

A story written by a student of the Liberal University in the late examination in rhetoric

The Ghosts of Silverdale.

BY LORA AMES.

SILVERDALE is a beautiful little valley in the northern part of Switzerland. Situated at its head is a small village, a winding, silvery stream runs through it. A small, deep, clear lake overshadowed by rocky cliffs, is on one side and a forest of tall trees on the other. It is a very picturesque place, for beautiful flowers bloom in the forest and tall ferns grow up out of damp, green moss on the bank of the lake, underneath the cliff, over which clear, sparkling water trickles in the sunshine.

The people who live in this place are quiet and peaceful. They are in perfect harmony with their surroundings, for the sweet monotony of their lives is as unbroken as the dropping of the water over the cliffs by the lake.

I spent one whole delightful summer in Silverdale. When the day was warm I used to take my book and go to the lake to read. It was so silent, and such a soothing calmness would steal over me that sometimes I would lay my book aside and give myself up to day-dreams.

A battle had once been fought on the banks of this lake, and the villagers claimed that on certain nights during the year, the ghosts of the dead soldiers, who, it seemed, could not rest in peace, would come back and hover over the lake in misty form. The people firmly believed this and told it for the truth.

One night, after I had been in Silverdale about two months, I was seized with such a restlessness that I could not sleep, and being impelled by some unknown force, I went out on the balcony to walk up and down that I might become calm. Passing out as if in a dream and gazing away across the valley, my attention was suddenly drawn to mysterious, white, human-like forms gliding back and forth over the lake. I rubbed my eyes and looked again, but no, I was not mistaken; I saw the same thing—surely the ghosts of the dead soldiers. I was very superstitious at that time, and it fairly made me tremble. But I was not a coward, and I determined to find out if possible whether it might or might not come from some natural cause.

I looked carefully till my eyes were cleared and I could still see the dim forms hovering over the lake. I went back into the house, but not to sleep. Superstitious fears and fantasies haunted me till the welcome dawn of a new day, when I told what I had seen. The people were not at all surprised, for they had seen it many times.

In a few days a new boarder

came to the place where I was staying. Of course he was told the tale. He did not look at it in the light I did, however, but laughed heartily and said he did not believe it. The next night the ghosts appeared and were shown to him. After he had been there about a week, he told us at the breakfast table one morning that he had an explanation to make concerning the haunted lake. We all gazed at him in open eyed astonishment.

He said he had discovered that certain times in the year a mist arises over the lake, and being so near the black cliff, it appears to be quite white. Then the moon shines from above the cliff and casts the shadows of some low shrubbery on the mist, making it appear like misty forms to the strong imagination of people who believed in ghosts.

Most of the villagers did not believe him, but upon making careful research, I found what he said to be true, and since then I have never believed in ghosts, and, thanks to this lesson of investigation, I am now entirely cured of superstition.

Little Stories.

Once when Bismarck was leaving home in 1866, his youngest son asked him how long he was to be away. He replied that he did not know. At that moment a servant came in to inquire how many bottles of cognac were to be packed in the prince's luggage. "Twenty-four," was the answer. "Ah," papa," cried the terrible infant, "now I know how long you are to be from home—twenty-four days!"

While dining at his son-in-law's one evening, it was noticed that Pasteur dipped his cherries in his glass of water and then carefully wiped them before eating them. As this caused some amusement, he held forth at length on the dangers of the microbes with which the cherries were covered. Then he leaned back in his chair, wiped his forehead and unconsciously picked up his glass, drank off the contents, microbes and all.

Fritz Williams, the actor, was sitting one evening in a New York cafe, when two very young men came in. They beckoned condescendingly to a waiter. "Waiter," said one, "bring me a chop. Mind it's just right, now. Just mention my name to the cook." "You may bring me a steak," said the other, just as grandly, "and tell the cook who it is for." The waiter was half way across the room, which was crowded, when Fritz Williams hailed him. "Waiter," he drawled, "bring me half a dozen Blue Points and mention my name to every darned oyster."

