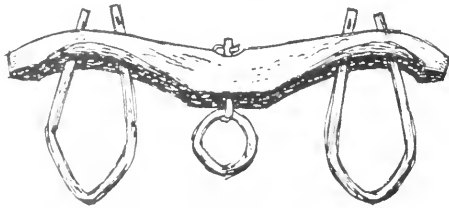


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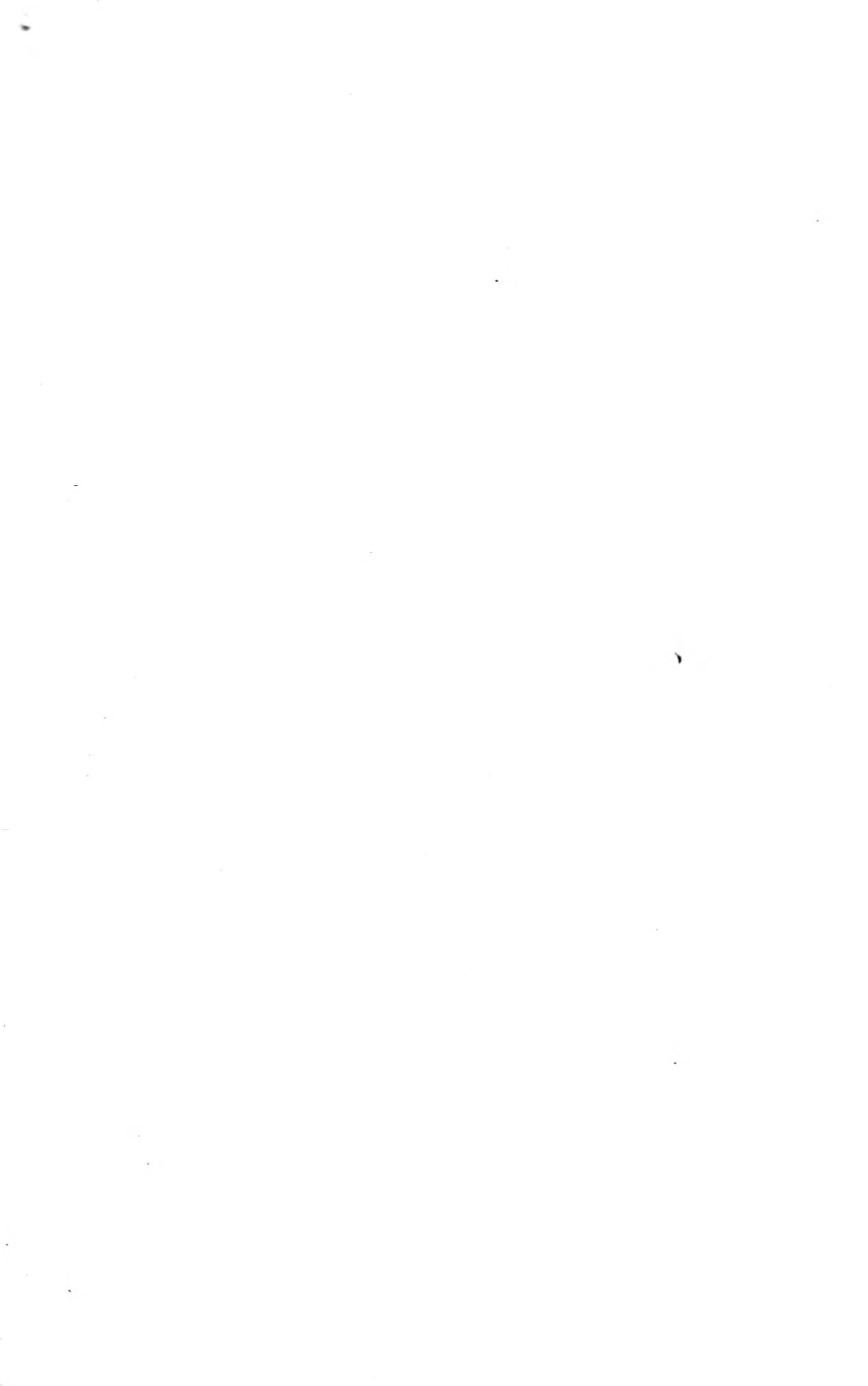


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JOHN E. REMSBURG



# Six Historic Americans

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PAINE, JEFFERSON,  
WASHINGTON, FRANKLIN,  
LINCOLN, GRANT

The Fathers and Saviors  
of Our Republic,  
Freethinkers

By JOHN E. REMSBURG



NEW YORK  
THE TRUTH SEEKER COMPANY,  
FORTY-NINE VESEY STREET.

80  
re

*Affectionately Inscribed*

16

*My Daughter.*

**REULLURA R. HARNESS**



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ULYSSES S. GRANT



## PREFACE.

Were the American people asked to name the five great historic figures of the first century of our national existence—the illustrious men who contributed most to build and glorify the United States of America—the answer would be, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Ulysses S. Grant.

To this list of immortals posterity will add another—Thomas Paine. For nearly a century this noble man—the real founder of our Republic—has been buried beneath the stones of obloquy. But slowly the angels of Justice are rolling back these stones from his sepulchre, and the resurrection of Thomas Paine is at hand.

While the orthodox clergy, to their everlasting shame, are responsible for the cruel treatment accorded this patriot, the liberal Christian ministers, to their eternal honor, have been candid and courageous enough to do him justice. These are but a few of their many tributes to him:

Rev. John Snyder:—"Paine did more than any

other single man to create this nation. I simply speak what will some day be the sober judgment of history."

Rev. Solomon Southwick:—"Had Thomas Paine been a Grecian or Roman patriot in olden times, and performed the same services as he did for this country, he would have had the honor of an apotheosis. The Pantheon would have been opened to him, and we should at this day regard his memory with the same veneration that we do that of Socrates and Cicero."

Rev. Minot J. Savage, D. D.:—"No man rendered grander service to this country; no man ought to be more cherished or remembered."

Dr. Moncure D. Conway:—"Above all, Paine was a profoundly religious man—one of the few in our Revolutionary era of whom it can be said that his delight was in the law of his Lord, and in that law did he meditate day and night. Consequently, he could not escape the immemorial fate of the great believers, to be persecuted for unbelief—by unbelievers."

Rev. Theodore Parker:—"He did more to promote piety and morality among men than a hundred ministers of that age in America."

Rev. Dr. David Swing:—"Paine was one of the best and grandest men that ever trod the planet."

Rev. O. B. Frothingham:—"No private charac-



ter has been more foully calumniated in the name of God than that of Thomas Paine."

Rev. James Kay Applebee:—"I see Thomas Paine as he looms up in history—a great, grand figure. The reputation bigots have created for him fades away, even as the creeds for which they raved and lied, fade away; but distinct and luminous, there remains the noble character of Paine created by himself."

Dr. John E. Roberts:—"So long as human rights are sacred and their defenders held in grateful remembrance; so long as liberty has a flag flung to the skies, a sanctuary in the hearts of men, so long, upon the eternal granite of history, luminous as light and imperishable as the stars, will be engraven the name of Thomas Paine."

The Church claims all great men. But the truth is the great men of all nations have, for the most part, rejected Christianity. Of these six historic Americans—the six greatest men that have lived on this Continent—not one was a Christian. All were unbelievers—all Infidels—all Free-thinkers.

It is popularly supposed that Paine was a very irreligious man, while Washington, Franklin, Jefferson, Lincoln and Grant were very religious. The reverse of this is more nearly true. Paine, although not a Christian, was a deeply religious

man; while the others, though practicing the loftiest morals, cared little for religion. Paine was a firm believer in the religion of Deism, and a zealous advocate of it; the others, while nominally Deists, and using the conventional language of Deism, were probably more nearly Agnostics in belief.

Washington and Grant, while unbelievers, attended church and retained the good will of the clergy. Franklin avowed his disbelief, but in a friendly spirit which provoked few censures. Jefferson and Lincoln both talked and wrote against Christianity, but Lincoln's criticisms were never published, while Jefferson's, scattered through several volumes, are little read. The rejection of Christianity by these men has been, to a great extent, forgotten or forgiven.

Paine not only opposed Christianity, but he opposed it in a book which was read by thousands, and which the defenders of Christianity could not answer. For this he was persecuted while living and calumniated when dead.

In this volume is presented the evidence of the disbelief of these great men. The first part entitled "The Fathers of Our Republic," deals with the religious views of Paine, Jefferson, Washington, and Franklin. The basis of it is an address delivered before the tenth annual Congress of the Ameri-

can Secular Union, in Chickering Hall, New York, November 13, 1886, at which Colonel Ingersoll presided. The second part, entitled, "The Saviors of Our Republic," deals with the religious opinions of Lincoln and Grant. The matter pertaining to Lincoln was published in 1893. It constitutes the larger portion of the work. For a quarter of a century following Lincoln's death there was a fierce controversy respecting his belief, and the testimony called out by this controversy was quite voluminous. Grant, in regard to his religious opinions, maintained that silence so characteristic of him and little was known or said respecting them.

*March, 1906.*

**J. E. R.**



**THE  
FATHERS OF OUR REPUBLIC:  
PAINE,  
JEFFERSON, WASHINGTON,  
FRANKLIN**



INDORSEMENT BY ROBERT G.  
INGERSOLL.

MY DEAR REMSBURG: Accept my thanks for "The Fathers of Our Republic." I was greatly interested in the lecture, and at the time I heard it hoped it would be issued in book form. You have done a good work, and have done it well. Your facts are stated in an admirable way, and your conclusions justly and naturally drawn. The pamphlet will do great good. The minds of thousands will be disabused. It has been, and still is, the business of most ministers and priests to show that all the great dead—the patriots, scientists and philosophers—were small enough and ignorant enough, and hypocritical enough, to pretend to be what they were not, and to believe what they did not.

R. G. INGERSOLL.





## INTRODUCTION.

Associated with the formation of our Republic are four names that deserve and will obtain a more enduring fame than others: Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and Benjamin Franklin.

It was Paine who first proposed American Independence, and prepared the public mind for its acceptance. To Jefferson was assigned the task, and to him has been accorded the honor, of formulating the political document whose adoption by the Continental Congress proclaimed our Nation's birth. This was followed by a war of Revolution, and the central figure, the leader, in this momentous struggle, was Washington. Yet skillful and sagacious as this commander was, brave and patriotic as his soldiers were, the recognition and assistance of a foreign power was necessary to insure success.

This was secured; England's great rival, France, came to the rescue, and the contest was decided in our favor. To the untiring labors of Franklin was this achievement due. Thus these

men stand forth—Paine the Author-Hero, Jefferson the Statesman-Hero, Washington the Soldier-Hero, and Franklin the Diplomatic-Hero of the Revolution.

Every event in the lives of these illustrious men, every element in their characters, has become a subject of surpassing interest. There is one theme connected with their history upon which I propose to dwell, and that is the question of their religious beliefs. Few questions are so little understood.

The world has been cursed with two great evils, kingcraft and priestcraft. Kingcraft, in this country, has been destroyed; priestcraft remains—a parasitic army preying upon our body politic. Founded upon fraud, the clerical profession, with many honorable exceptions, depends upon fraud for its support. One of its methods I shall expose in this work. While pretending to ignore reason, and intellectuality, and worldly greatness, its members yet realize the importance of having the intellectual Titans and the popular heroes of the world upon their side. “Great men may gain nothing from religion, but religion can gain much from great men,” said the theological buzzard that daily perched himself beside the dying Grant. At the same time they realize the humiliating fact that it is for the most part the dwarfs, and not the giants of the world, that train with them. One

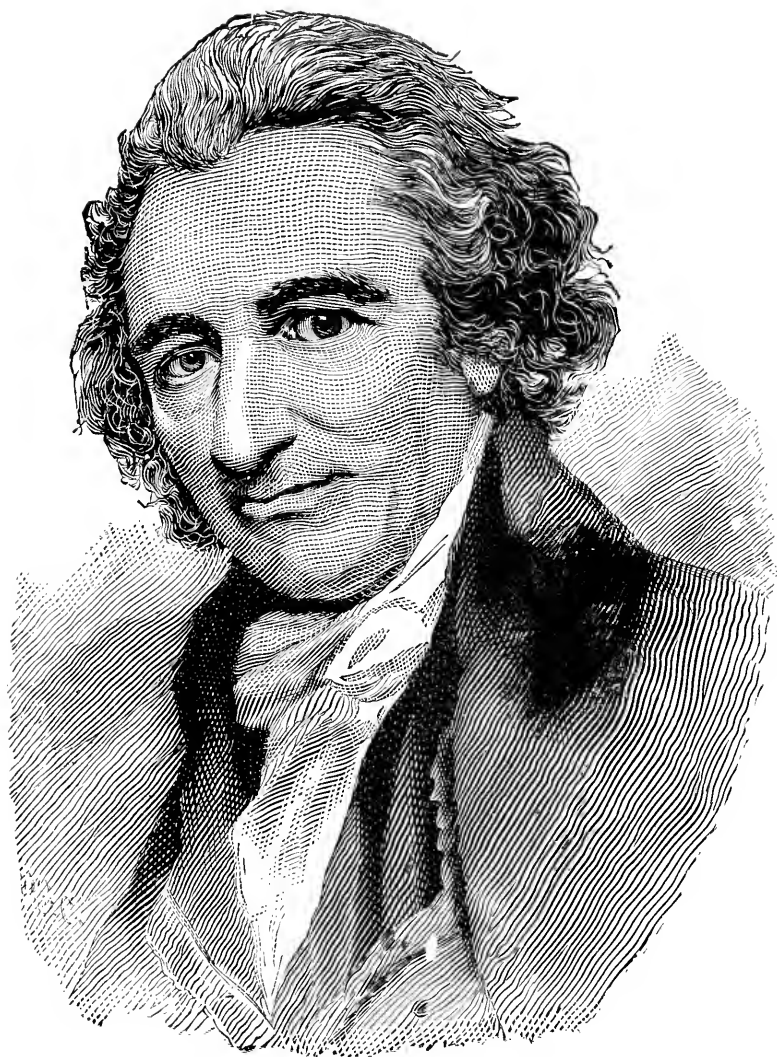
of their number, more honest than his fellows, says: "The great and the wise and the mighty are not with us. These men, the master-minds and imperial leaders among men, are outside our most Christian church." As Saladin observes, "The church would give ten millions of her blockheads for the adherence and support of one man strong enough to hew his name imperishably upon the mountain of adamant into which are cut the names of the immortals." And thus, recognizing the magic influence that a great name carries with it, the clergy have inscribed in the Christian roster the names of hundreds who were total disbelievers in their dogmas. As the venders of quack nostrums attach the forged certificates of distinguished individuals to their worthless drugs, to make them sell, so these theological venders present the manufactured endorsements of the great to make their nostrums popular. Jefferson, Washington, and Franklin have all been denominated Christians, not because they were such, for they were not, but because of the influence that attaches to their names.

Paine's opposition to priestcraft was too pronounced and too well known to claim him as an adherent of their faith, and so they have sought to destroy his influence by destroying his good name. Not only this, knowing the prejudice that

has prevailed against Atheism, they have misrepresented his theological opinions and declared him an Atheist.

**THOMAS PAINE**





THOMAS PAINE





## THOMAS PAINE.

The religious opinions of no other man have been so greatly misrepresented and so little understood as those of Thomas Paine. Orthodox Christians have, almost with the same breath, declared that he died an unrepentant Atheist and a convert to Christianity. A presentation of his religious views, as expressed in his writings and witnessed by his friends, will clearly establish the negative of the following:

1. Was Paine an Atheist?
2. Was he a Christian?
3. Did he recant?

### *WAS PAINE AN ATHEIST*

The President of the United States, Mr. Roosevelt, has characterized Thomas Paine as an Atheist. "Strong religious minds are not likely to be affected by the Atheism of Paine," recently wrote a Western journalist. Another writer, discussing the authorship of the Declaration of Independence, contended that Paine could not have written that document because it acknowledged the

existence of a Creator. Ask almost any orthodox Christian if Paine believed in a Supreme Being and he will tell you that he did not.

Now could these persons overcome their prejudice so far as to read a single page of Paine's theological writings they would be ashamed of their ignorance (I use the word not in reproach, but in charity) and amazed at the dishonesty of their religious teachers who are responsible for this ignorance. A more devout believer in God and immortality never lived than Thomas Paine. In no other works are the terms God and Creator used more frequently, or in a more reverential manner, than in his. In his "Age of Reason," the work that brought down upon his devoted head the wrath of almost the entire Christian priesthood, the recognition of a Supreme Being is made more than two hundred times.

On the first page of this book appears his creed, and his creed begins with these words:

"I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life."

In summing up his arguments in the first part of this work, he says:

"The moral duty of man consists in imitating the moral goodness and beneficence of God manifested in the creation toward all his creatures. That seeing, as we daily do, the goodness of God

to all men, it is an example calling upon all men to practice the same toward each other."

A concluding paragraph of the second part reads as follows:

"Were man impressed as fully and as strongly as he ought to be with the belief of a God, his moral life would be regulated by the force of that belief; he would stand in awe of God and of himself, and would not do the thing that could not be concealed from either. . . . This is Deism."

When Paine commenced his "Age of Reason," he was fifty-six. The first great product of his brain, "Common Sense," was written when he was thirty-eight. In this work a recognition of God is expressed on almost every page. He died at the age of seventy-two. His will begins with these words: "Reposing confidence in my Creator, God." It ends as follow: "I die in perfect composure and resignation to the will of my Creator, God."

Respecting a future existence, he says:

"I trouble not myself about the manner of future existence. I content myself with believing, even to positive conviction, that the power that gave me existence is able to continue it in any form and manner he pleases, either with or without this body" (Age of Reason).

"I consider myself in the hands of my Creator,

and that he will dispose of me after this life consistently with his justice and goodness" (Private Thoughts on a Future State).

Paine was one of the founders and most active members of the Society of Theophilanthropists (lovers of God and man,) which existed in Paris during and after the French Revolution. Upon their altars was this inscription:

"We believe in the existence of a God, and in the immortality of the soul."

The "Age of Reason," instead of being an Atheistic work, as popularly supposed, was written to oppose Atheism. In a letter to Samuel Adams, Paine says: "The people of France were running headlong into Atheism, and I had the work translated into their own language, to stop them in that career, and fix them in the first article of every man's creed, who has any creed at all—I believe in God."

#### WAS PAINE A CHRISTIAN?

The evidences of Paine's disbelief in Christianity, as a revealed religion, are irrefutable, as shown by the following extracts from his writings:

"I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the

Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church" (Age of Reason).

"All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit" (Ibid.).

"Each of these churches shows certain books, which they call revelation, or the word of God. The Jews say that their word of God was given by God to Moses, face to face; the Christians say that their word of God came by divine inspiration; and the Turks say that their word of God, the Koran, was brought by an angel from heaven. Each of these churches accuses the others of unbelief; and, for my own part, I disbelieve them all" (Ibid.).

"But some perhaps will say, Are we to have no word of God, no revelation? I answer, Yes; there is a word of God; there is a revelation.

"The word of God is the creation we behold. . . . It is only in the creation that all our ideas and conceptions of a word of God can unite. The creation speaketh an universal language, independently of human speech, or human language, multiplied and various as they be. It is an ever-existing original, which every man can read. It can-

not be forged; it cannot be counterfeited; it cannot be lost; it cannot be altered; it cannot be suppressed. It does not depend upon the will of man whether it shall be published or not; it publishes itself from one end of the earth to the other. It preaches to all nations and to all worlds; and this word of God reveals to man all that is necessary for man to know of God.

“Do we want to contemplate his power? We see it in the unchangeable order by which the incomprehensible whole is governed. Do we want to contemplate his munificence? We see it in the abundance with which he fills the earth. Do we want to contemplate his mercy? We see it in his not withholding that abundance even from the unthankful. In fine, do we want to know what God is? Search not the book called the Scripture, which any human hand might make, but the Scripture called the creation” (Ibid.).

“What is it the Bible teaches us?—rapine, cruelty, and murder. What is it the Testament teaches us?—to believe that the Almighty committed debauchery with a woman engaged to be married, and the belief of this debauchery is called faith” (Ibid.).

“It is the fable of Jesus Christ, as told in the New Testament, and the wild and visionary doctrine raised thereon, against which I contend.

The story, taking it as it is told, is blasphemously obscene" (Ibid.).

"As to the Christian system of faith, it appears to me as a species of Atheism—a sort of religious denial of God. It professes to believe in a man rather than in God. It is a compound made up chiefly of Manism with but little Deism, and is as near Atheism as twilight is to darkness. It introduces between man and his Maker an opaque body, which it calls a Redeemer, as the moon introduces her opaque self between the earth and the sun, and it produces by this means a religious, or an irreligious eclipse of light. It has put the whole orbit of reason into shade" (Ibid.).

"The intellectual part of religion is a private affair between every man and his Maker, and in which no third party has any right to interfere. The practical part consists in our doing good to each other. But since religion has been made into a trade, the practical part has been made to consist of ceremonies performed by men called priests....By devices of this kind true religion has been banished, and such means have been found out to extract money, even from the pockets of the poor, instead of contributing to their relief" (Letter to Camille Jordan).

"No man ought to make a living by religion. It is dishonest so to do" (Ibid.).

“Who art thou, vain dust and ashes, by whatever name thou art called—whether a king, a bishop, a church, or a state—that obtrudest thine insignificance between the soul of man and his Maker?” (Rights of Man).

“Any system of religion that has anything in it that shocks the mind of a child, cannot be a true system” (Age of Reason).

“To do good is my religion.”

“I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow-creatures happy” (Age of Reason).

Paine’s unbelief was life-long. In his “Age of Reason” he says: “From the time I was capable of conceiving an idea and acting upon it by reflection, I either doubted the truth of the Christian system or thought it to be a strange affair.”

It has been claimed that Paine, when he wrote his “Common Sense,” and advocated American Independence, was a Christian. Concerning this Moncure D. Conway says: “In his ‘Common Sense,’ (published January 10, 1776), Paine used the reproof of Israel (1 Samuel) for desiring a king. John Adams, a Unitarian and monarchist, asked him if he really believed in the inspiration of the Old Testament. Paine said he did not, and intended at a later period to publish his opinions on the subject” (Life of Paine, Vol. ii, p. 203).



*DID PAINE RECENT?*

Did Thomas Paine recant? Did Martin Luther recant? Protestants assert that Paine recanted; Catholics assert that Luther recanted. Neither recanted. Knaves invented these stories; fools believe them.

The church endeavors to convince the world that her opponents are not sincere. She attempts to impeach the intellectual honesty of those who reject her dogmas. She affects to believe that all must at some time acknowledge the truth of her claims. The supreme test is supposed to come just before dissolution. In the presence of death all bow to her authority.

When on his death-bed Paine was beset by emissaries of the church,—pious nurses, bigoted priests, and illiterate laymen—who by entreaties and threats tried to compel him to renounce his Deistic and Anti-Christian opinions. What a farcical scene! What a commentary on Christianity! Poor, ignorant, ill-mannered creatures, expecting with silly gibberish and impudence to change the life-long convictions of a dying philosopher!

After his death, Catholics, Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Episcopalians, and orthodox Quakers all vied with each other in inventing cal-

umnies concerning him. The last named sect was especially active in this work, because Paine was the son of a Quaker, and apostasy was as hateful to the Quaker as it was to the Catholic.

About ten years after Paine died, this recantation calumny appeared. Willet Hicks, a Quaker merchant and preacher, a cousin of the celebrated Elias Hicks, and a broad and liberal man, lived near Paine, and during his last illness did all he could to alleviate the sufferings of the sick man and make his last hours pleasant. Mary Roscoe, afterwards Mary Hinsdale, was a servant in the Hicks family, and, it is alleged, was sometimes sent to Paine's room on errands. On one of these visits Paine, it is claimed, engaged her in conversation, and recanted to her his Infidel opinions. According to this story, "Paine asked her if she had ever read any of his writings, and on being told she had read very little of them, he inquired what she thought of them, adding, 'From such a one as you I expect a correct answer.' She told him that when very young his 'Age of Reason' was put into her hands, but that the more she read in it the more dark and distressed she felt, and she threw the book into the fire. 'I wish all had done as you,' he replied, 'for if the devil ever had any agency in any work, he has had it in my writing that book.' When going to carry him

some refreshments, she repeatedly heard him uttering the language, 'Oh! Lord!' 'Lord God!' or 'Lord Jesus, have mercy upon me!' " (Life of Stephen Grellet, Vol. i., p. 125).

What a plausible tale! Paine's "Age of Reason" was published in 1794. After a lapse of fifteen years he desires an opinion of it. Persons of intellectual attainments and mature judgment, believers and unbelievers, many of them familiar with its contents, visit him daily. He ignores all of these and solicits the opinion of an illiterate servant girl! He "expects a correct answer" from her, the more especially as she has read very little of it and is ignorant of its contents.

The calumny quickly found its way to England. The famous English writer, William Cobbett, afterwards a member of Parliament, wrote a refutation of it. Mr. Cobbett's refutation, with a few abridgements, is as follows:

"It is a part of the business of a press sold to the cause of corruption to calumniate those, dead or alive, who have most effectually labored against that cause; and, as Paine was the most powerful and effectual of those laborers, so to calumniate him has been an object of their peculiar attention and care. Among other things said against this famous man is, that he recanted

before he died; and that in his last illness he discovered horrible fears of death."

"I happen to know the origin of this story, and I possess the real original document whence have proceeded these divers editions of the falsehood, of the very invention of which I was perhaps myself the innocent cause!

"About two years ago I, being then on Long Island, published my intention of writing an account of the life, labors, and death of Paine. Soon after this a Quaker of New York, named Charles Collins, made many applications for an interview with me, which at last he obtained. I found that his object was to persuade me that Paine had recanted. I laughed at him and sent him away. But he returned again and again to the charge. He wanted me to promise that I would say that 'it was said' that Paine had recanted. 'No,' said I, 'but I will say that you say it, and that you tell a lie, unless you prove the truth of what you say; and, if you do that, I shall gladly insert the fact.' This posed 'Friend Charley,' whom I suspected to be a most consummate hypocrite. He had a sodden face, a simper, and manœuvred his features precisely like the most perfidious wretch that I have known. . . . Thus put to his trump, Friend Charley resorted to the aid of a person of his own stamp; and at last he

brought me a paper. . . . This paper, very cautiously and craftily drawn up, contained only the initials of names. This would not do. I made him, at last, put down the full name and address of the informer—'Mary Hinsdale, No. 10 Anthony street, New York.' ”

“The informer was a Quaker woman, who, at the time of Mr. Paine’s last illness, was a servant in the family of Mr. Willet Hicks, an eminent merchant, a man of excellent character, a Quaker, and even, I believe, a Quaker preacher. Mr. Hicks, a kind and liberal and rich man, visited Mr. Paine in his illness; and from his house, which was near that of Mr. Paine, little nice things (as is the practice in America) were sometimes sent to him, of which this servant, Friend Mary, was the bearer; and this was the way in which the lying cant got into the room of Mr. Paine.

“To friend Mary, therefore, I went on the twenty-sixth of October last, with Friend Charley’s paper in my pocket. I found her in a lodging in a back room up one pair of stairs. . . . I was compelled to come quickly to business. She asked, ‘What’s thy name, Friend?’ and the moment I said, ‘William Cobbett,’ up went her mouth as tight as a purse! Sack-making appeared to be her occupation; and, that I might not extract through her eyes that which she was re-

solved I should not get out of her mouth, she went and took up a sack and began to sew, and not another look or glance could I get from her.

“However, I took out my paper, read it, and, stopping at several points, asked her if it was true. Talk of the Jesuits, indeed! The whole tribe of Loyola, who had shaken so many kingdoms to their base, never possessed the millionth part of the cunning of this drab-colored little woman, whose face, simplicity and innocence seemed to have chosen as the place of their triumph! She shuffled; she evaded; she equivocated; she warded off; she affected not to understand me, not to understand the paper, not to remember.”

“The result was that it was so long ago that she could not speak positively on any part of the matter; that she would not say that any part of the paper was true; that she had never seen the paper; and that she had never given Friend Charley (for so she called him) authority to say anything about the matter in her name.

“I had now nothing to do but to bring Friend Charley’s nose to the grindstone. But Charley, though so pious a man and doubtless in great haste to get to everlasting bliss, had moved out of the city for fear of the fever.”

Mr. Cobbett supposed that Mary Hinsdale had

really visited Paine, and this supposition was shared by Paine's friends generally. When Gilbert Vale, about twenty years later, was collecting materials for his life of Paine, he learned from Mr. Hicks that she had never seen Thomas Paine. Mr. Vale says:

“To our surprise, on seeing Mr. Hicks, as a duty which we owed the public, we learned that Mary Hinsdale never saw Paine to Mr. Hicks' knowledge; that the fact of his sending some delicacy from his table as a compliment occurred but a very few times, and that he always commissioned his daughters on this errand of kindness, and he designated Mrs. Cheeseman, then a little girl, but now the wife of one of our celebrated physicians, as the daughter especially engaged, and that she stated that Mary Hinsdale once wished to go with her, but was refused” (Life of Paine, p. 178).

This accounts for the embarrassment and reticence exhibited by Mary Hinsdale when confronted by Cobbett. She had never seen Paine, she had never visited the house in which he died; she could not describe its surroundings or interior; she had never seen any of his attendants. If she attempted to make any statements concerning them she had reason to believe that Madame Bonnevillle and other witnesses were near at hand to expose her.

