

SIGNS OF THE TIMES.

MARCH, 1875.

DR. FRASER, the Bishop of Manchester, is a prelate who talks a great deal, but who is, nevertheless, generally worth listening to. Some short time since he discussed the subject, "Is Christianity living or dead," and he drew a very remarkable picture of the present state of the Church. The candour with which the Bishop faced the facts of practical life was something extraordinary. He avowed that some people thought it wiser to pass over in discreet silence questions which asked, if Christianity be a passing system or an eternal truth, but he—the Bishop—deemed that "it was necessary to face these issues, and to give them a distinct and clear answer." He noted that intelligent laymen were in the habit of treating Church questions with indifference, and he acknowledged that "religion amongst us was becoming bitter, persecuting, intolerant, sectarian." He urged Christians not to think that it was enough to say: "God will protect his own cause." "*What historical instance was there,*" he asked, "*of God's maintaining a cause which man had deserted and despaired of?*" If Bishops are going to model their faith on history, we fear us that Christianity is indeed dying very rapidly. Does Dr. Fraser really want historical proofs of Christian dogma? Does he ask for historical instances of prayer being answered? If a Bishop thus seeks for guidance from experience, there will soon be an episcopal reinforcement to the ranks of Free Thought. Bitterly does Dr. Fraser speak of "Archbishops and Monsignors and Canons" wrangling "about theological terms, which they themselves could not ex-

plain consistently" (fie, Dr. Fraser!), while men and women were sinning and dying around them. This man has caught somewhat of his master's "enthusiasm of humanity," and the ring of his eloquence is true and strong. He wound up with a stern warning, more fit for the lips of a Free Thinker than for those of a Christian Bishop: "If the Church ceased to have a hold upon the consciences and the understanding of intelligent people, Churchmen might be able to maintain for a little time the skeleton of her organisation; they might still go on pattering her creeds (*sic*), and subscribing to her articles; but those would simply be so many swathing bands round a corpse." Verily, Dr. Fraser, you are a notable "sign of the times;" manly, outspoken, brave: a very phenomenon among Bishops. After this, we can scarcely be surprised to hear that the Bishop puts a very high value on sound secular education, and boldly says, that rather than keep a Church of England school in a state of inefficiency, he would hand it over to the School Board; "it was of supreme importance that our young people should be intelligently and thoroughly trained, in order that they might face the religious problems of the future." But, as Dr. Fraser likes history, we would point out to him that educated and intelligent people have hitherto had a way of solving religious problems which does not suit orthodox Christianity. Mr. W. R. Greg has lately solemnly warned us that the intellect of the country is becoming divorced from religion; if this is the case—and we very sincerely believe that it is so if, by religion, be meant orthodox Christianity—how will religion fare when solid secular education has spread abroad among the many the knowledge which is now the privilege of the few? Will the sharp lad believe in Dr. Colenso's arithmetic when applied to ordinary business, and doubt its accuracy when it shatters the history of the Pentateuch?—will he read of Cristna and Maia in India, and never connect them with

Christ and Mary in Palestine?—will he see the black virgin and child of “heathen mythology,” and not trace to them the black virgin and child of Christian relics?—will the cross remain in his mind as the symbol of his redemption, when he has met it again and again in the oldest religion of the world? In a word, will history unfold to him her secrets, and lay open to him her lore, and yet leave him simple and childish, the toy of superstition, and the dupe of a priest? Knowledge and orthodox Christianity? Yes, perhaps, when you can persuade mid-day and midnight to exist at the same moment side by side.

The *National Society* are, on the other hand, fully at one with us as to the dangerous tendency—to orthodox Christianity—of Secular Education: they have issued and circulated a pressing appeal to good Church folk to come forward and help them, for “our poorer schools in all parts of the country are in great danger of being lost to the Church.” The *National Society* sees the rock ahead, and recognises the fact that their craft is in danger, like that of the silver-smiths of Diana of old, if children are to be taught to use their brains, without having their intellectual faculties trained to run in Church harness. The Bishop of Peterborough wisely denounces “the serpent intellect,” for he, too, is wise in his generation, and knows that *even* “a little knowledge is a dangerous thing” to his creed. True to the traditions of his order, he would “take away the key of knowledge,” and those who would enter in he would hinder.