Knowledge and Belief.

BY B. F. UNDERWOOD.

Many people make no distinction between knowledge and belief, but the distinction is one which it is important to bear in mind, especially in controversy. Some persons think they know a great deal because they believe a great deal, and such persons imagine others know less than they do, because they assert only what they know, being reserved in regard to what they do not know.

One may believe much and know but little, and one may know a great deal and have a very short creed. The man of large experience and knowledge is cautious and discriminating in accepting unverified statements. The ignorant man is less capable of calculating probabilities and is easily imposed upon by false statements. It is easier to believe as one has been taught than to doubt such teaching. It is easier to think in old ruts which have been worn deep, than it is to strike out mentally in new directions, to think along new lines. It is easier to assent to an old creed, making the authority of a name or book serve in the place of proof, than it is to examine a subject, weigh evidence and make that the basis of belief or disbelief.

It is men who wish to control others and the slaves of authority so controlled, who repeat the threat, "He that believeth not shall be damned," and demand mental submission on penalty of excommunication here and eternal torment hereafter. It is men accustomed more or less to the authority of creeds and to the idea of the pre-eminent importance of believing this or that dogma, who pride themselves more on what they believe than on what they know, and more on the amount of the marvelous they can swallow than on the amount of evidence they can adduce to sustain their views, or on the strength of the reasons they can give for adopting and adhering to them.

Belief may exist without any real evidence and in conflict with the truth. But what one knows is always true. When a man says I know that I feel and think, he states a fact of consciousness which is beyond empirical proof and deeper than demonstration. When he affirms that he existed millions of years ago or that he will exist millions of years hence, he states what he believes, not what he knows. That which is believed may be as true as that which is known. What is believed by one person may be known to another. The evidence for belief may be of every degree of strength from one to ninety-nine in a scale of one hundred, zero representing no evidence and one hundred representing knowledge.

When a proposition is made which the mind has the strongest reasons for believing, next to the facts of consciousness, and the axioms and demonstrations of mathematics, most people say they know that proposition is true, when strictly speaking it is one of those statements of a conviction which, while it falls short of the requirements of actual knowledge, belongs to the highest or least doubtful class of beliefs, and of course for every practical purpose may have all the validity of knowledge.

A conviction is not to be treated as of no value simply because it is a belief. Beliefs move men to action; knowledge guides and corrects them. But before a rational man can ask another to accept his belief he must show that it has a good foundation, and if he fails to convince another he may have reason to suspect that the evidence is weak, or that he has not presented it clearly, or that the person he would convert is not mentally adapted to appreciate the evidence, which in time, however, may produce conviction. Theological teachers have prepared statements of what should be believed, declared disbelief and even doubt sinful in advance, and have then pronounced all who reject their theological nostrums as deserving and destined to eternal suffering.

Men may be urged to examine, but to urge them to believe is to treat them like children. If the evidence of any claim is good, it will sooner or later be accepted by all rational minds.

A Close Call.

Mr. Louis Tebbe, writing for the Freethought Ideal under the heading, "A Trip West," refers to our work in the following words:

"Mr. Schwab took us to the Capital of Oregon, the State House of which is a beautiful building. I was up in the dome, which is as near heaven as I ever expect to be. This is a fine valley in which small grain is raised in abundance. We were near Silverton at this point, where the Liberal School is, but my time was so limited that I could not visit them, but I read the Torch of Reason each week and I think it one of the best Freethought papers published, and they are doing a great work in the west which will be an aid to our work throughout. It does us good to find wide awake Liberals, for so many seem indifferent."

We do not know Mr. Tebbe, but we are very sorry he did not visit us. If he ever visits Oregon again we invite him to call. We also extend this invitation to any others among our Secular friends. Come and see us at our work.

The church members are bad eggs, but sing of hatching out with wings!—[Flaming Sword.]