In the neighborhood where Mrs. Hinsdale lived she was universally regarded as a low, disreputable woman, addicted to the use of opium, and notorious for her lying propensities. Nor was her share in the Paine calumny her only offense of the kind. Mr. Vale, writing in 1839, cites the following testimony of Mr. J. W. Lockwood, a reputable gentleman, of New York:

“This gentleman had a sister, a member of the Friends who died about two-and-twenty years ago. On her death, Mary Hinsdale, who was known to the family, stated to them that she should come to the funeral, for that she had met Mary Lockwood a short time before her death; and that she (Mary Lockwood) had said to her: ‘Mary, I do not expect to live long; my views are changed; I wish thee to come to my funeral, and make this declaration to my friends then assembled,’ and that consequently she should come. The relatives of the deceased, who were Hicksite Quakers, or Friends, knew the falseness of this statement. Those who had sat by her bedside, and heard her continued and last declarations on religious subjects (for she was emphatically a religious young woman), knew that no change had taken place. Her brother, our informant, had heard her express her opinions with great satisfaction. He and her other relatives therefore



said so to Mary Hinsdale, but invited her to attend the funeral. Mary Hinsdale did not attend" (Life of Paine, p. 185).

Collins himself afterwards tacitly admitted the falsity of the Paine calumny. Mr. Vale, on whom he once called, says:

"Finding Mr. C. Collins in our house, and knowing the importance of his testimony, we at once asked him what induced him to publish the account of Mary Hinsdale. He assured us he then thought it true. He believed that she had seen Mr. Paine, and that Mr. Paine might confess to her, a girl, when he would not to Willet Hicks. He knew that many of their most respected Friends did not believe the account. He knew that Mr. Hicks did not, whom he highly respected; but yet he thought it might be true. We asked Mr. Collins what he thought of the character of Mary Hinsdale now? He replied that some of our Friends believe she indulges in opiates and do not give her credit for truth." (Ibid.)

The exposures of Cobbett, Vale, and others, while they lessened the influence of the calumny, did not silence it. It mattered little to the church whether Paine recanted or not, but it was important that the masses should believe that he recanted. With most theologians a falsehood is as good as a truth so long as it serves its purpose.

The orthodox clergy continued to thunder it from the pulpit; tract distributors sowed it broadcast over the land; no Sunday school library was considered complete without a volume containing it; while the religious papers kept it continually before their readers. The New York Observer, a Presbyterian paper, repeatedly published it, together with other calumnies on Paine. In an open letter to the Observer, Col. Ingersoll, in 1877, issued the following challenge:

“I will deposit with the First National Bank of Peoria, Illinois, one thousand dollars in gold, upon the following conditions:—This money shall be subject to your order when you shall, in the manner hereafter provided, substantiate that Thomas Paine admitted the Bible to be an inspired book, or that he recanted his Infidel opinions—or that he died regretting that he had disbelieved the Bible—or that he died calling upon Jesus Christ in any religious sense, whatever.

“In order that a tribunal may be created to try this question, you may select one man, I will select another, and the two thus chosen shall select a third, and any two of the three may decide the matter.

“As there will be certain costs and expenditures on both sides, such costs and expenditures shall be paid by the defeated party.

“In addition to the one thousand dollars in gold, I will deposit a bond with good and sufficient security in the sum of two thousand dollars, conditioned for the payment of all costs in case I am defeated. I shall require of you a like bond.

“From the date of accepting this offer you may have ninety days to collect and present your testimony, giving me notice of time and place of taking depositions. I shall have a like time to take evidence upon my side, giving you like notice, and you shall then have thirty days to take further testimony in reply to what I may offer. The case shall then be argued before the persons chosen; and their decision shall be final as to us.

“If the propositions do not suit you in any particular, please state your objections, and I will modify them in any way consistent with the object in view.

“As soon as you notify me of the acceptance of these propositions I will send you the certificate of the bank that the money has been deposited upon the foregoing conditions, together with copies of bonds for costs.”

The Observer made a pretence of accepting the challenge and then backed out. It again repeated the Mary Hinsdale story with this endorsement: “It has been published again and again, and so far as we know has never been impeached.” In

a subsequent issue, it said: "We have never stated in any form, nor have we ever supposed that Paine actually renounced his Infidelity. The accounts agree in stating that he died a blaspheming Infidel." Col. Ingersoll's reply contained the following:

"From the bottom of my heart I thank myself for having compelled you to admit that Thomas Paine did not recant. \* \* \*

"You have eaten your own words, and, for my part, I would rather have dined with Ezekiel than with you.

"I ask you if it is honest to throw away the testimony of his friends—the evidence of fair and honorable men—and take the putrid words of avowed and malignant enemies?

"When Thomas Paine was dying, he was infested by fanatics—by the snaky spies of bigotry. In the shadows of death were the unclean birds of prey waiting to tear with beak and claw the corpse of him who wrote the 'Rights of Man.' And there lurking and crouching in the darkness were the jackals and hyenas of superstition ready to violate his grave.

"These birds of prey—these unclean beasts are the witnesses produced and relied upon by you.

"One by one the instruments of torture have been wrenched from the cruel clutch of the

Church, until within the armory of orthodoxy there remains but one weapon—Slander.”

In disproof of the lying statement of this depraved woman, who never saw Thomas Paine, we have, thanks to the unselfish labors of Cobbett, Vale, Ingersoll, and Conway, the testimony of a score of death-bed witnesses.

Two of Paine's most devoted friends in France were Nicholas Bonneville and his wife. Bonneville like Paine was a prominent actor in the French Revolution. After the Revolution Paine lived with the Bonnevilles in Paris. For criticising Napoleon in his journal Bonneville was imprisoned and his family reduced to penury. Paine gave them a home in America. When he was taken sick Madame Bonneville tenderly cared for him until he died. After his death Bonneville and his wife wrote a sketch of the life of their benefactor. It was subsequently revised by Cobbett, and will be found appended to Dr. Conway's admirable biography of Paine. The following, relative to Paine's death, is from the pen of Madame Bonneville:

“When he was near his end, two American clergymen came to see him, and to talk with him on religious matters. ‘Let me alone,’ said he, ‘good morning.’ He desired they should be admitted no more. Seeing his end fast approach-

ing, I asked him, in presence of a friend, if he felt satisfied with the treatment he had received at our house, upon which he could only exclaim, Oh, yes! He added other words but they were incoherent. It was impossible for me not to exert myself to the utmost in taking care of a person to whom I and my children owed so much. He now appeared to have lost all kinds of feeling. He spent the night in tranquility, and expired in the morning at eight o'clock."

Madame Bonneville was a lady of spotless character, educated and refined, and, like most French women, a Catholic.

Dr. N. Romaine, at that time the most eminent physician of New York, was Paine's physician. He testified that Paine did not recant. A Dr. Manley also visited him. But it afterward transpired that he was there as a Christian spy and emissary. His real mission was to extort, if possible, a recantation from the lips of the dying Infidel. In a letter to James Cheetham, the vilest of Paine's calumniators, he says: "I took occasions during the nights of the 5th and 6th of June to test the strength of his opinions respecting revelation. I purposely made him a very late visit; it was a time which seemed to suit exactly with my errand; it was midnight, he was in great distress." Addressing Paine, Dr. Manley said:

“Do you believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ? Come, now, answer me honestly. I want an answer from the lips of a dying man, for I verily believe that you will not live twenty-four hours.” Not receiving an immediate answer, he continued, “Allow me to ask again, do you believe? or let me qualify the question, do you wish to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? After a pause of some minutes, he answered, ‘I have no wish to believe on that subject.’”

Dr. Manley’s “minutes” were probably seconds. Indignant at the impertinence, not to say brutality, of his pious interrogator, the dying patient paused to summon strength to utter a reply that should not be misunderstood. With the exception of the brief words mentioned by Madame Bonneville, those were the last words of Thomas Paine.

Dr. Manley says that Paine throughout his illness manifested great fear. “He could not be left alone night or day; he not only required to have some person with him but he must see that he or she was there, and would not allow his curtain to be closed at any time.” This is true; and subsequent events showed that his fears were well founded. Dr. Conway says:

“His unwillingness to be left alone, ascribed to superstitious terror, was due to efforts to get a recantation from him, so determined that he dare

not be without witnesses. He had foreseen this. While living with Jarvis, two years before, he desired him to bear witness that he maintained his theistic convictions to the last. . . . When he knew that his illness was mortal he solemnly reaffirmed these opinions in the presence of Madame Bonneville, Dr. Romaine, Mr. Haskin, Captain Pelton, and Thomas Nixon." (Life of Paine, Vol. ii, p. 414.)

It was these witnesses—some of whom were always present when Dr. Manley visited him—that prevented this charlatan from doing what Mary Hinsdale did.

Just before Paine's death the Rev. Cunningham and the Rev. Milledollar, prominent clergymen of New York, gained access to his room. With that politeness so characteristic of clergymen, when addressing those who do not subscribe to their opinions, Mr. Cunningham said to him, "You have now a full view of death, you cannot live long, and whosoever does not believe in Jesus Christ shall be damned." To this Paine replied, "Let me have none of your popish nonsense. Good morning." Mr. Cunningham and Mr. Milledollar both affirmed that Paine died unrepentant.

A blind preacher, named Pigott, and his brother also visited Paine for the purpose of converting him. The brother says that Paine received



them cordially and treated them politely, but exhibited great displeasure when they attempted to obtrude their religious opinions upon him.

Mrs. Redden, Paine's pious nurse, was especially anxious to secure his conversion. She admitted the clergymen who annoyed him during his last hours and is charged with the responsibility of Dr. Manley's visits. But Mrs. Redden desired a genuine conversion, not a fabricated recantation. She frankly confessed that all efforts to change his views were futile.

There is usually an attempt to supply every demand. That there was an urgent demand for this recantation story, particularly among the Quakers, is attested by the Quaker preacher, Willet Hicks. Mr. Hicks says:

"You can have no idea of the anxiety of our people on this subject; I was beset by them, both here and in England, where I soon after went on a journey. . . . As for money, I could have had any sums if I would have said anything against Thomas Paine, or if even I would have consented to remain silent. They informed me that the doctor (Manley) was willing to say something that would satisfy them if I would engage to be silent." (Vale's Life of Paine, p. 178.)

The following affidavit was subscribed and

sworn to by William B. Barnes of Wabash, Indiana, October 27, 1877:

“In the year 1833 Willet Hicks made a visit to Indiana and stayed over night at my father’s house, four miles east of Richmond. In the morning at breakfast my mother asked Willet Hicks the following questions:

“ ‘Was thee with Thomas Paine during his last sickness?’

“Mr. Hicks said: ‘I was with him every day during the latter part of his last sickness.’

“ ‘Did he express any regret in regard to writing the “Age of Reason,” as the published accounts say he did?’

“Mr. Hicks replied: ‘He did not in any way by word or action.’

“ ‘Did he call on God or Jesus Christ, asking either of them to forgive his sins, or did he curse them or either of them?’

“Mr. Hicks answered: ‘He did not. He died as easy as any one I ever saw die, and I have seen many die in my time.’ ”

Mr. A. C. Hankinson of Peoria, Illinois, writes

“My parents were Friends (Quakers). My father died when I was very young. The elderly and middle-aged Friends visited at my mother’s house. We lived in the city of New York. Among the number I distinctly remember Elias Hicks

Willet Hicks, and a Mr. Day, who was a bookseller in Pearl street. There were many others, whose names I do not now remember. The subject of the recantation by Thomas Paine of his views about the Bible in his last illness, or at any other time, was discussed by them in my presence at different times. I learned from them that some of them had attended upon Thomas Paine in his last sickness and ministered to his wants up to the time of his death. And upon the question of whether he did recant there was but one expression. They all said that he did not recant in any manner. I often heard them say they wished he had recanted. In fact, according to them, the nearer he approached death the more positive he appeared to be in his convictions. These conversations were from 1820 to 1822."

The conversations related by Mr. Hankinson, it will be seen, occurred almost immediately after the publication of the Hinsdale story and were doubtless prompted by it.

In 1839 Gilbert Vale published in the New York Beacon the following testimony from Amasa Woodsworth, a gentleman who lived next door to Paine, and who was one of his most constant attendants. Mr. Vale says:

"As an act of kindness Mr. Woodsworth visited Mr. Paine every day for six weeks before his

death. He frequently sat up with him, and did so on the last two nights of his life. He was always there with Dr. Manley, the physician, and assisted in removing Mr. Paine while his bed was prepared. He was present when Dr. Manley asked Paine 'if he wished to believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God,' and he describes Mr. Paine's answer as animated. He says that lying on his back he used some action and with much emphasis, replied, 'I have no wish to believe on that subject.' He lived some time after this, but was not known to speak, for he died tranquilly. He accounts for the insinuating style of Dr. Manley's letter by stating that that gentleman just after its publication joined a church. He informs us that he has openly reproved the doctor for the falsity contained in the spirit of that letter, boldly declaring before Dr. Manley, who is yet living, that nothing which he saw justified the insinuations. Mr. Woodsworth assures us that he neither heard nor saw anything to justify the belief of any mental change in the opinions of Mr. Paine previous to his death."

The above is corroborated by Dr. Philip Graves who met Mr. Woodsworth in 1842. Dr. Graves says:

"He told me that he nursed Thomas Paine in **his** last illness, and closed his eyes when dead.

I asked him if he recanted and called upon God to save him. He replied, 'No. He died as he had taught. He had a sore upon his side and when we turned him it was very painful and he would cry out, "O God!" or something like that.' 'But,' said the narrator, 'that was nothing, for he believed in a God.' I told him that I had often heard it asserted from the pulpit that Mr. Paine recanted in his last moments. The gentleman said that it was not true, and he appeared to be an intelligent truthful man."

John Randel, Jr., a civil engineer of New York, an orthodox Christian, says that Mr. Woodsworth was a very worthy man and that he told him that there was no truth in the report that Paine recanted.

Thomas Nixon and Capt. Daniel Pelton, who attended Paine during his last sickness, wrote, signed and sent the following statement to William Cobbett:

"All you have heard of his recanting is false. Being aware that such reports would be raised after his death by fanatics who infested his house at the time it was expected he would die, we, the subscribers, intimate acquaintances of Thomas Paine, since the year 1776, went to his house—he was sitting up in a chair, and apparently in the full vigor and use of all his mental faculties. We

interrogated him on his religious opinions, and if he had changed his mind or repented of anything he had said or written on that subject. He answered, 'not at all,' and appeared rather offended at our supposition that any change should take place in his mind. We took down in writing the questions put to him, and his answers thereto, before a number of persons then in his room."

Paine's executors were Walter Morton, a lawyer of New York, and Thomas Addis Emmet, a brother of Robert Emmet, the Irish patriot. Both attended Paine and both testified that no change took place in his opinions. Mr. Morton, who was present when he expired, says:

"In his religious opinions, he continued to the last as steadfast and tenacious as any sectarian to the definition of his own creed."

Mrs. Kittie Few is declared by Conway to be "The woman for whom he (Paine) had the deepest affection in America." Their friendship dated back almost to the Revolution. She was the daughter of Commodore Nicholson of New York, and the wife of Col. Few, a senator from Georgia. Mrs. Few visited Paine before he died and offered him religious consolation. Had his opinions undergone any change he would certainly have communicated the fact to her. But according to Galatin's biographer, Henry Adams, "Paine only

turned his face to the wall, and kept silence.”

The eminent orator and statesman, Albert Gallatin, a brother-in-law of Mrs. Few, was also one of Paine's most loyal friends. He visited and conversed with Paine while on his death-bed, but received from him no intimation of a mental change. The gifted painter, John Wesley Jarvis, with whom Paine had formerly resided, testified that Paine on his death-bed reaffirmed the principles enunciated in his “Age of Reason.” So too, did the worthy lawyers, B. F. Haskin and Judge Hertel. And so, too, did Col. John Fellows, one of New York's most honored and respected citizens. This calumny Col. Fellows vehemently denounced. In a preface to Paine's works he says:

“I cannot relinquish this subject without taking notice of one of the most vile and wicked stories that were ever engendered in the fruitful imagination of depraved mortals. It was fabricated by a woman, named Mary Hinsdale, and published by one Charles Collins, at New York, or rather, it is probable that this work was the joint production of Collins, and some other fanatics, and that they induced this stupid ignorant woman to stand sponsor for it. . . . Mrs. Bonneville was absent in France at the time of its first appearance in New York, and when shown to her

on her return to America, although her feelings were highly agitated at the baseness of the fabrication, she would not permit her name to appear in print in competition with that of Mary Hinsdale. No notice, therefore, has been taken of it, excepting by Mr. Cobbett. Indeed, it was considered by the friends of Mr. Paine generally to be too contemptible to controvert."

Of this witness, and another death-bed witness, Judge Hertell, Judge Tabor writes:

"I was an associate editor of the New York Beacon with Col. John Fellows, then (1836) advanced in years, but retaining all the vigor and fire of his manhood. He was a ripe scholar, a most agreeable companion, and had been the correspondent and friend of Jefferson, Madison, Monroe and John Quincy Adams, under all of whom he held a responsible office . . . Col. Fellows and Judge Hertell visited Paine throughout the whole course of his last illness. They repeatedly conversed with him on religious topics and they declared that he died serenely, philosophically and resignedly. This information I had directly from their own lips, and their characters were so spotless and their integrity so unquestioned, that more reliable testimony it would be impossible to give" (Conway's *Life of Paine*, Vol. ii., pp. 398, 399).



Before his death "the good gray poet," Walt Whitman, in early manhood the friend and companion of Col. Fellows, adverting to the Paine calumnies, said:

"It was a time when, in religion, there was as yet no philosophical middle-ground; people were very strong on one side or the other; there was a good deal of lying, and the liars were often well paid for their work. Paine and his principles made the great issue. Paine was double-damnably lied about" (Ibid. p. 423).

Here are twenty death-bed witnesses, Madame Bonneville, Dr. Romaine, Dr. Manley, Rev. Cunningham, Rev. Milledollar, Mr. Pigott, Mrs. Redden, Willet Hicks, Mrs. Cheeseman, Amasa Woodsworth, Thomas Nixon, Captain Pelton, Walter Morton, Thomas Addis Emmet, Mrs. Few, Albert Gallatin, Mr. Jarvis, B. F. Haskin, Colonel Fellows, and Judge Hertell, many of them Christians, all affirming or admitting that Thomas Paine did not recant.

The orthodox clergy have, for the most part, rejected the testimony of these witnesses and accepted the unsupported statement of a notorious liar and opium fiend who was not a death-bed witness. Can men who do this be honest? Can a religion requiring such support be divine?

It should not have required the testimony of a

single witness to disprove this story. It is self-evidently false. Three facts confute it:

1. Its late appearance. Had Thomas Paine recanted every inhabitant of New York would have heard of it within twenty-four hours. The news of it would have spread to the remotest confines of America and to Europe as rapidly as the human agencies of that time could have transmitted it. It took ten years for this startling revelation to reach the ears of his sick-bed attendants.

- 2 He was denied burial in a Christian cemetery. Dr. Manley states that he was greatly distressed concerning his interment. Madame Bonneville says: "He wished to be buried in the Quaker burying ground. . . . The committee of the Quakers refused to receive his body, at which he seemed deeply moved." A renunciation of his Infidel opinions—a simple acknowledgment of Jesus Christ—would have secured him a burial place in any Christian cemetery. He was buried on his farm.

3. The continued assaults of the Church upon his character. The Church does not assail the characters of her converts. "Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." Had Paine recanted and accepted

Christ, Christians would have placed him on a pedestal higher than that of Washington. A breath of adverse criticism would have been frozen with a frown. But instead of the apotheosis which the conversion of this great Infidel would have brought him, we witness only the calumny of his character, and the consignment of his soul to endless misery in hell.

It needed not the dying testimony of Thomas Paine to prove his intellectual honesty in writing the "Age of Reason." This had been put to a supreme test when it was given to the world. His sincerity and his intense earnestness, which are evidenced on every page, were fully established by these facts:

1. The prosecution of the work, which had been projected in early manhood, was hastened by what he believed to be the near approach of death. In the first part of the book he writes:

"My friends were falling as fast as the guillotine could cut their heads off, and as I expected, every day, the same fate, I resolved to begin my work. I appeared to myself to be on my death-bed, for death was on every side of me, and I had no time to lose. This accounts for my writing at the time I did, and so nicely did the time and intention meet, that I had not finished the first part

of the work more than six hours before I was arrested and taken to prison."

2. On his way to prison—and believing that the prison was but a brief halting place on the road to the guillotine—he entrusted the work which he had dedicated to his "fellow citizens of the United States," to his friend Joel Barlow to convey to the publisher.

3. The second and concluding portion of the work was written while a prisoner in the Luxembourg, awaiting the summons of Death.

4. Dr. Bond, a fellow prisoner, bears this testimony to his sincerity: "Mr. Paine, while hourly expecting to die, read to me parts of the 'Age of Reason;' and every night when I left him, to be separately locked up, and expected not to see him alive in the morning, he always expressed his firm belief in the principles of that book, and begged I would tell the world such were his dying opinions. . . . He was the most conscientious man I ever knew."

"To do good is my religion." "Religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow creatures happy." This is the religion which Thomas Paine professed and practiced; this is the religion which the Church wished him to renounce, and accept in its stead, "I believe in Jesus Christ." The dogma of

the Church is passing away; but the religion of Thomas Paine will endure. The seeds of goodness sowed by him are germinating and growing and flowering and fruiting everywhere. Dr. Conway says: "His principles rest not. His thoughts, untraceable like his dust, are blown about the world which he held in his heart. For a hundred years no human being has been born in the civilized world without some spiritual tincture from that heart whose every pulse was for humanity, whose last beat broke a fetter of fear, and fell on the throne of thrones."

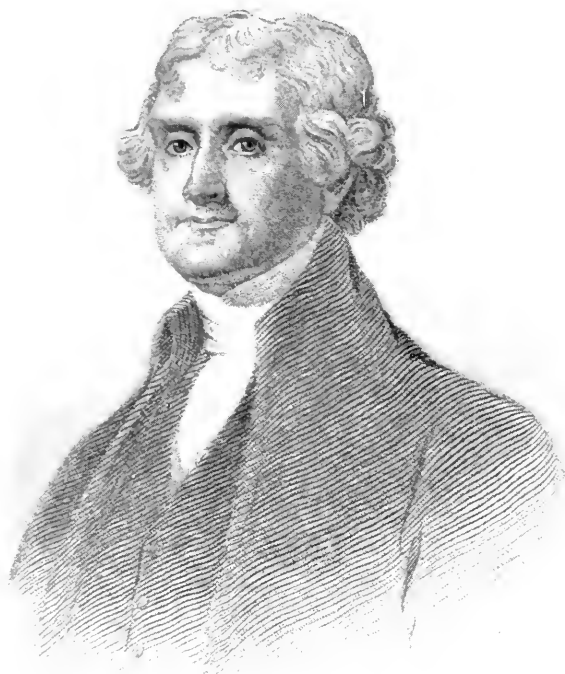
Thomas Paine did not recant. But the Church is recanting. On her death-bed tenet after tenet of the absurd and cruel creed which Paine opposed is being renounced by her. Time will witness the renunciation of her last dogma, and her death. Then will the vindication of Thomas Paine and the "Age of Reason" be complete.



**THOMAS JEFFERSON**







THOMAS JEFFERSON



## THOMAS JEFFERSON.

Had Jefferson's works been edited by some pious churchman who would have expunged or modified his radical sentiments; or had his works been suppressed after they were published, as some desired, the clergy might with less fear of exposure claim that their author was a Christian. But while his writings are accessible to the public, it adds nothing to their reputation for candor to make the claims respecting his belief which many of them do; for these writings clearly prove that he was not a Christian, but a Freethinker.

The "Memoirs, Correspondence and Miscellanies from the Papers of Thomas Jefferson," edited by Thomas Jefferson Randolph, a grandson of the distinguished statesman, was printed in four large volumes, and published in 1829. From these volumes, and other writings of Jefferson, I have culled some of the most radical thoughts to be found in the whole range of Infidel literature.

In a letter to his nephew and ward, Peter Carr, while at school, Jefferson offers the following advice, which though thoroughly sound, would be

considered rather questionable advice for a Christian to give a schoolboy:

“Fix Reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion. Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one, he must more approve the homage of reason than of blindfolded fear. . . . Do not be frightened from this inquiry by any fear of its consequences. If it end in a belief that there is no God, you will find incitements to virtue in the comfort and pleasantness you feel in its exercise and in the love of others which it will procure for you” (Jefferson’s Works, Vol. ii., p. 217).

The God of the Old Testament—the God which Christians worship—Jefferson pronounces “a being of terrific character—cruel, vindictive, capricious, and unjust” (Works, Vol. iv., p. 325).

In speaking of the Jewish priests, he denominates them “a bloodthirsty race, as cruel and remorseless as the being whom they represented as the family God of Abraham, of Isaac, and Jacob, and the local God of Israel” (Ibid.).

In a letter to John Adams, dated April 8, 1816, referring to the God of the Jews, he says:

“Their God would be deemed a very indifferent man with us” (Ibid. p. 373).

To his nephew he writes as follows regarding the Bible:

“Read the Bible as you would Livy or Tacitus. For example, in the book of Joshua we are told the sun stood still for several hours. Were we to read that fact in Livy or Tacitus we should class it with their showers of blood, speaking of their statues, beasts, etc. But it is said that the writer of that book was inspired. Examine, therefore, candidly, what evidence there is of his having been inspired. The pretension is entitled to your inquiry, because millions believe it. On the other hand, you are astronomer enough to know how contrary it is to the law of nature” (Works, Vol. ii., p. 217).

In this same letter, he thus refers to Jesus Christ:

“Keep in your eye the opposite pretensions: First, of those who say he was begotten by God, born of a virgin, suspended and reversed the laws of Nature at will, and ascended bodily into heaven; and second, of those who say he was a man of illegitimate birth, of a benevolent heart, enthusiastic mind, who set out without pretensions to divinity, ended in believing them, and was punished capitally for sedition by being gibbeted, according to the Roman law, which punished the first commission of that offence by whipping, and the second by exile or death in furca.”

His own opinion respecting the above is ex-

pressed in a letter to John Adams, written a short time previous to his death:

“The day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the Supreme Being as his father, in the womb of a virgin, will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter” (Works, Vol. iv, p. 365).

In the gospel history of Jesus, Jefferson discovers what he terms “a groundwork of vulgar ignorance, of things impossible, of superstitions, fanaticisms, and fabrications” (Works, Vol. iv, p. 325).

He continues: “If we could believe that he [Jesus] really countenanced the follies, the falsehoods, and the charlatanisms which his biographers [Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,] father on him, and admit the misconstructions, interpolations, and theorizations of the fathers of the early, and the fanatics of the latter ages, the conclusion would be irresistible by every sound mind that he was an impostor” (Ibid.).

Jefferson, however, did not regard Jesus as an impostor. He says:

“Among the sayings and discourses imputed to him by his biographers, I find many passages of fine imagination, correct morality, and of the most lovely benevolence; and others, again, of so much ignorance, of so much absurdity, so much untruth and imposture, as to pronounce it im-

possible that such contradictions should have proceeded from the same being. I separate, therefore, the gold from the dross, restore to him the former, and leave the latter to the stupidity of some and the roguery of others of his disciples" (Ibid., 320).

Jefferson made a compilation of the more rational and humane teachings of Jesus, the "gold," as he termed it, which has since been published. Some superficial readers have supposed this to be an acknowledgment of Christ. Orthodox teachers, however, know better and ignore the book.

For the man Jesus, Jefferson, like Rousseau, Paine, Ingersoll, and other Freethinkers, had nothing but admiration; for the Christ Jesus of theology, nothing but contempt.

In regard to Jesus believing himself inspired he interposes the plea of mild insanity. He says:

"This belief carried no more personal imputation than the belief of Socrates that he was under the care and admonition of a guardian demon. And how many of our wisest men still believe in the reality of these inspirations while perfectly sane on all other subjects" (Works, Vol. iv, p. 327).

Several of the preceding quotations are from a lengthy communication to William Short. In the

same communication he characterizes the Four Evangelists as "groveling authors" with "feeble minds." To the early disciples of Jesus he pays the following compliment:

"Of this band of dupes and impostors, Paul was the great Corypheus, and first corrupter of the doctrines of Jesus" (Ibid.).

The published writings of Jefferson, which, however, do not contain many of his most radical thoughts, would indicate that he regarded Jesus Christ as a historical character. In a contribution to *Frazer's Magazine* for March, 1865, Dr. Conway shows that he was sometimes disposed to entertain the mythical hypothesis. Mr. Conway says:

"Jefferson occupied his Sundays at Monticello in writing letters to Paine (they are unpublished, I believe, but I have seen them) in favor of the probabilities that Christ and his Twelve Apostles were only personifications of the sun and the twelve signs of the Zodiac."

This was the opinion held by Paine during the last years of his life.

For nearly sixteen hundred years the doctrine of the Trinity has been a leading tenet of the Christian faith. To doubt this dogma is the rankest heresy; for denying it thousands have lost their lives. In a letter to Col. Pickering, Jefferson speaks of "the incomprehensible jargon of



the Trinitarian arithmetic, that three are one and one is three.”

In a letter to James Smith, Jefferson says:

“The hocus-pocus phantasm of a God, like another Cerberus, with one body and three heads, had its birth and growth in the blood of thousands and thousands of martyrs” (Works, Vol. iv., p. 360).

Again, in the same communication, he says:

“The Athanasian paradox that one is three and three but one, is so incomprehensible to the human mind, that no candid man can say he has any idea of it, and how can he believe what presents no idea? He who thinks he does, only deceives himself. He proves, also, that man, once surrendering his reason, has no remaining guard against absurdities the most monstrous, and like a ship without a rudder, is the sport of every wind. With such persons, gullibility, which they call faith, takes the helm of reason, and the mind becomes a wreck.”

Not at an insignificant minority, not at an unimportant and unpopular sect, but at nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand Christians—at virtually the entire Christian church—was the above scathing criticism hurled. Even more bitter is the following from a letter to Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse:

“I should as soon undertake to bring the crazy skulls of Bedlam to sound understanding, as inculcate reason into that of an Athanasian” (Works, Vol. iv., p. 353).

In a letter to John Adams, written August 22, 1813, Jefferson says:

“It is too late in the day for men of sincerity to pretend they believe in the Platonic mysticism that three are one and one is three, and yet, that the one is not three, and the three are not one. . . . But this constitutes the craft, the power, and profits of the priests. Sweep away their gossamer fabrics of fictitious religion, and they would catch no more flies” (Ibid, p. 205).

