

And after growth and blossom, here they die,
 Even as he whose bones beneath them lie.
 Of men to read the writing comes not one:
Faithful is God, for He remembereth;
The Lord is mighty, and forgetteth none.

The busy hands that did this carving make,
 The eyes that wept, the voices that made moan,

Long respite from their grief and labours take;
 Their tears are dry, their lamentation done.
 The stars, like jewels on a banner spread,
 Are borne to other battles overhead.
 Still cries the grave, taunting oblivion:
Faithful is God, for He remembereth;
The Lord is mighty, and forgetteth none.

LUCY LYTTETON.

The Pilgrim's Progress.

BY THE REV. JOHN KELMAN, M.A., D.D., EDINBURGH.

Atheist.

'YONDER is a man with his back towards Zion, and he is coming to meet us.' For any sensitive spirit the combination is of tragic significance. It is one thing to know that there are atheists in the world, and men with their backs towards all that we hope and believe in. It is another thing to confront one such man. Something notable will come of such an encounter.

In the distance he is sure to be 'going softly,' and we are somewhat surprised to find on meeting him that this is an atheist of the blatant sort, loud and rude and roaring. We are relieved as well as surprised. Noisy atheism is a much less dangerous matter than atheism that 'goes softly.'

We have abundant means of knowing what John Bunyan meant by Atheist. There was No Truth in the *Holy War*, tearing down the image of Shaddai and the laws of that king, and setting up the horned image of Diabolus in its place. In the same book there was Atheism himself, who haunts 'Villain's Lane,' and 'Drunkard's Row, just at Rascal Lane's End,' and who 'goes softly' when occasion serves, but in these places speaks out his atheistic ideas boldly. There was Mr. Badman, who was an Atheist, 'if such a thing as an Atheist could be.' These bitter passages have life behind them, and we know from other sources whom he was thinking of. In *Grace Abounding* we read of those Ranters who formed such a wild background to the Puritan faith and morals—filthy men, who 'would also deny that there was a God,' etc. Perhaps the most interesting figure we know of as a prototype for Mr. Atheist is Antilegon in *The Plain Man's Pathway*,

that book which did so much for Bunyan. Antilegon is one of those who 'gad about to sermons and get no good; full of malice and ready to do an ill turn to their neighbours; much occupied with their dress; holding that lust is natural and excusable in youth and covetousness in later years; defending drunkenness and lying and idleness and swearing ('if we do no worse than that!'): professing dangerous views as to Election and Eternal Punishment; irritated by a man of tender conscience who is afraid of punishment after death, and offering him a list of books to chase away his forebodings, among which are *Helen of Rumming* and *Beves of Hampton*. From the opening of his talk, on the subject of the price of a cow, to its last sentence, proposing to go home because evening is drawing on, he stands for a full length portrait of the man of the world.

All these instances show how thoroughly, for Bunyan, character and opinions are bound up together. Many things go towards the making of an atheist. Dr. Whyte's list of questions about his past experience is full of suggestion. Atheist's own confession that he had found the way tedious is very near the root of the matter. But the tediousness of any journey depends upon the heart of the traveller quite as much as upon the character of the way. Christ's command, 'Have salt in yourselves,' doubtless has many meanings, but among them there is certainly this, that it is every man's duty to lead an interesting life. For the interest or dulness of life are matters far more within a man's own option than is usually supposed. It depends largely upon our strenuousness whether the life we lead is interesting or not, and it is possible to force an interest in the dullest

commonplace by accepting it as a challenge and pitting our imagination and our will against the monotony. Anything which we set ourselves to overcome immediately gains interest from the sense of antagonism, the ring of challenge scattering the sense of drudgery and putting colour into the greyest mile of the journey. A nobler cause of Atheism is that 'pestilence that walketh in darkness,' unsanctified sorrow and affliction. Readers of Wolfram will remember Parzival's words in 'Trevrezent':—

'A man's heart is mine, and sore wounded, it acheth and acheth still,
Yet once it was glad and joyous, and free from all thought of ill.
. . . And I do well to lay it on Him, the burden of this my shame,
Who can help if He will, nor withholdeth the aid that man fain would claim.
But *me* alone, hath He helped not, whate'er men of Him may speak,
But ever He turneth from me, and His wrath on my head doth wreak.'

Yet of this there is no sign in Bunyan's Atheist. He is of the cruder sort, whose atheism is obviously the result of his own behaviour. Bacon, in his profound essay on this subject, says: 'It is true, that a little philosophy inclineth man's mind to atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to religion. . . . The contemplative atheist is rare . . . the great atheists indeed are hypocrites, which are ever handling holy things but without feeling; so as they must needs be cauterized in the end.' 'I did believe it when I denied it,' says Francis Spira, in a passage well known to Bunyan, 'but now I neither believe that, nor the doctrine of the Roman Church; I believe nothing, I have no faith, no trust, no hope.'

