

## Ridicule as a Moral Weapon



REAT achievements have been wrought in this world by one kind of movement and another. Sometimes a war, with a wonderful leader at its head is necessary to effect the upheaval; sometimes it is the strenuous work of such a man as Luther or of a little band of men. Often parliaments and councils are convinced and brought to action by the telling argument of some member, a statesman whose name goes down in the history of his nation as one of the Great. All these are momentous influences; they have effected great things in the past and undoubtedly will in future, but there is one world weapon which I have not mentioned, a weapon more subtle, more powerful in its sway than any of the others; and that is the weapon of ridicule.

No matter in what age you take it, no matter whether it is in the life of some one person, or in that of a whole community, state or even nation, ridicule is always a compelling force. Instinctively we shrink from being laughed at. Perhaps we have been argued with, the subject of discussion has been gone over thoroughly but we blindly persist in our course; perhaps our friends have plead with us, used the utmost powers of persuasion, yet stubbornly we refuse to be moved; but let even a hint of ridicule come to our ears, and an uneasy feeling of guilt creeps over us, we turn this way and that and finding no means of escape we quietly, half self-apologetically, begin to mend our ways. Such is human nature that even pleasant laughter is barely endured, much less that which carries with it the sting of sarcasm.

What is true of the individual is true of the class and so we find one of the great weapons of history has been ridicule. Voltaire lived in an age of fermentation; the principles, the rule, the religion of the Middle Ages were becoming irksome to modern France; but there had as yet been no agitation of any strength. Men were afraid to say what they thought, the new knowledge or awakening interest in new knowledge, was as yet suppressed when Voltaire arose and became the center of the uprising against old customs,