Writing to John Adams a year later—July 5, 1814—he again refers to this subject:

“The Christian priesthood, finding the doctrines of Christ leveled to every understanding, and too plain to need explanation, saw in the mysticisms of Plato materials with which they might build up an artificial system, which might, from its indistinctness, admit everlasting controversy, give employment for their order and introduce it to profit, power and pre-eminence” (Ibid, p. 242).

Alluding to the eucharist, he styles the orthodox clergy “cannibal priests” (Ibid, p. 205).

Jefferson’s hatred of Calvinism was intense.

He never ceased to denounce the "blasphemous absurdity of the five points of Calvin." Three years before his death he writes John Adams:

"His [Calvin's] religion was demonism. If ever man worshiped a false God, he did. The being described in his five points is . . . a demon of malignant spirit. It would be more pardonable to believe in no God at all, than to blaspheme him by the atrocious attributes of Calvin" (Works, Vol. iv., p. 363).

"It is hard to say," observes Bancroft, "which surpassed the other in boiling hatred of Calvinism, Jefferson or John Adams."

To Dr. Cooper, November 2, 1822, Jefferson writes:

"I had no idea, however, that in Pennsylvania, the cradle of toleration and freedom of religion, it [fanaticism] could have arisen to the height you describe. This must be owing to the growth of Presbyterianism. The blasphemy of the five points of Calvin, and the impossibility of defending them, render their advocates impatient of reasoning, irritable, and prone to denunciation" (Works, Vol. iv, p. 358).

In the same letter, after mentioning the fact that in Virginia where he resides, the Christians being divided into different sects, including the Presbyterian, are more tolerant, he continues:

“It is not so in the districts where Presbyterianism prevails undividedly. Their ambition and tyranny would tolerate no rival if they had power. Systematical in grasping at an ascendancy over all other sects, they aim, like the Jesuits, at engrossing the education of the country, are hostile to every institution they do not direct, and jealous at seeing others begin to attend at all to that object.”

In the following significant passage we have Jefferson's opinion of the Christian religion as a whole:

“I have recently been examining all the known superstitions of the world, and do not find in our particular superstition [Christianity] one redeeming feature. They are all alike, founded upon fables and mythologies” (Letter to Dr. Woods).

Could a more emphatic declaration of disbelief in Christianity be framed than this?

In his “Notes on Virginia,” the following caustic allusion to Christianity occurs:

“Millions of innocent men, women, and children, since the introduction of Christianity, have been burnt, tortured, fined, and imprisoned; yet we have not advanced one inch toward uniformity. What has been the effect of coercion? To make one-half the world fools and the other half hypocrites.”

In his letter to Dr. Cooper, prayer meetings and revivals receive this cruel thrust from his pen:

“In our Richmond there is much fanaticism, but chiefly among the women. They have their night meetings and praying parties, where, attended by their priests, and sometimes by a henpecked husband, they pour forth the effusions of their love to Jesus in terms as amatory and carnal as their modesty would permit to a merely earthly lover” (Works, Vol. iv., p. 358).

A short time before his death, Jefferson, in a letter to John Adams, after commending the morals of Jesus, wrote as follows concerning his philosophical belief:

“It is not to be understood that I am with him [Jesus] in all his doctrines. I am a Materialist.”

In support of his Materialistic creed, he argues as follows:

“On the basis of sensation we may erect the fabric of all the certainties we can have or need. I can conceive thought to be an action of matter or magnetism of loadstone. When he who denies to the Creator the power of endowing matter with the mode of motion called thinking shall show how he could endow the sun with the mode of action called attraction, which reins the planets in their orbits, or how an absence of matter can have a will, and by that will put matter into motion,

then the Materialist may be lawfully required to explain the process by which matter exercises the faculty of thinking. When once we quit the basis of sensation, all is in the wind. To talk of immaterial existences, is to talk of nothings. To say that the human soul, angels, God, are immaterial, is to say they are nothings, or that there is no God, no angels, no soul. I cannot reason otherwise. But I believe that I am supported in my creed of Materialism by the Lockes, the Tracys, and the Stewarts."

Noting the absence of the idea of immortality in the Bible and particularly in the books ascribed to Moses, he writes:

"Moses had either not believed in a future state of existence, or had not thought it essential to be explicitly taught to the people." (Works, Vol. iv., p. 326.)

Jefferson's wife preceded him to the grave by nearly forty-four years. If ever woman was adored by man this woman was adored by her husband. The blow stunned him; and for weeks he lay prostrated with grief. Referring to the sad event, Wm. O. Stoddard, the Presidential biographer, says:

"He was utterly absorbed in sorrow, and took no note of what was going on around him. His dream of life had been shattered, and it seemed

as if life itself had lost its claim upon him, for no faith or hope of his reached onward and inward to any other." (Lives of the Presidents, Vol. ii, p. 270.)

In the following brave and truthful words we have Jefferson's estimate of priestcraft:

"In every country and in every age the priest has been hostile to liberty; he is always in alliance with the despot, abetting his abuses in return for protection to his own."

Alluding to his beloved child, the University of Virginia, he writes:

"The serious enemies are the priests of the different religious sects to whose spells on the human mind its improvement is ominous" (Works, Vol. iv., p. 322).

"We have most unwisely committed to the hierophants of our particular superstition the direction of public opinion—that lord of the universe. We have given them stated and privileged days to collect and catechise us, opportunities of delivering their oracles to the people in mass, and of molding their minds as wax in the hollow of their hands." (Ibid.).

His uncomplimentary allusions to the Christian clergy, to the Christian Sabbath, and to Christianity itself as "our particular superstition," are as unorthodox as anything to be found in Paine.

To John Adams he writes as follows regarding disestablishment in New England:

"I join you, therefore, in sincere congratulations that this den of the priesthood is at length broken up, and that a Protestant Popedom is no longer to disgrace the American history and character." (Works, Vol. iv., p. 301).

Jefferson's hatred of priestcraft was life-long; for while the above was written but a few years prior to his death, the following from a letter to Mr. Whyte, was written nearly half a century before:

"If anybody thinks that kings, nobles and priests, are good conservators of the public happiness, send him here [Paris]. It is the best school in the universe to cure him of that folly. He will see here with his own eyes that these descriptions of men are an abandoned confederacy against the happiness of the mass of the people."

While he detested the entire clergy, regarding them as a worthless class, living like parasites upon the labors of others, his denunciation of the Presbyterian priesthood was particularly severe, as evinced by the following:

"The Presbyterian clergy are the loudest, the most intolerant of all sects; the most tyrannical and ambitious, ready at the word of the law-giver, if such a word could now be obtained, to put their



torch to the pile, and to rekindle in this virgin hemisphere the flame in which their oracle, Calvin, consumed the poor Servetus, because he could not subscribe to the proposition of Calvin, that magistrates have a right to exterminate all heretics to the Calvinistic creed! They pant to re-establish by law that holy inquisition which they can now only infuse into public opinion" (Works, Vol. iv., p. 322).

He charges the early church in this country with uniform cruelty—in Virginia as well as New England. He says:

"If no capital execution [of Quakers] took place here it was not owing to the moderation of the church." (Notes on Virginia, p. 262.)

His noble fight against the church and in behalf of religious freedom for Virginia, in which he acknowledged the valiant support of Madison, entitles him to the everlasting gratitude of every lover of liberty. From his argument in favor of the disestablishment of religion, to be found in his "Notes on Virginia," (pp. 234-237,) the following extracts are taken:

"By our own act of Assembly of 1705, c. 30, if a person brought up in the Christian religion denies the being of God, or the Trinity, or asserts there are more gods than one, or denies the Christian religion to be true, or the Scriptures to be of

divine authority, he is punishable on the first offense by incapacity to hold any office or employment, ecclesiastical, civil, or military; on the second, by disability to sue, to take any gift or legacy, to be guardian, executor, or administrator, any by three years' imprisonment without bail. A father's right to the custody of his own children being founded in law on his right of guardianship, this being taken away, they may of course be severed from him, and put by the authority of the court, into more orthodox hands. This is a summary view of that religious slavery under which a people have been willing to remain, who have lavished their lives and fortunes for the establishment of civil freedom."

"The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no God. . . . Constraint may make him worse by making him a hypocrite, but it will never make him a truer man."

"Reason and persuasion are the only practicable instruments. To make way for these free inquiry must be indulged; how can we wish others to indulge it while we refuse it ourselves? But every state, says an inquisitor, has established some religion. No two, say I, have established the

same. Is this a proof of the infallibility of establishments?"

"It is error alone which needs the support of government. Truth can stand by itself."

There are still existing on the statute books of many states laws but little less intolerant than those which Jefferson and his friends removed from the statute books of Virginia. To those who contend that these laws are not dangerous because no longer enforced, I commend these words of Jefferson:

"I doubt whether the people of this country would suffer an execution for heresy, or a three months' imprisonment for not comprehending the mysteries of the Trinity. But is the spirit of the people infallible—a permanent reliance? Is it government? Is this the kind of protection we receive in return for the rights we give up? Besides, the spirit of the times may alter—will alter. Our rulers will become corrupt, our people careless. A single zealot may become persecutor, and better men become his victims." (Notes on Virginia, p. 269.)

Jefferson's Presidential administration was probably the most purely secular this country has ever had. During his eight years' incumbency of the office not a single religious proclamation was

issued. Referring to his action in this matter, he says:

“I know it will give great offense to the clergy, but the advocate of religious freedom is to expect neither peace nor forgiveness from them.”

In answer to a communication from the Rev. Mr. Miller relative to this subject, he writes as follows:

“I consider the Government of the United States as interdicted by the Constitution from meddling with religious institutions, their doctrines, discipline, or exercises. . . . But it is only proposed that I should recommend, not prescribe a day of fasting and praying. That is, I should indirectly assume to the United States an authority over religious exercises, which the Constitution has directly precluded them from. . . . Every one must act according to the dictates of his own reason and mine tells me that civil powers alone have been given to the President of the United States, and no authority to direct the religious exercises of his constituents.”

A favorite claim with the church is that we are indebted to the Bible and Christianity for our moral and civil law, and especially that the teachings of the Bible and Christianity are a part of the common law. This claim is universally urged by Christians and generally conceded by jurists. In

a letter to Major John Cartwright, Jefferson exposes the fraudulent character of the claim. Of such importance is the question, and so thorough is the refutation, that I give it entire:

“I was glad to find in your book a formal contradiction at length of the judiciary usurpation of legislative powers; for such the judges have usurped in their repeated decisions, that Christianity is a part of the common law. The proof of the contrary which you have adduced is incontrovertible; to wit, that the common law existed while the Anglo-Saxons were yet Pagans, at a time when they had never yet heard the name of Christ pronounced, or knew that such a character had ever existed. But it may amuse you to show when and by what means they stole the law in upon us. In a case of *quare impedit* in the Year Book 34 H. 6, folio 38, (anno 1458,) a question was made, how far the ecclesiastical law was to be respected in a common law court. And Prisot, Chief Justice, gives his opinion in these words: ‘A tiel leis qu’ils de seint eglise ont en ancien scripture covient a nous a donner credence,’ etc. . . . See S. C. Fitzh. Abr. Qu. imp. 89. Bro.; Abr. Qu. imp. 12. Finch, in his first book, c. 3 is the first afterwards who quotes this case, and mistakes it thus: ‘To such laws of the church as have warrant in Holy Scripture our law giveth cre-

dence;' and cites Prisot, mistranslating 'ancien scripture' into 'Holy Scripture.' Whereas Prisot palpably says, 'To such laws as those of holy church have in ancient writing it is proper for us to give credence;' to wit, to their ancient written laws. This was in 1613, a century and a half after the dictum of Prisot. Wingate, in 1658, erects this false translation into a maxim of common law, copying the words of Finch, but citing Prisot. Wing, Max. 3. And Sheppard, title 'Religion,' in 1675, copies the same mistranslation, quoting the Y. B. Finch and Wingate. Hale expresses it in these words: 'Christianity is parcel of the laws of England.' 1 Ventr. 293. 3 Keb. 607. But he quotes no authority. By these echoings and reechoings from one to another it had become so established in 1728 that, in case the King vs. Woolston, 2 Stra. 834, the court would not suffer it to be debated, whether to write against Christianity was punishable in the temporal courts at common law. Wood, therefore, 409, ventures still to vary the phrase, and say that all blasphemy and profaneness are offences by the common law, and cites 2 Stra. Then Blackstone, in 1763, 4.59, repeats the words of Hale, that 'Christianity is part of laws of England,' citing Ventris and Strange. And finally, Lord Mansfield, with a little qualification, in Evans's case, in 1767, says that

‘the essential principles of revealed religion are part of the common law.’ Thus ingulfing Bible, Testament, and all, into the common law, without citing any authority. And thus we find this chain of authorities hanging link by link, one upon another, and all ultimately on one and the same book, and that a mistranslation of the words ‘ancien scripture’ used by Prisot. Finch quotes Prisot; Wingate does the same. Sheppard quotes Prisot, Finch, and Wingate. Hale cites nobody. The court in Woolston’s case cites Hale. Wood cites Woolston’s case. Blackstone quotes Woolston’s case and Hale. And Lord Mansfield, like Hale, ventures on his own authority. Here I might defy the best read lawyer to produce another scrip of authority for this judiciary forgery; and I might go on further to show how some of the Anglo-Saxon priests interpolated into the texts of Alfred’s laws 20th, 21st, 22d, and 23d chapters of Exodus, and the 15th of the Acts of the Apostles, from the 23d to the 29th verse. But this would lead my pen and your patience too far. What a conspiracy this between church and state! Sing Tantarara, rogues all, rogues all! sing Tantarara, rogues all!” (Works, Vol. iv., pp. 397, 398).

It is claimed by Christian apologists that the grossest intolerance prevailed in Pagan Rome, that Christians were punished for their opinions

merely, that religious freedom was denied. The student of Roman history knows this to be untrue. Religious intolerance in the Roman Empire was virtually unknown. The so-called "Christian persecutions" are mostly Christian myths, and the Christian martyrs of the early church were mostly Christian criminals. To this Christian claim Jefferson pertinently replies:

"Had not the Roman Government permitted free enquiry Christianity could never have been introduced" (Notes on Virginia, p. 265).

The Fourth of July, 1826, was the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of American Independence. The people of Washington had decided to celebrate the memorable occasion in a fitting manner, and Mr. Weightman was deputed to invite the illustrious author of the Declaration to attend. On the 24th of June, Jefferson wrote a letter declining, on account of his infirmities, to be present. In this letter a new Declaration of Independence is proclaimed. Bravely he writes:

"All eyes are opened or opening to the rights of man. The general spread of the light of science has already laid open to every view the palpable truth, that the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God."



Those were the last words Jefferson penned. Ten days later—on the day that he had contributed so much to make immortal—the Sage of Monticello breathed his last. On the same day, too, died John Adams. Politically at variance these men differed but little in theology. Writing to Jefferson on the 5th of May, 1817, Adams, giving expression to the matured conviction of eighty-two eventful years, declares.

“This would be the best of all possible worlds if there were no religion in it.”

To this radical declaration Jefferson replied:

“If by religion, we are to understand sectarian dogmas, in which no two of them agree, then your exclamation on that hypothesis is just, ‘that this would be the best of worlds if there were no religion in it’ ” (Works, Vol. iv., p. 301).

Referring to another letter he received from Adams, he says:

“Its crowd of skepticisms kept me from sleep” (Ibid, p. 331).

Writing to Adams in 1817, Jefferson says:

“The result of your fifty or sixty years of religious reading in the four words: ‘Be just and good,’ is that in which all our enquiries must end; as the riddles of all the priesthood end in four more: ‘Ubi panis ibi Deus.’ What all agree in is

probably right; what no two agree in most probably wrong" (Ibid, p. 300).

These anti-Christian views of Jefferson were for the most part written after he had retired to private life; but that the public had always been apprised of his unbelief, there can be no doubt. When he ran for President, the more bigoted orthodox journals opposed his election upon these grounds. At his inauguration, some of these journals appeared in mourning, while flags were displayed at half-mast, in token of grief because an Infidel had been elevated to the Presidency. It is true that Washington and Adams, both disbelievers in Evangelical Christianity, had filled the office before him; but they were reticent in regard to the subject, openly expressing no opinions that would offend the church.

That Jefferson's Deistic opinions were well known before he retired from public life is shown by a letter which Paine wrote to Jefferson after his re-election. Paine says:

"When I was in Connecticut the summer before last, I fell in company with some Baptists among whom were three ministers. The conversation turned on the election for President, and one of them who appeared to be a leading man said, 'They cry out against Mr. Jefferson because they say he is a Deist. Well, a Deist may be a good

man, and if he think it right, it is right to him. For my own part,' said he, 'I had rather vote for a Deist than for a blue-skin Presbyterian.' ”

Jefferson's library contained the leading Freethought works of his day. They gave evidence of having been carefully studied, and the marginal annotations from his pen showed that the most radical sentiments were endorsed by him.

He wrote letters to Volney, and placed the bust of Voltaire in his library. He manifested the strongest attachment for Paine, which continued till the latter's death. When Paine signified his intention of returning from France to America, Jefferson furnished a national ship to convey him home. After his return he became the honored guest of the President, both at Washington and Monticello.

Alluding to Paine's visit to Washington, the editor of the "Diary and Letters of Gouverneur Morris" says that "Jefferson received him warmly, dined him at the White House, and could be seen walking arm in arm with him on the street any fine afternoon." This was eight years after Paine published his "Age of Reason," and when in the eyes of Christians he had become infamous.

President Jefferson continued to correspond with Paine on theological subjects up to Paine's

last illness, which occurred about the time he retired from the Presidency.

To Paine and the great English Deist, Bolingbroke, Jefferson paid the following tribute:

“You ask my opinion of Lord Bolingbroke and Thomas Paine. They were alike in making bitter enemies of the priests and Pharisees of their day. Both were honest men; both advocates for human liberty” (Letter to Francis Eppes).

To the English heretic, Dr. Priestley, he extended the following welcome:

“It is with heartfelt satisfaction that in the first moments of my public action, I can hail you with welcome to our land, tender to you the homage of its respect and esteem, and cover you under the protection of those laws which were made for the good and the wise like you.”

When Jefferson's works were first published, the *New York Observer*, then the leading Christian journal of this country, gave them the following notice:

“Mr. Jefferson, it is well known, was never suspected of being very friendly to orthodox religion, but these volumes prove not only that he was a disbeliever, but a scoffer of the very lowest class.”

What is remarkable, the *Observer* has never claimed that Jefferson recanted; while it has claimed that Paine did. According to this author-

ity Jefferson was more confirmed in his disbelief than Paine.

The clergy circulated a story to the effect that Jefferson admitted his indebtedness to the church by declaring that it was to a preacher, Dr. Small, of William and Mary College, that he owed the destinies of his life. Being in doubt as to whether the Dr. Small referred to was really a preacher or not, Mr. Wm. Edmonds, of Texas, in 1887, addressed a letter to Governor Fitzhugh Lee, of Virginia, on the subject. Gov. Lee instructed his private secretary, Mr. J. E. Waller, to send the following reply:

“The Governor directs me to say, in reply to your letter of inquiry of August 26th, that, from the best information he can get, he is satisfied that Dr. Small was either an M. D., or scientist, which would entitle him to the degree of Doctor. Mr. Jefferson was a Freethinker, and, as there is no record of Dr. Small ever having a church in Virginia, the natural conclusion is that this Dr. Small was of the same belief. John Randolph claims to have imbibed some of his skeptical ideas from a Dr. Small.”

The Rev. Thornton Stringfellow, D. D., a prominent Christian divine of Jefferson's own state, in his “Scriptural View of Slavery,” a work showing that the Bible sanctions slavery, says:

“My correspondent thinks with Mr. Jefferson, that Jehovah has no attributes that will harmonize with slavery; and that all men are born free and equal. Now, I say let him throw away his Bible as Mr. Jefferson did his and then they will be fit companions. But never disgrace the Bible by making Mr. Jefferson its expounder, nor Mr. Jefferson by deriving his sentiments from it. Mr. Jefferson did not bow to the authority of the Bible, and on this subject I do not bow to him.”

John S. C. Abbot, the panegyrist of Napoleon Bonaparte, in his “Lives of the Presidents” (p. 142), referring to one of Jefferson’s most distinguished efforts in behalf of religious liberty, says:

“He devoted much attention to the establishment of the University at Charlottesville. Having no religious faith which he was willing to avow, he was not willing that any religious faith whatever should be taught in the University as a part of its course of instruction. This establishment, in a Christian land, of an institution for the education of youth, where the relation existing between man and his Maker was entirely ignored, raised a general cry of disapproval throughout the whole country. It left a stigma upon the reputation of Mr. Jefferson, in the minds of Christian people, which can never be effaced.”

The noted divine, Dr. Wilson, in his celebrated sermon on "The Religion of the Presidents," has this to say of Jefferson:

"Whatever difference of opinion there may have been as to his religious faith at the time [of his election to the Presidency], it is now rendered certain that he was a Deist. . . . That fact after his 'Notes on Virginia' ought never to have been doubted by any reasonable man. That work itself contains sufficient evidence of the fact, and I believe the influence of his example and name has done more for the extension of Infidelity than that of any other man. Since his death, and the publication of Randolph, [Jefferson's Works,] there remains not the shadow of doubt of his Infidel principles. If any man thinks there is, let him look at the book itself. I do not recommend the purchase of it to any man, for it is one of the most wicked and dangerous books extant."

The Rev. Dr. D. J. Burrell, of New York, recently said:

"No man could be elected President of the United States to-day who is an avowed opponent of Christianity. Thomas Jefferson would not be an available candidate to-day for either party."

The "International Cyclopedia," edited by Daniel Coit Gilman, LL. D., President of Johns Hopkins University, says:

“In religion it is probable that he [Jefferson] was not far from what was then known and execrated as a Freethinker.”

The “New American Cyclopaedia,” in its edition of 1860, makes the following frank and truthful statement of Jefferson’s belief:

“Discarding faith as unphilosophical, he became an Infidel.”

This statement was offensive to some, and the edition of 1874 substituted the following which means the same thing:

“He carried the rule of subjecting everything to the test of abstract reason into matters of religion, venerating the moral character of Christ, but refusing belief in his divine mission.”

Bancroft, referring to Jefferson, says:

“He was not only a hater of priestcraft and superstition and bigotry and intolerance, he was thought to be indifferent to religion” (History of United States, Vol. v., p. 323).

Benson J. Lossing, in his “Lives of the Signers of the Declaration of American Independence,” sums up the religious and moral character of Jefferson in the following brief words:

“In religion he was a Freethinker; in morals pure and unspotted” (p. 183).

Morse, in his “Life of Jefferson,” which forms a part of the “American Statesman” series, says:



“To my mind it is very clear that Jefferson never believed that Christ was other than a human moralist” (p. 341).

Tucker, in his biography of Jefferson, says:

“It is very certain that he did not believe at all in the divine origin of Christianity, and of course not in the inspiration of the Scriptures; even of the New Testament.”

Theodore Dwight, in “The Character of Jefferson,” (p. 364) gives expression to the following sensible conclusion:

“It cannot be necessary to adopt any train of reasoning to show that a man who disbelieves the inspiration and divine authority of the Scriptures—who not only denies the divinity of the Savior, but reduces him to the grade of an uneducated, ignorant and erring man—who calls the God of Abraham (the Jehovah of the Bible), a cruel and remorseless being, cannot be a Christian.”

In an article on Jefferson’s religious belief, the Chicago Tribune says:

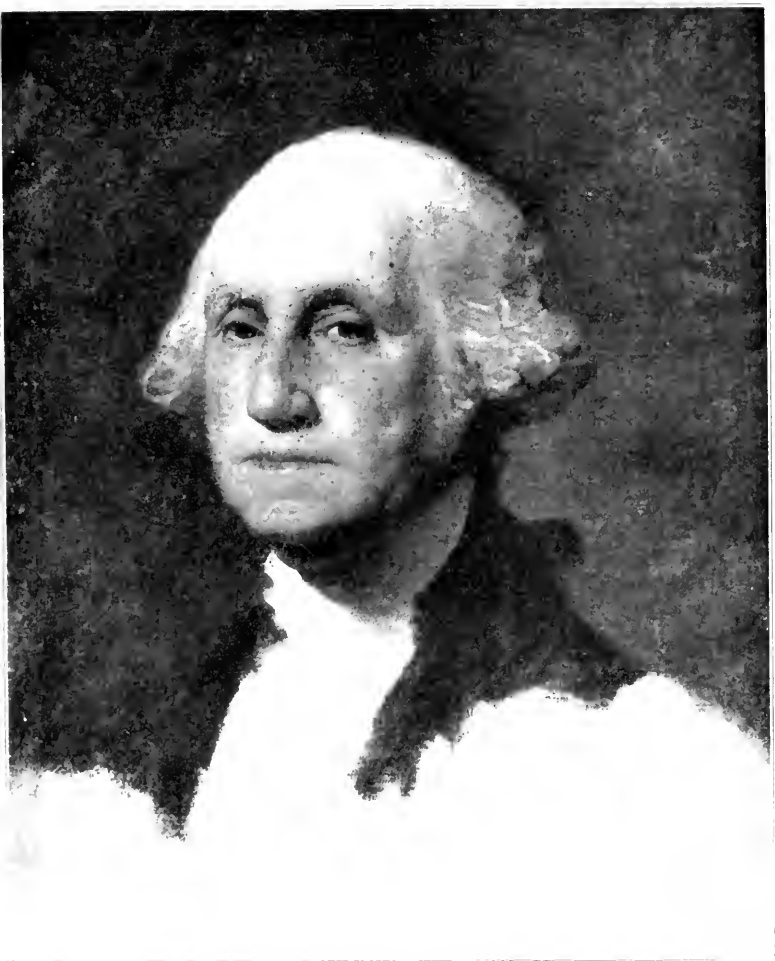
“A question has been raised as to Thomas Jefferson’s religious views. There need be no question, for he has settled that himself. He was an Infidel, or, as he chose to term it, a Materialist. By his own account he was as heterodox as Col. Ingersoll, and in some respects even more so.”

Surely, Christians, your cause must be growing

desperate, when, to sustain it, you must needs claim for its support so bitter an enemy as Thomas Jefferson—a man who affirmed that he was a Materialist; a man who recognized in your religion only “our particular superstition,” a superstition without “one redeeming feature;” a man who divided the Christian world into two classes—hypocrites and fools; a man who asserted that your Bible is a book abounding with “vulgar ignorance;” a man who termed your Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, a “hocus-pocus phantasm;” a man who denounced your God as “cruel, vindictive, and unjust;” a man who intimated that your Savior was “a man of illegitimate birth;” a man who declared his disciples, including your oracle, Paul, to be a “band of dupes and impostors,” and who characterized your modern priesthood as “cannibal priests” and an “abandoned confederacy” against public happiness.

**GEORGE WASHINGTON**





GEORGE WASHINGTON



## GEORGE WASHINGTON.

During the presidential campaign of 1880, the Christian Union made the startling admission that, of the nineteen men who, up to that time, had held the office of President of the United States, not one, with the possible exception of Washington, had ever been a member of a Christian church.

Was Washington a church member? Was he in any sense a Christian? In early life he held a formal adherence to the church of England, serving, for a time, as a vestryman in the parish in which he resided. But this being merely a temporal office did not necessitate his being a communicant, nor even a believer in Christianity. In his maturer age he was connected with no church. Washington, the young Virginia planter, might, perhaps, with some degree of truthfulness, have been called a Christian; Washington, the soldier, statesman and sage, was not a Christian, but a Deist.

This great man, like most men in public life, was reticent respecting his religious views. This

rendered a general knowledge of his real belief impossible, and made it easy for zealous Christians to impose upon the public mind and claim him for their faith. Whatever evidence of his unbelief existed was, as far as possible, suppressed. Enough remains, however, to prompt me to attempt the task of proving the truth of the following propositions:

1. That Washington was not a Christian communicant.
2. That he was not a believer in the Christian religion.

*WAS WASHINGTON A COMMUNICANT?*

Washington was not a communicant. This fact can be easily demonstrated. A century ago it was the custom of all classes, irrespective of their religious beliefs, to attend church. Washington, adhering to the custom, attended. But when the administration of the sacrament took place, instead of remaining and partaking of the Lord's Supper as a communicant would have done, he invariably arose and retired from the church.

The closing years of his life, save the last two, were passed in Philadelphia, he being then President of the United States. In addition to his eight years' incumbency of the presidency, he was, during the eight years of the Revolutionary war, and



also during the six years that elapsed between the Revolution and the establishment of the Federal government, not only a frequent visitor in Philadelphia, but during a considerable portion of the time a resident of that city. While there he attended the Episcopal churches of which the Rev. William White and the Rev. James Abercrombie were rectors. In regard to his being a communicant, no evidence can be so pertinent or so decisive as that of his pastors.

Bishop White, the father of the Protestant Episcopal church of America, is one of the most eminent names in church history. During a large portion of the period covering nearly a quarter of a century, Washington, with his wife, attended the churches in which Bishop White officiated. In a letter dated Fredericksburg, Aug. 13, 1835, Colonel Mercer sent Bishop White the following inquiry relative to this question:

“I have a desire, my dear Sir, to know whether Gen. Washington was a communicant of the Protestant Episcopal church, or whether he occasionally went to the communion only, or if ever he did so at all. . . . No authority can be so authentic and complete as yours on this point.”

To this inquiry Bishop White replied as follows:

“Philadelphia, Aug. 15, 1835.

“Dear Sir: In regard to the subject of your inquiry, truth requires me to say that Gen. Washington never received the communion in the churches of which I am the parochial minister. Mrs. Washington was an habitual communicant. . . . I have been written to by many on that point, and have been obliged to answer them as I now do you. I am respectfully.

“Your humble servant,

“WILLIAM WHITE.”

—(Memoir of Bishop White, pp. 196, 197).