Atheist's Self-Justification.

His one argument is that for twenty years he had sought the Celestial City and had never yet seen it. Atheist is in more meanings than one 'a man of sense.' He has no poetry in him, no imagination, and his atheism is the final doom of crude common sense. He has never, like Richter, 'heard the shriek of a fatherless world,' nor seen the horror of the black eye-socket, empty, bottomless in place of the Father's eye. That was how the Universe looked to Richter when he heard in his dream the voice that told him there was no

God. But this man has not soul enough to feel the frightful loneliness of the silence of a Godless universe. He has not imagination enough to go mad for want of a God.

It is a characteristic touch of genius which puts into his mouth the words, 'There is not such a place as you dream of in all this world.' The answer is obvious, 'But there is in the world to come.'

'I looked beyond the world for truth and beauty,
Sought, found, and did my duty.'

Even on his own low ground of argument it might have been replied to him that seeing is no test of reality. Had he ever seen either his own backbone or his brain? Yet in his self-confidence there is a profound belief in the reality of both these unseen things! Blessed are those who have intellect enough to believe further than they can see! But had he been inclined to take higher ground, and to climb the Delectable Mountains, he would have seen the city as Christian and Hopeful had done. The spiritual man is not moved by the argument of the unspiritual that he has not seen that in which the spiritual man believes. There are things that cannot be seen but on the heights, and he who refuses to climb above the levels of sense and common sense has never been in a position either to affirm or to deny. This is the inevitable dogmatism of faith, but it is a dogmatism justified by real experience, and if the denier has not had that experience, so much the worse for him, but none the worse for the argument.

Finally, even a man of common sense would have seen if he had gone on. Imagination and spirituality are not possible to all in the same manner as they are to some. But faithfulness and constancy are possible to all. Even the most unimaginative pilgrim, if he will endure to the end, will see the Celestial City when he shall have reached the further bank of the River. How much of America did Columbus see till the final day arrived? Whether a man shall see heaven or not may depend upon how long he shall go on looking for it. 'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.'

The Dogmatism of Atheist.

The loud laughter and the over-confident assertion tell rather of a man assured than in

suspense of judgment. The credulity of unbelief is one of the most amazing phenomena of human nature. It has perhaps never been more strikingly exposed than Bishop Earle's portrait of 'A Sceptic in Religion' (quoted, Kerr Bain, i. 70): 'A man guiltier of credulity than he is taken to be; for it is out of his belief of everything that he fully believes nothing. . . . He finds reason for all opinions, truth in none; indeed, the least reason perplexes him, and the best will not satisfy him. . . . In short, his whole life is a question, and his salvation a greater, which death only concludes, and then he is resolved.' Such a man, in whom the habit of doubt has come to be a chronic and deepening paralysis of the very faculty and power to believe, has to justify so unnatural and inhuman a state of intellect by loud assertion, drowning the crying voices of the heart by the loudness of his laughter. But such Atheism as this is no longer a negative but a positive affair. It has foreclosed the question, and is dogmatizing on the other side. It may use a word like Agnosticism, which professes to be a humble and indeed confessional word, declaring mere ignorance. But by Agnosticism it means not that we know nothing, but that nothing *can* be known. Here is a scepticism far beyond that of Hume and Huxley—at least beyond what they put forward as their ground of uncertainty, the lack of evidence. Here is negative certainty and dogmatic denial.

And the ground of it, according to Bunyan, is in the will rather than the intellect. It is that atheism to which the author of *Natural Religion* devotes one of his most striking and far-reaching chapters. 'There is an atheism,' says he, 'which is a mere speculative crotchet, and there is an atheism which is a great moral disease. . . . The purest form of such real atheism might be called by the general name of *wilfulness*.' It is that state of mind and will in which a man sets himself up against the universe, and deliberately chooses his own will against the general law. This is that fool who hath said in his heart "No God!"—he has said that in his heart, because his heart first said it to him. In a word, like Turnaway and so many other pilgrims whom John Bunyan holds in utter contempt, this man's back is to Mount Zion—the worst thing that can be said of any man.

Thus there is no quarrel with reason in John Bunyan. The spurious Part III. of the *Pilgrim's*

Progress introduces this, in its passages introducing Human Reason and Natural Speculations—a recurring habit of thought which has found curious revival in that outburst of attack on Reason in the later nineteenth century, which recalls the writings of Newman, A. J. Balfour, Kidd, and others. Such attacks are founded on a confusion of Reason with Reasoning—a very different thing. It is true that God and the truths of religion are beyond the reach of reasoning in the syllogistic sense. Yet they are given in Reason, and without them the conception of a Reasonable Universe falls to pieces. It is our trust in the Reasonableness of things which is the very essence of our faith. It is true that Bunyan does not feel himself called upon to discuss such questions in the abstract. But it is very striking to notice how his unerring instinct for truth keeps him from the mistakes into which his plagiarist falls when dealing with such characters as this.

