

SEEING THINGS IN THE RIGHT LIGHT.

BY CHARLES CATTELL.

THE past three years have allowed me many opportunities of conversation on the subject of belief and unbelief on board a steam packet. There, as elsewhere, people can run away from your argument if not from you. I find a very general reluctance to discuss the fundamentals of religion, as being unsuitable to the occasion; but it seems to be always fit, both in time and place, to make assertions about unbelievers, and about those who once went astray but returned to the fold of the faithful.

The two leading articles in these assertions are the stories of one lady, now living, and of one gentleman, now deceased (Mrs. Besant and Thomas Cooper). But it is hardly necessary to give their names, as from these two there is derived a general inference applicable to all Freethinkers—that ultimately they come to see things in the right light. Advanced age is thus quoted as really antagonistic to advanced thought. In other words, it is claimed that the net result of a life spent in inquiry into the truth and utility of Christianity ends in an abandonment of the conclusion arrived at! Supposing this to be true, wherein is there cause for rejoicing? Simply in the fact that the person who suddenly throws overboard the discoveries of an active, healthy intellect, and re-asserts his old errors, is restored to the party to which the one who rejoices belongs.

To me, it appears only as the evidence of a wasted life, of weakness, or of something worse. If any new discoveries had been made by which the old errors became new truths, that might be accepted as a reasonable ground for returning to them, but the results of all the inquiries point to a still further digression from the old idea of infallible truth. The relation of man and the earth to the universe cannot be at once restored to that which early Christians once believed to be true without abandoning the conclusions of demonstrated facts. If Christians at last come to see things in the right light, that is the light of Scripture, they must throw overboard all the leading scientists of the past three hundred years. Finding this view, on being properly analyzed, to be absolutely absurd, we are solicited to take a figurative view, and not a literal rendering of the teachings which pass current as the only true religion.

The general result of a few test questions as to what views the converted unbeliever maintained, and on what facts and arguments he once relied, is the startling discovery that the believer has not even seen any works of the unbelievers, excepting some more or less truthful biography. This true account of the state of the public mind is not confined to young men or Sunday-school teachers, but is applicable to gentlemen, men of the world, men of from forty to eighty years of age. How deeply the belief in the ultimate recantation of all unbelievers must have sunk into the general mind when old men still repeat the story!

I submit that it is a very serious question whether any man who has once