

life, we know, and we half suspect he knows, that here they cease to be types. This circumstance is chosen for dramatic effect, but is, of course, no consequence of the loss of religious belief. For the Atheist is not inclined to be miserable in this his only life. He loves it, joys in it, revels in it. He is not blind to its pains and sorrows. Bearing these cheerfully as he may, he concentrates his attention on the pleasures and sweetnesses of life, and on the task that ranks foremost amongst those pleasures—the task of lessening the aggregate of the world's misery. The man and woman of "Despair" have in truth no little reason for sadness. Their eldest born has forged his father's name. Another son is dead. The girl that might have been the solace of their saddened age had never looked upon the sun. In a line of surprising strength we are told she "had passed from the night to the night." He is ruined, and the wife has a horror of bodily disease upon her. But sorrows even such as these should not—nay, actually do not—drive the Atheist to suicide. Rarely or never do we encounter instances of those who are without God taking their own lives. The suicides are amongst the possessors of a religious belief. In truth, they are often in consequence of such a belief. Yet further evidence is furnished by the poem in favor of my view that the two central figures are not Atheists to the heart's core. The man uses the name of God. Four times the cry, "Ah, God!" breaks from his lips. He that has wholly abandoned the older creeds is always very careful to use no phrase that in any sense, however remote, implies them. He studiously avoids to-day the use of the word "religion." I am not ignorant of the fact that Thomas Paine, *a hundred years ago*, wrote: "To do good is my religion"; but at this hour the conscientious Atheist should strive to employ none of those words and phrases that through long usage have acquired a stereotyped meaning, and have become, as Wendell Holmes puts it, "polarized." Hence, even under strong emotion, when most likelihood exists of a reversion to the old habits of thought and expression of the earlier times of the individual or of the race, even then the man who has struggled out of ordinary beliefs should not use even interjectional phrases that would imply, however indirectly, recognition of deity.

And, again, in the lines that speak of

"A life without sun, without health, without hope, without any delight
In anything here upon earth,"

There is proof that these two unhappy ones have not grasped the fulness of the comfort of Atheism. Had their faith in man been stronger, their eyes had pierced the gloom surrounding their individual lives, and had seen the brightness of the face of man that is to be. "Without health," alas! men may be. "Without hope" man has no right to be. Because my little fragment of life is a failure, because my attempted contribution to the world-building is only some small modicum of dust, blown away by the breath of time and not a portion of enduring stone or marble, am I to despair of all? Nay, truly, let me rather behold the

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