Atheist's Reception by the Pilgrims.

When Atheist said that they were to have nothing but trouble for their pains, Christian mistook his meaning. It never occurred to him at that time to think of any one denying the reality of the world to come. Its powers had been felt too gloriously and too painfully in his soul of late. But his recent shame had not worn off his conscience, and there was a readiness to fear which is exceedingly true to life. So he, who is just recovering from the strokes of the angel, at once thinks that this man must be meaning to foretell of his rejection. There are two kinds of doubt. One, regarding one's own condition in relation to the acknowledged facts of religion; the other, regarding the accuracy and credibility of these so-called facts. Christian, for a moment, mistakes the latter for the former.

Then, as if to cover his error, and to draw off attention from his having exposed his conscience to such a man as Atheist, he nimbly turns to Hopeful with his question, by way of testing Hopeful's faith. This superiority of attitude in Christian strikes us as odd in one whose back is still raw with the strokes of well-deserved punishment. It is frequently the most disagreeable thing about him. He cannot bear to be in the wrong even in trifles, and he often makes himself unconsciously a foil to the sweet simplicity

and humility of Hopeful, who thinks less of himself and his dignity than Christian does. It is by such small characteristics, persistent and recurring, that a character in fiction gains individuality and consistency. In nothing does Bunyan show his mastery in his art more finely than in this. His men are not symbols, but live men, living out each his own life with its qualities and their defects.

Hopeful's eager remonstrance is characteristic of the guileless and eager heart he is. His last words, free from all thought of resentment, from all hint of criticism of his brother, are the summing up of this pilgrim's spirit—'Now do I rejoice in hope of the glory of God.' Such 'glad hearts without reproach or blot' are immune to the infection of atheism. He needs no arguments, for his spirit 'burns straight flame.'

Yet he uses arguments, and they are sound. The first is experience. They had seen the gate of the city from the Delectable Mountains. Let them trust their experience and walk by faith. What we have seen we have seen, and

Tasks in hours of insight willed
Must be through hours of gloom fulfilled.

There is a story of an old woman dying in a cottage in the Scottish lowlands, who quoted to a friend the psalm:

I shall not die, but live, and shall
The works of God discover.

A foolish and irreligious nurse who was attending upon her replied, 'Na, na, ye're deein', Katie.' The dying woman turned to her friend and said, 'She kens naething about it.'

Hopeful's other argument concerns the character of Atheist. 'Let us take heed to ourselves now, lest he should prove a flatterer also. . . .' 'Take heed, he is one of the Flatterers: remember what it hath cost us once already for hearkening to such kind of fellows.' There is much shrewdness here, and a wiser insight into character than Hopeful usually gets credit for. There was little apparent flattery in the 'very great laughter' with which Atheist had greeted them, or in his explanation of it—'I laugh to see what ignorant persons you are.'

Yet the quick intelligence of Hopeful discovered the subtle appeal that lay beneath the rudeness. The strongest weapon of Atheism is its flattery of man's pride of intellect, and the sense of superiority which it claims over those that believe. It may be safely said that if there were no pride of intellect there would be little Atheism.

The Departure.

He goes back laughing, but he goes alone. George Macdonald has somewhere said that the sight of a man's back is one of the most pathetic of things. The saying is not, perhaps, convincing at first. But such a scene as this supplies a commentary which interprets the novelist's meaning. The helpless loneliness of a man out on his journey among the mighty forces of the Universe and without God, is terrible indeed. 'In all this wide universe,' writes Richter, in his famous first Flower-Piece, 'there is none so utterly solitary as the denier of God. With orphaned heart—a heart which has lost the Great Father—he mourns beside the immeasurable corpse of Nature, a corpse no longer animated or held together by the Great Spirit of the Universe—a corpse which grows in its grave; and by this corpse he mourns until he himself crumbles and falls away from it into nothingness.' And we feel that he is going back not only from hope and gladness, but in character also. That back, dwindling to a speck down the stretch of the highway, tells of a degenerating man. For, in the words of Bacon, 'as Atheism is in all respects hateful, so in this, that it depriveth human nature of the means to exalt itself above human frailty.'

NOTE.—Part III., by a curious freak of imagination, continues and enlarges the story of Atheist. His name had been Well-meaning, but he became Atheist through the wiles of Human Reason. In the Enchanted Ground he fell asleep, and in his sleep walked back (meeting Christian and Hopeful, and laughing at them while still asleep), till he came to Vanity Fair, where he dwelt a great while. He was nearly killed by a thunderbolt there, and he reappears as Convert, who very earnestly warns the pilgrims not to sleep in the Enchanted Ground.