

beyond it. But whatever the proper limit of these assumptions is, — whether in the world of knowledge, or thought, or moral conviction, or expectation, or belief, — up to that limit, and no further, you have the right to meet doubt of the validity of these assumptions, by doubt of the validity of doubting these assumptions, — and we should add, have not only the right so to meet it, but are compelled so to meet it on the amply sufficient ground that to remain in doubt lands us in just as important and just as effectual a class of assumptions as to reject doubt, — only that it is effectual to paralyze us, instead of effectual to stimulate. Say, for instance, that what you doubt is the capacity of a finite being to hold any living relation with an infinite being. Well, that doubt, if you take your stand on it, has just as much positive effect as the belief which comes from rejecting it. In the grasp of that doubt, the mind turns away involuntarily from the contemplation of anything eternal, — practically holds all truths, however useful and lasting, to be quite provisional, — all affections, however deep and pure, to be transitory, — all conflicts and issues, however weighty, to be of measurable and limited significance, — and all expectations, however eager, to be doubtful in a degree depending chiefly on the time that has to elapse before they can be fulfilled, and on the prospect of a sufficiently prolonged existence for the being to whom they refer. No assumptions can be more important than these, or more productive of characteristic fruits. And, of course, they *are* assumptions. Whether they be true or false, is a question on which a great deal depends. If they be false assumptions, they are certainly also enfeebling assumptions, for in that case they would embarrass, and depress, and palsy a nature intended for communion with the infinite and eternal, and intended to enjoy the light and glow which the conviction of such communion inspires. If they be true assumptions, on the other hand, they would, of course, have the effect of vastly sobering a mind terribly prone to unreal visions and imaginary hopes. But who shall say whether such assumptions be true or false, except by comparing them with all the other assumptions on which man habitually acts, and of the practical value of which he has convinced himself, and seeing whether they are of like origin, and have like consequences? If the doubt is of the same kind with doubts which grow and strengthen with

our growing nature, we are apt to justify the doubt, to think it well grounded. On the other hand, if the doubt is of the same kind with doubts which are apt to dwindle and fade with our growing nature, we are wise to doubt the doubt, and reject it as alien to all within us which lives and grows. It was the conviction in Socrates that the doubts of the Sophists were alien to the healthy life of the soul and of the State, which made him so zealous to “doubt their doubts away.” And so, if the doubts of the modern sceptics shall prove to be, as we expect, doubted away by the more masculine representatives of a reviving philosophy and religion, it will be because Agnosticism will be shown to have its principles closely intertwined with conditions of thought and conditions of character altogether incompatible with the fundamental axioms of human knowledge, human virtue, and human hope.

From The Pall Mall Budget.

CURIOSITIES OF TRADE IN CHINA.

OPIUM and cottons, and tea and silk, constitute in the estimation of most people the sum total of the foreign trade with China. To such generalizers ships' bills of lading are unknown documents; they do not know apparently that cottons and opium do not supply all that Chinamen seek from foreigners, and that the laboring classes of the empire are not all employed in cultivating tea and manufacturing silk. These articles are after all only the big fish which come to the trader's net; and when they fail, there are plenty of smaller fry which help to supply their place. The Chinese boast themselves of being a civilized people; but though their philosophy is creditable they are unable to provide their seamstresses with any but the clumsiest of needles, and though they can calculate eclipses with commendable accuracy they have failed to contrive anything better than flint and steel wherewith to light the wicks floating in oil which serve them for lamps. These imperfections in the domestic economy of the people being universal and ever-present cause the appearance of a box of Bryant and May's matches or a packet of Kirby's needles to be received with expressions of pleasure which would make excellent models for the conversational advertisements now the fashion. One can imagine how enthusiasts among the

purchasers of the seventy-five thousand one hundred and twenty-nine gross of matches imported into Tientsin alone last year would dilate on the superior ease with which they are now able to light their evening lamps, and how the female owners of the two hundred and seventy-two and one-half million of needles, which were fellow-voyagers with the matches, would chatter over the excellences of the foreign manufacture.

But many other things go to China besides needles and matches. Rhinoceros horns, tigers' bones, and deer and buffalo sinews are imported for the benefit of timid and sickly Chinamen, who seek by swallowing decoctions made from these promising substances to acquire some of the strength and courage of their original owners. And there is no lack of enthusiasm among Chinese *gourmets* for the succulent *bêche-de-mer*, which the shallow waters of the islands of the Pacific Ocean yield at their demand, or for the birds' nests which lend such a glutinous charm to their favorite soup. No other swallows in the world but those which build their nests in caves on the sea-cliffs of Java and Borneo are able to produce these last most precious delicacies. Newly-formed nests or nests in which the eggs are freshly laid are most prized; and these have to go through a process of cleansing before they are dried and despatched for the China market, where, however, if in prime condition, they reward their captors at the rate of 36s. per pound. Among more materially-minded purchasers window-glass, watches, dyes, paint, and other "sundries" find a ready sale; and peacocks' and kingfishers' feathers are eagerly bought up to adorn the hats of mandarins whom the emperor delights to honor and the headdresses of fashionable ladies.

In return for these and other imports China sends into the outer world medicines of far greater value than those she accepts from it; though she has evidently some customers who are fond of rare remedies, and who look with a strange faith to lily flowers, ginseng, and lotus nuts for relief from some of the ills which flesh is heir to. Even from the disease-begotten tuber known as China-root, which grows from the roots of unhealthy fir-trees, fanciful invalids extract a cure for diseases as unreal as the remedy employed to dispel them. Another export due to an unhealthy condition aggravated by an uncongenial climate is the white wax of Sze-chuen. In the Keen-chang

district of that province there grows in abundance the *Ligustrum lucidum*, an evergreen tree with pointed ovate leaves, on the twigs of which myriads of insects spread themselves like a brownish film, in the spring of each year. Presently the surface of the twigs becomes encrusted with a white waxy substance secreted by the insects, and it increases in quantity until the latter part of August, when the twigs are cut off and boiled in water. During this process the wax, rising to the surface, is skimmed off, and is then melted and allowed to cool in deep pans. By one of those curious accidents which have done so much to increase the knowledge of mankind, it was discovered that by transporting the insects bred in Keen-chang to the less congenial climate of Kea-ting Fu, in the north of the province, the amount of wax produced was vastly increased. No people more readily discern a commercial advantage, or more speedily take advantage of one when unencumbered with political considerations, than the Chinese; and this singular effect of removing the insects from a congenial climate to one so uncongenial as to prevent their breeding was eagerly taken advantage of by the Sze-chuen traders. Travellers by night on the high-road between Keen-chang and Kea-ting Fu may meet in the spring of the year hundreds of wax-merchants, each carrying his load of female insects, big with young, on their way to their wax-farms in Kea-ting Fu. The journey is rough and long, and a fortnight's sun would precipitate the hatching, which should take place after the females have been attached to the trees. To the unscientific eyes of Chinamen the round, pea-like female appears to be nothing more than an egg, and this belief is the more excusable since the birth of the young is the signal for the death of the parent, of whose previous existence there remains only as evidence an outer shell or husk. Six or seven of these prolific mothers are wrapped in a palm-leaf and tied to a branch of the *Ligustrum lucidum*. In a few days swarms of infinitesimally small insects creep forth and cluster on the twigs of the tree, where they fulfil their mission and perish with its accomplishment in the boiling-pot each August. Baron Richthofen considers the value of the annual crop to be on an average upwards of £650,000; and during last year there was exported from the one port of Hankow upwards of eighty-one thousand pounds' worth of it.