In a standard Christian authority, Sprague's “Annals of the American Pulpit,” written and compiled by Rev. Wm. B. Sprague, D. D., is a sketch of the life of Rev. James Abercrombie, D. D. In this biographical sketch is to be found some very important evidence from the pen of Washington's other pastor, pertaining to the subject under consideration. I quote the following:

“One incident in Dr. Abercrombie's experience as a clergyman, in connection with the Father of his Country, is especially worthy of record; and the following account of it was given by the Doctor himself, in a letter to a friend, in 1831 shortly after there had been some public allusion to it: ‘With respect to the inquiry you make I can only

state the following facts; that, as pastor of the Episcopal church, observing that, on sacramental Sundays, Gen. Washington, immediately after the desk and pulpit services, went out with the greater part of the congregation—always leaving Mrs. Washington with the other communicants—she invariably being one—I considered it my duty in a sermon on Public Worship, to state the unhappy tendency of example, particularly of those in elevated stations who uniformly turned their backs upon the celebration of the Lord's Supper. I acknowledge the remark was intended for the President; and as such he received it. A few days after, in conversation with, I believe, a senator of the United States, he told me he had dined the day before with the President, who in the course of conversation at table said that on the preceding Sunday he had received a very just reproof from the pulpit for always leaving the church before the administration of the Sacrament; that he honored the preacher for his integrity and candor; that he had never sufficiently considered the influence of his example, and that he would not again give cause for the repetition of the reproof; and that, as he had never been a communicant, were he to become one then it would be imputed to an ostentatious display of religious zeal, arising altogether from his elevated

station. Accordingly, he never afterwards came on the morning of sacramental Sunday, though at other times he was a constant attendant in the morning'” (Annals of the American Pulpit, Vol. v, p. 394).

Here we have a confirmation of the statement previously made that Washington absented himself from church on sacramental Sundays; undeniable proof that during the later years of his life he was not a communicant; and, above all, the assurance of Washington himself that “he had never been a communicant.”

The Rev. E. D. Neill, in the Episcopal Recorder, the organ of the church of which it is claimed Washington was a communicant, says:

“As I read, a few days ago, of the death of the Rev. Richard M. Abercrombie, rector of St. Matthew's Protestant Episcopal church in Jersey City, memories of my boyhood arose. He was born not far from my father's house in Philadelphia and was the son of the Rev. James Abercrombie, a fine scholar and preacher, who had in early life corresponded with the great lexicographer, Dr. Samuel Johnson, and in later years was the assistant minister of Christ's and St. Peter's churches, in Philadelphia, where my maternal ancestors had worshiped for more than one generation. One day, after the father had reached

four score years, the lately deceased son took me into the study of the aged man, and showed me a letter which President George Washington had written to his father, thanking him for the loan of one of his manuscript sermons. Washington and his wife were regular attendants upon his ministry while residing in Philadelphia. The President was not a communicant, notwithstanding all the pretty stories to the contrary, and after the close of the sermon on sacramental Sundays, had fallen into the habit of retiring from the church while his wife remained and communed."

Referring to Dr. Abercrombie's reproof of Washington, Mr. Neill says:

"Upon one occasion Dr. Abercrombie alluded to the unhappy tendency of the example of those dignified by age and position turning their backs upon the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The discourse arrested the attention of Washington, and after that he never came to church with his wife on Communion Sunday."

The Rev. Dr. Wilson, in his famous sermon on the Religion of the Presidents, also alludes to this subject. He says:

"When the Congress sat in Philadelphia, President Washington attended the Episcopal church. The rector, Dr. Abercrombie, told me that on the days when the sacrament of the Lord's Supper

was to be administered, Washington's custom was to rise just before the ceremony commenced, and walk out of church. This became a subject of remark in the congregation, as setting a bad example. At length the Doctor undertook to speak of it, with a direct allusion to the President. Washington was heard afterwards to remark that this was the first time a clergyman had thus preached to him, and he should henceforth neither trouble the Doctor nor his congregation on such occasions; and ever after that, upon communion days, he 'absented himself altogether from the church.' "

The Rev. Bird Wilson, D. D., author of the "Memoir of Bishop White," says:

"Though the General attended the churches in which Dr. White officiated, whenever he was in Philadelphia during the Revolutionary war, and afterwards while President of the United States, he never was a communicant in them" (Memoir of Bishop White, p. 188).

The Rev. Beverly Tucker, D. D., of the Episcopal church, has attempted to prove that Washington was a churchman. But while professing to believe that he was a communicant before the Revolution he is compelled to admit that there is a doubt about his communing after the Revolution. He says:

“The doubt has been raised partly on the strength of a letter written by Bishop White in 1832. He says that Washington attended St. Peter’s church one winter, during the session of the Continental Congress, and that during his Presidency he had a pew in Christ church, ‘which was habitually occupied by himself, by Mrs. Washington, who was regularly a communicant, and by his secretaries. This language is taken to mean, and probably correctly, that Washington did not commune.’”

Dr. Tucker is evidently not acquainted with Bishop White’s letter to Col. Mercer in 1835. There is no question as to the meaning of that letter. Continuing, Dr. Tucker says:

“The doubt rests again on the recollection of Mrs. Fielding Lewis, Nelly Custis, Gen. Washington’s step-granddaughter, written in 1833, who states that after the Mount Vernon family removed from Pohick church to Christ church, Alexandria, the General was accustomed, on Communion Sundays, to leave the church with her, sending the carriage back for Mrs. Washington.”

Washington’s biographer, the Rev. Jared Sparks, who seems to have entertained the popular notion that Washington was in early life a communicant, admits that at a latter period he ceased to commune. He says:

“The circumstance of his withdrawing himself from the communion service at a certain period of his life has been remarked as singular. This may be admitted and regretted, both on account of his example and the value of his opinions as to the importance and practical tendency of this rite” (Life of Washington, Vol. ii, p. 361).

Origen Bachelor, in his debate with Robert Dale Owen in 1831, made an effort to prove that Washington was a Christian communicant. He appealed for help to the Rev. Wm. Jackson, rector of the Episcopal church of Alexandria, the church which Washington had attended. Mr. Jackson was only too willing to aid him. He instituted an exhaustive investigation for the purpose of discovering if possible some evidence of Washington having been a communicant. Letters of inquiry were addressed to his relatives and friends. But his efforts were unsuccessful. While he professed to believe that Washington was a Christian, he was compelled to say:

“I find no one who ever communed with him” (Bachelor-Owen Debate, Vol. ii, p. 262).

This, as might be supposed, did not satisfy Mr. Bachelor, and he entreated the rector to make another attempt. The second attempt was as fruitless as the first. He writes:

“I am sorry after so long a delay in replying to



your last, that it is not in my power to communicate something decisive in reference to General Washington's church membership" (Ibid., ii, p. 370.)

In the same letter Mr. Jackson says:

"Nor can I find any old person who ever communed with him."

The "People's Library of Information" contains the following:

"The question has been raised as to whether any one of our Presidents was a communicant in a Christian church. There is a tradition that Washington asked permission of a Presbyterian minister in New Jersey to unite in communion. But it is only a tradition. Washington was a vestryman in the Episcopal church. But that office required no more piety than it would to be mate of a ship. There is no account of his communing in Boston, or in New York, or Philadelphia, or elsewhere, during the Revolutionary struggle."

The tradition of Washington's wishing to unite with a Presbyterian minister in communion, like many other so-called traditions of the same character, has been industriously circulated. And yet it is scarcely possible to conceive of a more improbable story. Refusing to commune with the members of the church in which he was raised, and the church he was in the habit of attending,

and going to the priest of another church—a stranger—and asking to commune with him! Had Washington been some intemperate vagabond, the story might have been believed. But Washington was not an inebriate, and was never so pressed for a drink as to beg a sup of sacramental wine from a Calvinistic clergyman.

Gen. A. W. Greely, U. S. A., in an article on "Washington's Domestic and Religious Life" which was published in the Ladies' Home Journal for April, 1896, says:

"But even if he was ever confirmed in its [the Episcopal] faith there is no reliable evidence that he ever took communion with it or with any other church."

Some years ago, I met at Paris, Texas, an old gentleman, Mr. F. W. Miner, who was born and who lived for a considerable time near Mt. Vernon. He told me that when a boy he was once in company with a party of old men, neighbors in early life of Washington, who were discussing the question of his religious belief. He says that it was admitted by all of them that he was not a church member, and by the most of them that he was not a Christian.

Mr. George Wilson of Lexington, Mo., whose ancestors owned the Custis estate, and founded Alexandria, where Washington attended church,

writes as follows: "My great-grandmother was Mary Alexander, daughter of 'John the younger,' who founded Alexandria. The Alexander pew in Christ church was next to Washington's, and an old lady, a kinswoman of mine, born near Alexandria and named Alexander, told me that the tradition in the Alexander family was that Washington NEVER took communion."

In regard to Washington being a vestryman, Mr. Wilson says: "At that time the vestry was the county court, and in order to have a hand in managing the affairs of the county, in which his large property lay, regulating the levy of taxes, etc., Washington had to be a vestryman."

The St. Louis Globe contained the following in regard to the church membership of Washington:

"It is a singular fact that much as has been written about Washington, particularly with regard to his superior personal virtue, there is nothing to show that he was ever a member of the church. He attended divine service, and lived an honorable and exemplary life, but as to his being a communicant, the record is surprisingly doubtful."

In an article conceding that Washington was not a communicant, the Western Christian Advocate says:

“This is evident and convincing from the Life of Bishop White, bishop of the Episcopal church in America from 1787 to 1836. Of this evidence it has been well said: ‘There does not appear to be any such undoubtable evidence existing. The more scrutinously the church membership of Washington is examined, the more doubtful it appears. Bishop White seems to have had more intimate relations with Washington than any clergyman of his time. His testimony outweighs any amount of influential argumentation on the question.’ ”

The following is a recapitulation of the salient points in the preceding testimony, given in the words of the witnesses. It is in itself an overwhelming refutation of the claim that Washington was a communicant:

“Gen. Washington never received the communion in the churches of which I am the parochial minister.”—Bishop White.

“On sacramental Sundays, Gen. Washington, immediately after the desk and pulpit services, went out with the greater part of the congregation.”—Rev. Dr. Abercrombie.

“After that, [Dr. Abercrombie’s reproof,] upon communion days, he absented himself altogether from the church.”—Rev. Dr. Wilson.

“The General was accustomed, on communion

Sundays, to leave the church with her [Nelly Custis], sending the carriage back for Mrs. Washington."—Rev. Dr. Beverly Tucker.

"He never was a communicant in them [Dr. White's churches]."—Rev. Dr. Bird Wilson.

"I find no one who ever communed with him."—Rev. William Jackson.

"The President was not a communicant."—Rev. E. D. Neill.

"This [his ceasing to commune] may be admitted and regretted."—Rev. Jared Sparks.

"There is no reliable evidence that he ever took communion."—Gen. A. W. Greely.

"There is nothing to show that he was ever a member of the church."—St. Louis Globe.

"I have never been a communicant."—Washington, quoted by Dr. Abercrombie.

The claim that Washington was a Christian communicant must be abandoned; the claim that he was a believer in Christianity, I shall endeavor to show, is equally untenable.

#### *WAS WASHINGTON A CHRISTIAN?*

In the political documents, correspondence, and other writings of Washington, few references to the prevailing religion of his day are found. In no instance has he expressed a disbelief in the Christian religion, neither can there be found in

all his writings a single sentence that can with propriety be construed into an acknowledgment of its claims. Once or twice he refers to it in complimentary terms, but in these compliments there is nothing inconsistent with the conduct of a conscientious Deist. Religions, like their adherents, possess both good and bad qualities, and Christianity is no exception. While there is much in it deserving the strongest condemnation, there is also much that commands the respect and even challenges the admiration of Infidels. Occupying the position that Washington did, enjoying as he did the confidence and support of Christians, it was not unnatural that he should indulge in a few friendly allusions to their religious faith.

In his "Farewell Address," the last and best political paper he gave to the public, the Christian religion is not once named. In this work he manifests the fondest solicitude for the future of his country. His sentences are crowded with words of warning and fatherly advice. But he does not seem to be impressed with the idea that the safety of the government or the happiness of the people depends upon Christianity. He recommends a cultivation of the religious sentiment, but evinces no partiality for the popular faith.

In the absence of any recorded statements from Washington himself concerning his religious be-

lief, the most conclusive evidence that can be presented is the admissions of his clerical acquaintances. Among these there has been preserved the testimony of his pastors, Bishop White and Dr. Abercrombie.

In a letter to Rev. B. C. C. Parker of Massachusetts, dated Nov. 28, 1832, in answer to some inquiries respecting Washington's religion, Bishop White says:

"His behavior [in church] was always serious and attentive, but as your letter seems to intend an inquiry on the point of kneeling during the service, I owe it to the truth to declare that I never saw him in the said attitude. . . . Although I was often in company with this great man, and had the honor of dining often at his table, I never heard anything from him which could manifest his opinions on the subject of religion. . . . Within a few days of his leaving the presidential chair, our vestry waited on him with an address prepared and delivered by me. In his answer he was pleased to express himself gratified by what he had heard from our pulpit; but there was nothing that committed him relatively to religious theory" ("Memoir of Bishop White," pp. 189-191; Sparks' "Life of Washington," Vol. ii., p. 359).

The Rev. Parker, to whom Bishop White's let-

ter is addressed, was, it seems, anxious to obtain some evidence that Washington was a believer in Christianity, and, not satisfied with the bishop's answer, begged him, it would appear, to tax his mind for some fact that would tend to show that Washington was a believer. In a letter dated Dec. 21, 1832, the bishop writes as follows:

"I do not believe that any degree of recollection will bring to my mind any fact which would prove General Washington to have been a believer in the Christian revelation further than as may be hoped from his constant attendance upon Christian worship, in connection with the general reserve of his character" ("Memoir of Bishop White," p. 193).

Bishop White's testimony does not afford positive proof of Washington's unbelief, but it certainly furnishes strong presumptive evidence of its truth. It is hardly possible to suppose that he could have been a believer and have let his most intimate Christian associates remain in total ignorance of the fact. Bishop White indulges a faint hope that he may have been, but this hope is simply based on his "constant attendance" at church, and when we consider how large a proportion of those who attend church are unbelievers, that many of our most radical Freethinkers are regular church-goers, there are very small



grounds, I think, upon which to indulge even a hope. But even this "constant attendance" on the part of Washington cannot be accepted without some qualification; for, while it is true that he often attended church, he was by no means a constant attendant. Not only did he uniformly absent himself on communion days, but the entries in his diary show that he remained away for several Sundays in succession, spending his time at home reading and writing, riding out into the country, or in visiting his friends.

But if Bishop White cherished a faint hope that Washington had some faith in the religion of Christ, Dr. Abercrombie did not. Long after Washington's death, in reply to Dr. Wilson, who had interrogated him as to his illustrious auditor's religious views, Dr. Abercrombie's brief but emphatic answer was:

"Sir, Washington was a Deist."

Washington rarely attended, as we have seen, any church but the Episcopal, hence, if any denomination of Christians could claim him as an adherent, it was this one. Yet here we have two of its most distinguished representatives, pastors of the churches which he attended, the one not knowing what his belief was, the other disclaiming him and asserting that he was a Deist.

The Rev. Dr. Wilson, who was almost a con-

temporary of our earlier statesmen and presidents, and who thoroughly investigated the subject of their religious beliefs, in his sermon already mentioned affirmed that the founders of our nation were nearly all Infidels, and that of the presidents who had thus far been elected—George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, John Quincy Adams, and Andrew Jackson—not one had professed a belief in Christianity. From this sermon I quote the following:

“When the war was over and the victory over our enemies won, and the blessings and happiness of liberty and peace were secured, the Constitution was framed and God was neglected. He was not merely forgotten. He was absolutely voted out of the Constitution. The proceedings, as published by Thompson, the secretary, and the history of the day, show that the question was gravely debated whether God should be in the Constitution or not, and after a solemn debate he was deliberately voted out of it. . . . There is not only in the theory of our government no recognition of God’s laws and sovereignty, but its practical operation, its administration, has been conformable to its theory. Those who have been called to administer the government have not been men making any public profession of Chris-

tianity. . . . Washington was a man of valor and wisdom. He was esteemed by the whole world as a great and good man; but he was not a professing Christian."

Dr. Wilson's sermon was published in the Albany Daily Advertiser in 1831, and attracted the attention of Robert Dale Owen, then a young man, who called to see its author in regard to his statement concerning Washington's belief. The result of his visit is given in a letter to Amos Gilbert. The letter is dated Albany, November 13, 1831, and was published in New York a fortnight later. He says:

"I called last evening on Dr. Wilson, as I told you I should, and I have seldom derived more pleasure from a short interview with anyone. Unless my discernment of character has been grievously at fault, I met an honest man and sincere Christian. But you shall have the particulars. A gentleman of this city accompanied me to the Doctor's residence. We were very courteously received. I found him a tall, commanding figure, with a countenance of much benevolence, and a brow indicative of deep thought, apparently approaching fifty years of age. I opened the interview by stating that though personally a stranger to him, I had taken the liberty of calling in consequence of having perused an interesting

sermon of his, which had been reported in the Daily Advertiser of this city, and regarding which, as he probably knew, a variety of opinions prevailed. In a discussion, in which I had taken a part, some of the facts as there reported had been questioned; and I wished to know from him whether the reporter had fairly given his words or not. . . . I then read to him from a copy of the Daily Advertiser the paragraph which regards Washington, beginning, 'Washington was a man,' etc., and ending, 'absented himself altogether from the church.' 'I indorse,' said Dr. Wilson, with emphasis, 'every word of that. Nay, I do not wish to conceal from you any part of the truth, even what I have not given to the public. Dr. Abercrombie said more than I have repeated. At the close of our conversation on the subject his emphatic expression was—for I well remember the very words—"Sir, Washington was a Deist."'

In concluding the interview, Dr. Wilson said: "I have diligently perused every line that Washington ever gave to the public, and I do not find one expression in which he pledges himself as a believer in Christianity. I think anyone who will candidly do as I have done, will come to the conclusion that he was a Deist and nothing more."

In February, 1800, a few weeks after Washing-

ton's death, Jefferson made the following entry in his journal:

“Dr. Rush told me (he had it from Asa Green) that when the clergy addressed General Washington, on his departure from the government, it was observed in their consultation that he had never, on any occasion, said a word to the public which showed a belief in the Christian religion, and they thought they should so pen their address as to force him at length to disclose publicly whether he was a Christian or not. However, he observed, the old fox was too cunning for them. He answered every article of their address particularly, except that, which he passed over without notice” (Jefferson's Works, Vol. iv., p. 572).

Jefferson further says: “I know that Gouverneur Morris, who claimed to be in his secrets, and believed himself to be so, has often told me that General Washington believed no more in that system [Christianity] than he did” (Ibid).

Gouverneur Morris was the principal drafter of the Constitution of the United States; he was a member of the Continental Congress, a United States senator from New York, and minister to France. He accepted, to a considerable extent, the skeptical views of French Freethinkers.

The “Asa” Green mentioned by Jefferson was undoubtedly the Rev. Ashbel Green, chaplain to

Congress during Washington's administration. In an article on Washington's religion, contributed to the Chicago Tribune, B. F. Underwood says:

"If there were an Asa Green in Washington's time he was a man of no prominence, and it is probable the person referred to by Jefferson was the Rev. Dr. Ashbel Green, who served as chaplain to the Congress during the eight years that body sat in Philadelphia, was afterwards president of Princeton College, and the only clerical member of Congress that signed the Declaration of Independence. His name shines illustriously in the annals of the Presbyterian church in the United States."

Some years ago I received a letter from Hon. A. B. Bradford of Pennsylvania, relative to Washington's belief. Mr. Bradford was for a long time a prominent clergyman in the Presbyterian church, and was appointed a consul to China by President Lincoln. His statements help to corroborate the statements of Dr. Wilson, Thomas Jefferson, and Mr. Underwood. He says:

"I knew Dr. Wilson personally, and have entertained him at my house, on which occasion he said in my hearing what my relative, the Rev. Dr. Ashbel Green of Philadelphia, frequently told me in his study, viz., that during the time that Congress sat in that city the clergy, suspecting from

good evidence that Washington was not a believer in the Bible as a revelation from heaven, laid a plan to extort from him a confession, either pro or con, but that the plan failed. Dr. Green was chaplain to Congress during all the time of its sitting in Philadelphia; dined with the President on special invitation nearly every week; was well acquainted with him, and after he had been dead and gone many years, often said in my hearing, though very sorrowfully, of course, that while Washington was very deferential to religion and its ceremonies, like nearly all the founders of the Republic, he was not a Christian, but a Deist."

Mr. Underwood's article contained the following from the pen of Mr. Bradford:

"It was during his [Dr. Green's] long residence in Philadelphia that I became intimately acquainted with him as a relative, student of theology at Princeton, and a member of the same Presbytery to which he belonged. . . . Many an hour during my student and clergyman days did I spend with him in his study at No. 150 Pine street, Philadelphia, listening to his interesting and instructive conversation on Revolutionary times and incidents. I recollect well that during one of these interviews in his study I inquired of him what were the real opinions Washington entertained on the subject of religion. He promptly

answered pretty nearly in the language which Jefferson says Dr. Rush used. He explained more at length the plan laid by the clergy of Philadelphia at the close of Washington's administration as President to get his views of religion for the sake of the good influence they supposed they would have in counteracting the Infidelity of Paine and the rest of the Revolutionary patriots, military and civil. But I well remember the smile on his face and the twinkle of his black eye when he said: 'The old fox was too cunning for us.' He affirmed, in concluding his narrative, that from his long and intimate acquaintance with Washington he knew it to be the case that while he respectfully conformed to the religious customs of society by generally going to church on Sundays, he had no belief at all in the divine origin of the Bible, or the Jewish-Christian religion."

The testimony of General Greely, whose thorough investigation of Washington's religious belief makes him an authority on the subject, is among the most important yet adduced. From his article on "Washington's Domestic and Religious Life" I quote the following paragraphs:

"The effort to depict Washington as very devout from his childhood, as a strict Sabbatarian, and as in intimate spiritual communication with



the church is practically contradicted by his own letters."

"In his letters, even those of consolation, there appears almost nothing to indicate his spiritual frame of mind. A particularly careful study of the man's letters convinces me that while the spirit of Christianity, as exemplified in love of God and love of man [Theophilanthropy or Deism], was the controlling factor of his nature, yet he never formulated his religious faith."

"It is, however, somewhat striking that in several thousand letters the name of Jesus Christ never appears, and it is notably absent from his last will."

"His services as a vestryman had no special significance from a religious standpoint. The political affairs of a Virginia county were then directed by the vestry, which, having the power to elect its own members, was an important instrument of the oligarchy of Virginia."

"He was not regular in attendance at church save possibly at home. While present at the First Provincial Congress in Philadelphia he went once to the Roman Catholic and once to the Episcopal church. He spent four months in the Constitutional Convention, going six times to church, once each to the Romish high mass, to the

Friends', to the Presbyterian, and thrice to the Episcopal service."

"From his childhood he traveled on Sunday whenever occasion required. He considered it proper for his negroes to fish, and on that day made at least one contract. During his official busy life Sunday was largely given to his home correspondence, being, as he says, the most convenient day in which to spare time from his public burdens to look after his impaired fortune and estates."

Dr. Moncure D. Conway, who made a study of Washington's life and character, who had access to his private papers, and who was employed to edit a volume of his letters, has written a monograph on "The Religion of Washington," from which I take the following:

"In editing a volume of Washington's private letters for the Long Island Historical Society, I have been much impressed by indications that this great historic personality represented the Liberal religious tendency of his time. That tendency was to respect religious organizations as part of the social order, which required some minister to visit the sick, bury the dead, and perform marriages. It was considered in nowise inconsistent with disbelief of the clergyman's doctrines

to contribute to his support, or even to be a vestryman in his church."

"In his many letters to his adopted nephew and young relatives, he admonishes them about their manners and morals, but in no case have I been able to discover any suggestion that they should read the Bible, keep the Sabbath, go to church, or any warning against Infidelity."

"Washington had in his library the writings of Paine, Priestley, Voltaire, Frederick the Great, and other heretical works."

Conway says that "Washington was glad to have Volney as his guest at Mount Vernon," and cited a letter of introduction which Washington gave him to the citizens of the United States during his travels in this country.

In a contribution to the New York Times Dr. Conway says:

"Augustine Washington, like most scholarly Virginians of his time, was a Deist. . . . Contemporary evidence shows that in mature life Washington was a Deist, and did not commune, which is quite consistent with his being a vestryman. In England, where vestries have secular functions, it is not unusual for Unitarians to be vestrymen, there being no doctrinal subscription required for that office. Washington's letters during the Revolution occasionally indicate his recog-

nition of the hand of Providence in notable public events, but in the thousands of his letters I have never been able to find the name of Christ or any reference to him."

There is no evidence to show that Washington, even in early life, was a believer in Christianity. The contrary is rather to be presumed. His father, as Dr. Conway states, was a Deist; while his mother was not excessively religious. His brother, Lawrence Washington, was, it is claimed, the first advocate of religious liberty in Virginia, and evidently an unbeliever, so that instead of being surrounded at home by the stifling atmosphere of superstition, he was permitted to breathe the pure air of religious freedom.

It is certain that at no time during his life did he take any special interest in church affairs. Gen. Greely says that "He was not regular in church attendance save possibly at home." At home he was the least regular in his attendance. His diary shows that he attended about twelve times a year. During the week he superintended the affairs of his farm; on Sunday he usually attended to his correspondence. Sunday visitors at his house were numerous. If he ever objected to them it was not because they kept him from his devotions, but because they kept him from his work. In his diary he writes:

“It hath so happened, that on the last **Sundays**—call them the first or seventh [days] as you please, I have been unable to perform the latter duty on account of visits from strangers, with whom I could not use the freedom to leave alone, or recommend to the care of each other, for their amusement.”

When he visited his distant tenants to collect his rent, their piety, and not his, prevented him from doing the business on Sunday, as the following entry in his diary shows:

“Being Sunday, and the people living on my land very religious, it was thought best to postpone going among them till to-morrow.”

His diary also shows that he “closed land purchases, sold wheat, and, while a Virginia planter, went fox hunting on Sunday.”

He did not, like most pious churchmen, believe that Christian servants are better than others. When on one occasion he needed servants, he wrote:

“If they are good workmen, they may be from Asia, Africa, or Europe; they may be Mahomedans, Jews, or Christians of any sect, or they may be Atheists.”

These extracts contain no explicit declarations of disbelief in Christianity, but between the lines we can easily read, “I am not a Christian.”

There is no evidence that he ever entertained any special reverence for the Bible, or devoted any particular attention to its teachings. The writer has seen Washington's Bible and is prepared to vouch for the correctness of the following notice of it which appeared in the Washington Post:

"It is not injured inside, the leaves are not dog-eared, nor the margins marked, and it does not look as if it was ever used at all."

Had Washington been a Christian it is reasonable to suppose that on his death-bed, at least, he would have let fall from his lips some word revealing the fact, conscious as he was from the first that his illness would prove fatal. We have the certificate of Dr. Craik and Dr. Dick, the physicians who attended him during his last illness, and this shows that he made no recognition of Christ or Christianity. This is corroborated by the testimony of his private secretary, Mr. Tobias Lear.

Thus writes Moncure D. Conway of his last hours:

"When the end was near, Washington said to a physician present—an ancestor of the writer of these notes—'I am not afraid to go.' With his right fingers on his left wrist he counted his own pulses, which beat his funeral march to the grave. 'He bore his distress,' so next day wrote one pres-

ent, 'with astonishing fortitude, and conscious, as he declared, several hours before his death, of his approaching dissolution, he resigned his breath with the greatest composure, having the full possession of his reason to the last moment.' Mrs. Washington knelt beside his bed, but no word passed on religious matters. With the sublime taciturnity which had marked his life he passed out of existence, leaving no act or word which can be turned to the service of superstition, cant, or bigotry" (Open Court).

In his discussion with Bacher, Robert Dale Owen says:

"When I spoke of Washington's death-bed, I had the account of an eye-witness lying before me. And most strongly does that corroborate my opinion that Washington's religion was of the most liberal stamp. No clergyman around his death-bed. No protestations that in the dying hour religion afforded him aid. No praying. No repeating texts. No asking for a Bible to read a chapter. Not a syllable about the redeeming blood of Christ, or the saving efficacy of divine grace. Not even a straw for the orthodox to catch at and work up in tract form, as 'The dying testimony of that distinguished Christian, George Washington.' True, the father of his country died the death of a patriot; he died as he had lived, in dignity and

peace; but he left behind him not one word to warrant the belief that he was other than a sincere Deist."

"It has been confidently stated to me," says Mr. Owen, "that he actually refused spiritual aid when it was proposed to send for a clergyman."

The Rev. Dr. Miller, of Birmingham, England, who devoted much time to an investigation of this subject, in *London Notes and Queries*, says:

"My researches do not enable me to affirm that Washington, on his death-bed, gave evidence of Christian belief."

In the last hour of the day, on the last day of the week, in the last month of the year, at the end of a long and illustrious career, with the simple words, "I am not afraid to go," the hero of a dozen battle-fields surrendered.

Every child is familiar with the story of Washington praying at Valley Forge. The Peter Parleys who write historical romances and label them "School Histories" have repeated it as a historical fact. But it is false. It bears the stamp of fiction on its face, and is of itself sufficient to excite the suspicion that Washington was not a religious man. Unable to prove that he was in the habit of praying in public, unable to cite a single instance of his ever having uttered a



prayer in his family, this pious tale was fabricated.

Referring to the Sunday-school stories that have been related of Washington, and that have gained popular credence, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* says:

“The story of the hatchet and the cherry tree, and similar tales, are quite apocryphal, having been coined by Washington’s most popular biographer, Weems.”

