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YOUNG PERSONS AND SCEPTICISM.

Be not alarmed. We do not intend to write an orthodox homily, nor an argument or tirade against infidelity. It is our object to call the attention of young men and women, who are inclined to atheistical views, to a few important facts which ought not to be neglected in forming a correct opinion on so very important a matter. We shall take the liberty to ask a few questions to which each one ought to give fair and unequivocal answers.

There is a numerous class of young sceptics, however, for which we have such utter contempt, that we do not intend to waste a single syllable upon them. We will content ourselves with a description of a representative of this class.

He is generally boastful, conceited and ignorant. He is at heart a braggart, a bully and a coward. Being entirely lacking in manly principle, and entirely incapable of manly, independent thought, like all weak-minded persons, he is constantly trying to convince the world that he is richly endowed with these very powers. So, what does he do? Why he goes to bullying the Almighty. He boldly announces that God is a myth. He learnedly declares the Bible to be false *in toto*, when he has never read a dozen chapters. He swears by Tom Paine, when very likely he knows no more of Tom Paine than he does of Hermes Trismegistus. He argues (disputes) incessantly, on the same principle as Goldsmith's "village schoolmaster." And he does all this to establish a reputation for manhood, thought, intellectuality! But he is a miserable coward. No sooner does God show his power in some dread manifestation than he collapses like a perforated gas bag. When he feels His awful tread in the earthquake's shock, hears His voice in the hurricane, and the billowy ocean ter-pest, driving his vessel upon the death-dealing breakers, or when Pestilence stalks at noonday through the crowded city, smiting down high and low, prince and slave or when any sudden danger portends death—does this *brave* man stand firm and say: "What signifies; there is no hereafter—no God?" No, not he. He is the

first to fling himself in the dirt, and howl, and beg, and bellow, like a booby, for the mercy of his Creator whose existence he has ignored. God hates a coward who verily believe; and if such a passion can exist in the breast of Deity, with what ineffable loathing and contempt must He look down upon such a cowardly wretch! My friend, in your normal condition, you were what good old Hepsibah Stebbins—peace to her ashes—would have denominated "a pure and undefiled lass." But you have attempted a metamorphosis. You thought, cunningly, to conceal the degrading tokens of your consanguinity and descent, like a relative of yours that one, Æsop, tells about, by adroitly slipping a lion's skin over your carcass. My dear sir, you have made an egregious mistake. You have clapped on a mule's pelt, instead of the royal covering of the king of beasts, and, in your mongrel condition, your original stupidity and ugliness are ten fold more hideous and disgusting. No, sir. We have nothing to say to you. You are too stupid to comprehend our suggestions, and too *mulish* to be convinced if you could. We pass on you.

But, young comrades, among students and in the learned professions, you who are either *doubting* the merits of Christianity, or are already declaring yourselves infidels, you who are earnestly and honestly, (at least as you suppose), thinking and searching for the truth—to you we have somewhat to say.

Are you quite sure that you are not doubting or discarding the Bible because this or that successful lawyer, or this or that eminent professor has done so?

You could accept the Bible if this or that point were made plainer, or this or that doctrine were only in accordance with *reason*? Are you satisfied that you have thoroughly studied the Bible and the evidences of its authenticity, until you are positively sure that that the point you complain of *is not* made plain, and the doctrine at which you stumble *is not* rendered perfectly reasonable by the Bible itself?

You are beginning to say, "I believe thus and so" about some vital point; you say, "My theory is thus, about the great problems of Being, Existence, Creation." Have you thoroughly verified your theory by induction and deduction, by investigation and thought until you are sure it will "hold water"? or is it a sort of chimerical idea that you have seized upon, which you hardly know whether to trust or not?

Are you aware that in your speculations—your theorizing—you are wandering into the uncertain field of philosophy? Do you remember how futile has been the effort of philosophy for over twenty centuries to solve the mysteries which Inspiration professes to make plain?

Let us together take a brief review of its history to refreshen our minds. We commence with the earliest of the Greek thinkers and glance rapidly along the line of earnest searchers for truth to the end of the Socratic movement.

Here we observe some man of mighty intellect, versed in all the learning of his day, start forth transcendent among his countrymen, determined to devote his life to an arduous but god-like labor. He is sincere, honest, unselfish, large-souled and deeply in earnest. What is his task? To solve the problems of Being, Existence, Creation. He longs for light. The divinity within him yearns to speak to the divinity without. He hits upon a

theory at length which he believes to be a solution of his problem. He argues himself into the belief that he has reached the goal—that his work is ended. He passes from the scene of action, and in his place another great thinker, equally sincere, just as earnest, with the same learning, and in addition thereto versed in the philosophy of his predecessor, with the same unquenchable longing in his soul for light. What does he do? He proves the theory of the first to be false and inconsistent, and then offers one of his own, which he thinks will dispel all doubt and uncertainty forever. But his wisdom is shown to be folly by his successor, and so on to the end.

