

GOLDEN THRONE.

[A ROMANCE BY SAMUEL P. PUTNAM.]

knack of begging, and raising funds for the carrying on of church enterprises. He did some practical good in his way, it must be admitted. He established gymnasiums and coffee-houses, and helped young men to procure situations and spend their evenings with some sort of profit; but all that he did was so saturated with dogma that it was utterly impossible for him to give a piece of bread without giving a piece of advice. In fact, he couldn't tell a man the right street or number without cautioning him not to be on the road to damnation. He was a thorough busybody, and acted as if the salvation of the whole world was upon his shoulders.

Of all things, he detested a heretic; and to deny the existence of hell-fire was almost the unpardonable sin. The only one who made any attempt to oppose the redoubtable Skinflint was the Rev. Ezekiel Milkanwater. He was not quite so barbarous as the rest of them. He had some elements of civilization. He was not cruel and he was not bigoted. He read Darwin and slightly affected Spencer. He was very much in favor of the mythical theory of creation, and fell back upon the Christian fathers for support. He was an easy-spoken man and hated quarrels, and was in favor of "sweetness and light." He was of a poetic turn of mind and revelled in Tennyson, but had not one particle of intellectual stamina. His mind was floating as a dream. He had no fixed ideas, no continuity of thought. He was entirely backboneless, and, like a chameleon, reflected all the hues of every sentiment about him. He had a wonderful way of saying nothing. He could not be accused of heresy, for he never made a definite proposition. When it came to the test, he could believe as many horrible dogmas as Skinflint. Why should he deny them, and thereby lose the least comfort in this world? He was not the man to exchange a theoretical hell for a practical one by sacrificing a single luxury to his conscience.

Skinflint made the first address. "It is important," said he, "that we settle the foundations of the Church. We are living in very dangerous times. The world is full of error. The word of God is being disregarded, and men will not submit to divine authority. We must take our stand on the rock of ages. Our God is a consuming fire. We need to be saved from his wrath. We must proclaim the atonement, that is our central truth; but why an atonement, if there is no hell? There is no salvation, unless we are lost,

Christ died because of our sins. We must preach this, otherwise we cannot arouse men, we cannot advance the Church, we cannot make it triumphant. I love my young brother, and I want he should see the error of his course and turn from it. If he does not, then we must deal with him as a disobedient child and pour upon him the thunders of our condemnation."

Skinflint was greeted with great applause, and his remarks were sustained by the two or three who followed him.

The Rev. Milkanwater then made his little speech, slightly differing from Skinflint, and deprecating any severe action:—

"I agree of course with Brother Skinflint as to the necessity of preaching hell-fire. It is a fundamental part of our beautiful system of doctrine. I always devote one Sunday every year to its special enforcement, and I think it does my congregation good. They are a little more careful of their behavior for a week or two. They have a realizing sense of what may happen. I am a stanch believer in hell. I feel that it gives me a strength and joy for my work that nothing else does. But I advise reserve in this matter, and tenderness and brotherly kindness. Remember this is a doctrine that the unregenerate soul is apt to rebel against, as seeming too harsh and cruel; but we must not set our blind reason against the great Jehovah. We must not be at enmity with God, for his ways are not as our ways. I sympathize with Brother Demorest. He is too good-natured, that's all. He hasn't looked upon the darker side of God. He sees only the beautiful. We must persuade him. We mustn't insist upon too much at once. As for myself, I believe in an eternal hell [applause], and that perhaps ninety-nine out of every hundred will go to it [renewed applause]; but it isn't really necessary for my brother to believe so many will perish.

"It will be sufficient for the purpose of our council, if our young brother will assent to this doctrine in a certain sense and to a certain extent; for it is all-important to preserve the soundness of our creed, or that we do not dishonor it before the world."

This address was also greeted with applause, for ministers dearly love a compromise. Most of them wanted Demorest in their ranks, and they were eager to make the test easy. Milkanwater was followed by several who advocated his lenient way of dealing with the accused; and it was evident that persuasion was to be used as well as compulsion in order that the "lost sheep" might be effectually "corralled." There were loud cries of "Amen!" and "Glory to God!"

all over the house, and the scene was both amusing and pathetic.