Of all these apocryphal tales none is so utterly unworthy of credit as is this fable about his praying at Valley Forge. Intelligent Christians are ashamed of it. The Rev. E. D. Neill, whose father’s uncle owned the building occupied by Washington at Valley Forge, thus writes :

“There is a story about Washington being found in the woods in winter time in prayer by the owner of the house which he used as his headquarters at Valley Forge, which I would like to believe, if it were not so improbable, and if it had not first been put in print by the eccentric and not very accurate Episcopal minister, Rev. Morgan L. Weems. . . . With the capacious and comfortable house at his disposal, it is hardly possible that the shy, silent, cautious Washington should leave such retirement and enter the leafless woods, in the vicinity of the winter encampment of an

army, and engage in audible prayer" (Episcopal Recorder).

Alluding to the same subject, Rev. Minot J. Savage, in a sermon, said:

"The pictures that represent him on his knees in the winter forest at Valley Forge are even silly caricatures. Washington was, at least, not sentimental, and he had nothing about him of the Pharisee that displays his religion at street corners or out in the woods in the sight of observers, or where his portrait could be taken by 'our special artist.' "

Moncure D. Conway, whose researches enable him to speak authoritatively, makes the following statement, which will be a profound surprise to the student of Weems:

"Many clergymen visited him, but they were never invited to hold family prayers, and no grace was ever said at table" (Open Court).

General Greely says: "When he was urged to have public prayers in camp, so as to excite the curiosity and foster the conversion of the Indians, he ignored the recommendation" (Ladies' Home Journal).

Washington was a great man and a good man, but he was not a demi-god nor a saint. He was entirely human and possessed of human virtues and human frailties. If the churchmen could read

his diary, and read the testimony of those who knew him best—in short, could they become acquainted with the man Washington—they would scarcely conclude that he had much regard for Christian piety. They would be disposed to believe that after all the race track had more attractions for him than the church; that he preferred a glass of good brandy to a drop of communion wine; that he was probably more addicted to swearing than he was to praying.

Washington was one of the leading spirits who molded our present form of government, presiding over the convention that framed our Constitution. His influence was very great, and the greatest deference was paid to his opinions. Had he desired it he could probably have had the government established upon a Christian foundation; and had he been a very zealous adherent of that faith, it is reasonable to suppose that he would have done so, or at least have favored some recognition of its claims in the Constitution. But he did not utter a word in its behalf.

Above his official signature, as President of the United States, appears this important declaration:

“The government of the United States is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion” (Treaty with Tripoli).

He further solemnly declares that "the United States is not a Christian nation any more than it is a Jewish or a Mohammedan nation," referring to it, of course, in a political and not in a religious sense.

Washington, like Paine, Jefferson, and Franklin, was a staunch opponent of ecclesiastical tyranny. Almost immediately after his first inauguration, in answer to an address presented by the Baptists of Virginia, he said:

"If I could have entertained the slightest apprehension that the Constitution framed in the Convention, when I had the honor to preside, might possibly endanger the religious rights of any ecclesiastical society, certainly I would never have placed my signature to it; and if I could now conceive that the general government might be so administered as to render the liberty of conscience insecure, I beg you will be persuaded that no one would be more zealous than myself to establish effectual barriers against the horrors of spiritual tyranny and every species of religious persecution."

In reply to an address received from the Quakers, he said:

"Government being, among other purposes, instituted to protect the consciences of men from oppression, it certainly is the duty of rulers, not

only to abstain from it themselves, but according to their stations, to prevent it in others. . . .

While men perform their social duties faithfully, they do all that society or the state can with propriety demand or expect; and remain responsible to their maker for the religion, or mode of faith, which they may prefer or profess."

That he was fully cognizant of the intolerant spirit of Christianity is evidenced by a letter written to Sir Edward Newenham, dated October 20, 1792, in which he says:

"Of all the animosities which have existed among mankind, those which are caused by a difference of sentiments in religion appear to be the most inveterate and distressing, and ought most to be deprecated. I was in hopes that the enlightened and liberal policy, which has marked the present age, would at least have reconciled Christians of every denomination so far that we should never again see their religious disputes carried to such a pitch as to endanger the peace of society."

To Lafayette, who was trying to secure religious toleration for France, he wrote:

"I am not less ardent in my wish that you may succeed in your plan of toleration in religious matters. Being no bigot myself, I am disposed to indulge the professors of Christianity in the

church with that road to heaven which to them shall seem the most direct, plainest, easiest, and least liable to exception."

Soon after he became President, the First Presbytery of the Eastward sent him an address containing the following: "We should not have been alone in rejoicing to have seen some explicit acknowledgment of the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent, inserted somewhere in the Magna Charter of our country." To this Washington replied:

"The path of true piety is so plain as to require but little political direction. . . . In the progress of morality and science, to which our government will give every furtherance, we may confidently expect the advancement of true religion and the completion of our happiness."

Washington's most popular biographers were Weems and Sparks, both clergymen. Weems' "Life of Washington," the delight of many an American boy, a work made up of historical facts highly colored and interwoven with traditional stories and anecdotes, has long since been discarded as an authority. Weems does not give us the real Washington, but an ideal hero of his own creation. This hero he surrounds with a halo of piety. And yet the religion of this hero is not the religion of Christ, but the religion of God. The

Washington of Weems is a Theist, not a Christian. Sparks affirms that Washington was a Christian. But from his standpoint the affirmation was one easily made. Sparks was a Unitarian—one who rejects the dogmas of the inspiration of the Bible and the divinity of Christ—one who defines Christianity as “one with the absolute religion of nature and reason”—one who classes as Christians all good men, regardless of their religious belief. It is true that Sparks declares that Washington was a member of the Episcopal church, but he also admits that during his life he ceased to be a communicant of this church.

Theodore Parker, in his “Four Historic Americans,” describes the religion of Washington as follows:

“He had much of the principle, little of the sentiments of religion. He was more moral than pious. In early life a certain respect for ecclesiastical forms made him vestryman at two churches. This respect for outward forms with ministers and reporters for newspapers very often passes for the substance of religion. It does not appear that Washington took a deep and spontaneous delight in religious emotions more than in poetry, in works of art, or in the beauties of nature. . . . Silence is a figure of speech, and in the

latter years of his life I suppose his theological opinions were those of John Adams, Dr. Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson, only he was not a speculative man, and did not care to publish them to the world."

The Rev. Dr. Minot J. Savage, in a sermon on Washington, says: "Those best qualified to testify tell us that he was decidedly Liberal in his theology in his mature manhood; and we know he was not shocked by the teachings of Thomas Paine. That he trusted in God, believed in a Providence that in some large way guided human destiny, is, doubtless, true; but that he was an evangelical Christian is almost certainly not true."

The Rev. John Snyder, of St. Louis, in an article on Thomas Paine says: "If Thomas Paine is in hell on account of his religious opinions, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson are in his company. . . . He shared the religious convictions of Washington, Franklin and Jefferson."

It has been claimed that Washington's failure to demand Paine's release, when he was imprisoned in France, was because of Paine's Infidelity. Nothing can be further from the truth than this. His failure to interfere in Paine's behalf was owing to the misrepresentations of his minis-



ter, Gouverneur Morris, who declared that Paine had become a French citizen, and his determination to observe a strict neutrality in regard to European affairs. His love for Lafayette was scarcely less than that of a father for his son; yet when Lafayette was imprisoned in Austria he wrote: "As President there must be no commitment of the Government to any interference of mine."

The Rev. Dr. Swing of Chicago, in a sermon on Washington and Lincoln, said: "It is often lamented by the churchman that Washington and Lincoln possessed little religion except that found in the word 'God.' All that can here be affirmed is that what the religion of these two men lacked in theological details it made up in greatness. Their minds were born with a love of great principles. Washington loved and exalted each great principle. He was compelled by his nature to select from Christianity its central ideas. This tendency was intensified by the local friendship for France. France was battling against a vast bundle of false Christian particulars. The Colonies so hated England and so admired France that most of our early statesmen reduced Christianity to that French Rationalism which was quite well satisfied with the doctrine of a creator. A superstitious Christianity was falling to pieces, and the

new orthodoxy had not yet come. Many of those statesmen when they took any steps at all in the path of religion walked with God alone."

Judge J. B. Stallo, minister to Italy during President Cleveland's first administration, in an argument before the Superior Court of Cincinnati, made use of the following words: "The men who assembled in Philadelphia to frame our Constitution were, many of them, imbued with the spirit of Freethought then prevalent. I am not without apprehension that this will be found to be true to a certain extent of George Washington—clarum et venerabile nomen—who presided in that convention; that when you turn to the reliable accounts of his life and not to the rhetoricians, who have seen fit to meddle with it, the suspicion will arise that he would hardly have subscribed to any of the dogmatic creeds of the day."

The centennial of Washington's inauguration called out an increased degree of interest in his history. Everything pertaining to the man, including his religious belief, was fully and freely discussed. It was gratifying to note that the facts connected with this subject, which of late years have been exhumed and made public by our industrious truth seekers, had had their effect in largely disabusing the popular mind of the fraudulent claims so persistently maintained by

the church. Twenty-five years ago. Washington's orthodoxy was rarely questioned. Now, in spite of religious prejudice and bigotry, the secular press, the barometer of public sentiment, generally affirms its improbability.

Even the religious press is beginning to admit the truth. The Western Christian Advocate, one of the most influential organs of the leading Protestant denomination of the United States, editorially says:

"The simple truth is, that while many denominations claim Washington, he belonged to no church, and was not perhaps a Christian in that experimental sense necessary, by the New Testament standards, to constitute a child of God."

The Catholic World makes this significant admission: "In all the voluminous writings of General Washington, the holy name of Jesus Christ is never once written."

A Southern paper, the Memphis Commercial Appeal, recently gave a pen picture of Washington which, although rather harshly drawn, is a more truthful picture than the one usually drawn by Sunday-school artists:

"Several writers of late have marred the perfect wooden image which history has left us of George Washington. They have shown that he was a master hand at swearing; that he could

carry about as much liquor as any other of his esteemed contemporaries, and that he was, in short, something of a dead game sport. Human nature is such that it has rather rejoiced over these revelations. It gags at perfection just as strenuously as it condemns total depravity.

“Zealous efforts have been made by priestly falsifiers to make the ‘Father of his Country’ something he was not. They represented him, while at the head of the army, frequently going aside to pray. This is wholly false, as is the hatchet and cherry-tree story told by Elder Weems.

“Truthful history presents Washington as irascible, impetuous, and very profane on great occasions. He was human, with the infirmities of human nature. He was not an orthodox believer, but, like nearly all the fathers of the Republic, he was a Deist.”

The following extracts from the evidence adduced epitomizes this evidence and clearly show that the truth of my second proposition, “Washington was not a believer in the Christian religion,” has been established:

“I do not believe that any degree of recollection will bring to any mind any fact which would prove General Washington to have been a be-

liever in the Christian revelation.”—Bishop White.

“Sir, Washington was a Deist.”—Rev. Dr. Abercrombie.

“Like nearly all the founders of the Republic, he was not a Christian, but a Deist.”—Rev. Dr. Ashbel Green, quoted by Mr. Bradford.

“He had no belief at all in the divine origin of the Bible.”—Ibid.

“I think anyone who will candidly do as I have done, will come to the conclusion that he was a Deist and nothing more.”—Rev. Dr. Wilson.

“Gouverneur Morris . . . has often told me that General Washington believed no more in that system [Christianity] than he did.”—Thomas Jefferson.

“He left behind him not one word to warrant the belief that he was other than a sincere Deist.”—Robert Dale Owen.

“It has been confidently stated to me that he actually refused spiritual aid when it was proposed to send for a clergyman.”—Ibid.

“My researches do not enable me to affirm that Washington, on his death-bed, gave evidence of Christian belief.”—Rev. Dr. Miller.

“In mature life Washington was a Deist.”—Dr. Moncure D. Conway.

“Many clergyman visited him, but they were

never invited to hold family prayers, and no grace was ever said at table."—Ibid.

"In the thousands of his letters I have never been able to find the name of Christ or any reference to him."—Ibid.

"In several thousand letters the name of Jesus Christ never appears, and it is notably absent from his last will."—Gen. A. W. Greely.

"In all the voluminous writings of General Washington, the holy name of Jesus Christ is never once written."—Catholic World.

"He belonged to no church, and was not perhaps a Christian in that experimental sense necessary, by the New Testament standards, to constitute a child of God."—Western Christian Advocate.

"That he was an evangelical Christian is almost certainly not true."—Rev. M. J. Savage.

"I suppose his theological opinions were those of John Adams, Dr. Franklin and Thomas Jefferson."—Theodore Parker.

"He [Paine] shared the religious convictions of Washington."—Rev. John Snyder.

"Most of our early statesmen [including Washington] reduced Christianity to that French Rationalism which was quite well satisfied with the doctrine of a Creator."—Rev. Dr. Swing.

"The men who assembled in Philadelphia to

frame our Constitution were, many of them [including Washington] imbued with the spirit of Freethought then prevalent.”—Judge J. B. Stallo.

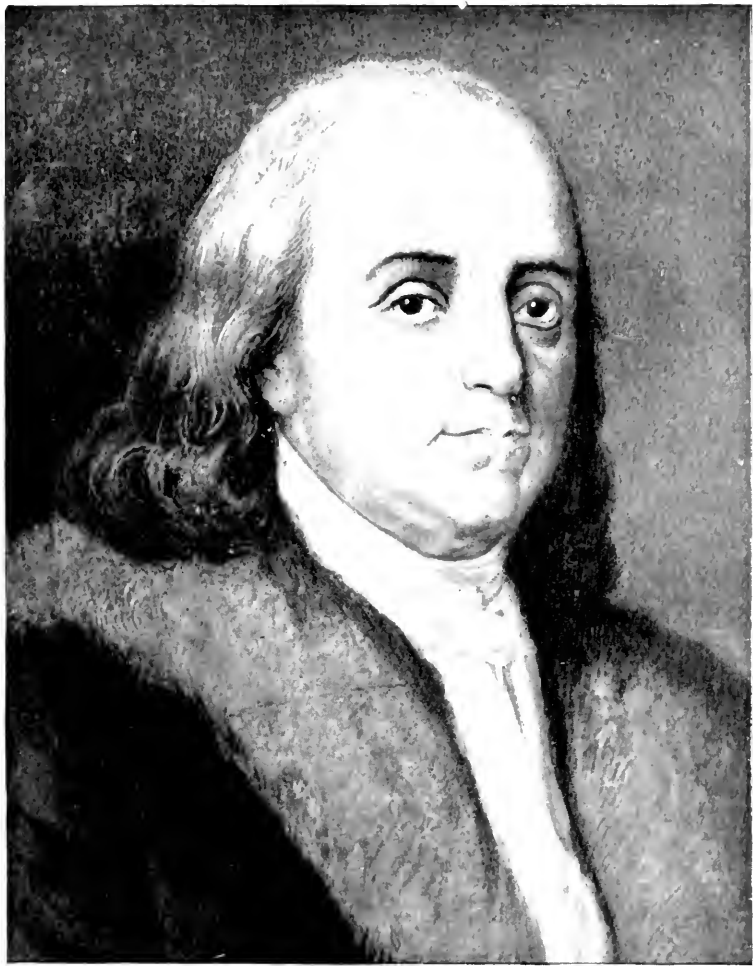
Washington was not a church member; he was not a Christian. Like Paine and Jefferson, he was a disbeliever in Christianity—a Freethinker.





**BENJAMIN FRANKLIN**





BENJAMIN FRANKLIN



## BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.

The world has produced few wiser or better men than our American Socrates, Benjamin Franklin. While he lived he was loved and honored by all; when he died, two continents mourned as a child mourns the loss of a beloved father. Eagerly has the church striven to place to her credit the prestige of this wise and good man's name. But in vain; she cannot efface the oft-repeated declarations of his disbelief.

Franklin received a religious training, but his good sense and his humane nature forced him to rebel against the irrational and inhuman tenets of his parents' faith, and at an early age a spirit of skepticism was developed in him, as the following extracts from his Autobiography will show:

“My parents had given me betimes religious impressions, and I received from my infancy a pious education in the principles of Calvinism. But scarcely was I arrived at fifteen years of age, when, after having doubted in turn of different tenets, according as I found them combated in the

different books that I read, I began to doubt of Revelation itself" (Autobiography, p. 66).

He read much, and the ambition of his youth, as he declares, was to become a decent writer of the English language. His favorite exercise was to reproduce, in his own words, the ideas of the authors he read. Alluding to this, he says:

"The time which I devoted to these exercises, and to reading, was the evening after my day's labor was finished, the morning before it began, and Sundays when I could escape divine service. While I lived with my father, he had insisted on my punctual attendance on public worship, and I still indeed considered it as a duty, but a duty which I thought I had no time to practice" (Ibid. p. 16).

In the course of his mental pursuits he read Locke on the "Human Understanding," and carefully studied some essays which taught the Socratic method of disputation, which he immediately put to use in combating superstition:

"Charmed to a degree of enthusiasm with this mode of disputing, I adopted it, and renouncing blunt contradictions, and direct and positive argument, I assumed the character of a humble questioner. The perusal of Shaftesbury and Collins had made me a skeptic; and, being previously so as to many doctrines of Christianity, I found

Socrates' method to be both the safest for myself, as well as the most embarrassing to those against whom I applied it. It soon afforded me singular pleasure; I incessantly practiced it; and became very adroit in obtaining, even from persons of superior understanding, concessions of which they did not foresee the consequence" (Ibid, p. 17).

The result of his many disputes upon the subject of religion is easily divined. He says:

"I began to be regarded, by pious souls, with horror, either as an apostate or an Atheist" (Ibid, p. 22).

Being associated with an elder brother in the publication of the New England Courant, young Franklin made use of its columns to propagate his radical thoughts. From an old edition of Goodrich's Reader (Fifth, pp. 273, 274) I quote the following relative to his adventures in this field of religious criticism:

"In Boston, in 1721, when the pulpit had marshaled Quakers and witches to the gallows, one newspaper, the New England Courant, the fourth American periodical, was established as an organ of independent opinion, by James Franklin. Its temporary success was advanced by Benjamin, his brother and apprentice, a boy of fifteen, who wrote pieces for its humble columns.

"The little sheet satirized hypocrisy and spoke

of religious knaves as of all knaves the worst. This was described as tending 'to abuse the ministers of religion in a manner which was intolerable.' 'I can well remember,' writes Increase Mather, then more than four score years of age, 'when the civil government would have taken an effectual course to suppress such a cursed libel.'

"The ministers persevered, and, in January, 1723, a committee of inquiry was raised by the legislature. Benjamin Franklin, being examined, escaped with an admonition; James, the publisher, refusing to discover the author of the offense, was kept in jail for a month; his paper was censured as reflecting injuriously on the reverend ministers of the gospel; and, by a vote of the House and Council, he was forbidden to print it, 'except it be first supervised.' "

This young opponent of priestcraft soon after left Boston, went to New York, and from thence to Philadelphia. In passing through New Jersey he stopped at an inn near Burlington, kept by a Dr. Brown. Of this Dr. Brown, he writes as follows:

"This man entered into a conversation with me while I took some refreshment, and perceiving that I had read a little, he expressed toward me considerable interest and friendship. Our acquaintance continued during the remainder of his



life. I believe him to have been what is called an itinerant doctor; for there was no town in England, or indeed in Europe, of which he could not give a particular account. He was neither deficient in understanding nor literature, but he was a sad Infidel; and, some years after, wickedly undertook to travesty the Bible, in burlesque verse, as Cotton has travestied Virgil. He exhibited, by this means, many facts in a very ludicrous point of view, which would have given umbrage to weak minds, had this work been published, which it never was" (Autobiography, p. 25).

I can see the sly twinkle in Benjamin's eye as he writes about this "sad Infidel" who "wickedly undertook to travesty the Bible." It was with these same "sad Infidels" that he delighted to associate throughout his life, while many a time he, too, "wickedly undertook to travesty the Bible" by pretending to read from it, but extemporizing in a ludicrous manner as he went along (Parton's *Life of Franklin*, Vol. i., p. 320).

In Philadelphia he was associated with a printer named Keimer. Referring to Keimer, he says:

"He formed so high an opinion of my talents for refutation that he seriously proposed to me to become his colleague in the establishment of a new religious sect. He was to propagate the doctrine by preaching, and I to refute every opponent.

“When he explained to me his tenets, I found many absurdities which I refused to admit. . . . Keimer wore his beard long, because Moses had somewhere said, ‘Thou shalt not mar the corners of thy beard.’ He likewise observed the Sabbath; and these were with him two very essential points. I disliked them both” (Autobiog. p. 40).

At a later period, alluding to his religious belief, Franklin says:

“Some volumes against Deism fell into my hands. They were said to be the substance of sermons preached at Boyle’s Lecture. It happened that they produced on me an effect precisely the reverse of what was intended by the writers; for the arguments of the Deists, which were cited in order to be refuted, appealed to me much more forcibly than the refutation itself. In a word, I soon became a thorough Deist” (Ibid, p. 66).

In one of his youthful essays he professes a sort of polytheistic belief as shown by the following extracts:

“The Infinite Father expects or requires no worship or praise from us.”

“I conceive, then, that the Infinite has created many beings or gods vastly superior to man.”

“It may be these created gods are immortals; or it may be that after many ages, they are changed, and others supply their places.

“Howbeit, I conceive that each of these is exceeding good and very powerful; and that each has made for himself one glorious sun, attended with a beautiful and admirable system of planets.

“It is that particular wise and good God, who is the author and owner of our system, that I propose for the object of my praise and adoration” (Franklin’s Works, Vol. ii., p. 2).

He subsequently rejected some of his earlier philosophical and ethical views, particularly those contained in a small pamphlet which he wrote, entitled a “Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain.” Referring to his arguments in this pamphlet he says:

“The object was to prove, from the attributes of God, his goodness, wisdom, and power, that there could be no such thing as evil in the world; that vice and virtue did not in reality exist, and were nothing more than vain distinctions. I no longer regarded it as so blameless a work as I had formerly imagined; and I suspected that some error must have imperceptibly glided into my argument, by which all the inferences I had drawn from it had been affected, as frequently happens in metaphysical reasonings. In a word, I was at last convinced that truth, probity, and sincerity in transactions between man and man were of the utmost importance to the happiness of life; and

I resolved from that moment, and wrote the resolution in my journal, to practice them as long as I lived" (Autobiography, pp. 66, 67).

His unbelief in Christianity, however, remained unchanged. He continues:

"Revelation, indeed, as such had no influence on my mind" (Ibid, p. 67).

I have given the theological views of Franklin's youth and early manhood; I shall next present the religious opinions of his mature manhood and old age. Less reticent than Washington, he was at the same time less radical than Jefferson, and less disposed to combat the dogmas of the church. Nevertheless, his expressed opinions are ample to show that at no time during his career was he a Christian—that he lived and died a Deist.

In a letter to the Rev. George Whitefield, written in 1753, when he was forty-seven years old, we have his opinion of Christianity:

"The faith you mention has doubtless its use in the world. I do not desire to see it diminished, nor would I desire to lessen it in any way; but I wish it were more productive of good works than I have generally seen it. I mean real good works, works of kindness, charity, mercy, and public spirit, not holy-day keeping, sermon-hearing, and reading, performing church ceremonies, or making

long prayers, filled with flatteries and compliments, despised even by wise men, and much less capable of pleasing the Deity" (Works, Vol. vii., p. 75).

Writing to his sister, Mrs. Jane Mecom, five years later, he says:

"It is pity that good works, among some sorts of people, are so little valued, and good words admired in their stead. I mean seemingly pious discourses, instead of humane, benevolent actions. These they almost put out of countenance by calling morality, rotten morality; righteousness, ragged righteousness, and even filthy rags, and when you mention virtue, pucker up their noses; at the same time that they eagerly snuff up an empty, canting harangue, as if it were a posy of the choicest flowers" (Works, Vol. vii., p. 185).

"Improvement in religion is called building up and edification. Faith is then the ground floor, hope is up one pair of stairs. My dear beloved Jenny, don't delight so much to dwell in those lower rooms, but get as fast as you can into the garret; for in truth the best room in the house is charity. For my part I wish the house was turned upside down" (Ibid, p. 184).

Franklin possibly believed in a future state of existence, but his conception of immortality was that of the Deist, and not of the Christian. In his

letter to Whitefield, previously alluded to, he says:

“By heaven, we understand a state of happiness, infinite in degree and eternal in duration. I can do nothing to deserve such a reward. He that, for giving a draught of water to a thirsty person, should expect to be paid with a good plantation, would be modest in his demands compared with those who think they deserve heaven for the little good they do on earth. . . . for my part, I have not the vanity to think I deserve it, the folly to expect, or the ambition to desire it” (Works, Vol. vii., p. 75).

In a letter to Mrs. Elizabeth Partridge, he observes:

“With regard to future bliss, I cannot help imagining that multitudes of the zealously orthodox of different sects, who at the last day may flock together in hopes of seeing each other damned, will be disappointed, and obliged to rest content with their own salvation” (Works, Vol. x., p. 366).

Writing to his sister, Mrs. Mecom, he says:

“When religious people quarrel about religion, or hungry people about their victuals, it looks as if they had not much of either about them” (Works, Vol. vii., p. 438).

In a letter to “A Friend in England” (supposed to be Dr. Priestley), Franklin makes some observations regarding the inspiration of the Bible:

“I agreed with you in sentiments concerning the Old Testament, and thought the clause in our [Pennsylvania] Constitution, which required the members of the Assembly to declare their belief that the whole of it was given by divine inspiration, had better have been omitted. That I had opposed the clause; but, being overpowered by numbers, and fearing more in future might be grafted on it, I prevailed to have the additional clause, ‘that no further or more extended profession of faith should ever be exacted.’ I observed to you, too, that the evil of it was the less, as no inhabitant, nor any officer of government, except the members of Assembly, was obliged to make the declaration.

“So much for that letter; to which I may now add, that there are several things in the Old Testament impossible to be given by divine inspiration; such as the approbation ascribed to the angel of the Lord of that abominably wicked and detestable action of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. If the rest of the book were like that, I should rather suppose it given by inspiration from another quarter, and renounce the whole” (Works, Vol. x., p. 134).

He extolled the character of Jesus, but in regard to his divinity he declared himself a skeptic.

His opinion of the Fall of Man, the Atonement,

and other Christian doctrines, may be inferred from an anecdote related by him in an essay which he wrote on the "Savages of North America."

"A Swedish minister having assembled the chiefs of the Susquehanna Indians, made a sermon to them, acquainting them with the principal historical facts on which our religion is founded, such as the fall of our first parents by eating an apple; the coming of Christ to repair the mischief; his miracles and sufferings, etc. When he had finished, an Indian orator stood up to thank him. 'What you have told us,' said he, 'is all very good. It is indeed bad to eat apples. It is better to make them all into cider. We are much obliged by your kindness in coming so far to tell us those things which you have heard from your mothers. In return, I will tell you some of those which we have heard from ours. In the beginning, our fathers had only the flesh of animals to subsist on; and if their hunting was unsuccessful, they were starving. Two of our young hunters having killed deer, made a fire in the woods to broil some parts of it. When they were about to satisfy their hunger, they beheld a beautiful young woman descend from the clouds, and seat herself on that hill which you see yonder among the blue mountains. They said to each other, it is a spirit that perhaps



has smelt our broiled venison and wishes to eat of it; let us offer some to her. They presented her with the tongue; she was pleased with the taste of it, and said, 'Your kindness shall be rewarded. Come to this place after thirteen moons, and you shall find something that will be of a great benefit in nourishing you and your children to the latest generations.' They did so and, to their surprise, found plants they had never seen before; but which, from that ancient time, have been constantly cultivated among us to our great advantage. Where her right hand touched the ground they found maize; where her left hand touched it they found kidney-beans.' . . . The good missionary, disgusted with this idle tale, said, 'What I delivered to you were sacred truths; but what you tell me is mere fable, fiction, and falsehood.' The Indian, offended, replied, 'My brother, it seems your friends have not done you justice in your education; they have not well instructed you in the rules of common civility. You saw that we, who understand and practice these rules, believed all your stories, why do you refuse to believe ours?' "

The following extract from a letter to Jared Ingersoll, written in 1762, shows how he regarded the Christian Sabbath: "When I traveled in Flanders I thought of your excessively strict ob-

servation of Sunday, and that a man could hardly travel on that day among you upon his lawful occasions without hazard of punishment, while where I was everyone traveled, if he pleased, or diverted himself in any other way; and in the afternoon both high and low went to the play or the opera, where there was plenty of singing, fiddling, and dancing. I looked around for God's judgments, but saw no sign of them. The cities were well built and full of inhabitants, the markets filled with plenty, the people well favored and well clothed, the fields well tilled, the cattle fat and strong, the fences, houses, and windows all in repair, and no 'old tenor' anywhere in the country; which would make one almost suspect that the deity was not so angry at that offense as a New England justice."

In a letter to Dr. Price he had this to say of religious tests:

"I think they were invented not so much to secure religion as the emoluments of it. When a religion is good, I conceive that it will support itself; and when it does not support itself, and God does not take care to support it, so that its professors are obliged to call for help of the civil power, 'tis a sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one" (Works, Vol. viii., p. 506).

The above was written in 1780. It is as true

to-day as it was a century ago, and I respectfully commend it to the prayerful consideration of those pious fanatics who, under the mask of temperance and other reforms, are endeavoring to have religious tests incorporated into our national Constitution.

Clerical conceit and arrogance receive the following merited rebuke from his pen:

“Nowadays we have scarcely a little parson that does not think it the duty of every man within his reach to sit under his petty ministration, and that whoever omits this offends God. To such I wish more humility” (Works, Vol. vii., pp. 76, 77).

In an essay on “Toleration” the intolerant character of Christianity is thus presented:

“If we look back into history for the character of the present sects in Christianity, we shall find few that have not in their turns been persecutors, and complainers of persecution. The primitive Christians thought persecution extremely wrong in the Pagans, but practiced it on one another. The first Protestants of the Church of England blamed persecution in the Romish church, but practiced it upon the Puritans. These found it wrong in the Bishops, but fell into the same practice themselves both here [England] and in New England” (Works, Vol. ii., p. 112).

