



Don't Shirk.

BY ELLA WHEELER WILCOX.

I KNOW not whence I came,
I know not whither I go,
But the fact stands clear
That I am here
In this world of pleasure and woe;
And out of the mist and murk
Another truth shines plain—
It is in my power
Each day and hour
To add to its joy or pain.
I know that the earth exists;
It's none of my business why.
I can not find out
What it's all about—
I would waste but my time to try.
My life is a brief, brief thing;
I am here for a little space;
And while I stay,
I would like, if I may,
To brighten and better the place.
The trouble, I think, with us all
Is lack of high conceit;
If each man thought
He was sent to the spot
To make it a bit more sweet,
How soon we could gladden the world,
How easily right all wrong,
If nobody shirked
And each one worked
To help his fellows along.

The Decay of the Old Faith.

BY B. F. UNDERWOOD.

THE decay of theological belief in this country the past twenty-five years has been very rapid. Immense numbers have been reached and sensibly influenced by lectures and writings directed against the popular faith, and a multitude of causes have combined to destroy or diminish confidence in the creeds, and to diffuse unbelief far and wide.

Many who have been affected by these influences, without a scientific education, unschooled in systems of thought, and unaccustomed to much, if any, reflection on the foundation of morals, have no well-defined or well-grounded ethical philosophy; while nearly all have been taught from infancy to regard theology and morality as inseparable, the latter, indeed, as dependent upon and secondary to the former.

It is therefore a matter of regret that the decay of faith has not been accompanied by an equally marked acquaintance with and acceptance of that positive thought upon which modern thinkers rely to furnish the needed guarantees of a moral life and the incentive to a lofty moral character. It is unquestionable that thousands have discarded the faith with which they were taught to associate all their best conceptions of character and conduct, without understanding a philoso-

phy divested of supernatural features, and capable of supplying the motives and the basis of moral rectitude and social order. Many are in the ranks of Skeptics and Free-thinkers, not because of any deep or earnest thought they have given the subject of religion, but because they have been drawn into a strong current of thought and borne along like so much driftwood on its surface. A large proportion of them are still very strongly under the influence of their early theological teachings, and are full of inherited superstitious tendencies, which are far deeper than the disbelief or doubt which they now proclaim. Hence, the inconsistency, credulity, intolerance, indifference to science, and practical disregard and dislike of scientific methods, desire for "leaders" and readiness to be led in the name of liberty and reform by demagogues, exhibited by so many professed Liberals.

It is fortunate that the average man can not suddenly relieve himself of the influences of early belief; for, however erroneous, since it is intimately associated in his mind with moral ideas and feelings of obligation, its total destruction, before correct beliefs could be accepted and their influence could be woven into the mental structure, would leave him in an undesirable and unsafe condition. For, even in spite of the resistance offered by old beliefs and inherited tendencies, transitions have been so rapid as to involve a temporary loosening of moral restraints. In such times the old standards are destroyed faster than the new ones can be evolved out of the confusion resulting from the mental break-up. That which has been considered the foundation of every virtue is disbelieved or doubted ere the mind has come to understand the more rational views, and especially before it has acquired the habit and the aptitude practically to connect motive and conduct with these but partially assimilated views.

In this country, the past few years, the work of destructive criticism among the pronounced Liberals has been more extensive and more felt than the labors of the comparatively few who have devoted their efforts to constructive work in the domain of thought. It is true that in the field of science, Darwin, Haeckel, Huxley, Tyndall and others have, by their discoveries and reasonings, profoundly influenced thinkers and modified popular belief. Mill, Spencer and oth-

er profound philosophic minds have given to the world positive thought which has been received by thousands and is percolating down through the intellectual strata of enlightened lands. A number of the best representatives of Liberalism have emphasized the positive side of liberal thought, and now and then has appeared a journal or periodical that has endeavored to gain attention and get support as an organ of positive Liberalism.

But a large class, to which we have alluded in this article, are not in a condition to be reached by these authors and publications, except indirectly and slowly, as all classes are ultimately made to feel the influence of great discoveries and reforms. The demand among such is for cheap pamphlets criticising the Bible, not for works like Spencer's "Data of Ethics," Darwin's "Origin of Species," Lubbock's "History of Civilization," Mill's "Liberty," or Lecky's "History of Morals." While there has been the past dozen years a steady and enormous increase in the number of intelligent and educated Free-thinkers, it is also true that the number of superficial, ignorant people—who are in an anarchical condition of thought, whose Liberalism goes no farther than disbelief in the orthodox doctrines in which they were educated—has likewise increased.

That there is anything in modern liberal thought which, when fully understood, tends to encourage immorality, or to sap the foundations of character, has never been shown, although this is constantly affirmed by theological writers. Even if the transition of thought in this country has been accompanied by moral disturbance along the line of least resistance, where the old restraints are the most weakened and where the violence of passion is quick to manifest itself, we have here only what occurred in France during the early years of the Reformation. And it would be as unjust to ascribe the increased licentiousness in France during that period to the great principles of the Reformation as to ascribe similar evils to the liberal thought of today. In both cases the irregularities may be due to the unsettled mental condition resulting from the rapid change from the old faith to the new.

Let no one be disheartened by the repulsive characteristics of some self-styled reformers, or by the superficiality and demagogism

of some self-constituted leaders, or the erratic conduct of cranks who are attracted to free platforms, or the loose theories and moral deformities of some men found in the ranks of Liberalism. Human nature is not perfect. The average man has but a thin coating of intellectual culture, beneath which is solid savagery. The progress of the race has been marked in every age by changes which seemed to many to involve the most ruinous consequences, but which are now seen to have been but necessary incidents in great intellectual and moral movements. We must not expect that progress will continue without any exhibition of weakness and selfishness during transitional periods, when changes occur more rapidly than some minds can adjust themselves to the new conditions.

Absurdity of Pretended Miracles.

BY JEAN MESLIER.

AN attempt is made to persuade us that men who have been favored by the most high have received from him the power to perform miracles; but in order to perform a miracle it is necessary to have the faculty of creating new causes capable of producing effects opposed to those which ordinary causes can produce. Can we realize how God can give to men the inconceivable power of creating causes out of nothing? Can it be believed that an unchangeable god can communicate to man the power to change or rectify his plan, a power which, according to his essence, an immortal being cannot have himself? Miracles, far from doing much honor to God, far from proving the divinity of religion, destroy evidently the idea which is given to us of God, of his immutability, of his incommunicable attributes, and even of his omnipotence. How can a theologian tell us that a god who embraced at once the whole of his plan, who could make but perfect laws, who can change nothing in them, should be obliged to employ miracles to make his projects successful, or grant to his creatures the faculty of performing prodigies, in order to execute his divine will? Is it probable that God needs the support of men? An omnipotent being, whose wishes are always gratified, a being who holds in his hand the hearts and minds of his creatures, needs but to wish in order to make them believe all he desires.