

AFFIRMATIVE—G. B. WILSON.

Before resuming the argument in favor of the proposition advanced by my colleague, let me refer to some objections which have been brought against it by the leader of the negative.

The influence of Averroes, of the injurious effects of which he spoke, was confined to Southern Italy and the south of Spain, in which latter country it was equally destructive to the regnant Mohammedanism. I am rather surprised that Col. Ingersoll's name should have been introduced as that of an exponent of free thought; as a matter of fact I never heard that the doughty Colonel had ever yet contributed a single thought of any kind, free or unfree, to the sum of human knowledge.

It has been asserted that controversy has never benefited the cause of truth, and that the earliest Christianity is the purest Christianity. This latter is, I think, an exploded idea, for we are most of us well aware that simony was introduced into the Church in the earliest history, and that the Epistle of John is believed to have been written against the Gnosticism, which found its way into the Church even in apostolic times: and as to the former statement, I have no doubt that your eminent Professor of Systematic Theology who so ably fills the chair on this occasion, has often pointed out that it has been during controversy in the struggle with error, that truth has been apprehended, formulated and assimilated by the Christian Church.

There is somewhat more force, I must admit, in the statement that the faith of many has been wrecked by the influence of free thought, yet I must point out that (1) many people who are said to have lost their faith in this way, had little or no faith to lose. (2) Many have called themselves freethinkers who were such only in name. They wished to lead sinful lives such as the Church must disapprove of; they disliked the moral standard which the Christian Church set up, and so they took refuge from their conscience behind the mask of free thought. In these cases their bad lives were the *cause*, not the *result*, of their pretended free thinking. (3) In regard to those who were sincere and morally earnest, many of them have not remained free thinkers, but have been led out into the clear light of a higher, a more intelligent faith—e. g., Neander, Coleridge, Goethe, Prof. Thompson and many others whose experience has been like Arthur Hallam's, so beautifully described by Tennyson—

"Who fought his doubts and gathered strength."

Thus he came at length to find a firmer faith his own. We can, however, point to more positive gains.