In a speech which Sparks ascribes to Franklin, we find the following hit at religious dogmatism:

“Most sects in religion think themselves in possession of all truth, and that whenever others differ from them, it is so far error. Steele, a Protestant, in a dedication, tells the Pope, that ‘the only difference in our two churches, in their opinions of the certainty of their doctrines, is, the Romish Church is infallible, and the Church of England never in the wrong.’ ”

On one occasion, when Whitefield visited this country, he wrote to Franklin, stating that the friend with whom he expected to lodge in Philadelphia had left the city. Franklin very naturally tendered him the hospitalities of his home. Referring to Whitefield’s acceptance, he writes:

“He replied that, if I made that offer for Christ’s sake I should not miss of a reward. And I returned, ‘Don’t let me be mistaken; it was not for Christ’s sake, but for your sake.’ ” One of our common acquaintances jocosely remarked that, knowing it to be the custom of the saints, when they received any favor, to shift the burden of obligation from off their own shoulders and place it in heaven, I had contrived to fix it on earth.”

The following is an extract from a letter written to Richard Price of England:

“My nephew, Mr. Williams, will have the honor

of delivering you this line. It is to request from you a list of a few good books, to the value of about twenty-five pounds, such as are most proper to inculcate principles of sound religion and just government. A new town in the state of Massachusetts having done me the honor of naming itself after me, and proposing to build a steeple to their meeting house if I would give them a bell, I have advised the sparing themselves the expense of a steeple, for the present, and that they would accept of books instead of a bell, sense being preferred to sound" (Works, Vol. x., p. 158).

The fact that Franklin selected a man who denied the infallibility of the Bible and the divinity of Christ, to make a collection of books "to inculcate principles of sound religion," to say nothing of his expressed preference of sense to sound, is of itself sufficient to prove his disbelief in popular Christianity.

At the age of eighty, in a letter to Benjamin Vaughan, of England, he paid the following tribute to the character of heretics:

"Remember me affectionately to good Dr. Price, and to the honest heretic, Dr. Priestley. I do not call him honest by way of distinction, for I think all the heretics I have known have been virtuous men. They have the virtue of fortitude, or they could not venture to own their heresy; and they

cannot afford to be deficient in any of the other virtues, as that would give advantage to their many enemies; and they have not, like orthodox sinners, such a number of friends to excuse or justify them. Do not, however, mistake me. It is not to my good friend's heresy that I impute his honesty. On the contrary, 'tis his honesty that brought upon him the character of a heretic" (Works, Vol. x., p. 365).

When interrogated as to why he did not promulgate his rational views on religion he replied:

"The things of this world take up too much of my time, of which indeed I have too little left, to undertake anything like a reformation in religion" (Ibid, p. 323).

Franklin was not an Atheist; he did not deny the existence of a God; he believed in a God; but his God was the humane conception of Deism and not the God of Christianity. His biographer, Parton, says:

"He escaped the theology of terror, and became forever incapable of worshiping a jealous, revengeful, and vindictive God" (Life of Franklin, Vol. i., p. 71).

"In conversation with familiar friends he called himself a Deist or Theist, and he resented a sentence in Mr. Whitefield's journal which seemed to imply that between a Deist and an Atheist there

was little or no difference. Whitefield wrote: 'M. B. is a Deist; I had almost said an Atheist.' 'That is,' said Franklin, 'chalk, I had almost said charcoal' (Ibid, Vol. i., p. 319).

At the age of eighty-four, just previous to his death, in reply to inquiries concerning his religious belief from Ezra Stiles, the President of Yale College, he wrote as follows:

"Here is my creed: I believe in one God, the Creator of the universe. That he governs it by his providence. That he ought to be worshiped. That the most acceptable service we render him is doing good to his other children. That the soul of man is immortal, and will be treated with justice in another life respecting its conduct in this."

This is pure Deism. Paine and Voltaire would have readily subscribed to every one of the above six articles of faith. Compare the creed of Franklin with the creed of Paine.

It is not improbable that Franklin had much to do with shaping the Deistic belief of Paine. Par-ton says:

"Paine was a resident of Philadelphia, a frequenter of Franklin's house, and was as well aware as we are of Dr. Franklin's religious opinions. Nor is there much in the 'Age of Reason' to which Franklin would have refused to assent" (Life of Franklin, Vol. ii., p. 553).

In his letter to Ezra Stiles, he extols the system of morals taught by "Jesus of Nazareth," but says, "I apprehend it has received various corrupting changes, and I have, with most of the Dissenters in England, doubts as to his divinity."

There was "found" in Franklin's handwriting, or in a handwriting resembling his, the draught of a letter advising against the publication of an anti-religious manuscript which had been submitted to the writer. To relieve a pressing want some enterprising Christian long afterward transformed this letter into a religious novelette, or tract, altering the language and affirming that it was written by Franklin to Paine for the purpose of dissuading him from publishing his "Age of Reason," the manuscript of which he was presumed to have sent to Franklin for his opinion. It was given the suggestive title "Don't Unchain the Tiger," and published as "A true story." In disproof of this story, the following facts may be cited:

1. The "Age of Reason" was the first Anti-Christian writing that came from Paine's pen, and he expressly declares that he did not begin to write this work until the autumn of 1793.

2. This letter purports to have been written July 3, 1786, more than seven years before Paine wrote his "Age of Reason."



3. Franklin, its reputed author, died April 17, 1790, nearly four years before Paine's book was written.

4. The letter is anonymous. It is addressed to no one and signed by no one. It cannot be positively affirmed that Franklin wrote it, while it can be affirmed with certainty that the person to whom it was written is absolutely unknown.

5. Freethought was widely prevalent at the time it is said to have been written. Hundreds in France, England and America were talking and writing against Christianity. Why then was Paine singled out as the one who provoked the criticism?

6. Regarding his literary productions Paine says: "In my publications, I follow the rule I began with in 'Common Sense,' that is to consult nobody, nor to let anybody see what I write till it appears publicly."

7. The religious opinions advanced in the "Age of Reason" are the religious opinions which Franklin held. Is it reasonable to suppose that Franklin would condemn his own opinions?

8. There are several versions of this letter extant, all differing from the original. It has been published with Paine's name prefixed, and Franklin's name subscribed to it. If these published

versions are known to be in part forgeries, may not the original be a forgery also?

9. At the time this story appeared it was believed that no greater service could be rendered religion than the invention and circulation of calumnies against Thomas Paine.

10. Its chief disseminator was the American Tract Society, a society that has probably published more pious fictions than any other publishing house in this country.

Upon this story and his motion for prayers in the Convention that framed our Constitution is based the Christian piety of Franklin. Regarding the latter, it is only necessary to remark that it was in harmony with the second and third articles of his Deistic creed.

Franklin's motion for prayers in the Constitutional Convention has been used as the basis for another clerical falsehood that has been presented to the eyes or ears of nearly every man, woman and child in the United States. We are told that the Convention for a month opened its sessions without prayer, that at the end of this time nothing had been accomplished, it was in a state of confusion, and on the point of adjourning, when Franklin came forward, proposed that the sessions be opened with prayer, which was adopted, after which the work of the Convention was speed-

ily and successfully performed. This is adduced as a striking proof of the efficacy of prayer. The fact is, there was not a prayer offered in the Convention from the time it convened until it closed. So nearly unanimous were the members in their opposition to Franklin's proposition that not even a vote was taken on it. Franklin himself, referring to it, says: "The Convention, except three or four persons, thought prayers unnecessary."

Reference may be made here to the oft-quoted Epitaph of Franklin. Regarding this the St. Louis Globe of May 7, 1893, says: "This was written by Franklin simply as a jest; it is not and never was on his gravestone."

The "New American Cyclopaedia" contains the following relative to Franklin's religion: "Fault has been found with his religious character. He confesses that during a period of his life, before the age of twenty-one, he had been a thorough Deist; and it has been said that five weeks before his death he expressed a 'cold approbation' of the 'system of morals' of 'Jesus of Nazareth.' "

Johnson's "New Universal Cyclopaedia" says: "In youth he was an avowed skeptic in religious matters and of somewhat loose morals, but his practical good sense enabled him to correct his way of living, and he in later life treated the

Christian religion with reverence, though never avowing his faith in any religious system."

Sparks, though loth to admit that Franklin was not a Christian, says: "It is deeply to be regretted that he did not bestow more attention than he seems to have done on the evidences of Christianity" (Life of Franklin, p. 517).

The truth is, Franklin bestowed more attention on the evidences of Christianity than his Christian biographer is willing to concede. Had he bestowed less attention on these evidences Christianity might not be compelled to lose the prestige of his illustrious name.

Dr. Franklin and Dr. Priestley were intimate friends. Of Franklin, Priestley writes:

"It is much to be lamented that a man of Franklin's general good character and great influence should have been an unbeliever in Christianity, and also have done as much as he did to make others unbelievers" (Priestley's Autobiog., p. 60).

This great man was himself denounced as an Infidel. He was a Unitarian of the most advanced type, and was mobbed and driven from England on account of his heretical opinions and his sympathy with the French Revolution. Franklin's Infidelity must have been of a very radical character to have provoked the censure of Dr. Priestley.

While in France, Franklin consorted chiefly with Freethinkers, among whom were Mirabeau, D'Holbach, D'Alembert, Buffon, and Condorcet. Respecting his religious belief, Parton classes him with Goethe, Schiller, Voltaire, Hume, and Jefferson, and says they would all have belonged to the same church.

John Hay, in a posthumous article on "Franklin in France," which appeared in the *Century* for January, 1906, says:

"Franklin became the fashion of the season. For the court itself dabbled a little in liberal ideas. So powerful was the vast impulse of Free-thought that then influenced the mind of France—that susceptible French mind, that always answers like the wind harp to the breath of every true human aspiration—that even the highest classes had caught the infection of liberalism."

Mr. Hay mentions among Franklin's most esteemed acquaintances, Voltaire, D'Holbach, Condorcet, and D'Alembert, four of France's most pronounced Infidels.

Franklin and Voltaire, a short time before the death of the latter, met for the first time at a theatre in Paris. On being introduced, they cordially shook hands. But this was not enough. Each then clasped the other in his arms, and for a moment held him in an affectionate embrace. It

was not a mere formal meeting between two aged philosophers; a deeper significance attached to the interesting scene. It was the spontaneous outburst of kindred feelings and a common faith. It was the Deism of the New World, through its most illustrious representative, saluting that of the Old.

Theodore Parker, who made a study of Franklin's religious opinions, writes:

"If belief in the miraculous revelation of the Old Testament and the New is required to make a man religious, then Franklin had no religion at all. It would be an insult to say that he believed in the popular theology of his time, or of ours, for I find not a line from his pen indicating any such belief."

The Rev. Dr. Swing, of Chicago, said: "Voltaire, Bolingbroke, Pitt, Burke, Washington, Lafayette, Jefferson, Paine, and Franklin moved along in a wonderful unity of belief, both political and religious, each one wearing some little beauty or deformity of disposition, but all marked by one religious rationalism."

The Rev. Dr. Savage, of New York, in a sermon on Robert G. Ingersoll, said:

"His [Ingersoll's] ideas are very largely those of Voltaire, of Gibbon, of Hume, of Thomas Paine, of Thomas Jefferson, of Benjamin Franklin, and

of a good many other of our prominent Revolutionary heroes.”

The Hon. Henry W. Blair, United States Senator from New Hampshire, said in reply to Rev. Alonzo Jones, who was arguing against Sunday laws, that “Franklin was a Deist, at all events,” intimating that he might have been an Agnostic, or even an Atheist.

Such were the religious opinions of Franklin. The Christian may, with Dr. Priestley, lament that this learned man “should have been an unbeliever in Christianity,” but notwithstanding his lamentations the fact remains. He may distort it, but he cannot disprove it. As Dr. Wilson said of Washington, so must it be said of Franklin—“He was a Deist and nothing more.”

## CONCLUSION.

I have adduced abundant evidence, I think, to show that the popular notion concerning the religious opinions of these great men is erroneous. Paine, we have seen, was not an Atheist. Nor were the others Christians. They were Deists, held substantially the same theological opinions held by Paine. But, engrossed for the most part with other affairs, they found time to publish no "Age of Reason" to be a standing witness of their unbelief, and hence escaped the malicious shafts which the Author-Hero was doomed to receive.

According to the church, every person has at some period in his life been forced to acknowledge the genuineness of her dogmas. The more conservative Freethinkers she would have us believe live devoted Christian lives, while into the dying lips of the more radical ones she puts a recantation. Thus with consummate coolness she informs us that Jefferson, Washington, and Franklin procured their entire religious wardrobe at the Orthodox clothing emporium, and that even Paine was obliged to order his shroud from this establishment.

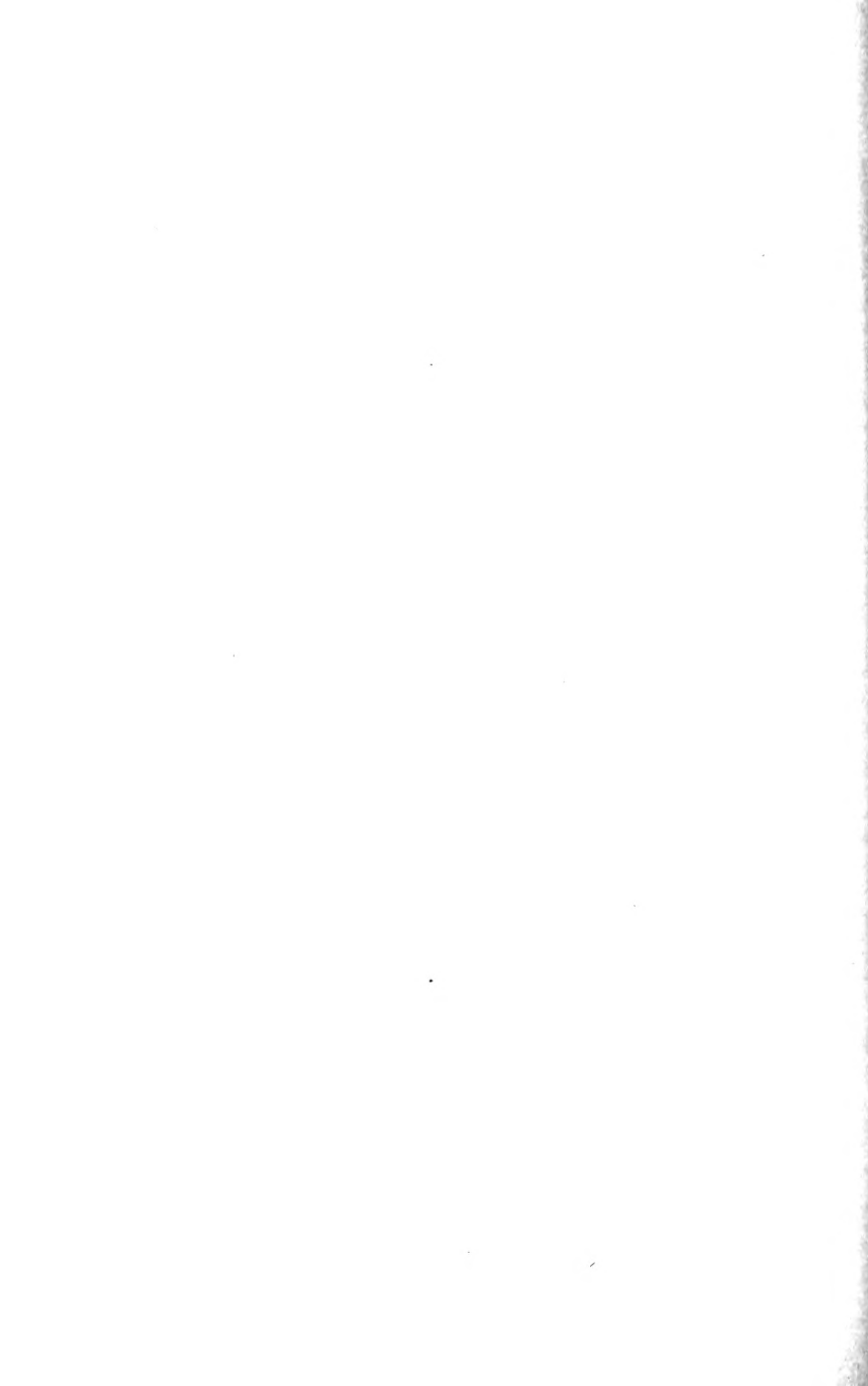


But these claims, unfounded as they are, must fall. These men were not believers. They were good and virtuous men, but not Christians. They were eminent and patriotic statesmen, but not "Christian statesmen." They had unbounded faith in humanity, but reposed very little in "our particular superstition." Morally and intellectually they were giants, and their large hearts and mighty brains yearned and grasped for something better, for a broader, holier faith than that professed by those around them. It would appear absurd for one to hold up the toys and garments of a child and say, "Behold the armor that Goliath wore!" and it is equally absurd for Christians to exhibit their dwarfish, senseless creeds and claim that these shrunken, threadbare robes were worn by the Fathers of our Republic.

To the realm of Freethought these characters belong. And they are not alone; they have illustrious company. Earth's noblest sons and daughters—the brightest stars in the constellation of genius—those who have added most to the riches of science, and literature, and statesmanship,—Bruno, Spinoza, Galileo, and Descartes; Bacon and Newton; Humboldt and Darwin; Comte and Mill; Draper; Spencer, Tyndall, and Huxley; Haeckel and Helmholtz; Hume and Gibbon; Goethe and Schiller; Shakespeare, Pope, Byron,

Burns, and Shelley; Rousseau, Voltaire, and Diderot; D'Alembert, Buffon, and Condorcet; Frederick and Bolingbroke; Volney; De Stael, Sand, Eliot, and Martineau; Strauss and Renan; Hugo, Carlyle, and Emerson; Lincoln and Sumner; Gambetta and Garibaldi; Bradlaugh and Castellar; our own loved Ingersoll—these were all disbelievers in the Orthodox faith—these have each borne the name of Infidel, a word in which is concentrated all the hatred and scorn of Christendom. But these so-called Infidels have ever constituted the forlorn hope in the onward march of human progress, and this word, instead of a term of reproach, will become one of the grandest words in all the languages of men.

## **PART II**



**THE**  
**SAVIORS OF OUR REPUBLIC :**  
**LINCOLN, GRANT**



## INTRODUCTION

The Republic established by our Fathers, after enduring for three-quarters of a century, was menaced by destruction. Slavery, which had been planted in both sections of the Union, had proved unprofitable in the North and profitable in the South. The South sought to expand the influence of the institution, the North sought to contract it. "A house divided against itself cannot stand." Either slavery or the nation must perish. Compromises had proved ineffectual. There was an appeal to the arbitrament of arms; the most stupendous civil conflict the world has witnessed followed; the South went down in defeat; slavery perished, and the Nation lived.

The South was sincere in its advocacy of slavery. Its people had been educated to believe in its justness. They had been taught that it was divine. The Bible sanctioned it, and the church upheld it. Those who believed in the divinity of this institution—those who were reduced from affluence to poverty by its abolition—can never become wholly reconciled to the new order of things. But aside from these the South as well as the

North now rejoices that the Union was preserved and the Republic saved.

The great statesman who ruled with gentle hand, and guided with wondrous skill the ship of state on its perilous voyage, and the great captain who with consummate ability, valor, and perseverance, conquered the rebellious hosts, were Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses S. Grant. By nearly all the North, and by a large portion of the South, these men are held in loving remembrance as the Saviors of our Republic.

While the president of the Confederacy, and the general of its vanquished armies—a statesman of acknowledged worth, and a soldier unsurpassed—were devout believers in Christianity, their victorious adversaries, Lincoln and Grant, were disbelievers. If the God of Christians be the God of battles, as claimed, he fought a losing fight, or deserted the standard of his devotees for that of aliens.



ABRAHAM LINCOLN

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## PREFACE.

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ALMOST immediately after the remains of America's most illustrious son were laid to rest at Springfield, one of his biographers put forward the claim that he was a devout believer in Christianity. The claim was promptly denied by the dead statesman's friends, but only to be renewed again, and again denied. And thus for a quarter of a century the question of Abraham Lincoln's religious belief has been tossed like a battledoor from side to side.

As a result of this controversy, thousands have become interested in a subject that otherwise might have excited but little interest. This is the writer's apology for collecting the testimony of more than one hundred witnesses, and devoting more than three hundred pages to the question, "Was Lincoln a Christian?"

About few other men has so much been written as about Abraham Lincoln; while no other American's life has engaged the pens of so many biographers. A thousand volumes record his name and refer to

his deeds. In a hundred of these he is the central figure. Nearly a score of elaborate biographies of him have been written. As many more books pertaining wholly to his life, his martyrdom, and his character have been published. Of the many works on Lincoln which the writer has consulted in the preparation of this volume, the following deserve to be mentioned: Nicolay and Hay's "Life of Lincoln," Herndon and Weik's "Life of Lincoln," Lamon's "Life of Lincoln," Holland's "Life of Lincoln," Arnold's "Life of Lincoln," Raymond's "Life of Lincoln," Stoddard's "Life of Lincoln," Barrett's "Life of Lincoln," "Every-Day Life of Lincoln," Arnold's "Lincoln and Slavery," Carpenter's "Six Months at the White House with Lincoln," "Reminiscences of Lincoln," "Anecdotes of Lincoln," "Lincolniana," "The President's Words," "The Martyr's Monument," "Tribute of the Nations to Lincoln," "Lincoln Memorial" and "Lincoln Memorial Album."

The testimony concerning Lincoln's religious belief presented in this volume has been derived chiefly from three sources. 1. A part of it has been gathered from the works above named. In a single volume is published for the first time matter which heretofore was only to be found scattered through numerous volumes, some of them inaccessible to the general reader. 2. A considerable portion of it

has been gleaned from newspapers and periodicals containing statements brought out by this controversy, many of which would otherwise soon be lost or forgotten. 3. A very large share of it has been obtained by the writer from personal friends of Lincoln; and when we realize how rapidly those who lived and moved with him are passing away—that ere long none of them will remain to testify—the importance of this evidence can hardly be overestimated.

The writer believes that he has fully established the negative of the proposition that forms the title of his book. He does not expect to silence the claims of the affirmative; but he has furnished an arsenal of facts whereby these claims may be exposed and refuted as often as made.

This effort to prove that Lincoln was not a Christian will be condemned by many as an attempt to fasten a stain upon this great man's character. But the demonstration and perpetuation of this fact will only add to his greatness. It will show that he was in advance of his generation. The fame of Abraham Lincoln belongs not to this age alone, but will endure for all time. The popular faith is transient and must perish. It is unpopular now to reject Christianity, but the day is fast approaching when to accept its dogmas will be considered an evidence of human weakness. To perpetuate the claim that **Lincoln was a Christian** is to perpetuate an idea

that in a future age will lessen the luster of his name.

It will be urged by some that the intent and purpose of this work is solely to promote the interests of Freethought. But it is not. The writer advocates no cause that requires the prestige of a great name to make it respectable. The cause that requires the indorsement of the great to sustain it is not worthy to survive. He has prosecuted this investigation, not in the interest of any belief or creed, but in the interest of truth; and truth is certainly as high as any creed, even if that creed be true. In proving Lincoln a disbeliever he does not presume to have proved Christianity false, or Freethought true; but he has shown that some Christians are not honest, and that an honest man may be a Freethinker.

ATCHISON, KAN., *April*, 1893.

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Hon. Geo. W. Julian—Hon. John B. Alley—Hon. Hugh McCulloch—Donn Piatt—Hon. Schuyler Colfax—Hon. Geo. S. Boutwell—Hon. Wm. D. Kelly—E. H. Wood—Dr. J. J. Thompson—Rev. James Shrigley—Hon. John Covode—Jas. E. Murdock—Hon. M. B. Field—Harriet Beecher Stowe—Hon. J. P. Usher—Hon. S. P. Chase—Frederick Douglas—Mr. Defrees—Hon. Wm. H. Seward—Judge Aaron Goodrich—Nicolay and Hay's "Life of Lincoln"—Warren Chase—Hon. A. J. Grover—Judge James M. Nelson.

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### OTHER TESTIMONY AND OPINIONS.

New York *World*—Boston *Globe*—Chicago *Herald*—*Manford's Magazine*—*Herald and Review*—Chambers's Encyclopedia—Encyclopedia Britannica—People's Library of Information—The World's Sages—Every-Day Life of Lincoln—Hon. Jesse W. Weik—Chas. W. French—Cyrus O. Poole—A Citizen of Springfield—Henry Walker—Wm. Bissett—Frederick Heath—Rev. Edward Eggleston—Rev. Robert Collyer—Allen Thorndike Rice—Robert C. Adams—Theodore Stanton—Geo. M. McCrie—Gen. M. M. Trumbull—Rev. David Swing, D.D.—Rev. J. Lloyd Jones—Rev. John W. Chadwick.

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### EVIDENCE GATHERED FROM LINCOLN'S LETTERS, SPEECHES, AND CONVERSATIONS.

The Bible and Christianity—Christ's Divinity—Future Rewards and Punishments—Freedom of Mind—Fatalism—Providence—Lines in

Copy-book—Parker—Paine—Opposition of Church—Clerical Officiousness Rebuked—Irreverent Jokes—Profanity—Temperance Reform—Indorsement of Lord Bolingbroke's Writings—Golden Rule.

## CHAPTER XV.

### RECAPITULATION AND CONCLUSION.

Character of Christian Testimony—Summary of Evidence Adduced in Proof of Lincoln's Unbelief—Douglas an Unbeliever—Theodore Parker's Theology—Fallacy of Claims Respecting Lincoln's Reputed Conversion—His Invocations of Deity—His Alleged Regard for the Sabbath—The Church and Hypocrisy—Lincoln's Religion.



## INTRODUCTION.

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Was Abraham Lincoln a Christian? Many confidently believe and earnestly contend that he was; others as confidently believe and as earnestly contend that he was not.

Before attempting to answer this question, let us define what constitutes a Christian. A Christian is one who, in common with the adherents of nearly all the religions of mankind, believes, 1. In the existence of a God; 2. In the immortality of the soul. As distinguished from the adherents of other religions, he believes, 1. That the Bible is a revelation from God to man; 2. That Jesus Christ was the miraculously begotten son of God. He also believes in various other doctrines peculiar to Christianity, the chief of which are, 1. The fall of man; 2. The atonement.

Those who in nominally Christian countries reject the dogmas of Christianity are denominated Infidels, Freethinkers, Liberals, Rationalists, unbeliev-

ers, disbelievers, skeptics, etc. These Infidels, or Freethinkers, represent various phases of belief, among which are, 1. Deists, who affirm the existence of a God and the immortality of the soul; 2. Atheists, who deny the existence of a God, and, generally, the soul's immortality; 3. Agnostics, who neither affirm nor deny these doctrines.

The following are the religious views Lincoln is said to have held as presented by those who affirm that he was a Christian:

1. He believed in the existence of a God, and accepted the Christian conception of this Being.

2. He believed in the immortality of the soul, and in the Christian doctrine of the resurrection.

3. He believed that the Bible is a revelation from God—the only revealed will of God.

4. He believed in the divinity of Christ—believed that Christ is God.

5. He believed in the efficacy of prayer, and was accustomed to pray himself.

6. He believed in the doctrine of experimental religion, and had experienced a change of heart.

7. Although he never united with any church, he was contemplating such a step at the time of his assassination.

8. The church with which he would have united, we are led to infer, was the Presbyterian.

The following is a statement of the theological

opinions of Lincoln as understood by those who deny that he was a Christian :

1. In regard to a Supreme Being he entertained at times Agnostic and even Atheistic opinions. During the later years of his life, however, he professed a sort of Deistic belief, but he did not accept the Christian or anthropomorphic conception of a Deity.

2. So far as the doctrine of immortality is concerned, he was an Agnostic.

3. He did not believe in the Christian doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures. He believed that Burns and Paine were as much inspired as David and Paul.

4. He did not believe in the doctrine of Christ's divinity. He affirmed that Jesus was either the son of Joseph and Mary, or the illegitimate son of Mary.

5. He did not believe in the doctrine of a special creation.

6. He believed in the theory of Evolution, so far as this theory had been developed in his time.

7. He did not believe in miracles and special providences. He believed that all things are governed by immutable laws, and that miracles and special providences, in the evangelical sense of these terms, are impossible.

8. He rejected the doctrine of total, or inherent depravity.

9. He repudiated the doctrine of vicarious atonement.

10. He condemned the doctrine of forgiveness for sin.

11. He opposed the doctrine of future rewards and punishments.

12. He denied the doctrine of the freedom of the will.

13. He did not believe in the efficacy of prayer as understood by orthodox Christians.

14. He indorsed, for the most part, the criticisms of Thomas Paine on the Bible and Christianity, and accepted, to a great extent, the theological and humanitarian views of Theodore Parker.

15. He wrote a book (which was suppressed) against the Bible and Christianity.

16. His connection with public affairs prevented him from giving prominence to his religious opinions during the later years of his life, but his earlier views concerning the unsoundness of the Christian system of religion never underwent any material change, and he died, as he had lived, an unbeliever.





ABRAHAM LINCOLN



# ABRAHAM LINCOLN: WAS HE A CHRISTIAN?

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## CHAPTER I.

### CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY.

Dr. J. G. Holland—Hon. Newton Bateman—Rev. J. A. Reed—Rev. James Smith, D.D.—N. W. Edwards—Thomas Lewis—Noah Brooks—Rev. Byron Sunderland, D.D.—Rev. Dr. Miner—Rev. Dr. Gurley—Hon. I. N. Arnold—F. B. Carpenter—Isaac Hawley—Rev. Mr. Willets—A Pious Nurse—*Western Christian Advocate*—An Illinois Clergyman—Rev. J. H. Barrows, D.D.—Rev. Francis Vinton, D.D.—Bishop Simpson.

