

Selections.

ANSWERING A FOOL ACCORDING TO HIS FOLLY.

It was towards the close of the reign of Louis the Fourteenth, when that monarch imagined that he was establishing the decrees of his government upon the obligations of religion, that theology and metaphysics became fashionable studies; the various parties at court imagining that in them they found inexhaustible arsenals whence they might select their weapons for attack or defence. The law of the church had become that of the state, and the crowds of distinguished persons, who had hitherto complied with the ceremonies of worship from habit and the accident of education, without being at the pains of inquiry, suddenly became sceptical in matters of religion, through motives of policy; for according to the current notions, to establish the errors of the believers in Christianity, was to attack the fountain of authority at its source, and convict the throne of tyranny and injustice.

At that period, (says the narrator of the following scene,) I was living at Paris. It was one of the hottest days of summer; the sun, pursuing his course in mid-day, shed such intolerable radiance upon the waters of the river, the roofs of the palaces, and the tops of the trees, that my vision was oppressed with the glare, and I sought relief in the shade. Desirous of solitude and meditation, I repaired to the umbrageous avenue of the Cours-la-Reine; there, in lonely reverie, I was reflecting on the power and benevolence of the Creator, and the innumerable incentives which man has to the exercise of gratitude and praise, when I heard myself accosted familiarly by an acquaintance, a self-constituted metaphysician and professor of logic, whose passion was reasoning, and who wanted but reason to make him an adept in his art.

All his motions seemed actuated by a satisfaction which he could not contain; his eye sparkled with joy; and so soon as I had caught sight of him, he entered at once into conversation, like a man who, bursting with impatience to impart great tidings, has no time to throw away in the empty formality of ceremony. "My friend," said he, "congratulate me; I have been engaged in a most interesting work on the soul. I have made a grand discovery, and am at length in the condition to prove that what men call the soul is but a word—an empty word—void of significance, and that neither you nor I, nor anybody else, ever had a soul!"

"Stop a moment," said I, recoiling from his proffered embrace; empty words and void of signification, are those you have just pronounced; you may rank yourself with the brutes if you choose; permit me to decline that honor."

"Calm yourself, my friend," said he; "I knew you would not surrender without proofs; but, thanks be to philosophy, I can furnish them. Let us reason coolly; for I am going to combat this ideal existence of the soul, not by vain declamations, too common at the present day, but by triumphant arguments derived from the perpetual contradictions of a host of learned, and, as you esteem them, wise men who have treated of this subject. Now, as Quintilian says, 'When men of intellect acknowledged as such, cannot, after entire ages of impartial discussion, agree concerning a cause, or an effect, we are justified in denying both;' and as this is a recognized maxim among philosophers, who by its means have settled the question of ghosts, phantoms and spectres, in asserting a negation, which negation is the sole truth—therefore I set out with this principle, and hasten to put my first question. What is the soul? 'A nature always in motion,' says Thales; 'A self-existent quantity,' says Pythagoras; 'A subtle air,' says Plutarch; 'It is rather an active fire,' says Aristotle; 'You deceive yourselves,' says Hipponius; 'it is an ethereal fluid;' 'you should rather say it is a composition of earth and water,' says Anaximander; 'Silence, you are all partly wrong,' cries Empedocles; 'it is a mixture of all the elements.' Whereupon a thousand voices are babbling at once: It is a simple essence, says one; No, it is a compound says another; a third declares it is a celestial flame; a fourth, that it is a mere harmony; a fifth, that it is a cohesion of infinite small atoms; while a sixth will have it that it is 'a portion of the divinity; and a seventh contends that it is nothing but a conflict of the senses. Then, where is its seat? Hippocrates places it in the vestibule of the brain; Epicurus, in the stomach; Erastrius makes it serve for an envelope to the head; while Strabo contends it is situated between the eyebrows. 'I see the blood,' says Crates; 'Y' in the heart,' adds Empedocles; 'Say rather it is the

diaphragm,' contends Plutarch; 'Stuff!' says Descartes, 'it is in the pineal gland.' Now, after so many evident contradictions and centuries of doubt, I invoke the principles of Quintilian—I apply my negation, and declare boldly that the soul is but a dream of our good ancestors, which the full light of reason will banish forever, with the philosopher's stone, and the histories of hobgoblins."

While he was thus speaking, we had wandered from the green alleys under which my logician had found me meditating, and the river ran lazily at our feet, in an unenclosed spot, exposed to the burning rays of the sun.

"My friend," said I, seizing him forcibly by the arm, and constraining him to remain immovable before me, to shield me from the more oppressive influence of the sun, "I very much admire your mode of reasoning; in thus striking at the foundation of a contested subject, you have got rid of so many serious difficulties, that really I am tempted to experiment in your way of thinking and reasoning. Really you and Quintilian are two very clever fellows."

"You flatter me," said he; "but permit me to take a more convenient position to receive your compliments; for I assure you I feel as though I were frying in the sun."

"What, the sun! You, the foe of prejudice, can you not free yourself from such a simple one as that?"

"The sun a prejudice! My good sir, I am forced to believe in it; it is burning me up."

"Let us reason coolly," said I, fixing him in his former position. "I had hitherto believed that this admirable harmony of nature—the grandeur of man, the might of his intellect—the marvellous spectacle of an entire creation submitted to his industry—his reason governing the tempest of his fiery passions—all sufficiently indicated the distance which separates him from other animals; but now that, by the law of contradictions, you have demonstrated that his intellect is no right but base matter, and that his existence is without an object, permit me in my turn, by the same arguments, to cure you of your error relative to the sun."

