

THOMAS COOPER'S REASON'S FOR FORSAKING SKEPTICISM.

Thomas Cooper, the well known Chartist Lecturer, lately delivered a course of lectures at Sheffield in support of Christianity. At the commencement of the first lecture, he made the following statement :—

He said he had not come to Sheffield as a gladiator, to get up a discussion, but to reason with his friends, the working classes. He had to visit the town to make up inquiries for an article for a newspaper on the cutlery workers, and, having changed his religious opinions, felt that he could not come among his old friends without telling them the reason. After rebutting the charge of inconsistency urged against him, the lecturer spoke of the causes of skepticism, mentioning the bad example of many religious professors ; the blundering and confused way in which theology was often expounded from the pulpit ; attempts to stifle instead of directing the spirit of inquiry in youth ; and the oppression practised by professedly religious employers on the working classes. Speaking of the various forms of skepticism, Mr. Cooper said the skeptics twitted Christians with their differences of opinion, but were themselves open to the same accusation. The lecturer referred to his life for the explanation of his changes of creed. Religiously educated, doubts were first raised in his mind through the prohibition of innocent pursuits, and he became a Theist. Sickness brought soberness of thought, and, on recovery, he joined the Wesleyans, among whom he was a local preacher seven years, but was driven from the body by the persecutions of the Revs. John Williams and William Smith, and became an Unitarian. He then became a Chartist, and as such was imprisoned. Looking upon himself as a martyr, the harsh treatment of the prison sank deep into his spirit, and he came to doubt whether there was a God. He thanked God that he never got to positive Atheism ; he never said that there was no God ; at the worst he only doubted. Mr. Cooper spoke of the agony of doubt which constantly harassed free-thinkers, who were often compelled to seek relief in diversion, or give up the study of the subject in despair. Then came the explanation of the lecturer's return to Christianity. One of the doctrines of Robert Owen and his followers was that man was the creature of circumstances, undeserving of praise or blame for his good or bad actions. It was the discussion of the word "duty" in relation to this doctrine that formed the turning point in his career of skepticism. It led him to the conclusion that man has a moral nature, and that consequently there must be a moral governor. If there was a moral governor, then the good ought to prosper and the vicious not. But seeing that was not the case, then he concluded that there must be a hereafter of rewards and punishments ; for, though virtue was to some extent its own reward, and vice its own punishment, it was not fully so. Besides, how, in the absence of a moral governor, was man to get that moral nature ? Skeptics talked about religious intolerance, but when he announced his new convictions, his skeptical friends treated him with an intolerance which amazed him ; they behaved more like bears than men. This, instead of cowering, spurred him on to further investigation. He went on to think and pray—yes, he was not ashamed to say that he sought God in prayer, for hazardous was the state of that man who gave up prayer—until he became convinced that Christianity was true. (Cheers.)—*Doncaster Gazette.*