

"There ain't no cleverness about it," she replied, with a harsh nasal accent; "any fool most could do as much." Wilkinson carried the tin pail to the shanty disillusioned, took his drink out of a cup that seemed clean enough, joined his friend in thanking mother and daughter for their hospitality, and retired to the road.

"Do you find your respect for the fair sex rising?" he asked Coristine, cynically.

"The mother's an awful old harridan—"

"Yes, and when the daughter is her age she will be a harridan, too; the gentle rustic beauties have gone out of date, like the old poets. The schoolmaster is much needed here to teach young women not to compare gentlemen, even if they are pedestrianizing, to 'any fool most.'"

"Oh, Wilks, is that where you're hit? I thought you and she were long enough over that water business for a case of Jacob and Rachel at the well, ha, ha!"

"Come, cease this folly, Coristine, and let us get along."

(To be continued.)

#### A PARSON'S PONDERINGS CONCERNING THEOSOPHY.

I RECEIVED, the other day, a letter from a gentleman unknown to me personally, who told me therein that he had just read my Ponderings in THE WEEK on "The Wise Men of the East." His remarks were extremely kind and laudatory, and I naturally felt highly gratified. But when I read a little further on, and was assured that my sentiments were quite acceptable to himself as a *Theosophist*, I became alarmed. My first thought was: Wonder if I said anything heretical? Wonder if I shall be hauled up before the Sanhedrim? Wonder if my clerical brethren will insist on my resignation or dismissal, as a dangerous character, as a heretic in disguise, as a Theosophist, no less!

My courteous correspondent sent me at the same time a couple of pamphlets explaining the elementary principles of Theosophy. These I read most anxiously and carefully. I had, a few years ago, tried to wade through some dozen numbers of the late Madame Blavatsky's periodical, the *Theosophist*; but I must confess the perusal left one somewhat bewildered, not as to my faith but as to theirs. The pamphlets, however, kindly furnished me by my correspondent ("Letters on Theosophy," 2 sets, by Alex. Fullerton, F.T.S.) have the merit of putting the Theosophic doctrine in as concrete a form as I conceive to be possible. When I had mastered them, my alarm subsided.

Mr. Fullerton opens his case in these words: "Any man, upon first hearing the word 'Theosophy,' naturally supposes it a new form of religion or a new interpretation of the Bible. Remembering the variety of churches and sects in even the smallest towns, and that these, as well as the fresh formations recorded in the daily press," etc.

Ah! there it is, the old story! The numerous divisions of Christians are the cause of still another effort to get some universal problem on which all can unite and so show forth the brotherhood of man! The late Lord A. Cecil used to begin his preachings in the same strain. So does every "fresh formation." So schism breeds schisms; so we Christians put a stumbling-block in the weak brother's way! I do not mean to say that there should be no differences of opinions or views among Christians; they are necessary and desirable. But it is neither necessary nor desirable that each separate opinion should be embodied in a separate organization. Fancy, if every shade of political opinion in Canada had its own separate Parliament and Executive!

Mr. Fullerton proceeds to expound in plain prose the two great central doctrines of Theosophy which Sir Edwin Arnold has drawn out in such charming verse in his "Light of Asia," viz., "Re-incarnation" and "Karma." The first of these, re-incarnation, is a new name for the old opinions of Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato, of the pre-existence and transmigration of every individual soul. Socrates (in the "Phædo" of Plato) argues that the soul of every individual must have existed in some bodily shape or other before it possessed its present organism, and that after death it will again tenant some other form, human or bestial, and so on, *ad infinitum*. Now this is just the Theosophic (or Buddhist) doctrine of "Re-incarnation." I remember, as a boy, reading a most curious and interesting tale—I wish I could get hold of it again—called "The Transmigrations of Indur." It ran something like this: Indur, a pious Brahman, while endeavouring to rescue some animal from the jaws of a beast of prey, receives his own death-wound from the ferocious creature. But before his soul departs, Buddha appears to him and benignantly asks him to name his last wish. The dying man asks that in all his future "transmigrations" he shall always keep the memory and personal consciousness of his present human "incarnation." The request is granted, whereupon his soul contentedly departs from his body. On awakening to his new life he finds himself in a vast waste of waters, no land visible anywhere. He splashes about; he spouts water through his nose; he feeds on minute creatures of the air and water which he swallows by the million; he admires the graceful lines of his back and tail; he is astonished at his own bulk. He is a whale. Notwithstanding, he enjoys himself hugely in his new "environment"; he is quite convinced that life is worth living; until, one fine day, he feels a sharp pain in the

nape of his neck. It is the stab of a harpoon. He looks with wrath upon a boat-load of fellow-souls, incarnated in shapes similar to that he wore formerly. He goes for them, but they dodge him, and he gets the prod of another harpoon. Finally through loss of blood his soul is again dislodged, and he "migrates." The next time he turns up as a tiger; then a monkey, and so on. We boys used to read this story as one now reads Grimm's "Fairy Tales" or "Alice in Wonderland." But it appears that, according to Theosophy, we were all the time absorbing the most solemn truths.

