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"MANY SHALL RUN TO AND FRO, AND KNOWLEDGE SHALL BE INCREASED."—DANIEL xii. 4.

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GENERAL LITERATURE.

THE COURSE OF INFIDELITY:

A SOLEMN WARNING.

MERLIN was a young man of respectable line, age, and ample fortune. His parents, although not evangelically pious, paid to religion an outward respect, and observed its forms. The son, therefore, was brought up in the general belief of religion, although without any very distinct views of its spiritual nature. Before he had arrived at his majority, he was left an orphan and an heir. Of a sanguine temperament, freed from parental restraint, possessing all the facilities for vicious indulgence, and withal encouraged by the society of those who abandoned themselves, took a pride in overcoming his scruples, he became, as might have been expected, criminal in his habits. He was not, however, easy; harassed by an unquiet conscience which would interpose in the midst of his guilty revels, and remind him of a judgment to come, he felt that his cup of pleasure was mingled with wormwood and gall. This conviction, instead of inducing him to renounce his guilty career, led him to inquire how he might pursue it without molestation. His happiness seemed to depend on his ability to disbelieve the Christian religion, and to cast off its restraints. For this end he willingly listened to the cavils of infidels, eagerly pursued their most malignant writings, and thoroughly imbued his mind with their sentiments. His efforts so far succeeded, that he regarded religion as a fable, and its professors as unhappy dupes, who were foregoing the pleasures of this life in the vain expectation of a heavenly reward.

The effect of this change became obvious in the increased eagerness with which he gratified the lusts of the flesh. Having no fear of God before his eyes, he restrained not his appetites, but indulged in "surfeiting and drunkenness, chambering and wantonness." Thus for a season he lived, and presumed to call himself a happy man. Conscience no longer accused him of his excesses; but his physical ability, too severely taxed, at length gave signs that it was no longer able to bear the burdens imposed upon it. His capacity for enjoyment daily declined—his lusts were as imperious as ever, but he had not the strength to gratify them, and his dearest pleasures palled on the appetite. Now came a season of reflection. He had tried the world, and drunk deeply of all its pleasures; he was satiated, but not satisfied, and while on the review he was persuaded that it could not impart happiness, he cried out with Solomon, "vanity of vanities, all is vanity." For the first time, a feeling of regret entered his mind that he had so studiously rejected the belief of Christianity, and that he had thus consummated his misery by cutting himself off from the hopes of a future life, at a time, when the present one was forsaking him. He reflected upon the past, the present, and the future, but without comfort. The past was stained by his vices, the present was rendered miserable

by his diseases, and the light of the future had been extinguished by his infidelity. In a season of more than usual lassitude and discontent, he took up a Bible with the intention of discovering its consolations, if it had any to offer; but at each sentence, the thought would arise, it is a fiction, it cannot be relied on. When he read its promises and invitations, he would mentally say, this would be pleasant if it were true. He thought of God, and doubted whether he existed; of his own soul, and doubted whether he had one; of heaven, and supposed that it was but a dream of the enthusiast. It became his lot on one occasion to witness the power of religion in a poor man who was cheerful in his poverty and disease, and who, at length, met death not only with composure, but with joy sparkling in his countenance. What could have sustained him under these circumstances? said he. It was that thing they call religion; and yet it is a delusion. How willingly would I gave my fortune to be deluded in a similar manner! The arguments which he had with so much care and difficulty engraved upon his mind, were now more officious than ever, and like so many busy devils continually beset him to confirm him in his belief that religion was a fable.

He had made himself an infidel, but he could not reverse his work. His labour had been too successful; he had done a mischief to his soul to serve a selfish purpose, which could only be undone by an Almighty power, in which he did not believe. For several years his soul was corroded by its thoughts, for which he had no cure, and then death began visibly to approach. He was startled, and instinctively shrunk back from an event which he had ever endeavoured to exclude from his thoughts. But why alarmed? Is not death an eternal sleep? He found it not so easy to persuade himself of this as it had been in his gayer hours. The thoughts would obtrude—perhaps the soul is immortal—perhaps there is a God—perhaps there is a hell for the wicked! The reflection was misery. The minister of religion visited his dying bed; he spoke of the depravity of the heart, the fullness of a Saviour's love, the possibility of salvation to the chiefest sinner; but infidel cavils came thick to the remembrance, to turn off the point of these truths, and to prevent an impression from being made. He had deliberately chosen infidelity to countenance him in a course of vice, and now infidelity was his portion, it was a confirmed curse on his soul, it was God's judgment upon him, to stand in the way of his return to peace.—The last hour was approaching—the minister of religion with tearful eye stood beside his couch, still holding up the cross as the sinner's hope even in the eleventh hour; but it availed not, the eye was glazed, the hand clutched the bed clothes in the agonies of the dying strife, and the miserable sinner who was so soon to stand in the august presence of the Great Judge of quick and dead, to answer for his deeds, breathed out his last breath in the exclamation—*I do not—I cannot believe.—Presbyterian.*

THE ABBE DE LAMENNAIS.

OUR readers are familiar with the name of this distinguished Frenchman. Some years ago, he broke away from the bands of Popery. His book on the "Affairs of Rome," swept over France and Western Europe like a tornado; in a couple of years it passed through twenty-two editions; a severer blow has not been sustained by the Popedom since the days of Napoleon. His "Words for the People," has been translated by Mr. Green of Boston. It is a little volume of singular power, burning with eloquence; his master work was published before his revolt from Popery, on "Religious Indifference;" its extraordinary eloquence established his fame at once, and the literati of France placed him next to Rousseau in the catalogue of writers. His writings are distinguished by a power truly tremendous—a sarcasm scathing as the lightning—a polished eloquence of style, and a pathos, a genuine poetry of sentiment, which touches at times the very heart. For years he has now been battling with Popery, exposing its corruptions unceasingly. He is the staunch advocate of the popular rights. For his writings against the Government, he has suffered a year's imprisonment. A French correspondent of the New York Observer speaks thus of him:—

"Ought an old man to have been treated with so much rigor who has filled the world with his name? He has quit Paris, and lives in a small village in the west of France. It is painful to say that Mr. de Lamennais is so poor that he has been obliged to sell his library to get a morsel of bread. Ah! if he had consented to bow his head under the yoke of popery, he would now have been bishop, cardinal, prince of the Romish Church; he would have been in possession of all the grandeur and wealth which a worldly man can desire; but his independent soul rejected false authority, and he has hardly a hovel to shelter his weary old age."

But poverty is not the worst ingredient in his cup; like most distinguished Frenchmen, his mind, in recoiling from Popery, has plunged into darkness of doubt. He wrote a book in prison, which has just been issued. It was written, as we learn from the above correspondent, for his own satisfaction, and not for publication. It presents an affecting picture of a mind clouded with the despair of scepticism; sceptics may learn a lesson from it. We give a couple of his eloquent passages:—

"My soul, why art thou sad? Is not the sun beautiful? Is not its light sweet, now as we look upon the leaves and flowers, with their thousand shades, glittering beneath its rays, and all nature recuming new life? Every thing that breathes has a voice to bless Him who lavishes upon all his bounties. The little bird sings his praises in the bush; the insect hums them in the grass. My soul, why art thou sad, when there is not a creature but revives with joy, revels in love? Yes, the sun is beautiful, its light is sweet; the little bird, the insect, the plant, all nature renews its life and joy; but I sigh, because no sun