

cause, not only our land, but every land, to be indeed the "home of the brave and the land of the free."

Twenty years ago, Evolution was a theme for sneers and laughter. To-day the highest culture investigates its methods, and the name of the noblest interpreter, Darwin, is breathed with reverence and respect. If there is any laugh to come in, it is not in the fact of the evolution of the human race, but, rather, it is in the story of the Maker of a universe coming down to fashion a man out of soft clay, as a child plays at making mud pies! Or in the still more ridiculous tale of tracing the origin of woman to a mad man's rib!

There was never a time in the history of the world when Freethought was so widely spread as to-day. Like the dew of a summer morning, it has crept everywhere. All the east is aglow, with its sunlight betokening the dawn of a fairer day, and the morning rays of its sun float over to the west, enwrapping the world in a light and beauty such as it was never clothed in before. Its arrows of truth and knowledge come speeding into the hearts and homes of the people everywhere, and whether Freethought is wanted or not, it is here, and here to stay, to brighten, beautify, and educate the race, to bless the world, and, eventually, to make this grand old earth a very Eden of delight, and without a serpent in it.

What is the result of all this Freethought that is surging up and down like the ocean billows?—what its influence upon society, the individual, upon the most sacred and beautiful relation in the world—the family? We are sometimes told that Freethought means lax morals, moral depravity; that liberty of thought indicates licence, and, in the family, it means disintegration, breaking up of all that is purest and truest in humanity. This is incorrect. It is the *lack* of Freethought in society that has produced a lax morality; it is the prevalence of that monstrous dogma, that though one indulge in the most cruel and wicked conduct, yet at the eleventh hour he may repent and become a member of the *best* society in the "City of the New Jerusalem," that has made such mischief in society here. It is the doctrine that *another* has suffered and atoned for the sins of the most guilty wretches, that is responsible for the loose morals in the social world to-day.

Freethought teaches that he who sins must suffer for that sin, not another. In Freethought there is no such thing as vicarious atonement, for it teaches that the wrong-doer must suffer the penalty of his own wrong-doing every time, and that there is no escape through the sacrifice of another, living or dead.

The position of the Freethinker in the community is not that of one who defrauds his neighbour, who meddles with that which is not his own, or who pretends to be that which he is not. Whatever else he may be called, he is not a hypocrite. Honest in his dealings, independent in his views and opinions—a little rough, maybe, sometimes, speaking out plainly his candid opinion—he is your straightforward, upright, intelligent citizen, whose word is as good as his bond. He is not perfect, by any means, for perfection is not allowed to dwell on earth, but he tries to do as nearly right as possible, the best he can; and "Who does the best his circumstance allows, does well, acts nobly—angels can no more."

The prisons, houses of correction, gaols, idiotic and insane asylums, and reformatory institutions, are filled, not with Freethinkers and their families, but by those who believe freethinking to be a sin, and who also believe that sin-stains can be rubbed out with blood. Rarely is a Freethinker before the Courts for any crime or misdemeanour—hence, it is not this class who commit offence against law and order.

The influence of Freethought in the family is always that which truth, candor, and common sense bears. It finds its heaven in the home, its paradise in the family circle, its saviour from evil in a correct understanding of the laws of Nature, its angels of good in right endeavour, its blessings in the loves embodied in husband, wife, children. In the home where liberty of thought is welcomed, there are no jars, no strife, for the rights of all are admitted and respected. In such a home you do not find a family of drunkards,

nor nest of libertines. True, you may not discover there a Sunday-school Superintendent or a pious deacon, nor will you find one engaged in studying how to violate a business trust, or branded as an embezzler, thief, or swindler. I challenge the whole world to produce a family governed by true Freethought principles, read by reason and intelligence, that is not upright, moral, just, and honourable. The influence of pure liberty of thought tends not to immorality, licentiousness, or wrong doing. Where an enlightened judgment is the guiding star, it is next to impossible to go astray; and I claim that the children educated under its influence are superior, physically, morally, all ways, for they are taught to observe the health laws, taught that truth and justice are to be held sacred and inviolate—that the crown of true happiness is not found in the following of blind impulse, or unreasoning faith, but in obeying the dictates of calm reason, and living in harmony with the mandates of Nature, whose laws and commands are as the rhythmic flow of sweet music.

Books, music, and games are found in the Freethinker's home—a sweet interchange of thought obtains in that family circle; and one great subject of thought and discussion in such a home is to know how to live—as Herbert Spencer beautifully expresses the art of living as the highest results of education: "Not how to live," he says, "in the mere material sense only, but in the widest sense. The general problem which comprehends every special problem is the right ruling of conduct in all directions, under all circumstances. In what way to treat the body; in what way to treat the mind; in what way to bring up a family; in what way to manage our affairs; in what way to behave as a citizen; in what way to utilise all these forces and sources of happiness which Nature supplies—how to use all the faculties to the greatest advantage of ourselves and others."

That is the doctrine taught and practised in the Freethinker's home; that is the influence of freethinking upon the home and family—the striving to make it the sweet centre of honour, trust, and truth, of purity and affection, from which shall radiate the principles destined to make purer and more holy all hearts that they may reach—that shall yet make life indeed worth the living.

Freethought fully and firmly endorses monogamic marriages as the highest outcome of all the social forces that have operated in the history of the past. It believes in it as the best and highest good for the race. It would have it, not a theme for jest, a rushing into in a silly, hap-hazard manner, the most incompatible unions receiving priestly sanction, to be followed by mutual recrimination and abuse, and snapped by a divorce court in a year or two, or less; but it would make marriage more sacred and beautiful by a more careful understanding of its laws, uses, obligations, a deeper insight into the laws that govern temperament, mutual adaptation, congenial harmony, all of which would make it a complete blending of physical, moral, and mental forces, and all held in perfect control by the intellect, and, in such unions, divorce would be as unnatural as impossible.

Thus is the influence of Freethought positive and practical. Its children are better children for being taught that they are of human origin, and that their highest duty is not to make haste to save their souls for some other world, but to make the best and highest use of this—to unfold and spread all there is of good—to turn from that which is evil—to depend on labour and science for their aid, and not upon some unknown power—to do right for right's sake, not hoping for reward, nor fearing punishment, and that virtue expects no recompense save the satisfaction arising from the performance of noble deeds.

Freethought, little understood by many, is, however, in its influence, especially upon the family, one of the noblest and worthiest powers, and more and more will its influence be seen and felt as the years roll on, until it is found to be indispensable in all the relations of life, for it is as the stars to the night, the sun to the day, without which there can be clear light, no true life, no genuine beauty.