However, to be just, Mr. Fullerton says nothing about our re-incarnation or our pre-incarnations as brutes or fishes. He talks about the evolution of the spirit in its various human forms. Well, let it be granted (after the manner of Euclid's hypotheses) that my "Ego," or "soul," has been through numberless transmigrations or re-incarnations since the beginning of humanity. What would I not give to be able to recall at will to my memory any particular incarnation through all that time! I would not like to carry them all in my mind at once. But just suppose some "Mahatma" (or whatever the title of the proper authority might be) could act as a sort of "telepathic central." If I could only ring her up and shout, "Hello! central: connect me with the reminiscence of my 'Ego' in the Stone Age!" How interesting to see myself—or feel myself, or remember myself—clad in a cave-bear's skin and armed with a stone tomahawk, prowling around after some woolly rhinoceros! Then to recognize myself as an early Briton paddling a coracle; and then, may-be, re-incarnated in St. Augustine of Canterbury; and so on all through history! What a glorious panorama of the ages would the story of one such spirit be! Now that Madame Blavatsky is dead, and Col. Olcott retired, perhaps Mrs. Besant will devote her energies to becoming such a "central." It would give such a practical and useful turn to Theosophic teaching, and be of inestimable service in solving a thousand problems of the past.

Mr. Fullerton says that re-incarnation has no respect of country or sex. I wonder if my soul was ever embodied in Egypt? Possibly I might some day view the very mummy in which I once lodged. If so, I hope some "adept" will be there to inform me: it would be so interesting to know the fact. Or I might have been a Hindoo widow burning on a funeral pile—or Juliet of Verona—or Queen Elizabeth; who knows?

"Which is absurd," as Euclid would say. Besides, if the soul, between each transmigration or re-incarnation, is steeped in the waters of Lethe, what is the use of it all? What matters it to me whether my spirit formerly lodged in Greek or Trojan? Here Theosophy steps in with her second central doctrine of "Karma," which is to set this all right. So let us investigate "Karma." Mr. Fullerton thus describes it: "The great doctrine of Karma is in itself exceedingly simple. It is the doctrine of perfect, inflexible justice. It means, as first defined by Col. Olcott, 'the law of ethical causation'—'whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' But it also expresses the balance sheet of merit and demerit in any individual character." "The Karmic law asserts itself over vast stretches of time and through numberless incarnations, not interpreting itself intelligibly in each specific incident of each life, but ensuring approximate justice in separate incarnations, and absolute justice in their totality." "There are . . . deeds of heroism or atrocity too momentous for full payment in one incarnation, and the settlement for such passes over and on till it suddenly appears during some distant birth, the long-pent force discharging itself at last, and, to our narrow vision, inexplicably. It is said that Buddha's favourite disciple was slain in his presence by robbers, and that he did not interpose. Questioned as to this, he replied that in a far remote date his disciple, then himself a robber, had committed a murder for which Karma had now overtaken him."

But, dear me, it is horrible to think what results may follow, if Theosophy becomes universal or even prevalent! Let us imagine a case in a criminal court in the distant future. A burglar is tried and convicted of having robbed and murdered a Mr. John Smith. The Judge asks the prisoner why sentence should not be pronounced. The convict replies: My Lord, I have simply to say, it is Karma. Some centuries ago the soul of the late John Smith whom I murdered—I mean, whom I assisted towards a happier re-incarnation—inhabited the body of a South Sea islander; at the same time my Ego was incarnated in a missionary. That islander slew that missionary and appropriated his goods and ate him up. So this little incident, in which we both met again under altered circumstances, is simply an act of vengeance—I mean, the operation of the Karmic law." What criminal could not so plead justification for all his crimes? But perhaps by that time there will be an "adept" in the Supreme Court to test the truth or falsehood of all such allegations.