As we contemplate the earnest, life-long struggles of these men for truth—the anguish and labor of their souls to bring forth solutions to their self-imposed problems, we experience a feeling of admiration, mingled with pity, almost painful. And the immortal Three, who yet claim the wonder and admiration of the world—Pagan and Christian—which they ruled for centuries, SOCRATES, PLATO, ARISTOTLE, did they discover the bright Hesperides where grew the golden apples they so much coveted? Though they reached the ultimate of human thought, beyond which no mortal will probably ever step, they utterly failed to gain the wished for prize. Scarcely had the ashes of ARISTOTLE become cold than up rose PYRRHO, the Sceptic, and proved that the whole philosophy of the Socratics and the method, upon which so much stress was laid, was false and uncertain? Such is the history of philosophy, a hopeless, profitless wandering in pursuit of an *ignis fatuus* which has ever led the poor wanderer into more impassable morasses and thicker and more thorny brambles, leaving him at last lost and bewildered, hopelessly remote from his destination. The philosopher finds himself in an inextricable maze more tortuous in its windings than the Cretan labyrinth, well nigh fatal to the career of the redoubtable THESEUS. But alas where is the maid, ARIADNE, with her golden thread to lead him to the gracious light? Are you willing to risk yourself and your eternal destiny in this same labyrinth in idle search for that which now is generally acknowledged to be beyond the ken of the human intellect—in the region of the unknowable?

Now turn again to the Cross. Here is an explanation of "the great mystery in which we live and of which we form a part," as TYNDALL says, purporting to come from the lips of the great First Principle, the ARKA himself. The Gospel is the beautiful Guide, extending to you Inspiration, Revelation, the golden thread which shall lead you from the meshes of the web in which you are entangled out to the "perfect day!" Think of all that Christianity has accomplished, all she promises to achieve.

Does it not become you, therefore, to reflect long and well before you scorn this beneficent Guide as an impostor? Should you not be very careful, very deliberate, very certain you are right before you rudely rend the golden cord as a dangerous lure?

We turn with sadness to you, comrades, who have boldly inscribed on the top of your banner "THERE IS NO GOD," and on the bottom, "THERE IS NO HEREAFTER." Pardon us if our words show a bias. The words of the Psalmist continually ring in our ears as

we think of your theory—"The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God." Is it a satisfactory conviction to you, as a man, to reflect that you, *all of you*, your *Ego* shall lie down in the dust on a perfect equality with the ox? that you both will furnish one common dish for the worm?

Do you ever dare to lift the veil and gaze upon your (?) future destiny? Your straining eye gazes into murky, pitchy night, in which no faint glimmering star sends forth a trembling ray of hope to pierce the impenetrable blackness, and shed consolation upon your heart. Your destiny is hopeless! Ah! have you ever thought what a world of anguish and despair is concealed in that little word *hopeless*? Let me recall to your memory the oldest of primeval myths, and compare it with your belief.

PANDORA, the first woman that ever lived, according to HESIOD, received from JUPITER a beautiful box. When she opened it, there escaped therefrom, one by one, all the evils, miseries, and calamities of human life. PANDORA closed the box just in time to retain hope which lay at the very bottom.

Behold! even here the first struggles of the primitive mind produces a conception more endurable, at least, than years! Even here through fogs and mists of superstition and ignorance, shimmers a glad ray of HOPE! Ah! blessed hope! which " * * like a cordial, innocent though strong, At once inspirits and serenues."

If we must rest our eternal destiny upon a belief, let us search out the most beautiful myth of the ancients, clothe it with all the taste, culture, and refinement of the nineteenth century, and foster it. Let us have something to make *life* endurable at least. We would not restrict thought. Let honest thought, free, unprejudiced investigation be carried to the ultimate. If the Bible can not stand such a test, let it fall. But the silliest thing we know of is for a youth, without adequate knowledge or investigation, to declare himself a sceptic. We shall try ourselves by the same regimen we lay down for you, which may be summed up in these seven regulations:

1. Ever remember that your eternal welfare *may* depend on your decision.
2. Be sure you have reached your best maturity of mind before you form your opinion.
3. Let your investigation be honest, unprejudiced, and adequate.
4. Be candid. When you read the works of a great sceptic, doubter, or infidel, read also an author of equal rank on the evidences of Christianity.
5. Let your final summary and conclusion be careful and deliberate.
6. When you arrive at your conclusion be *perfectly sure* you are right. Do not simply *think* you are sure.
7. Finally, give yourself a thorough introspection and see whether you can detect any evidence of the bullyism, and cowardice we have mentioned. Then get a double mental reflector and scrutinize you back carefully, and if you find any patches of "mule pelt," for shame's sake saut your eyes and somersault blindly back into the good old orthodox cradle from which you doubtless sprung, then open your eyes, clean out the dust, and take an intelligent start.

THE SOCIETY CRITIC.

We have reference to the *average critic*, as he is seen in our own literary societies. He is an officer elected to criticise the literary performances of each meeting.