

accepted as a ban to legal marriage. But if that were so, *a fortiori*, the marriage with a deceased wife's sister would hold good, since under the law of heredity what was lawful and expedient marriage with one member of a family would be so with another. Perhaps, Mr. Editor, some of the guests of the 'Round Table' would discuss this matter.

M.

DIDEROT A BENEFACTOR TO MANKIND.

THE 'Round Table' of this Review is meant to carry out what Mr. Parkin, in an article in the present number, shown to us by the editor, so justly desiderates, the free communication of what thought may occur to us in our studies. As Mr. Parkin has drawn attention to the position of Diderot in literary history, it may be worth while to remind readers of a few facts in the biography of that remarkable man, a new edition of whose works is now attracting attention, just a century after his death, and concerning whom the interesting article to which Mr. Parkin has referred, appeared in the *Nineteenth Century*.

Diderot was a Parisian, Gliver Goldsmith. He had somewhat the same misadventures in early life, received, like Goldsmith, a good education, like him, vexed and disappointed his friends by turning away again and again from respectability and respectable callings, and finally, and for the rest of his days as a literary Bohemian, being so much worse off than Goldsmith, inasmuch as the Parisian Grub Street was under the ban of the Church, and of the Police as well as of Society. The tone of society at this time was deplorably lax, and Diderot was no better than his neighbours; but one fails to see why Mr. Parkin should make that an argument against his philosophical opinions, as he does when he talks of 'the impotence of lofty intellect to lift a man above the influence of the vilest passions?' Why, Mr. Parkin, what do you make of the 'vilest passions' of the Cardinal de Rohan or the Abbé Perigard? Do they disprove or discredit Christianity? Is it not notorious that the French Church in Paris was at that time steeped in the worst profligacy? Argue against Materialism if you will, but do not argue against it

on account of Diderot's amours, for that argument cuts both ways, and the average Christian of Diderot's time was, we fear, not much better than he.

And it may be truly said that the evil that Diderot did was interred with his bones, while the good lives after him, in the social and political fruits of his *Encyclopædia*. In this, the great engine for overturning the Feudal oppression of France, there is no irreligion, no atheism, only passionate pleading for equal rights of man with man; for the poor, for the oppressed; for the doctrine then so abhorrent to men in power, now so generally accepted that it seems trite; the doctrine that the common people ought to have a voice in government, and be the main object of governmental care. At this great work Diderot laboured incessantly, over many years, suffering constant persecution. But the *Encyclopædia* spread its influence far and wide. All classes read it. It took the place of a modern liberal newspaper of the highest class in a day when, in our sense of the word, there was no newspaper. Joined with other kindred forces, it made possible the Great Revolution whose thunders shook so many strongholds of evil, when lightnings cleared the air of so much that was noxious. This debt of gratitude modern society owes to Diderot.

Like Goldsmith, Diderot had a ready, facile and clear style. He is rather a brilliant and forcible writer of political pamphlets and leading articles, than a deep-thinking philosopher. As Rosenkrantz, the Hegelian, said of him: 'Diderot is a philosopher in whom all the contradictions of the time struggle with one another.' His mind is the echo of a chaos. His opinions did indeed incline to the crude and rough-shod Materialism of D'Holbach, but of argument or logical system he built up nothing, and contributed to the literature of Materialism only a few pages of declamatory eloquence.

Mr. Parkin imagines that he is seriously reasoning with Materialists when he asks—'What is the Great Producer? Is it not the mind?' As if any so-called Materialist from Epicurus on would deny the superiority of the phenomenon which we call mental. Let us reason against Materialism, by all means, but let us not suppose that Materialists are so childish as to consider mental results to be of less value than those which are more obviously what we call material.