The *Church Defence Association* have also been putting their house in order, seeing that their enemies are closing in on every side. Every speaker had the same tale to tell, a moan over the danger which menaced, and a shriek against the impending doom. Oddly enough, the hopes of the Churchmen clustered round Mr. Forster; surely never was a quainter sight than these valiant devotees finding a champion in a Nonconformist leader. It may be that, having found him “squeezeable” in the Education Bill, they

hope by gentle pressure to persuade him to defend the Establishment; at any rate, they build on him their hopes. "Every true lover of the Church" is summoned to aid her in keeping the national property she has so long usurped, and strange to say, for a kingdom which is not of this world, a keen eagerness is shown to "keep tight hold of the money." We are surprised also to hear, from the lips of a Church dignitary, that "if ever the Church were disconnected from the State, it would necessarily fall." We had always imagined that Churchmen believed that their Church was an independent organisation, founded on a rock, against which the gates of Hell should never prevail. Surely, then, it would not fall, even though not buttressed by the State? Whatever the Church people may think, we are very sure of one thing—that when the Church is disestablished, she must also be disendowed, or else, like Frankenstein, we shall have created a monster who will spread destruction throughout the State. We, like Dr. Fraser, have studied history, and we have drawn therefrom some serious ideas about the danger to the Commonwealth of an independent and a wealthy Church in her midst. In regard to this question Mr. Bright's speech at Birmingham is interesting, even though it lack the old incisiveness and the old fire of eloquence. His satirical reference to the clergy who boast themselves gentlemen and sons of gentlemen, and are yet so lawless as to require special legislation to curb them, like the less respectable classes of publicans and marine store-keepers, will scarcely be favourably received in clerical circles; yet it was answered by the laity with thunders of applause. The drift of the speech was to the disestablishment, or, as Mr. Bright apparently preferred to phrase it, the enfranchisement of the Church, and it was throughout marked with strong religious feeling of the earnest Nonconformist type. Although, on this point, we can have no sympathy with Mr. Bright, yet it is well that the thousands who are influenced by his voice should

be so plainly urged to work steadily and quietly to bring about this great change. The Bishop of Carlisle has bitterly attacked Mr. Bright for his speech, and essayed, somewhat lamely, to defend the Church, and hoped God would bless her; if He does, disendowment must be close at hand, for we are distinctly told, "Blessed are ye *poor*." A large meeting assembled at Spurgeon's tabernacle to hear a very excellent lecture on the same subject from Mr. Vincent, and a meeting at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, echoed the same cry. Everywhere this question is coming to the front, and "the signs of the times" point to a speedy destruction of the supremacy of the State Church.

The question about the disposal of our dead, drags its slow length along without exciting any very strong feeling on either side. A suggestion has been made which is a kind of compromise between burial and cremation; it is proposed that the corpse should be wrapped in a shroud and placed in a slight wicker frame of open basket work, and then buried in the ground. Advocates of this plan contend that the sanitary objections to burial will be thus obviated, for the slow decay which makes churchyards so injurious to the living is principally the result of the enclosure of the body in a solid coffin; earth has powerful deodorising qualities, and some consider that the present dangers would not exist if coffins were no longer used. We may suggest that, even supposing this theory to be correct in some cases, it would not answer in clay, and would be of very doubtful advantage in sandy soils. On the other hand, cremation gives an absolute security against injury to the living, and, in cases of contagious disease, it would be an invaluable protection. A little patient work in spreading information as to the injurious results of burial, and in combating the childish prejudices fostered by persons like the Bishop of Lincoln, would soon bring about this important sanitary reform.