"What is the sun? Is it a cloud inflamed—a burning rock—a fire that extinguishes and renews itself—a mirror—a fifth element—a composition of different fire—a spiritual flame—a globe which transmits rays of light, or receives them, as Xenophon, Metrodorus, Democritus, Philolaus, Aristotle, Plato, Antisthenes, Pythagoras, and Newton have in their turn averred? Then, how large is it? Heracitus gives it a diameter of one foot; Anaxagoras extends it to the size of the Peloponnesus; Anaximander makes it the size of the earth; while Eudoxus believes it nine times, and Thales sixty times, as large as the moon; Lucretius says it is just the size it appears to be; and Anaximene reduces its circumference to that of a leaf; and, lastly, Cassini pronounces it a million times bigger than the whole earth."

"Agreed, agreed, but it burns me!"

"It cannot burn you if it does not exist; of which I am going logically to convince you. Let me proceed. Xenophon asserts that each zone has its particular sun; Empedocles admits two; thus you are convinced on every side. I invoke, therefore, the principle of Quintilian and your own, and declare boldly that the existence of the sun is but a dream of our good ancestors."

"Believe what you like," cried my enraged reasoner burning violently from my grasp; but your negative has damaged the membranes of my brain by keeping me here in the heat."

"Go and recover yourself," said I; "and sage logician as you are, endeavour to comprehend that the immortal soul is to the mortal creation what the sun is to the material: man and sovereign of the earth. Cease to pride yourself on treading your glory under your feet and renouncing your immortality."—*The Leisure Hour.*

THE FAMINE IN MICHIGAN.—The pioneer who hews the path for the march of American civilization, has long been regarded as the type of Anglo-Saxon enterprise. We are accustomed to extol the manly virtues so essential to his character, and to expatiate on the self-sacrifice which is compelled by his rough and robust life. But rarely have we been taught to realize that famine is one of the foes with which he wrestles.

Nevertheless, the sufferings which have befallen the inhabitants of Northern Michigan are only aggravated, not novel. They are caused by privations and trials of character incident to all border emigrants, and their parallel can be found in the history of the settlers of every Western State.

In the extreme North of Michigan there are now three thousand people who are dependent for their sustenance on the charity of the Southern counties, and thousands of dollars have been raised in Detroit for their relief. The agents who have been despatched from that city, to examine the condition of these people, report that the accounts of their destitution are not exaggerated, and authenticate at least six instances of death from starvation. They traversed districts embracing hundreds of square miles, finding provender with difficulty for their horses, in which the population were living chiefly on boiled oats, molasses, and stewed pumpkins, with little enough even of such unsavory food. Some families were found who tasted nothing for a fortnight but maple sugar and sassafras tea. Their cattle, sheep and hogs had died by hundreds, for want of hay and corn, and the stores which had been laid up for planting during the spring had all been expended.

The news of this distress seems to have taken Southern Michigan by surprise, and every call for relief was readily and liberally answered. It is a singular fact that it did not become known at Detroit until it had reached its climax. The first statement seemed incredible. It seemed impossible that only a few hundred miles away, more than a thousand people had been living on roots, pumpkins, and boiled oats, for several weeks, without sending to represent their destitution and beseech relief. But the very suddenness of the announcement increased the liberality of the contributions, although the singular delay is still unexplained.

Before the generosity of the people of Massachusetts can reach so far, the condition of affairs will be remedied, and there will probably be no demand for us to exercise that charity which we are always glad to bestow on such an object.

But it is well to seek for the causes of the calamity, in order to avoid its repetition, and the same remarks that apply to Michigan, are applicable to Indiana, Iowa, Tennessee, and other Western States, in certain portions of which there is a scarcity of food, so great as to astonish most people, who are accustomed to regard the West as the granary of the East, as Sicily was the granary of ancient Rome, and who cannot realize that destitution can prevail in a land which exports such immense quantities of provisions.

The winter throughout the entire West was uncommonly severe. Most of the potatoes stored last fall were frozen and spoiled. The long-continued rains this spring killed much of the newly-sown wheat, and a large quantity was expended in replanting. The crops of most vegetables and of buckwheat, last autumn, were very light. The hay crop, especially in Indiana, was not improved as it should have been. The farmers thought they had too much hay cut, and allowed tens of thousands of tons to go to waste; while that thus lost would not sell for from \$12 to \$10 a ton, according to location.

But notwithstanding all these troubles, famine might have been escaped, had it not been for the improvidence of the whole people,—a fault not peculiar to them alone, although its consequence in their case are especially deplorable. They were content to let tomorrow take care of itself, trusting to be able to live on from hand to mouth. And yet there were precedents by which they should have been warned. From 1837 to 1845 the same causes produced similar results in what were then frontier districts of Michigan, but are now the richest and most productive counties in the State; and almost every Spring since that time there have been occasional instances of destitution.

It is perhaps cruel to dwell longer on this fault, while its consequences are being visited so terribly on those by whom it was committed. We are persuaded that it will teach a lesson that will long be remembered. And while we dwell with pride on the growth of the West, let us learn to appreciate the concomitants of its growth, the trials of character which result from the border emigrant's life,—at one season of the year in the midst of almost barbaric profusion, at another pinched by cold and want,—and learn also to prize the teachings of frugality and temperance in which the children of New England are reared, and without practicing on which they cannot thrive.—*Boston Traveller, May 27.*

BAPTISM IN ABYSSINIA.—The practice of the Abyssinian Church places the question beyond dispute. That people were converted to Christianity, and received their ritual from the Judaizing Church of Egypt; about the middle of the fourth century. They still receive their Bishop from Alexandria. They retain circumcision, and other Jewish observances, in connection with Christianity; and owing to their entire