

Notes & Queries.

ANSWERS.

THE MADHI.

In answer to a query in the April number, I send you the following from the pen of an Englishman resident in Egypt:—Mohammed Achmet, the Mahdi, is a Dongolawi, or native of the province of Dongola. His grandfather was called Fahil, and lived on the island of Nait Arti (Arti-Dongolawi or island). The island lies east of and opposite to Oridi, the native name for the capital of Dongola. His father was Abdullhi, by trade a carpenter. In 1852 this man left and went to Shindi, a town on the Nile, south of Berber. At that time his family consisted of three sons and one daughter, called respectively Mohammed, Hamid, Mohammed Achmet (the Mahdi), and Nurelsham (Light of Syria). At Shindi another son was born, called Abdullah. As a boy Mohammed Achmet was apprenticed to Sherifed-deem, his uncle, a boatman, residing at Shakabeh, an island opposite Sennaar. Having one day received a beating from his uncle, he ran away to Khartoum, and joined the free school or "Medressu" of a faki (learned man, head of a sect of dervishes), who resided at Hogahli, a village east of and close to Khartoum. The school is attached to the tomb of Sheikh Hogahli, the patron saint of Khartoum, and who is greatly revered by the inhabitants of that town and district. The sheikh of this tomb or shrine, although he keeps a free school and feeds the poor, derives a very handsome revenue from the gifts of the pious. He claims to be a descendant of the original Hoghali, and through him of Mahomet. Here he remained some time studying religion, the tenets of the sheikh, &c., but did not make much progress in the more wordly accomplishments of reading and writing. After a time he left and went to Berber, when he joined another free school kept by a Sheikh Ghubush, at a village of that name nearly opposite to Mekerref (Berber). This school is also attached to a shrine greatly venerated by the natives. Here Mohammed Achmet remained six months completing his religious education. Thence he went to Aradupp (Tamarind Tree), a village south of Cana. Here in 1870 he became a disciple of another faki—Sheikh Nur-el-Daim (Continuous Light). Nur-el-Daim subsequently ordained him a sheikh or faki, and he then left to take up his home in the island of Abba, near Kana, on the White Nile. Here he began by making a subterranean excavation (khaliva—retreat), into which he made a practice of retiring to repeat for hours the names of the Deity, and this accompanied by fasting, incense burning, and prayers. His fame and sanctity by degrees spread far and wide, and Mohammed Achmet became wealthy, collected disciples and married several wives, all of whom he was careful to select from among the daughters of the most influential Baggara Sheikhs (Baggara—tribes owning cattle and horses and notables). To keep within the legalised number (four), he was in the habit of divorcing the surplus, and taking them on again according to his fancy. About the end of May, 1881, he began to write to his brother fakis (religious chiefs), and to teach that he was the Mahdi foretold by Mahomet, and that he had a divine mission to reform Islam, to establish universal equality, a universal law, a universal religion, and a community of goods ("beyt-ul-mal"); also, that all who did not believe in him should be destroyed, be they Christian, Mohammedan or pagan. Among others, he wrote to Mohammed Saleh, a very learned and influential faki of Dongola, directing him to collect his dervishes (followers) and friends and join him at Abba. This Sheikh, instead of complying with his request, informed the Government, declaring the man must be mad. This information, and with that collected from other quarters, alarmed his Excellency Reouf Pasha, and the result was the expedition on 3rd August 1881. In person the Mahdi is tall, slim, with a black beard and light brown complexion. Like most Dongowalis he reads and writes with difficulty. He is local head of the Gherlan or Kadridge order of dervishes, a school originated by Abul-Kader-el-Ghatani whose tomb is I believe at Bagdad. Judging from his conduct in affairs and policy, I should say he had considerable natural ability. The manner in which he had managed to merge the usually discordant tribes together denotes great tact. He had probably been preparing the movement some time past.

DARWINISM.

In reply to "Fiat Lux," in No. 7, there has been little done in the way of supplying missing links since Darwin's death. Huxley is the greatest expositor of the theory of Evolution. The most important discovery has been that of a low type of skull found in France—as low as the Neanderthal, which approached that of the anthropoids. The continuity of life from the monera to man has been pretty conclusively established. Darwin's death is so recent, the discoveries since made cannot be many.—A.

NEMESIS.

The character of Nemesis as the goddess of vengeance is well known, but, as with most of the heathen divinities, was subject to the law of evolution, passing through three distinct stages in her mythological career. She was called the daughter of Night, and was in her earliest period a personification of the reverence for law and conscience. In this character Nemesis is morally the greatest of all gods and goddesses. In the second stage, she is pictured by Herodotus as measuring out happiness and unhappiness to mortals, teaching humility to the proud and raising the meek and lowly. The third stage represents her in her popular character as the avenging fate that sooner or later overtakes the hardened sinner. She was represented as a virgin.—C.

QUERIES.

Can you or any of your readers inform me who is the author of the following lines, and about the time they were written.—J.P.

"I sent my soul through the Invisible, some letter of the afterlife to spell :

And by-and-bye my soul returned to me and answered :—
'I myself am heaven and hell.'

"Heaven, but the vision of fulfilled desire,
And hell the shadow of a soul on fire ;
Last on the darkness into which ourselves,
So late emerged from, shall so soon expire."

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

ON HEARING HIM READ HIS POEMS IN BOSTON.

A stranger, schooled to gentle arts,

He slept before the curious throng.

His path into our waiting hearts

Already paved by song.

Full well we knew his choristers

Whose plaintive voices haunt our rest,

Those sable vested harbingers

Of melancholy guest.

We smile on him for love of these,

With eyes that swift grew dim to scan

Beneath the veil of courteous ease

The faith-forsaken man.

To his sad gaze the weary shows

And fashions of our vain estate,

Our shallow pain and false repose,

Our barren love and hate,

Are shadows in a land of graves,

Where creeds, the bubbles of a dream,

Flash each and fade, like meeting waves

Upon a moonlight stream.

Yet loyal to his own despair,

Erect beneath a darkened sky,

He deems the thorniest truth more fair

Than any gilded lie;

And stands, the spectre of his age,

With hopeless hands that bind the sheaf,

Claiming God's work without His wage,

The bard of unbelief.

—'Literary World.'

A correspondent of the Boston Index elucidates the tenets of "Free Religion" in the following terms:—In the article of F. M. Holland, in a late Index, the formula of the Free Religionists is set forth. No scepticism has, he thinks, spoken of these four principles: 1. The positive existence of a transcendent Reality, which reveals itself in conscience, but is above all definition; 2. Our continual dependence on this Reality, in which we live and move and have our being; 3. The certainty that it acts through fixed and general laws; and, 4. Some sort of connection between this action and the tendency which leads us to do right. Now, when we come to dwell in this Reality, we become philosophers, and have a real existence as such. And a philosopher is not an automaton; he is a Reality-reliant man in phenomenal things. In fact, a man is as he lives, or dwells; for the quality of a substance must be in strict relation to the substance itself.