Balderdash made the closing speech and appeal:—

"I have," said he, "the kindest feelings toward our wandering brother. I sympathize fully with Milkanwater in his efforts to make as easy as possible his return to the fold. We must be careful, however, and not let the bars down altogether. I admit that we must yield somewhat to the spirit of the age, and moderate in our demands upon the faith of the people. But the line must be drawn, and there is a point beyond which we cannot go. We must stand for revelation as opposed to human reason. I consider it the most noble act of my life to bow down humbly to the Bible and accept its teaching, no matter how much it contradicts what my unaided intellect affirms. The Bible reveals a hell, an eternal hell. There is no doubt of that. We may soften this fact as much as we please, but admit it we must at all hazards. Unless we do, the prop of our faith is gone. If we have no hell, then we have no heaven; and so without hell we are lost. There is no hope for the elect. I want our brother to put himself upon the side of hell. I do not ask him to preach it, though I myself desire it. To me, it is a very strengthening doctrine. It gives a force and solemnity to religion that nothing else can.

"It is for our own highest welfare that we preserve that part of our creed. Only let it be understood that our brother accepts it, and he may say as little about it as he chooses. We come to him in the spirit of Christian charity. We don't wish to fetter him, but we want he should stand for something. I am sure he will acknowledge the error of his ways, and like an obedient child admit the existence of the worm that dieth not. On this basis, we can shake hands and be brothers, and labor for the glory of God."

Demorest arose to make his reply. He was greeted with a round of cheers and "amens" and "hallelujahs." There was an evident purpose to move upon his good nature, and by a flood of emotional sympathy compel him to say yes. It was a sore trial, and it required all the manhood that Demorest possessed to meet the point distinctly.

"Brethren," said Demorest, "I am sorry that this issue has come upon us. I do not see any need of it. It does not strike me as it does you. I cannot look upon the doctrine of hell as fundamental to our religion, though I admit that the Bible teaches it. [Cries of "Good!" "Good!"] But it teaches something far more profoundly true; namely, humanity. This is to me the deepest meaning of Jesus. This is what he really taught, for which he died

—love and mercy and self-sacrifice. It is that which has conquered the world, and made Christianity of any value. This is the soul of our religion. I concerned myself with nothing more. The spirit of love as illustrated by Jesus, has been the theme of my discourses. In doing so I believe that I have come home to the real needs of men and women. You admit that my preaching has been acceptable. You do not ask me to change its character. You only ask that I give my public assent to a dogma. This dogma you will all declare is abhorrent to our human feeling. We revolt against it. We believe in it, because the Bible says so, and because the Church is built upon the Bible. You compel me to say that I cannot accept this doctrine. I do not surrender my reason to the Bible or to you. [There was a tremendous, unanimous groan from the whole assembly.] This is a barbaric doctrine. It came from the brain of a savage. If one actually believed it, it would make him insane. You do not believe it. The people do not want it, and you have not manhood to tear it from your creed. You are the slaves of a Book, worse even than a pope. I have taught the best part of that Book, but the worst part I shall never teach. It is unworthy of our advancement. There is something beautiful in the old religion, and I have clung to it on that account. I have sought to draw forth its hidden sweetness, and make it serviceable. If, however, you are determined to ally the Church with the theology of a savage past, and compel me to lie, then will I accept your fiat and go forth. But remember the fiat that sends me forth destroys your Church. If you put yourselves with a dead barbarian, then the grave opens before you, and you will tumble into it. You will perish, even as these cruel dogmas will perish."

Of course, after such a speech, Demorest was unanimously expelled from the conference, although three-fourths of the ministers who condemned him felt the truth of every word he uttered.

"Glad it's over with," said Demorest. "I'm free now. I know my course. Henceforth, the universe is mine. What shall I do? That I can't tell. For the time, I can only think and dream. The way of action is not clear. But changes are immense and rapid. There is a great field before us—vast opportunities. The work of Chainey in Boston, of Miln in Chicago, of Adler in New York, show that the deep heart of the world is awaking to a grander ideal. They voice the new and golden hope. They are the prophets of that which is to come fresh and beautiful from Nature herself. I may be able to do something myself. I cannot tell; but whether I do or not, that mighty