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TORONTO, MAY, 1878.

A SYMPOSIUM.

Since our last issue we have received one of the most remarkable and suggestive books of this age of intellectual strife. The symposium of the Ancients was a feast of the gods. The *modern symposium** is a feast of mental food provided by the most vigorous writers and thinkers of this restless and inquisitive age. Every shade of opinion, from Rationalism to Romanism, has its representative in the weighty questions under consideration, viz.: "The soul and future life," and "The influence upon morality of a decline in religious belief." The method of discussion is a novel one: three lawyers, four divines, two scientists, four literary critics and two politicians, orthodox and heterodox, discuss in writing on the method of oral debate. Frederick Harrison, (a disciple of Comte), opens the first question with two papers, extending over 46 pages, forwards the manuscript to the second (R. H. Hutton, Editor of the *Spectator*), who comments on the opinions of Mr. Harrison, and forwards the two manuscripts to Prof. Huxley for his criticism, which method is continued until it reaches the tenth, when the ten manuscripts are returned to Mr. Harrison for a final review. By this arrangement we obtain the well digested thoughts and opinions of ten acute thinkers of every shade of belief on the question under consideration.

This deliberate sifting process offers the best means of arriving at certainty, if certainty can be obtained; as passionate declamation, gesture, modulation of voice, and all the tricks of rhetoric are dispensed with, leaving full play to reason and reflection to grapple fairly with fact and argument.

The volume under notice is a valuable addition to any library.

* A Modern Symposium, published by Rose-Belford Publishing Co., Toronto. Price \$1.00. For sale at this office.

Its contents gave a rapid popularity and wide circulation to the *Nineteenth Century*, where the papers first appeared. In book form it possesses three additional qualities: it is neat and cheap, compact and ably edited, with a critical and explanatory preface.

The editor of the *St. Croix Courier*, May 9th, after praising the book, and assuring his readers that he had read it with pleasure and profit in magazine form, and hoped to read and re-read it again, condemns the editor as partial, and asks for his dismissal. This appears to us to be ungrateful, as few would have discovered that the editor had made the acquaintance of any part of the book except the preface, had he not informed them of the fact. With all his professions of acquaintance with the contents in magazine form, renewed by a recent perusal of the book, he neither quotes nor even substantially notices any part but the preface. He charges the editor with thinking every leading sect of Christianity (not forgetting to name them) are fools and liars, and that only he, and a few others, have truth and reason on their side. After a careful perusal of the preface we are of opinion that the charge is not supported by a single fact, nor even by a fair inference. We consider the preface a very valuable addition to the original matter, as it furnishes information which the general reader is not only unacquainted with, but which is essential to his pleasure and profit. The lawyer may be acquainted with the legal position of the lawyers engaged in the controversy, the cleric with the divines, others with the scientists, but few will have formed the acquaintance of each and all. Hence the usefulness of a brief sketch of the disputants to readers in this country.

As the limits of our paper will only permit but a very short notice of the contents of the first subject, we introduce Mr. Harrison, who opens by stating the fact that a profound change is coming over the religious belief of the world, both in the intensity of religious feeling, and in the certainty with which religious convictions are held. This state of things is also ably set forth by Froude, who says* "that opinions once fixed as a rock are now fluid as water." Mr. Harrison deals mercilessly with the favorite arguments for a conscious personal existence after death, and contends very ably and earnestly "that man survives only in the activities of the race. He is willing to retain the words "soul" and "future life" for their associations, provided we make it clear, that we mean by *soul* the combined faculties of the *living* organisms, and by *future life* the subjective effect of man's objective life on the actual lives of his fellow men." This, Mr. Huxley shows, is an argument *against* a future life in the ordinary sense of the term, the future life, as advocated by Mr. Harrison, is but an immortality, by deputy.

The earnest and eloquent plea of Mr. Harrison for the posthumous activities and their influence on the human race, with Prof. Huxley's trenchant attack on the unreality of Positivist assumptions which he maintains mean nothing firm or solid, give force to the discussion which develops into an appearance of bitterness between these two ablest disputants—they seem to have had an old score to settle, but this Mr. Harrison disavows.

Mr. Huxley, like ourselves, regrets that he cannot find evidence of any thing like certainty for the soul and a future life, and upbraids Mr. Harrison for "breaking away from beliefs, whether true or false, which embody great and fruitful conceptions, to fall back into the arms of a half breed between science and theology,

* Religion and Science, Ancient and Modern, Rose-Belford, Toronto.