The United Presbyterian Church of Scotland is trying to put together a hymn-book which shall pour old wine into new bottles, *i.e.*, pour old dogmas into modern rhythm. The task appears to be a most exhilarating one, and the traditional ideas of the sobriety and sternness of the true Calvinist were ruthlessly ignored by the Scotch hymn-makers. When a hymn containing a line about "Angels bending low before Him" was under discussion, a presbyter remarked that "angels have not got backbones as we have." We are curious to know whence this gentleman derived his anatomical knowledge; according to his Bible angels have arms, wings, and feet, and a creature with these limbs who was devoid of a backbone to support those to which they are articulated, would be a curious natural phenomenon; besides, the Bible speaks of angels as "young men," and however devoid many young men may be of backbone to their character, they yet possess the physical property. One hymn was too "churchy," another too "stuffy," another too "jingling;" on the whole the sitting was very lively, and jokes flew about freely. Scotchmen joking over hymns is truly, as Dominie Sampson would have said, "pro-de-gious."

A curious little squabble is reported from the diocese of Exeter, ruled over, as our readers know, by Dr. Temple, erst of Rugby. A clergyman who was presented to a vacant cure was refused induction by the Bishop; the clergyman was of blameless life, and was beloved and revered by the people to whom he had for some time ministered as curate; "why was he refused?" the public are asking. Was it that his views were not quite those of his lordship of Exeter? It would be interesting to know, by the way, what Dr. Temple's "views" are. Are they the views of the liberal Editor of 'Essays and Reviews,' who admitted to that much-talked-of volume the essay of the Rev. Baden Powell; or is the withdrawal of the first essay—the Editor's contribution—to be regarded as

a mark of true repentance, whereby "he publicly retracts, that, his wicked error?" Is the clever erst headmaster of Rugby a believer in the bodily resurrection, in the bodily ascension, in the return of the Son of Man, in the miracles of the Bible, in any of the manifold absurdities of orthodox Christianity? And if he is not, how much does he believe?—does he believe just enough to wear the mitre and live in the palace, without conscience smiting him too hardly? The public would be deeply interested in hearing a confession of faith from the Bishop of Exeter. Once he bade fair to be a leader in the army of Free Thought, but, alas!

"Just for a handful of silver he left us,
Just for a ribbon to stick in his coat."

With how many the good seed of Free Thought springs up for a time, and is then choked by what Jesus sadly termed, "the love of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches."

The controversy between Monsignor Capel and Canon Liddon must have left the Ritualists with very uneasy feelings. The Canon, however skilfully he may have striven to Parry the blows of his antagonist, had emphatically the worst of the fight, and was thoroughly beaten out of his very untenable position:—

"What's in a name?"
When Capel tries, by subtle blows,
The Canon's faith to harry;
He foils each deadly thrust, and shows,
His name is rightly "Parry."

In any controversy, the man who knows what he means is sure to have the advantage over the man whose meaning is hazy, even to himself, and when the Roman Catholic defends Transubstantiation against the Anglican who believes in a Real Presence, somehow the Roman Catholic is sure to win. Then how distressed the Ritualists must have felt when all meaning of any kind was spirited out of their warm eucharistic hymns. Canon Liddon is an adept at

juggling with words; but, for the sake of that sincerity which is wont to be called an English virtue, we do very earnestly hope that Englishmen—if they must be superstitious—will at least have the manliness to put their superstition into intelligible words, and not to cheat themselves by using phrases which have only one meaning on the face of them, and that a meaning which common-sense folk are ashamed of on week-days, even if they employ it on Sundays.

It is painful to look across the water to Spain, and to see priestcraft once more raising its evil head in that unhappy country, the “privileges of which the Church was unjustly deprived, are to be restored,” and Rome is jubilant over the piety of the new boy-king. There is, of course, no real Free Thought possible in Spain at present, among a people whose education, is that burlesque of education, given grudgingly by a priesthood, and who have neither manliness of mind nor purity of heart. Still we had hoped that the destruction of the fatal supremacy of the Church would slowly have paved the way for a sterner education, and would thus have brought the people into a more enlightened condition, in which they would have been fit to receive the light of Free Thought. An ignorant people will always be superstitious, and will degrade any truth that is offered to them until it is narrowed to the capabilities of their faculties; and Spain is not yet able even to conceive Free Thought. But she will sink yet lower under a king, who is being incessantly blessed by archbishops, and who chooses the Virgin as one of his Captain-Generals.