

ONE DOLLAR A YEAR

Two Kinds of Infidels.
When you are going to divide a class, you must have first and foremost—the logician assure us—a basis of division. Two bases of division suggest themselves as we approach the class "infidels." These are the infidels of the old school and the infidels of the new school. That is the first *fundamental* distinction.

Infidels of the old school are disciples of Tom Paine, and advocate a bold, blatant infidelity. They ask you, triumphantly, where Cain got his wife; question the very existence of Jesus of Nazareth; and, in the same breath, insist that his mother was no better than she should be. They pick flaws, here and there, in the sacred narrative; but they have not vigor and strength enough to wrestle with it as a whole. They have never studied the gospel narrative, as a whole. They have not strength enough to apprehend it as a whole.

We had fondly supposed this school of infidelity a thing of the past—cherished only by a few country bumpkins who had surreptitiously obtained, of some book-peddler, a copy of Paine's "Age of Reason." But Col. Robert Ingersoll has given to this effete phase of infidelity a new lease of life. He and his followers are years behind the age; but they haven't found it out yet—nor have those Young Men's Christian Associations found it out who invite Ingersoll to lecture, and after pocketing the proceeds, find fault that he has given them "an infidel lecture." An infidel lecture, forsooth? It would have been an infidel lecture once; but Col. Ingersoll's phase of infidelity has long since been outgrown by all sensible infidels.

Infidels of the new school are sensible enough to see that one might as reasonably question the personal existence of Julius Caesar as that of Jesus of Nazareth. They have some conception of the weight of evidence, and have actually read the narratives which they profess to doubt. They confess, therefore, that Jesus of Nazareth actually lived, and that he was a wonderful man. Some of them place him far above Socrates and Seneca and Marcus Aurelius and Sakya-Muni. To Renan, at least—who, with Strauss, is the arch-apostle of the new school of infidelity—Jesus is the man of men, the wonder of the ages. It is only when it becomes a question of his supernatural powers—his identity with Deity—that Renan begins to doubt. Such is the position of the reasonably intelligent and moderately far-ruined infidels of the new school. They deny to Jesus personal trust, but they fully concede to him historic credibility, and regard him with unbounded respect. Words would fail us to express the contempt with which they would regard him who should do otherwise—Ingersoll, for instance.

But there is—as we have already hinted—another subdivision possible of the class "infidels"; and that is so aggressive, just now, that it may be well to run transverse lines across it.

Under our second basis of classification we recognize, first, the honest, regretful infidels—those men and women who would gladly believe in Christianity if they only could; but who, by nature and training, so full of doubts and questionings that they can really believe in nothing. Charles Kingsley describes such an one in the thirteenth chapter of his *Hypatia*—perhaps the best historical novel that has ever been written—and sketches like his Alben Ezra are to be handled with the greatest care and treated with the tenderest respect. Infidels of this class always treat with respect—sometimes they seem to regard with reverence—those who have attained to firmer faith than they; and they do not deserve to be overwhelmed with obloquy.

But, over against this class, we must recognize a far larger class—and we fear, a rapidly increasing class—who are bound to be infidels whether or no, who pride themselves upon their infidelity, and systematically stultify their minds and harden their heart that they may hold it all the more firmly. They are the analogues, in spirit, of the effete Tom Paine school of infidelity; and yet their ranks are reinforced—we regret to say—mainly from the "advanced thinkers" of modern times, the disciples of Darwin and Huxley and Herbert Spencer. It is not enough that they be infidels—nobody denies that poor privilege—everybody else must be infidel too. They are full of sneers and flings and innuendoes against everybody and everything that is, in the slightest degree, identified with Christianity. The Bible—whatever else it may be—is, in common contempt, a marvel of literary excellence; but a purely literary allusion to the Bible has the same effect upon them that the display of a red flag has upon a baited bull in the Spanish arena. Christianity is—to claim the very least—a fact, a phenomenon, which should be dispassionately considered, by every sensible man, like all other facts and phenomena. But the most distant allusion to Christianity by a lecturer—always excepting Ingersoll—is, to the blatant infidel who boasts his infidelity in the face of the nineteenth century—whom Christianity has made what it is—an attempt to produce, on a stage upon the rights of production.

We have had exceptional opportunities, lately, to make a study of this class of infidels—our specimens being men with brains enough to perceive, in all reason, their being such infidels as they are. They have imbibed the spirit of Tom Paine's "Age of Reason"; but they have not so much as heard of "The Rights of Man"—*See & Chronicle.*

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