And then, again, what a fearful weapon this will be in the hands of personal enemies—or political opponents—for destroying each other's characters. Fancy a Tory and a Liberal candidate on the platform of the future; the one asserting that he has it on the very best authority that the soul of the other once infested Ananias; and the other retorting that he has indisputable evidence that his opponent once had a life-lease of the body of Caligula. What libel suits the "adepts" of the future will have to settle! For my part, if my "spirit" is ever charged with the evil deeds it committed while dwelling in some

cruel or vicious monster of the past, I hereby repudiate all responsibility. I will not be answerable for what it did while some other fellow had possession of it, and this I fancy will be the general verdict of the western mind. We of this continent are very practical, very business-like; we expect quick returns for our investments. "Every man for himself" is the general creed; and the idea of a man being responsible for the acts of ten thousand individuals of the past ages will not I think take much hold of us.

On the other hand, jesting apart, we Christians are bound in fairness to look at the other side of the question. If we see in the religious opinions of another what seems to us absurd or repulsive, it is only right that we in turn should take cognizance of those things in our religious opinions which seem repulsive or absurd to him. We all need to see ourselves as others see us. I can quite understand that the many doctrinal eccentricities of Christians are in a measure responsible for the strange recoils of Materialism on the one hand and Theosophy on the other; and if these opposing systems have lashed us very sharply with their whips, it is (as my esteemed correspondent truly says) because the Christian temple needs cleansing.

Mr. Fullerton's first charge against us—our unhappy divisions—has already been dealt with. Doubtless our rivalries and wranglings—especially perhaps in our newspapers—do seem to them contemptible. I wish there were less of it. Then he charges the Christian doctrines of Atonement, Retribution, etc., with being opposed to all sense of justice. I am free to admit that these doctrines have been handled by very many preachers (and that not in one denomination, but in all) in ways to shock the sense of justice in many a scrupulous and cultured mind. But these are travesties of such doctrines, which the lashings of "our friends the enemy" may do much to correct.

And now let us see how far we can agree with our Theosophist friends. We, too, believe in Incarnation—in ONE Incarnation—so firmly and fondly that we deem it almost sacrilege to use the expression in any other reference. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us"; partaking of our human nature that we through Him might be "partakers of the Divine nature" (II. Peter i. 4). We believe also in re-incarnation, in a sense; for we hold that Christ rose again with His body. True, that body was changed; it was no longer a "natural" body but a "spiritual" body (I. Cor. xv. 44), call it an "astral" body if you will, for with it He ascended into Heaven. And in that same sense we believe in a (future) re-incarnation for ourselves. We do not believe that the "soul" abstracted from all organic form is the highest stage of our existence. Our doctrine looks upon the soul, when freed from the body, as in a sort of "naked" condition, waiting to be clothed with our "house from Heaven" (II. Cor. v. 1-3), when He "will change our vile bodies that they may be fashioned like unto His glorious body" (Phil. iii. 21).

And we, too, believe in "Karma"—if Karma means absolute and eternal justice. The sentence quoted by Col. Olcott, "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap," is taken from our Scriptures, written by St. Paul, who also wrote: "We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, that every man may receive of the things done in the body." For we believe that the body sins as well as the soul. In fact the body and the soul together constitute the individual who does right or wrong; and therefore we see the Karma—the eternal justice and fitness of things—in the body and soul re-united—of if you please, the soul re-incarnated, before the judgment seat of Christ—and therefore it is that we say, not, I believe in the Immortality of the Soul, but, "I look for the Resurrection of the Dead, and the Life of the World to Come."

Almonte, Ont.

GEO. J. LOW.

#### PARIS LETTER.

AT the present moment France commences to seriously feel that colonial expansion is a costly luxury, and that "superfluity is not the necessary." She is now in hot water in Dahomey and at Madagascar; in Tonquin, dacoity, under the name of piracy, is chronic, and the old colonies remain old colonies. In their hearts the thinking portion of the French condemn the grabbing of territory, but the moment the ultra patriots insist on possessing a colonial empire that in area will look big when coloured on a map, and fat when represented in square miles, opposition has to lie low and keep mute. It is quantity, not quality, of territory that is aimed at. It is useless reminding the French that colonies cannot be developed without colonists, and it is useless demanding capital for opening up any new country till European heads and hands have therein pitched their tents. Besides, the world's Gardens of Eden are in the possession of the Anglo-Saxon.

France is more unfavourably situated than any other nation for undertaking "little wars"; the people next to dread them, not wholly on account of their cost, the dribbling losses in men and money, but they are viewed as the occasion for tempting a rival or covetous power to take advantage of their being in a fix. Then again, the French expect the material proofs of success in a new take before attempts have been made to utilize the possession. England, Germany and Italy grab; France hence, it is concluded, must in self-defence do the same or her influence in the world will be diminished. She only forgets that what may be one man's meat may be another man's poison. The King of Dahomey is again on the warpath to clear