IN confirmation of the claim that Lincoln was a Christian, the following evidence has been adduced:

#### *DR. J. G. HOLLAND.*

President Lincoln died on the 15th of April, 1865. In the same year, the "Life of Abraham Lincoln," written by Dr. J. G. Holland, appeared. In the fields of poetry and fiction, and as a magazine writer, Dr. Holland had achieved an enviable reputation. His "Life of Lincoln" was written in his usually

entertaining style and secured a wide circulation. He affirmed that Lincoln was a Christian, and by means of this work, and through *Scribner's Magazine*, of which he was for many years the editor, contributed more than any other person to render a belief in this claim popular. Referring to Lincoln's administration, Dr. Holland says :

“The power of a true-hearted Christian man, in perfect sympathy with a true-hearted Christian people, was Mr. Lincoln's power. Open on one side of his nature to all descending influences from him to whom he prayed, and open on the other to all ascending influences from the people whom he served, he aimed simply to do his duty to God and man. Acting rightly he acted greatly. While he took care of deeds fashioned by a purely ideal standard, God took care of results. Moderate, frank, truthful, gentle, forgiving, loving, just, Mr. Lincoln will always be remembered as eminently a Christian President; and the almost immeasurably great results which he had the privilege of achieving were due to the fact that he was a Christian President” (*Life of Lincoln*, p. 542).

**HON. NEWTON BATEMAN.**

Dr. Holland's claim rests chiefly upon a confession which Lincoln is said to have made to Newton Bateman in 1860. During the Presidential campaign

Lincoln occupied the Executive Chamber at the State House. Mr. Bateman was Superintendent of Public Instruction at the time, had his office in the same building, and was frequently in Lincoln's room. The conversation in which Lincoln is alleged to have expressed a belief in Christianity is thus related in Holland's "Life of Lincoln :"

"On one of these occasions Mr. Lincoln took up a book containing a careful canvass of the city of Springfield in which he lived, showing the candidate for whom each citizen had declared it his intention to vote in the approaching election. Mr. Lincoln's friends had, doubtless at his own request, placed the result of the canvass in his hands. This was toward the close of October, and only a few days before the election. Calling Mr. Bateman to a seat at his side, having previously locked all the doors, he said : 'Let us look over this book. I wish particularly to see how the ministers of Springfield are going to vote.' The leaves were turned, one by one, and as the names were examined Mr. Lincoln frequently asked if this one and that were not a minister, or an elder, or the member of such or such a church, and sadly expressed his surprise on receiving an affirmative answer. In that manner they went through the book, and then he closed it and sat silently and for some minutes regarding a memorandum in pencil which lay before him. At length he turned to Mr.

Bateman, with a face full of sadness, and said : ‘ Here are twenty-three ministers, of different denominations, and all of them are against me but three ; and here are a great many prominent members of the churches, a very large majority of whom are against me. Mr. Bateman, I am not a Christian—God knows I would be one—but I have carefully read the Bible, and I do not so understand this book ;’ and he drew from his bosom a pocket New Testament. ‘ These men well know,’ he continued, ‘ that I am for freedom in the territories, freedom everywhere as far as the Constitution and laws will permit, and that my opponents are for slavery. They know this, and yet, with this book in their hands, in the light of which human bondage cannot live a moment, they are going to vote against me. I do not understand it at all.’ Here Mr. Lincoln paused—paused for long minutes—his features surcharged with emotion. Then he rose and walked up and down the room in the effort to retain or regain his self-possession. Stopping at last, he said, with a trembling voice and his cheeks wet with tears : ‘ I know there is a God, and that he hates injustice and slavery. I see the storm coming, and I know that his hand is in it. If he has a place for me—and I think he has—I believe I am ready. I am nothing, but truth is everything. I know I am right, for Christ teaches it, and Christ is God.’

“The effect of this conversation upon the mind of Mr. Bateman, a Christian gentleman whom Mr. Lincoln profoundly respected, was to convince him that Mr. Lincoln had, in his quiet way, found a path to the Christian standpoint—that he had found God, and rested on the eternal truth of God. As the two men were about to separate, Mr. Bateman remarked: ‘I have not supposed that you were accustomed to think so much upon this class of subjects. Certainly your friends generally are ignorant of the sentiments you have expressed to me.’ He replied quickly: ‘I know they are. I am obliged to appear different to them; but I think more upon these subjects than upon all others, and I have done so for years; and I am willing that *you* should know it’” (Life of Lincoln, pp. 236–239).

REV. J. A. REED.

In 1872, seven years after the publication of Holland’s work, Lamon’s “Life of Abraham Lincoln” was published. In this work the statements of Holland and Bateman concerning Lincoln’s religious belief are disputed, and the testimony of numerous witnesses cited to prove that he lived and died a disbeliever. Soon after Lamon’s book was published, the Rev. J. A. Reed, a Presbyterian clergyman, of Springfield, Ill., delivered a lecture in which he attempted to refute or modify the evidence of Lamon’s

witnesses and prove that Lincoln died a Christian. He admitted that Lincoln was an Infidel up to 1848, and possibly as late as 1862, but endeavored to show that previous to his death he changed his views and became a Christian. The following extracts present the salient points in his discourse :

“ Having shown what claims Mr. Lamon’s book has to being the ‘ only fair and reliable history ’ of Mr. Lincoln’s life and views, and of what ‘ trustworthy materials ’ it is composed, I shall now give the testimony I have collected to establish what has ever been the public impression, that Mr. Lincoln was in his later life, and at the time of his death, a firm believer in the truth of the Christian religion. The Infidelity of his earlier life is not so much to be wondered at, when we consider the poverty of his early religious instruction and the peculiar influences by which he was surrounded.”

“ It does not appear that he had ever seen, much less read, a work on the evidences of Christianity till his interview with Rev. Dr. Smith in 1848. We hear of him as reading Paine, Voltaire, and Theodore Parker, but nothing on the other side.

“ While it is to be regretted that Mr. Lincoln was not spared to indicate his religious sentiments by a profession of his faith in accordance with the institutions of the Christian religion, yet it is very clear that he had this step in view, and was seriously con-



templating it, as a sense of its fitness and an apprehension of his duty grew upon him.'

In support of his claims, Dr. Reed presents the testimony of Rev. Dr. Smith, Ninian W. Edwards, Thomas Lewis, Noah Brooks, Rev. Dr. Sunderland, Rev. Dr. Miner, and Rev. Dr. Gurley.

*REV. JAMES SMITH, D.D.*

The Rev. James Smith was for many years pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Springfield. Lincoln formed his acquaintance soon after he located there, remained on friendly terms with him, and with Mrs. Lincoln frequently attended his church. Dr. Smith was one of the three Springfield clergymen who supported Lincoln for President in 1860, and in recognition of his friendship and fidelity, he received the consulship at Dundee. Dr. Reed quotes from a letter to W. H. Herndon, dated East Cainno, Scotland, January 24, 1867, in which Dr. Smith says :

"It is a very easy matter to prove that while I was pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Springfield, Mr. Lincoln did avow his belief in the divine authority and inspiration of the scriptures, and I hold that it is a matter of the last importance not only to the present, but all future generations of the great Republic, and to all advocates of civil and religious liberty throughout the world, that this avowal

on his part, and the circumstances attending it, together with very interesting incidents illustrative of the excellence of his character, in my possession, should be made known to the public. . . . It was my honor to place before Mr. Lincoln arguments designed to prove the divine authority and inspiration of the scriptures accompanied by the arguments of Infidel objectors in their own language. To the arguments on both sides Mr. Lincoln gave a most patient, impartial, and searching investigation. To use his own language, he examined the arguments as a lawyer who is anxious to reach the truth investigates testimony. The result was the announcement by himself that the argument in favor of the divine authority and inspiration of the Scriptures was unanswerable."

**HON. NINIAN W. EDWARDS.**

Ninian W. Edwards, a brother-in-law of Lincoln, writes as follows :

"Springfield, Dec. 24th, 1872.

"Rev. Jas. A. Reed :

"Dear Sir—

"A short time after the Rev. Dr. Smith became pastor of the First Presbyterian church in this city, Mr. Lincoln said to me, 'I have been reading a work of Dr. Smith on the evidences of Christianity, and have heard him preach and converse on the subject,

and I am now convinced of the truth of the Christian religion.'

Yours truly,

"N. W. Edwards."

*THOMAS LEWIS.*

In corroboration of Mr. Edwards's statement, Thomas Lewis, of Springfield, Ill., testifies as follows :

"Springfield, Jan. 6th, 1873.

"Rev. J. A. Reed :

"Dear Sir—

"Not long after Dr. Smith came to Springfield, and I think very near the time of his son's death, Mr. Lincoln said to me, that when on a visit somewhere, he had seen and partially read a work of Dr. Smith on the evidences of Christianity which had led him to change his views about the Christian religion; that he would like to get that work to finish the reading of it, and also to make the acquaintance of Dr. Smith. I was an elder in Dr. Smith's church, and took Dr. Smith to Mr. Lincoln's office and introduced him; and Dr. Smith gave Mr. Lincoln a copy of his book, as I know, at his own request.

Yours etc.,

"Thos. Lewis."

*NOAH BROOKS.*

Noah Brooks, a newspaper correspondent of New

York, and the author of a biography of Lincoln, gives the following testimony :

“New York, Dec. 31, 1872.

“Rev. J. A. Reed,

“My Dear Sir :

“In addition to what has appeared from my pen, I will state that I have had many conversations with Mr. Lincoln, which were more or less of a religious character, and while I never tried to draw anything like a statement of his views from him, yet he freely expressed himself to me as having ‘a hope of blessed immortality through Jesus Christ.’ His views seemed to settle so naturally around that statement, that I considered no other necessary. His language seemed not that of an inquirer, but of one who had a prior settled belief in the fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion. Once or twice, speaking to me of the change which had come upon him, he said, while he could not fix any definite time, yet it was after he came here, and I am very positive that in his own mind he identified it with about the time of Willie’s death. He said, too, that after he went to the White House he kept up the habit of daily prayer. Sometimes he said it was only ten words, but those ten words he had. There is no possible reason to suppose that Mr. Lincoln would ever deceive me as to his religious sentiments. In many conversations with him, I absorbed the firm

conviction that Mr. Lincoln was at heart a Christian man, believed in the Savior, and was seriously considering the step which would formally connect him with the visible church on earth. Certainly, any suggestion as to Mr. Lincoln's skepticism or Infidelity, to me who knew him intimately from 1862 till the time of his death, is a monstrous fiction—a shocking perversion.

“Yours truly,

“Noah Brooks.”

*REV. BYRON SUNDERLAND, D.D.*

Mr. Reed presents a lengthy letter from the Rev. Byron Sunderland, of Washington, dated Nov. 15, 1872. Dr. Sunderland in company with a party of friends visited the President in the autumn of 1862. In this letter he says:

“After some conversation, in which he seemed disposed to have his joke and fun, he settled down to a serious consideration of the subject before his mind, and for one half-hour poured forth a volume of the deepest Christian philosophy I ever heard.”

*REV. DR. MINER.*

The Rev. Dr. Miner, who met Lincoln in Washington, says:

“All that was said during that memorable afternoon I spent alone with that great and good man is

engraven too deeply on my memory ever to be effaced. I felt certain of this fact, that if Mr. Lincoln was not really an experimental Christian, he was acting like one. He was doing his duty manfully, and looking to God for help in time of need; and, like the immortal Washington, he believed in the efficacy of prayer, and it was his custom to read the Scriptures and pray himself."

*REV. P. D. GURLEY, D.D.*

While in Washington, Lincoln with his family attended the Presbyterian church of which the Rev. Dr. Gurley was pastor. Mr. Reed cites the following as the testimony of Dr. Gurley in regard to the alleged Infidelity of Lincoln :

"I do not believe a word of it. It could not have been true of him while here, for I have had frequent and intimate conversations with him on the subject of the Bible and the Christian religion, when he could have had no motive to deceive me, and I considered him sound not only on the truth of the Christian religion but on all its fundamental doctrines and teachings. And more than that, in the latter days of his chastened and weary life, after the death of his son Willie, and his visit to the battlefield of Gettysburg, he said, with tears in his eyes, that he had lost confidence in everything but God, and that he now believed his heart was changed, and that he

loved the Savior, and, if he was not deceived in himself, it was his intention soon to make a profession of religion."

*HON. ISAAC N. ARNOLD.*

One of the most ardent friends and admirers of Abraham Lincoln was Isaac N. Arnold, for several years a member of Congress from Illinois. Mr. Arnold wrote a work on "Lincoln and Slavery," and a "Life of Lincoln" which was published in 1885. Lincoln's religious views are thus described by Mr. Arnold:

"No more reverent Christian than he ever sat in the Executive chair, not excepting Washington. He was by nature religious; full of religious sentiment. The veil between him and the supernatural was very thin. It is not claimed that he was orthodox. For creeds and dogmas he cared little. But in the great fundamental principles of religion, of the Christian religion, he was a firm believer. Belief in the existence of God, in the immortality of the soul, in the Bible as the revelation of God to man, in the efficacy and duty of prayer, in reverence toward the Almighty, and in love and charity to man, was the basis of his religion" (Life of Lincoln, p. 446).

"His reply to the Negroes of Baltimore when they, in 1864, presented him with a magnificent Bible, ought to silence forever those who charge him

with unbelief. He said: 'In regard to the Great Book I have only to say that it is the best gift which God has given to man. All the good from the Savior of the world is communicated through this book'" (Ibid., p. 447).

"His faith in a Divine Providence began at his mother's knee, and ran through all the changes of his life. Not orthodox, not a man of creeds, he was a man of simple trust in God" (Ib., p. 448).

*F. B. CARPENTER.*

Mr. Carpenter, the artist, in his popular book, entitled "Six Months in the White House with Abraham Lincoln," uses the following language :

"I would scarcely have called Mr. Lincoln a religious man—and yet I believe him to have been a sincere Christian" (Six Months in the White House, p. 185).

*ISAAC HAWLEY.*

In the spring of 1887, in going from Springfield to Havana, I met Isaac Hawley, one of the early settlers of Illinois, and who for nearly twenty years resided within a few blocks of Lincoln in Springfield. In answer to the question, "Was Lincoln a Christian?" Mr. Hawley replied :

"I believe that Lincoln was a Christian, and that he was God's chosen instrument to perform the mighty work he did."



*REV. MR. WILLETS.*

The Rev. Mr. Willets, of Brooklyn, N. Y., is credited with the following statement concerning Lincoln's reputed conversion. The information it contains was obtained, it is said, from a lady of Mr. Willets's acquaintance who met Lincoln in Washington:

“The President, it seemed, had been much impressed with the devotion and earnestness of purpose manifested by the lady, and on one occasion, after she had discharged the object of her visit, he said to her: “Mrs. —, I have formed a high opinion of your Christian character, and now, as we are alone, I have a mind to ask you to give me, in brief, your idea of what constitutes a true religious experience.’ The lady replied at some length, stating that, in her judgment, it consisted of a conviction of one's own sinfulness and weakness, and personal need of a Savior for strength and support; that views of mere doctrine might and would differ, but when one was really brought to feel his need of divine help, and to seek the aid of the Holy Spirit for strength and guidance, it was satisfactory evidence of his having been born again. This was the substance of her reply. When she had concluded, Mr. Lincoln was very thoughtful for a few moments. He at length said, very earnestly, ‘If what you have

told me is really a correct view of this great subject, I think I can say with sincerity that I hope I am a Christian ' ' (Anecdotes of Lincoln, pp. 166, 167).

#### *A PIOUS NURSE.*

A pious lady, who served in the capacity of a hospital nurse at Washington, and who sometimes visited the White House, testifies to Lincoln's belief in the efficacy of prayer. The incident narrated occurred while a battle was in progress. The report says :

"The possibility of defeat depressed him greatly ; but the lady told him he must trust, and that he could at least pray. ' Yes,' said he, and taking up a Bible, he started for his room. Could all the people of the nation have overheard the earnest petition that went up from that inner chamber as it reached the ears of the nurse, they would have fallen upon their knees with tearful and reverential sympathy " (Anecdotes of Lincoln, p. 120).

#### *WESTERN CHRISTIAN ADVOCATE.*

Soon after the close of the war, the *Western Christian Advocate*, the leading Christian journal of the West, published the following :

" On the day of the receipt of the capitulation of Lee, as we learn from a friend intimate with the late President Lincoln, the cabinet meeting was held an

hour earlier than usual. Neither the President nor any member was able, for a time, to give utterance to his feelings. At the suggestion of Mr. Lincoln all dropped on their knees, and offered in silence and in tears their humble and heartfelt acknowledgment to the Almighty for the triumph he had granted to the national cause."

The above is quoted by Raymond and other biographers of Lincoln.

**AN ILLINOIS CLERGYMAN.**

In the "Lincoln Memorial Album" appears what is reported to be Lincoln's "Reply to an Illinois Clergyman:"

"When I left Springfield I asked the people to pray for me. I was not a Christian. When I buried my son, the severest trial of my life, I was not a Christian. But when I went to Gettysburg, and saw the graves of thousands of our soldiers, I then and there consecrated myself to Christ. Yes, I *do* love Jesus" (L. M. A., p. 366).

**REV. JOHN H. BARROWS.**

In the "Lincoln Memorial Album," Dr. J. H. Barrows contributes an article on "The Religious Aspects of Abraham Lincoln's Career," from which I quote as follows:

"In the anxious uncertainties of the great war, he

gradually rose to the heights where Jehovah became to him the sublimest of realities, the ruler of nations. When he wrote his immortal Proclamation, he invoked upon it not only 'the considerate judgment of mankind,' but 'the gracious favor of Almighty God.' When darkness gathered over the brave armies fighting for the nation's life, this strong man in the early morning knelt and wrestled in prayer with him who holds in his hand the fate of empires. When the clouds lifted above the carnage of Gettysburg, he gave his heart to the Lord Jesus Christ. When he pronounced his matchless oration on the chief battlefield of the war, he gave expression to the resolve that 'this nation, under God, should have a new birth of freedom.' And when he wrote his last Inaugural Address, he gave to it the lofty religious tone of an old Hebrew psalm" (L. M. A., p. 508).

*REV. FRANCIS VINTON, D.D.*

This clergyman, a resident of New York, and a stranger to Lincoln, visited the White House in 1862, it is claimed, and indulged in an argument and exhortation, the effect of which was to convert the President to a belief in the Christian doctrine of the resurrection and the immortality of the soul. During the interview, Lincoln, it is reported, fell upon the neck of his clerical visitor and wept like a child.

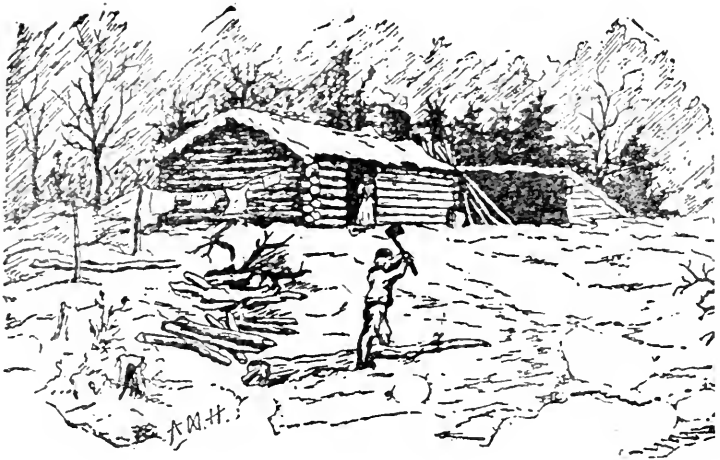
Before retiring, Dr. Vinton said: "I have a sermon upon this subject which I think might interest you." "Mr. Lincoln," the report continues, "begged him to send it at an early day, thanking him repeatedly for his cheering and hopeful words. The sermon was sent, and read over and over by the President, who caused a copy to be made for his own private use before it was returned" (*Anecdotes of Lincoln*, pp. 107, 108).

*BISHOP SIMPSON.*

The most eminent Methodist divine of that period was Bishop Simpson. During the war his commanding influence and rare eloquence did much to secure for the Union cause the united support of Northern Methodists. Lincoln appreciated the services of the distinguished divine, and they became warm friends. When the remains of the President were conveyed to their final resting-place at Springfield, Bishop Simpson was selected to deliver the funeral oration. Alluding to the religious phase of Lincoln's character, he spoke as follows:

"As a ruler, I doubt if any President has ever shown such trust in God, or in public documents so frequently referred to divine aid. Often did he remark to friends and to delegations that his hope for our success rested in his conviction that God

would bless our efforts because we were trying to do right" (Lincoln and Slavery, p. 673).



PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S EARLY HOME.

## CHAPTER II.

REVIEW OF CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY—HOLLAND AND BATE-  
MAN.

Character of Holland's "Life of Lincoln"—The Bateman Interview—Inconsistency and untruthfulness of its statements—Holland's Subsequent Modification and Final Abandonment of his original Claims.

In the preceding chapter has been presented the Christian side of this question. It has been presented fully and fairly. Even the Christian claimant must admit that it is the longest and most complete array of testimony that has yet been published in support of his claim. This evidence is explicit and apparently conclusive. To attempt its refutation may seem presumptuous. And yet, in the face of all this evidence, the writer does not hesitate to declare that Abraham Lincoln was not a Christian, and pledge himself to refute the statements of these witnesses by a volume of testimony that is irresistible and overwhelming.

Before introducing this testimony the evidence already adduced will be reviewed. This evidence may properly be grouped into three divisions: 1. The testimony of Holland and Bateman; 2. The

testimony of Reed and his witnesses; 3. The testimony of Arnold and the miscellaneous evidence remaining.

Holland's "Life of Lincoln," from a literary point of view, is a work of more than ordinary merit. It possesses a beauty of diction and an intellectual vigor seldom surpassed; but as an authority it is unreliable. Like Weems's "Life of Washington," it is simply a biographical romance founded upon fact, but paying little regard to facts in presenting the details. Following the natural bent of Christian biographers, Holland parades the subject of his work as a model of Christian piety. He knew that this was false; for, while he was unacquainted with Lincoln, he had been apprised of his unbelief—had been repeatedly told of it before he wrote his biography. But this did not deter him from asserting the contrary. He knew that if he stated the facts the clergy would condemn his book. They needed the influence of Lincoln's great name to support their crumbling creed, and would have it at any sacrifice, particularly when its possession required no greater sacrifice than truth. Holland was equal to the emergency. When one of Lincoln's friends in Springfield suggested that the less said about his religious views the better, he promptly replied: "Oh, never mind; I'll fix that." And he did. With dramatic embellishments, he presented



to the delight of the orthodox world the now famous, or rather infamous, Bateman interview.

The publication of this story produced a profound sensation among the personal friends of the dead President. It revealed to them the unpleasant fact, assuming Holland's account to be correct, either that Newton Bateman, who had hitherto borne the reputation of being a man of veracity, was an unscrupulous liar, or that Abraham Lincoln, whose reputation for honesty and candor, long anterior to 1860, had become proverbial, was a consummate hypocrite; and loath as they were to believe the former, they rejected with disdain the latter.

Referring to this story, Lamon, in his "Life of Lincoln," says :

"There is no dealing with Mr. Bateman except by a flat contradiction. Perhaps his memory was treacherous or his imagination led him astray, or, peradventure, he thought a fraud no harm if it gratified the strong desire of the public for proofs of Mr. Lincoln's orthodoxy" (Life of Lincoln, p. 501).

While Bateman undoubtedly misrepresented Lincoln in his account of their conversation—for it is not denied that he had an interview with Lincoln—it is quite probable that he did not to the extent represented by Holland. Bateman doubtless exaggerated the affair, and Holland magnified Bateman's report of it. In an article originally published

in the *Index*, and subsequently quoted by Lamon, Lincoln's law partner, Mr. Herndon, says :

“I doubt whether Mr. Bateman said in full what is recorded there. I doubt a great deal of it. I know the whole story is untrue—untrue in substance, untrue in fact and spirit. As soon as the [Holland's] ‘Life of Lincoln’ was out, on reading that part here referred to, I instantly sought Mr. Bateman and found him in his office. I spoke to him politely and kindly, and he spoke to me in the same manner. I said substantially to him that Mr. Holland, in order to make Mr. Lincoln a technical Christian, made him a hypocrite ; and so his ‘Life of Lincoln’ quite plainly says. I loved Mr. Lincoln, and was mortified, if not angry, to see him made a hypocrite. I cannot now detail what Mr. Bateman said, as it was a private conversation, and I am forbidden to make use of it in public. If some good gentleman can only get the seal of secrecy removed I can show what was said and done. On my word, the world may take it for granted that Holland is wrong—that he does not state Mr. Lincoln's views correctly” (Lamon's *Life of Lincoln*, p. 496).

In a lecture on “Lincoln's Religion,” delivered in Springfield in 1874, alluding to the same subject, Mr. Herndon says :

“My notes of our conversation bear date December 3, 12, and 28, 1865. Our conversations were

private, I suppose. However, I can say this much: that Mr. Bateman expressly told me Mr. Lincoln was, in the conversation related in Holland, talking *politics* and not religion, nor Christianity, nor morals, as such. I have persistently dogged Mr. Bateman for the privilege of publishing my notes, or to give me a letter explaining what Mr. Lincoln did say, so that I might make known the facts of the case. Mr. Bateman has as stoutly refused."

Dr. Bateman finally permitted Mr. Herndon to make public a letter, marked "confidential," which he had written Mr. Herndon in 1867. In this letter Bateman says:

"He [Lincoln] was applying the principles of moral and religious truth to the duties of the hour, the condition of the country, and the conduct of public men—ministers of the gospel. I had no thought of orthodoxy or heterodoxy, Unitarianism, Trinitarianism, or any other ism, during the whole conversation, and I don't suppose or believe he had."

Had Lincoln made the confession he is reported to have made, this would have suggested to Mr. Bateman the idea of his admitted orthodoxy as well as his reputed heterodoxy. Had Lincoln declared that "Christ is God," this would have suggested to him the idea of Trinitarianism. It will be seen, even from this letter, that instead of talking theology and

professing a belief in Christianity, he was talking politics and denouncing the intolerance and bigotry of Christian ministers.

Dr. Bateman privately asserts that he was not correctly reported, that Holland's version of the interview "is colored." It is to be regretted that he had not the courage to state this fact to the public, and his plea, "My aversion to publicity in such matters is intense," is a poor apology for refusing to do so.

As previously intimated, this story is probably founded on fact and has an element of truth in it. Lincoln and Bateman had a political interview, and the object of this interview was the examination and discussion of the list of Springfield voters. This list revealed the fact that twenty out of twenty-three clergymen and a very large majority of the church-members of Springfield were opposed to Lincoln. The significance of this fact Dr. Holland and Dr. Bateman have apparently overlooked. Why was the church opposed to him? It must have been either because it was opposed to the Republican party, or because he was personally objectionable to the members of that party. His political principles were the principles of his party, his ability was conceded, and his moral character was above reproach. It is fair to assume that the political sentiment of the Christians of Springfield was substantially the political

sentiment of Northern Christians generally. Now, was the Northern Church overwhelmingly in favor of the extension of slavery? Were eighty-seven per cent. of Northern Christians Democrats? Or did the Christians of Springfield oppose Lincoln because he was an Infidel?

Holland makes Bateman affirm that Lincoln "drew from his bosom a pocket New Testament." It is generally believed by Lincoln's friends that he did not have a New Testament, that the only book used in the interview was the book containing the list of Springfield voters. One of them says: "The idea that Mr. Lincoln carried the New Testament or Bible in his bosom or boots, to draw on his opponents in debate, is ridiculous." It is possible, however, that there was a New Testament in the room, and that Lincoln used it to enforce an argument. Indeed, there is internal evidence in the story, aside from the declaration of Bateman, that such was the case. The central idea in his political creed—the keynote of his campaigns, both in 1858 and in 1860—was contained in that memorable passage, "A house divided against itself cannot stand.' This government can not endure permanently half slave and half free." The figure quoted was a familiar and powerful one, and Lincoln recognized its force in dealing with the masses. It was taken from the New Testament, and from the words of Christ himself. That he should

use it against those Christians who were acting contrary to this well-known truth, is not strange. Immediately after the declaration, "Christ is God," he is reported as saying: "I have told them that a house divided against itself cannot stand, and Christ and reason say the same." This furnishes a solution to the whole story. This shows what he was doing with a New Testament. In connection with this, nothing is more natural than that he should exclaim: "Christ teaches it, and Christ is [their] God!" That he was terribly in earnest, that he was deeply agitated and pained to learn that his Christian neighbors were opposed to him, is not improbable. Thus the incidents of a simple political interview that were natural and reasonable have been perverted to make it appear that he was a Christian. A mere reference to the New Testament and Christ have been twisted into an acknowledgment of their divinity. Bateman himself admits that Lincoln said: "I am not a Christian." Why not accept his statement, then? Why then distort his words and in the face of this positive declaration attempt to prove that he was a Christian? Bateman reports him as modifying the statement by adding: "God knows I would be one." Yes, "God knows I would be one were I convinced that Christianity is true, but not convinced of its truth, I am an unbeliever."

Lincoln is also reported to have said that in the

light of the New Testament "human bondage can not live a moment." But he did not utter these words. He did not utter them because they are untrue, and none knew this better than himself. He knew that in the light of this book human bondage had lived for nearly two thousand years; he knew that this book was one of the great bulwarks of human slavery; he knew that there was not to be found between its lids a single text condemning slavery, while there were to be found a score of texts sustaining it; he knew that that infamous law, the Fugitive Slave law, received its warrant from this book—that Paul, in the light of its earliest teachings, had returned a fugitive slave to his master.

