



Nature's Freethinker.

FOR what has he, whose will sees clear,
To do with doubt and faith and fear,
Swift hopes and slow despondencies?
His heart is equal with the sea's
And with the sea-wind's, and his ear
Is level to the speech of these,
And his soul communes and takes cheer
With the actual earth's equalities—
Air, light, and night, hills, winds and streams—
And seeks not strength from strengthless dreams.

His soul is even with the sun
Whose spirit and whose eye are one,
Who seeks not stars by day, nor light
And heavy heat of day by night.
Him can no god cast down, whom none
Can lift in hope beyond the height
Of fate and nature, and things done
By the calm rule of might and right
That bids men be, and bear, and do,
And die beneath blind skies or blue.
[Swinburne.]

Intolerance.

BY HENRY M. TABER.

THERE is today the same spirit among Christians which forced Roger Williams to seek the protection of the supposed savage, but humane, Massasoit, from the persecutions of a Christian sect; which lodged in jail in Culpepper county, Va., Baptist ministers for preaching immersion; which brought the charge of blasphemy against Chevalier de la Barre, in 1676, for not having removed his hat on the passing of a religious procession, resulting in the most inhuman and excruciating torture and death; which, in 1812, sent Daniel Isaac Eaton to prison for eighteen months for publishing the "Age of Reason"; which imprisoned the venerable Abner Kneeland in 1835 for differing from the orthodox on the question of Universalism.

Human nature has been very much the same in all ages of the world, and there is scarcely a doubt that the intolerance of a few hundred years ago would again be rampant in our midst if only the religious zealots had the power they formerly had. Is it unlikely that such bigots as the president of Amherst College, as the bishop of Delaware, as the editor of the Christian Advocate, would add to their intolerant utterances acts of persecution, of cruelty and of murder, similar to those which so long stained the pages of Christian history, if only they were sustained by the same public sentiment by which the atrocities of the church in the centuries that are past were made possible? By no means. President Seelye and the rest are no more human or humane than were the bigots of former times.

It was public sentiment which sustained prominent and gifted men like Sir Matthew Hale, Cotton Mather and John Wesley in encouraging the torture and death of innocent women, because in the Christian's Bible the command is given, "Thou shalt not permit a witch to live."

"In the name of God every possible crime has been committed, every conceivable outrage perpetrated. Brave men, loving women, beautiful girls and prattling babes have been exterminated in the name of Jesus Christ. For more than fifty generations the church has carried the black flag. Her vengeance has been measured only by her power. With the heart of a fiend she has hated. With the clutch of avarice she has grasped. Pitiless as famine, merciless as fire. Such is the history of the church of God."

Fiendish as have been the acts which Col. Ingersoll, as above, has portrayed, they would be re-enacted today by the adherents of Christianity—Protestant and Catholic alike—under circumstances similar to those which hitherto existed, for religion not only enslaves the mind, but it makes captive the heart as well.

There is no objection whatever to Christian people believing in a place of eternal punishment, in a blissful heaven, in a personal devil, in a God (even of such imperfections as the Bible represents), in angels who have not fallen, as well as in those who have, in the story of creation, in miracles, in an infallible church, a divinely ordained ministry, in an inspired book, or in aught else that is unprovable or improbable. These are mere matters of opinion, and any one who can so believe is unquestionably entitled to such belief; but where the intolerance shows itself is in asserting that such belief is necessarily meritorious, and that those who do not so believe are necessarily immoral and criminal, utterly ignoring the fact that belief is involuntary, that it is impossible for any one to believe unless convinced, by reason, of the truth of such belief.

But as orthodox Christianity is never likely to relinquish its dogmatic, pharisaical, unreasoning, unjust and intolerant position, every indication of the disintegration or decay of the Christian religion should be hailed with delight by all who believe in the fullest tolerance of opinion, by all lovers of mental liberty.—[Faith or Fact.]

Perversion.

BY F. L. OSWALD.

THE puerile supernaturalism of the pagan myth-mongers could not fail to injure their prestige, even in an age of superstition; but the anti-naturalism of the Galilean fanatics not only neglected but completely inverted the proper functions of priesthood. The pretended ministers of truth became her remorseless persecutors; the promised healers depreciated the importance of bodily health, the hoped-for apostles of social reform preached the doctrine of renunciation. We should not judge the Christian clergy by the aberrations engendered by the maddening influence of protracted persecutions. It would be equally unfair to give them the credit of latter-day reforms, reluctantly conceded to the demands of rationalism. But we can with perfect fairness judge them by the standard of the moral and intellectual types evolved during the period of their plenary power, the three hundred years from the tenth to the end of the thirteenth century, when the control of morals and education had been unconditionally surrendered into the hands of their chosen representatives. The comparative scale of human turpitude must not include the creations of fiction. We might find a ne plus ultra of fiction in the satires of Rabelais, in the myths of Hindostan, or the burlesques of the modern French dramatists. But if we confine our comparison to the records of authentic history, it would be no exaggeration to say that during the period named the type of a Christian priest represented the absolute extreme of all the groveling ignorance, the meanest selfishness, the rankest sloth, the basest servility, the foulest perfidy, the grossest superstition, the most bestial sensuality, to which the majesty of human nature has ever been degraded. Thousands of monasteries fattened on the toil of starving peasants. Villages were beggared by the rapacity of the tithe-gatherer; cities were terrorized by witch-hunts and autos da fe. The crimps of the inquisitorial tribunals hired spies and suborned perjurers by promising them a share of confiscated estates. The evidence of intellectual pursuits was equivalent to a sentence of death. Education was almost limited to the memorizing of chants and prayers. "A

cloud of ignorance," says Hallam, "overspread the whole face of the church, hardly broken by a few glimmering lights who owe almost the whole of their distinction to the surrounding darkness. * * * In 992 it was asserted that scarcely a single person was to be found, even in Rome itself, who knew the first elements of letters. Not one priest of a thousand in Spain could address a common letter of salutation to another." Every deathbed became a harvest field of clerical vampires who did not hesitate to bully the dying into robbing their children for the benefit of a bloated convent. Herds of howling fanatics roamed the country, frenzied by the superstitious rustics with their predictions of impending horrors. Parishioners had to submit to the base avarice and the baser lusts of innocent parish priests, who in his turn kissed the dust at the feet of an arrogant prelate. The doctrine of Antinaturalism had solved the problem of inflicting the greatest possible amount of misery on the greatest possible number of victims.—[Bible of Nature.]

Free Discussion.

BY HORACE SEAVER.

THE man not imbued with superstitions, and who entertains a sincere desire to promote the happiness of the human race, will readily admit that open and impartial discussion is the foundation of human liberty. Free, unrestrained inquiry on all subjects is, in fact, the source of knowledge and wisdom, for how can we detect error or distinguish truth if there is one topic remaining which we are not to investigate? We may expatiate for centuries on the advantages attending correct views and correct principles, but if those systems which brutalize the mind, which proscribe the use of reason and which hold mankind under the dominion of a vile superstition, are not to be probed to the bottom and exhibited in all their deformity, the most powerful eloquence, the most transcendent reasoning in the world (though of weight in their proper place) will be utterly useless. To convince man that happiness is attainable, it is not enough that he know this. The causes which deprive him of it, the sources of his misery, must be clearly and distinctly pointed out; otherwise, he will remain all his lifetime a child of sorrow and misfortune. Ignorant of the nature of the evils which beset him, he will continue the dupe of the crafty and designing, whose sole object is to darken the understanding, that they may perpetuate their inordinate power and influence.—[Occasional Thoughts.]