors be the result of a temperance movement as Sir Julius Vogel seems to consider it, since he speaks of the moral improvement thus testified to, the use of tea must be increased, for men and women who cease to drink the intoxicating liquors naturally require some substitute, and cold water will not prove sufficient. At any rate the working classes and the poorer portion of the community use tea, and must continue to use it to a large extent, and the increase in the duty will affect them severely. Again as to the matter of boots and shoes, everyone who provides for a poor household will tell you that one of the most trying among the expenses he is obliged to meet is that for the articles in question. Children's boots especially are a burden to the head of a family whose earnings are limited, and an increase in their price means discomfort, and perhaps illness, for many an unhappy little one or growing boy or girl, with an increase of anxiety and distress for the father or mother who is unable to procure what the children absolutely need. The same argument, again, may almost be employed with regard to ready-made clothing, and blankets and rugs, which are also taxed. The fact is, however, that this tariff must be regarded as in a very great degree the imposition of protective duties. It is at the same time, rather worse in some respects for while it acts in such a way towards articles that may be made in the colony, it includes several that cannot be manufactured or produced here. The increased taxation will fall heavily then on the poorer classes, and there is an intermediate class whom it will if possible still more seriously affect, that is, people who by their industry have acquired a little property, but who are still, from circumstances, such, for example, as the requirements of a large family, obliged to work for their living, or, being unable to work, are barely able to live in comfort. The customs tariff is certainly the weak point of this financial statement, which otherwise, with the exception of that doubtful compromise of a property tax for a land tax, and the large increase of £26,989 for godless education, is as satisfactory as the circumstances of the Colony will admit of its being. It is especially reassuring to learn that the fears as to Sir Julius Vogel's rash disposition to borrow