

you? As stated at the beginning of this discourse, my physical and intellectual textures were woven *for* me, not *by* me. Processes in the conduct or regulation of which I had no share have made me what I am. Here, surely, if anywhere, we are as clay in the hands of the potter. It is the greatest of delusions to suppose that we come into this world as sheets of white paper on which the age can write anything it likes, making us good or bad, noble or mean, as the age pleases. The age can stunt, promote or pervert pre-existent capacities, but it cannot create them. The worthy Robert Owen, who saw in external circumstances the great moulders of human character, was obliged to supplement his doctrine by making the man himself one of the circumstances. It is as fatal as it is cowardly to blink facts because they are not to our taste. * * * * It is not, however, from the observation of individuals that the argument against 'free will,' as commonly understood, derives its principal force. It is, as already hinted, indefinitely strengthened when extended to the race." Prof. Tyndall here goes on to show the results of "heredity," "accidental variation," etc., in evolving the race from "progenitors which could not be called human" to what we are to-day, and then thus tranchantly states the argument against the popular doctrine of "free will."

"If, then, our organisms, with all their tendencies and capacities, are given to us without our being consulted; and if, while capable of acting within certain limits in accordance with our wishes, we are not masters of the circumstances in which motives and wishes originate; if, finally, our motives and wishes determine our actions—in what sense can these actions be said to be the result of free will?"

Let the theologian answer if he can! The fact is, no distinguished student of human nature who is free from prejudice can for one moment accept the theological doctrine of free will. The religionist only accepts it because he has been taught it, and because it is an essential constituent of his creed. He accepts it by *faith*, not by reason. Haeckel, in his great work, "The History of Creation," says: "Where faith commences science ends." With many science never begins, for faith is the beginning and end.

James Fitzjames Stephen, the noted English Barrister and Author, in his work, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," has one incidental sentence which shows unmistakably his opinion of the doctrine of free will. Here it is: "That any human creature ever, under any conceivable circumstances, acted otherwise than in obedience to that which for the time being was his strongest wish, is to me an assertion as incredible and as unmeaning as the assertion that on a particular occasion two straight lines enclosed a space." The truth is, the notion of the freedom of the human will has been frequently doubted and occasionally challenged by reflective minds for centuries. We find Shelley, with apparent impatience at so absurd a proposition, exclaiming: "The word liberty, as applied to mind, is analogous to the word chance as applied to matter; both spring from our ignorance of the certainty of the conjunction between antecedents and consequents. * * * Only the few fanatics who are engaged in the Herculean task of reconciling the justice of their God with the misery of man, will longer insult common sense by the supposition of a voluntary action without a motive."

I now propose, as the lawyers say, to rest my case here, that is, so far as the philosophical and scientific arguments against free will are concerned. But I also propose to go further—to "beard the lion in his den" if you please. I propose to meet the theologian on his own ground, *to wit*: Theology and the Bible, and disprove his doctrine of free will *from his own premises*. This I will endeavor to accomplish in the next article, and then in one or two subsequent articles deal with moral responsibility and "Free Moral Agency." Meanwhile I beg to wish all the contributors and readers, orthodox and heterodox, of the FREETHOUGHT JOURNAL a happy New Year.

Selby, December 13, 1877.

EXCELLENT ADVICE.

To the Managing Editors and Directorate of the Freethought Journal, and all others concerned:

DEAR FRIENDS AND BROTHERS,—Will you allow me to make a suggestion, and earnestly urge it upon your consideration? It is the desirability of continuing the FREETHOUGHT JOURNAL as a *monthly* instead of a *weekly*, at least for a time. This, I think, would be the more prudent course, for various reasons.

In the first place, you will all agree with me that it is better to commence low and work up gradually than to begin high and have to come down. In any laudable undertaking, upward progress from an humble beginning is commendable and creditable; while retrogression, or failure, *might* be discreditable and *certainly* would be humiliating. Let us, then, avoid the latter in our journalistic enterprise by moving cautiously and on a safe basis. It may be quite true that the Liberal element throughout the Dominion, with the assistance we would get from our brethren across the border, is strong enough to sustain a *weekly* journal at \$2 per year, if such element could be immediately reached and brought in. But this, in the absence of a regular and thorough canvass, is at present impracticable, and will require time. A monthly journal at, say, one dollar a year, could perhaps be carried along safely and successfully until such time, sooner or later, as the Liberal element would be generally enlisted; and then as fast as we felt warranted, financially and otherwise, we could enlarge, and change from monthly to semi-monthly, or weekly. This, it seems to me, would be the more judicious course. Besides, a one dollar journal would work much sooner into circulation than one high-priced. Many outside our own ranks would *try* it at that price, whereas they would not care to venture more in what to them would at first appear a dubious investment. But after reading it for a time, having gauged it, they would no doubt be quite willing to pay more and get it oftener.

There are also other considerations in favor of the temporary *monthly* issue instead of *weekly*. The substantial and literary character of the monthly is necessarily higher than that of the weekly. The writer for the monthly periodical, having more time in which to prepare his articles, furnishes more substantial and mature food for his readers. And in this, the inauguration of a Freethought journal in Canada, it is absolutely essential that it should avoid the stigma of crudity and superficiality. Let us then endeavor at the outset to give it a character of solidity, utility, and culture. Such a character, once established, will command the patronage of not only the distinctively rationalistic, but of the broad and liberal-minded *outside* our ranks. In all the churches is quite a large element, in merely nominal connection, who have almost outgrown their creeds, and who are inwardly liberal. To say nothing of the whole body of Unitarians, this is especially true of the Episcopalian and Presbyterian denominations of the Christian Church. This class of nominal, or *quasi*, believers we will inevitably reach if we succeed in making such a journal as above indicated. We must keep abreast with the times. We must give our readers, not indeed our own thoughts alone, but the *best thoughts of the best minds*, and the latest facts, philosophic and scientific, bearing upon our field, which are constantly emerging from the brain of the age and from the infinite Cosmos in which we are and of which we form a part. Abandoning mere carping, we must deal with doctrines not men. In our attacks upon false doctrines and false systems we must recollect that our opponents regard them as true. And we must build up as fast as we pull down. In any case where we have no better edifice to put in the place of the existing one, it will not be molested. We will endeavor to thrust no doctrine or fact into the place of another, which is not better than that other.

With these objects and principles faithfully adored to and carried out our journal *must* succeed, and ultimately become a potent factor in shaping the thought and destiny of this Dominion.

Fraternally yours,

ALLEN PRINGLE.

Selby, Ont., December, 1877.