

THE DECLINE OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF.

To the Editor.

Sir—My letter on the above subject in your issue of July 3 was written under a misapprehension, and I hasten to make the amende honorable. The misapprehension was excusable, as the following will show. In another section of the press a paragraph was published, with the above title, from which it appeared (to me at least) that Professor Jethro Brown quoted approvingly certain views opposed to Christian teaching. On reading the very full report of the professor's address contained in your issue of Tuesday I saw that the professor was merely giving a review of certain current views, only to say afterwards that he disagreed with them. It is a fine thing, and not at all unusual, to see a University professor expounding high principles in days when shallow unbelief is propagated by those who are not competent to speak. I wish to express my regret at having (quite unintentionally) misrepresented the professor, and beg to thank him for his splendid address.—I am, &c.,
A BELIEVER IN HELL.

Sir—"A Believer in Hell" seems to be very much in doubt as to what religion is or whence it comes, or anything connected with it at all. He signs himself as a believer in an unfathomable abyss of fire, called hell, filled with malignant spirits of horrid shape, in which are reserved the most exquisite torments for those who have been displeasing to God in their moral state, and yet he asks the question, "What did Christ teach?" The all-powerful man of to-day believes his own little creed made by himself, and leaves God's commands and Gospel as set out in the Bible as nought, and not worthy to be considered. The original word for hell in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word, "Sheol." The word is translated hell, properly, as a general thing, if intended to mean the same as the old Saxon word, "hell," the covered receptacle of the dead, where the good and bad repose, together in a state of unconsciousness. Had Sheol been uniformly translated pit or grave, or the state of the dead, no such absurd idea as that of a place of torment could have been associated with it. In the English language we have words which convey the same meaning, viz., "helting," the cover of a book; "helmet," covering for the head, &c., all derived from the same root. Can we wonder at the decreasing attendances at our churches when a theory so horrible as "hell torments" is put before them? Rather than believe such a doctrine most men reject God from their creed, and take refuge in the calm of rationalism. The whole teaching of the Bible in regard to the destiny of the wicked is summed up in four words from the 37th Psalm, verse 20:—"The wicked shall perish." Paul gives the explanation in Romans vi., 23:—"The wages of sin is death." Other testimonies—Proverbs x., 25; Job, xx., 48; Psalm, xxxvii., 20; Isa., xxvi., 14. "Hell" simply means grave in many of the verses of the Bible, and the prevailing and popular idea of a place of torment is borrowed from the ancient Egyptians, the Persians, Assyrians, Romans, and Greeks.—I am, &c.,

JOS. H. RICHARDS.

Clarence Park, July 3, 1913.

EDUCATION AND THE CHURCHES.

From Professor Jethro Brown:—"I am reluctant to enter into a press correspondence. Yet I feel that I ought to say a few words with respect to some letters which appear in your issues of Wednesday and Thursday. At the outset I should like to say that there appears to have been some misunderstanding of my position. I expressly said in my address to the teachers that I did not speak in terms of praise or censure. Certainly nothing was further from my thought than to impute any blame to the churches. In my humble opinion the churches are doing the best they can under conditions of peculiar difficulty. Nor was I concerned to maintain that the churches are no longer a serviceable ally to the teacher. But I do believe that, as such an ally, they have not the power today they once had. The Rev. J. G. Creswell rates me for discussing a theology which was 'buried some years ago.' But I do not think that he has quite realized my point. Briefly, my point is that while some dogmas have been discarded, they have not yet been replaced, as far as I can judge, by any religious convictions of equal power over the minds of the many. This opinion, of course, makes no reference to the possibility of future developments. The Rev. G. H. Jose protests against 'the negative and destructive tendency' of my remarks. Here again, I must refer to the object I had in view. I was not concerned to express any opinion as to the truth of religious beliefs, ancient or modern. I may be assumed to be less competent to do so than your correspondent. It was not the truth, but the present potency, of such beliefs which concerned me. As an observer of social forces, I felt quite within my province in expressing an opinion on this subject. That opinion was relevant to my treatment of the more general question of the milieu in which the teacher works. I think your correspondent does less than justice to my remarks when he accuses me of speaking of Christ as 'a philosopher, saint, or nonentity.' What I said was that most men 'think of Christ as philosopher or saint—or think of Him not at all.' Mr. Jose is far too acute a reasoner not to realize the difference. If, however, I understand Mr. Jose aright, he is not so anxious to challenge my opinions as to guard against certain possible misconstructions of the language which I have employed to express those opinions. I readily endorse his tribute to the awakened interest in the personality of Christ. But, so far as I am able to judge, that awakened interest has not as yet succeeded in reinstalling the churches in the position they once had. It may do so in the future. That is, of course, another and quite different question. Archdeacon Clappett accuses me of a 'breach of privilege.' I cannot concede the accusation to be just. I think it is very relevant for a teachers' conference to consider the extent to which the responsibilities of the teacher are affected by the great social, moral, and religious forces by which he is surrounded. I would have been guilty of a breach of privilege if I had utilized the occasion to discuss the truth of religious beliefs. But, to consider their power as an ally to the teacher, appears to me to have been well within my province. Your correspondent accuses me of being 'obsessed with the idea of hell.' As a matter of fact I referred only to the intensity of the belief in hell in relation to the general question of the influence of religious dogma or beliefs upon human conduct in times past and present. There are several other charges your correspondent makes which I think have been anticipated by my previous remarks. In conclusion, I should like to express my appreciation of the courtesy and sympathy with which your correspondents have criticised my remarks. I doubt whether their criticisms would have been uttered if they had been present at the conference, or if they had read the article which I contributed to The Hibbert Journal in April, 1904. The remarks which your correspondents object to are extracts taken from the article referred to. Divorced from their context they are perhaps open to misconception. But my time was too limited to enable me to guard against all possible misconstructions."