In this story Lincoln is charged with the grossest hypocrisy. He is declared to have professed a belief in Christ and Christianity, and when Bateman observed that his friends were ignorant of this, he is made to reply: "I know they are. I am obliged to appear different to them." Now, to use Lincoln's own words, "A sane person can no more act without a motive than can there be an effect without a cause," and what possible motive could he have had for such conduct? Supposing that he was base enough to be a hypocrite, what could induce him to lead the world to suppose he was an Infidel if he were not? In the eyes of the more ignorant and bigoted class of Christians, Infidelity is a more

heinous crime than murder, and an Infidel is a creature scarcely to be tolerated, much less to be intrusted with a public office. Freethinkers generally detest the dogmas of Christianity as thoroughly as Christians possibly can the principles of Freethought. But free thought and free speech are the leading tenets of their creed. They recognize the fact that we are all the children of circumstances, that our belief is determined by our environments, and while they reject Christianity, they have nothing but charity for those who conscientiously profess it. They may repudiate a bigot, but will not oppose a man merely because he is a Christian. If Lincoln were an Infidel, discretion might urge a concealment of his views; if he were a Christian, policy would prompt him to give it as wide a publicity as possible, especially when he rested under the imputation of being a disbeliever. Had he changed his belief and become a convert to Christianity, a knowledge of the fact would not have lost him the support of his friends, even though some of them were Freethinkers; while it would have secured for him a more cordial support from the Republican side of the church, many of whom had been alienated on account of his supposed anti-Christian sentiments. It is hard to believe that Lincoln was a hypocrite; but this story, if true, makes him not only a hypocrite but a fool. If he



believed in Christianity there can be but one reason advanced for his desiring to keep it a secret—he was ashamed of it.

Holland, in trying to explain away the inconsistencies of this fabrication, repeatedly blunders. In one of his attempts he makes use of the following remarkable language :

“It was one of the peculiarities of Mr. Lincoln to hide these religious experiences from the eyes of the world. . . . They [his friends] did not regard him as a religious man. They had never seen anything but the active lawyer, the keen politician, the jovial, fun-loving companion in Mr. Lincoln. All this department of his life he had kept carefully hidden from them. Why he should say that he was obliged to appear differently to others does not appear; but the fact is a matter of history that he never exposed his own religious life to those who had no sympathy with it. It is doubtful whether the clergymen of Springfield knew anything of these experiences” (Life of Lincoln, pp. 239, 240).

What! had the clergymen of Springfield no sympathy with a religious life? A person can utter one falsehood with some degree of plausibility; but when he attempts to verify it by uttering another, he usually trips and falls. The above passage is mere hypocritical cant. It carries with it not only its own refutation, but that of the rest of Holland's testi-

mony also. It is the language of the man who is conscious of having stated a falsehood; conscious that there are others who believe it to be a falsehood. He knew that the personal friends of Lincoln all understood him to be a disbeliever. He knew that the church-members of Springfield all entertained the same opinion. He virtually says to these people: "It is true that Lincoln professed to be an Infidel, but he was not; he was a Christian. The fact has been kept a profound secret. Bateman and I have been the sole custodians of this secret, and we now give it to the world."

A Christian writer, apologizing for the absurd and contradictory statements of Holland and Bateman, says, "They aimed at the truth." I do not believe it. It is clearly evident that they aimed at a plausible lie. But in either case they made a bad shot.

In his "Life of Lincoln," Holland endeavors to convey the impression that Lincoln was always a devout Christian. He declares that even during the years of his early manhood at New Salem, "he was a religious man;" that "he had a deep religious life." When Herndon and Lamon exposed his shameful misrepresentations he retreated from his first position, and in *Scribner's Monthly* wrote as follows:

"What Abraham Lincoln was when he lived at New Salem and wrote an anti-Christian tract (which

the friend to whom he showed it somewhat violently but most judiciously put in the fire) is one thing, and it may be necessary for an impartial historian to record it. What he was when he died at Washington with those most Christian words of the Second Inaugural upon his lips, and that most Christian record of five years of patient tenderness and charity behind him, is quite another thing."

He admits that Lincoln was an Infidel in Illinois, but would have us believe that he was a Christian in Washington. He refers to "those most Christian words of the Second Inaugural," and "that most Christian record of five years of patient tenderness and charity." In the Second Inaugural there is not a word affirming a belief in Christianity—not a word in reference to Christianity. He mentions God, and quotes from the Bible, but does not intimate that the Bible is God's word. That Christians have a monopoly of "patient tenderness and charity," can hardly be accepted. The history of the church does not confirm this assumption. Many Christians have possessed these virtues. So have the votaries of other religions. These attributes belong to good men everywhere, but they are the distinguishing features of no particular creed.

Smarting under his exposure, with that whining cant so peculiar to the vanquished religionist, Hol-

land finally sent forth this parting wail and virtually abandoned the whole case :

“ The question is, not whether Abraham Lincoln was a subscriber to the creeds of orthodoxy, but whether he was a believing—that is to say, a truthful Christian man ; not whether he was accustomed to call Jesus Christ ‘ Lord, Lord,’ but whether he was used to do those things which Jesus Christ exemplified and enforced. He was accustomed, as we know well enough, to speak of an Almighty Father, of whom justice and mercy and sympathy with weak and suffering humanity were characteristic attributes. Who was it that revealed to man a God like this? Who was it that once ‘ showed us the Father and it sufficed us?’ Whoever it was that made this revelation to mankind it was of him that this man, even though he knew it not, had learned, and it was in his spirit that he acted ” (Scribner’s Monthly).

The concluding words of Dr. Holland’s testimony, as quoted from his “ Life of Lincoln,” are as follows :

“ Moderate, frank, truthful, gentle, forgiving, loving, just, Mr. Lincoln will always be remembered as eminently a Christian President ; and the almost immeasurably great results which he had the privilege of achieving were due to the fact that he was a Christian President.”

This prediction and this assumption are false. I change one word and make them grandly true.

“Moderate, frank, truthful, gentle, forgiving, loving, just, Mr. Lincoln will always be remembered as eminently a Liberal President; and the almost immeasurably great results which he had the privilege of achieving were due to the fact that he was a Liberal President.”

## CHAPTER III

## REVIEW OF CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY—REED AND HIS WITNESSES.

Reed—Smith—Edwards—Lewis—Brooks—Statements of Edwards, Smith, and Brooks Compared—Sunderland—Miner—Gurley—Failure of Reed to Establish his Claims.

OF the twenty Christian witnesses whose testimony is given in Chapter I., ten admit that, during a part of his life, Lincoln was an unbeliever, or Infidel. Of the remaining ten, not one denies the fact. It is conceded, then, that he was once an Infidel. Now, it is a rule of law that when a certain state or condition of things is once proven to exist, that state or condition is presumed to continue to exist until the contrary is proven. If Lincoln was, at one time, an Infidel, it is fair to assume that he remained an Infidel, unless it can be shown that he changed his belief and became a Christian. This Dr. Reed attempts to do.

His lecture, under the caption of "The Later Life and Religious Sentiments of Abraham Lincoln," will be found in *Scribner's Monthly* for July, 1873. The evidence presented by Lamon had placed Dr. Hol-

land in a most unenviable light. As Reed's lecture reaffirmed the claim made by Holland, and brought forward fresh evidence to substantiate the claim, it was naturally regarded by many Christians as a vindication of Holland's position, especially by those who had not read Lamon's work. Holland was particularly pleased at its opportune appearance, and cheerfully gave it a place in his magazine.

Reed's individual testimony proves nothing. He does not profess to know, from personal knowledge, what Lincoln's religious views were. The object of his lecture was to invalidate, if possible, the testimony of those who affirmed that he died an Infidel, and to present, in addition to what had already been presented by Holland, the testimony of those who affirmed that during the last years of his life he was a Christian. To answer his witnesses is to answer his lecture.

The Rev. Dr. Smith affirms that he converted Lincoln to a belief in "*the divine authority and inspiration of the Scriptures.*" It was imperative that he should, for, said he, "It was my honor to place before Mr. Lincoln arguments designed to prove *the divine authority and inspiration of the Scriptures.*" As a matter of course, "the result was the announcement by himself that the arguments in favor of *the divine authority and inspiration of the Scriptures* were unanswerable." Consequently, "Mr. Lincoln

did avow his belief in *the divine authority and inspiration of the Scriptures.*"

Impressed with a deep sense of the gravity and importance of his work, he declares that "It is a matter of the last importance not only to the present but to all future generations of the great Republic, and to all advocates of civil and religious liberty throughout the world that this avowal on his part, . . . should be made known to the public," coupled with the more important fact, of course, that it was Dr. Smith who did it. It is to be regretted that his waiting until after Lincoln's death to announce it, prevented the convert's Christian friends from tendering their congratulations and extending the hand of fellowship. It is possible that he counseled Dr. Smith not to divulge the secret for fear it might injure his political prospects. Certain it is, his neighbors were ignorant of this remarkable change. When Holland canvassed Springfield, in 1865, eager to obtain a morsel of evidence upon which to base his claim that Lincoln was a Christian, he failed to catch even the faintest whisper regarding this alleged conversion.

When Dr. Smith's letter was made public, the Christians of Springfield generally smiled, but said nothing, while unbelievers laughed outright and pronounced it the acme of absurdity. Dr. Reed read it to his audience and tried to look serious.



Concerning this claim, Lincoln's biographer, Colonel Lamon, says :

“The abilities of this gentleman to discuss such a topic to the edification of a man like Mr. Lincoln seem to have been rather slender; but the chance of converting so distinguished a person inspired him with a zeal which he might not have felt for the salvation of an obscurer soul. Mr. Lincoln listened to his exhortations in silence, apparently respectful, and occasionally sat out his sermons in church with as much patience as other people. Finding these oral appeals unavailing, Mr. Smith composed a heavy tract out of his own head to suit the particular case. ‘The preparation of that work,’ says he, ‘cost me long and arduous labor;’ but it does not appear to have been read. Mr. Lincoln took the ‘work’ to his office, laid it down without writing his name on it, and never took it up again to the knowledge of a man who inhabited the office with him, and who saw it lying on the same spot every day for months. Subsequently Mr. Smith drew from Mr. Lincoln an acknowledgment that his argument was unanswerable—not a very high compliment under the circumstances” (Life of Lincoln, p. 498).

The gentleman whom Colonel Lamon refers to as testifying that Lincoln did not read Dr. Smith's book was Lincoln's partner, Mr. Herndon. In his lecture on “Lincoln's Religion,” Mr. Herndon says :

“Mr. Lincoln received a book from Dr. Smith on Infidelity. He placed it on our law table. He never opened it—never read it to my knowledge.”

If Dr. Smith had converted Lincoln, as claimed, is it not reasonable to suppose that he would have joined Dr. Smith's church? Had he been converted would the clergymen of Springfield have denounced him as an Infidel in 1860? Again, if Dr. Smith's book was so effective as to convert from Infidelity to Christianity as great a mind as Lincoln, why have we not heard more of it? Why has it not been used to convert other Infidels? Was its vitality as an evangelizer exhausted in converting Lincoln?

Mr. Reed was a trifle more successful than Dr. Holland in obtaining witnesses; for while Holland was able to secure but one witness in Illinois, Reed was able to summon two—Ninian Edwards and Thomas Lewis.

The testimony of Mr. Edwards, providing that he was the author of the letter accredited to him, can only be accounted for on the following supposition. Being a believer in Christianity himself, he considered Lincoln's Infidelity a grave defect in his character, and was vexed to see that this controversy had given it such wide publicity. To assist in removing this stain, as he regarded it, from his kinsman's name, he allowed to be published over his signature a statement which, unless his memory was very

treacherous, he must have known was untrue.

It may be that Lincoln did change his views in regard to some historical or doctrinal point connected with Christianity, and informed Mr. Edwards and other friends at the time of the fact. He might have changed his opinions on a hundred theological questions without having in the least changed his views in relation to the main or fundamental doctrines of Christianity. An admission concerning some trivial question connected with Christianity has been tortured to convey the idea that he accepted the whole system.

A prominent and respected citizen of Springfield, a gentleman whose name has, as yet, not been mentioned in connection with this controversy, had a conversation with Mr. Edwards relative to this subject, soon after Reed's lecture was published, and, as the result of that conversation, he writes as follows: "Mr. Edwards was not as good a witness on oral examination as he was in print."

The letter of Mr. Edwards is dated Dec. 24, 1872. On Jan. 6, 1873, the letter of Thomas Lewis was written. After two weeks of arduous labor, Reed, it seems, succeeded in finding one witness in Springfield who was prepared to corroborate the testimony of Edwards—Thomas Lewis.

In a lecture on Lincoln which appeared in the

*State Register*, of Springfield, Mr. Herndon disposed of this witness as follows :

“Mr. Lewis’s veracity and integrity in this community need no comment. I have heard good men say they would not believe his word under any circumstances, especially if he were interested. I hate to state this of Tom, but if he will obtrude himself in this discussion, I cannot help but say a word in self-defense. Mr. Lincoln detested this man, I know. The idea that Mr. Lincoln would go to Tom Lewis and reveal to him his religious convictions, is to me, and to all who know Mr. Lincoln and Tom Lewis, too absurd.”

The introduction of this Lewis as a witness demonstrates the paucity of evidence to be obtained on this side of the question among Lincoln’s neighbors. Reed, living in a city of twenty thousand inhabitants, many of them the personal friends of Abraham Lincoln, after a vigorous search for evidence, is able only to present this pitiable apology.

I have reason to believe that the letters of Edwards and Lewis were drafted, not by the persons whose signatures they bear, but by the Rev. J. A. Reed.

We come next to the testimony of Noah Brooks. Mr. Edwards, supported by Mr. Lewis, states that Lincoln was converted soon after Dr. Smith located at Springfield, and about the time of his son Eddie’s

death. Dr. Smith came to Springfield in 1848, and Eddie died toward the close of the same year. Dr. Smith, in his letter, does not state when Lincoln's conversion took place, but it is understood from other sources that he claimed that it occurred about the year 1858. Mr. Brooks, in his letter to Dr. Reed, says: "Speaking to me of the change which had come upon him, he said, while he could not fix any definite time, yet it was after he came here [Washington], and I am very positive that in his own mind he identified it with about the time of Willie's death."

Willie's death occurred in February, 1862, nearly fourteen years after the death of Eddie, and four years after Smith claimed to have converted Lincoln. Thus it will be seen that these witnesses nullify each other. The testimony of each is contradicted and refuted by the testimony of the other two. Mr. Edwards says that Lincoln was converted in 1848. This is contradicted by the testimony of both Smith and Brooks. According to Dr. Smith his conversion happened about 1858. This is contradicted by the testimony of both Edwards and Brooks. Mr. Brooks is quite positive that it took place about the time of Willie's death, in 1862. This, in turn, is contradicted by the testimony of both Edwards and Smith. If Mr. Edwards is right, both Dr. Smith and Mr. Brooks are wrong. If Dr. Smith is correct, both Mr. Edwards and Mr. Brooks are incorrect. If Mr. Brooks

has stated the truth both Mr. Edwards and Dr. Smith have stated falsehoods.

The testimony of these witnesses does not strengthen Reed's case, but weakens it. The testimony of two of them is self-evidently false, and this is a sufficient reason for doubting the truthfulness of the third. Had the evidence of neither Edwards nor Smith been invalidated by the evidence of the others, the fact that Lincoln is so generally conceded to have been an unbeliever up to the time that he became President, would render it unworthy of consideration. The testimony of Brooks alone demands notice. Did Lincoln change his belief after he left Springfield and went to Washington? The evidence upon this point is decisive.

The man who stood nearest to President Lincoln at Washington—nearer than any clergyman or newspaper correspondent—was his private secretary, Col. John G. Nicolay. In a letter dated May 27, 1865, Colonel Nicolay says :

“Mr. Lincoln did not, to my knowledge, in any way change his religious ideas, opinions, or beliefs from the time he left Springfield to the day of his death.”

In a letter to his old friend, Judge Wakefield, written after Willie's death, he declared that his earlier views of the unsoundness of the Christian scheme of salvation, and the human origin of the

Scriptures, had become clearer and stronger with advancing years, and he did not think he should ever change them.

After his assassination Mrs. Lincoln said: "Mr. Lincoln had no hope and no faith in the usual acceptance of these words." His lifelong friend and executor, Judge David Davis, affirmed the same: "He had no faith in the Christian sense of the term." His biographer, Colonel Lamon, intimately acquainted with him in Illinois, and with him during all the years that he lived in Washington, says: "Never in all that time did he let fall from his lips or his pen an expression which remotely implied the slightest faith in Jesus as the son of God and the Savior of men."

Why do the statements of these witnesses, Smith, Edwards, and Brooks, not agree respecting the date of Lincoln's conversion? When their testimony was given, Smith was in Scotland, Edwards was in Illinois, and Brooks was in New York.

If he was converted, why was the fact not revealed before his death? Why did these men wait until he died to make these statements to the world? Simply because the dead can make no reply.

Had Lincoln been converted, the news would have been wafted on the wings of lightning from one end of the continent to the other. It would have been published in every newspaper; it would have been

proclaimed from every pulpit ; it would have been a topic of conversation at every fireside. When Henry Wilson, a man of far less note than Lincoln, was converted to Christianity, the fact was heralded all over the land.

Lincoln's home was twice visited by death during his lifetime, and both occasions have been seized upon to assert that he experienced a change of heart. The death of a beloved child is no common sorrow, and the womanly tenderness of Lincoln's heart made it doubly poignant to him. "When death entered his household," says his friend, George W. Julian, "his sorrow was so consuming that it could only be measured by the singular depth and intensity of his love." That Mr. Edwards and Mr. Brooks did each observe a change in the demeanor of the grief-stricken father, following the sad events referred to, is not improbable. But a manifestation of sorrow is no proof of a theological change.

Three of Reed's witnesses remain—three clergymen—Dr. Sunderland, Dr. Miner, and Dr. Gurley. Dr. Sunderland is a man of distinction. He has had the honor of praying for the United States Senate and officiating at the marriage of a President. Yet, distinction is not always the badge of honesty. W. H. Burr, a literary gentleman, of Washington, writing to a Boston paper in 1880, paid the following tribute to Dr. Sunderland's veracity: "He can prob-



ably put more falsehood and calumny in a page of foolscap than any priest out of prison."

Mr. Sunderland called upon the President in 1862. In his letter to Reed he says: "For one half hour [he] poured forth a volume of the deepest Christian philosophy I ever heard." Notwithstanding ten years had elapsed since that visit, he proceeded to give from memory a verbatim report of Lincoln's remarks. The report is too long to reproduce in this work, and even if correct, would add but little to the weight of Christian evidence already presented. It is merely an ethical discourse, and aside from a few indirect admissions in favor of Christianity for which Sunderland doubtless drew upon his imagination, there is nothing that Paine or any other Deist might not with propriety have uttered. Those who wish to peruse Mr. Sunderland's letter will find it in *Scribner's Monthly* for July, 1873.

Dr. Miner, like Dr. Sunderland, had a quiet chat with the President, and what was said he assures us is too deeply engraved on his memory ever to be effaced. But, unlike Dr. Sunderland, he does not favor us with a transcript of it. He does not repeat a word that was uttered. He states, however, that, "If Mr. Lincoln was not really an experimental Christian, he was acting like one." But how does an experimental Christian act? If he behaves himself, if he is intelligent and honest, his actions are not

materially different from those of a good Freethinker. Dr. Miner did not believe that Lincoln was an experimental Christian, and in his article there is an implied admission that he knew nothing about his religion.

He says that, "Like the immortal Washington, he believed in the efficacy of prayer." The comparison is happily drawn. Lincoln probably did believe as much in the efficacy of prayer as Washington; that is to say, he did not believe in it at all, in the evangelical sense. There is no evidence that Washington believed in prayer, no proof that he ever uttered a prayer. That story about his praying at Valley Forge is as truly a myth as the story about the hatchet. The Rev. E. D. Neill, an eminent Episcopal minister, and a relative of the person who is reported to have seen Washington engaged in prayer, pronounces it a fiction.

Dr. Gurley is represented as saying: "I considered him sound not only on the truth of the Christian religion, but on all its fundamental doctrines and teachings." This, remember, is from a Calvinistic standpoint. Lincoln, then, not only accepted Christianity, but its most ultra variety—Calvinism. He believed in original sin, predestination (including infant damnation), particular redemption, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. Because he sometimes went with his wife to the

Presbyterian church, of which she was an adherent, the priests of this denomination have the contemptible assurance to assert that he was a rigid Calvinist!

When he died Dr. Gurley, being Mrs. Lincoln's pastor, delivered the funeral oration in Washington. In that oration Dr. Gurley did not affirm that Lincoln was a Christian, a thing he would not have failed to do had it been true. Long after Lincoln's death, Dr. Gurley, if Reed has correctly reported him, makes a statement that he had not the courage to make over his dead body.

A reputable Christian gentleman, of Springfield, who desires to have his name withheld from the public, declares that Dr. Gurley knew and admitted that Lincoln was a disbeliever in Christianity.

It is quite probable that Gurley did not state in full what Reed reports him to have stated. A man who can take up his pen and at one sitting indite a score of falsehoods and misrepresentations, as Reed, on a subsequent occasion, is shown to have done, can not be relied upon for accuracy as a reporter.

The reader has doubtless not failed to notice the introduction of a claim by Reed to the effect that Lincoln at the time of his assassination was intending to unite with the church. That the idea was suggested by Reed is shown by the fact that no less than three of these witnesses, including Reed, allude

to it. Reed says: "While it is to be regretted that Mr. Lincoln was not spared to indicate his religious sentiments by a profession of his faith in accordance with the institutions of the Christian religion, yet it is very clear that he had this step in view." Dr. Gurley is made to say: "It was his intention soon to make a profession of religion." Mr. Brooks says: "I absorbed [the porosity of some of these witnesses is remarkable] the firm conviction that Mr. Lincoln . . . was seriously considering the step which would formally connect him with the visible church on earth."

This *dernier resort* of an argument has been repeated respecting nearly every notable person who has died outside of the church. Soon after the publication of Reed's lecture, the *New York World* contained the following pertinent answer to this stale fabrication:

"It is admitted by Mr. Reed and everybody else that Mr. Lincoln was a working Infidel up to a very late period of his life, that he wrote a book and labored earnestly to make proselytes to his own views, that he never publicly recanted, and that he never joined the church. Upon those who, in the face of these tremendous facts, allege that he was nevertheless a Christian lies the burden of proof. Let them produce it or forever hold their peace. In the mean time it is a sad and puerile subterfuge to

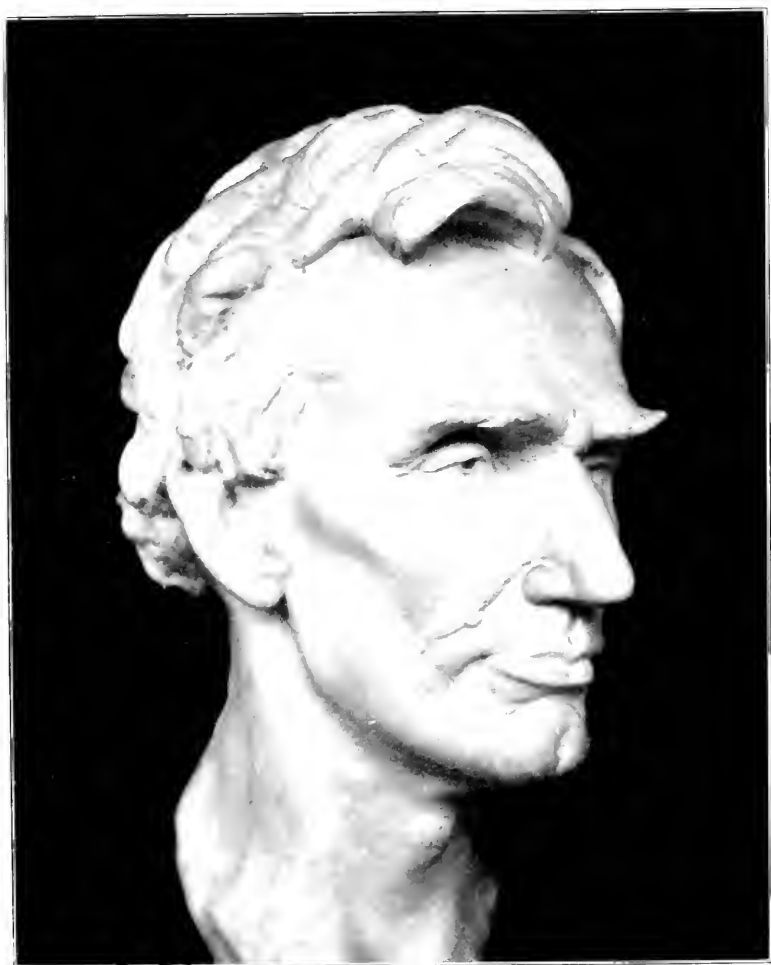
argue that he *would* have been a Christian if he had lived long enough, and to lament that he was not 'spared' for that purpose. He *had* been spared fifty-six years and surrounded by every circumstance that might soften his heart and every influence that might elevate his faith. If he was at that late, that fatal hour standing thus gloomily without the pale, what reason have we to suppose that he intended ever to enter?"

Reed speaks of "the poverty of his early religious instruction," apparently forgetting that he was raised by Christian parents. His father was a church-member, his mother was a church-member, and his stepmother was a church-member. Reed states, also, that the books he read were all of an anti-religious character. Holland, on the contrary, declares that better books than those he read could not have been chosen from the richest library. The fact is, Abraham Lincoln did not become an Infidel to Christianity from a lack of knowledge respecting its claims. He thoroughly examined its claims, and rejected them because he found them untenable.

One important feature of this subject Reed has either inadvertently omitted or purposely ignored, and that is in regard to the validity of the Bateman story. As the result of previous controversy this evidence had been rendered valueless. Lincoln's partner had declared it to be false, had asserted that

Mr. Bateman in private conversations acknowledged it to be in part untrue, and announced his readiness to substantiate his assertions if Mr. Bateman could be prevailed upon to permit the publication of his notes of these conversations taken at the time. If Mr. Herndon's affirmations were true, it destroyed the testimony of Holland and Bateman; if untrue, it challenged Mr. Bateman to reaffirm the statements recorded by Holland, and allow the seal of privacy to be removed from his conversations on the subject. Why did Mr. Reed not rehabilitate this damaged evidence? Did he forget it? No, it is plainly evident that he did not dare to attempt it.

In reviewing this Calvinistic *coterie* of witnesses (they are all Calvinists, and nearly all Presbyterians), one is struck with the formidable display of theological appendages. What an imposing array of D.D.'s! Rev. J. A. Reed, D.D.! Rev. James Smith, D.D.! Rev. Byron Sunderland, D.D.! Rev. Mr. Miner, D.D.! Rev. Mr. Gurley, D.D.! It was a desperate case—divinity was sick and needed doctoring. The doctors of divinity were accordingly called in, and prescribed "The Later Life and Religious Sentiments of Abraham Lincoln," after which it was supposed that divinity would recover. He may be better, but it is painfully apparent that some of these D.D.'s are themselves sadly in need of a doctor.



Mrs. Cadwalader Guild, New York, Sculptor

LINCOLN





## CHAPTER IV.

## REVIEW OF CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY—ARNOLD AND OTHER WITNESSES.

Arnold's "Life of Lincoln"—Claims Concerning Lincoln's Religious Belief—Address to Negroes of Baltimore—Carpenter—Hawley—Willets—Pious Nurse—*Western Christian Advocate*—Illinois Clergyman—Barrows—Vinton—Simpson.

WITH the Christian masses whose minds have become warped by the bigoted teachings of their clerical leaders, nothing affects the reputation of a man so much as his religious belief. Public men who are disbelievers are fully cognizant of this, and generally refrain from expressing sentiments that would tend to alienate those upon whom the retention of their positions depends. Biographers understand this, too, and are likewise aware that a dead Infidel is as cordially hated as a live one. They know that a cold reception awaits their works unless they are able to clothe the characters of their subjects in the robes of popular superstition. Mr. Arnold realized this when he wrote his "Life of Lincoln." He had been most forcibly reminded of the fact by the fate of two biographies of his own subject which had

already appeared—Holland's and Lamon's. Holland's work by catering to popular prejudice, regardless of truth, had been financially a success; Lamon's work by adhering to truth, regardless of popular prejudice, had been financially a failure.

Determined to profit by these examples, and intimidated by the threats and entreaties of those who had resolved to secure for Christianity the influence of the Great Emancipator's name, Arnold dare not give the facts regarding Lincoln's religious belief. Nor is it to be presumed that he desired to. He had previously appeared as a special pleader for the popular faith.

He affirms that "No more reverent Christian than Lincoln ever sat in the Executive chair, not excepting Washington." The fact is, when Arnold wrote his biography of Lincoln, no very reverent Christian ever had occupied the Executive chair. Previous to the installation of Gen. B. H. Harrison no real orthodox Christian communicant had held the office of President.

If Mr. Arnold knew no more about Lincoln's religion than he appears to have known about Washington's, a more charitable reason than those suggested might be assigned for his statements concerning the former. Washington, like Lincoln, has been claimed by the church; yet, Washington, like Lincoln, was a Deist. This is admitted even by the

leading churchmen of his day. Three of the most eminent divines of his age, and the three to whom he was most intimately related in a social way, were Bishop White, Rev. Dr. Abercrombie, and Rev. Dr. Ashbel Green. Bishop White declares that Washington was not a communicant, as claimed by some, and intimates that he was a disbeliever. The Rev. Dr. Abercrombie, whose church he attended while he was President, said: "Washington was a Deist." The Rev. Dr. Ashbel Green, chaplain to Congress during his administration, said: "Like nearly all the founders of the Republic, he was not a Christian, but a Deist."

Arnold presents the following as the basis of Lincoln's religion, and proofs of his Christianity: "(1) Belief in the existence of God, (2) in the immortality of the soul, (3) in the Bible as the revelation of God to man, (4) in the efficacy and duty of prayer, (5) in reverence toward the Almighty, and (6) in love and charity to man."

1. "Belief in the existence of God." This does not prove a belief in Christianity. The Jew believes in the existence of God; the Mohammedan believes in the existence of God; the Deistic Infidel believes in the existence of God.

2. "Belief in the immortality of the soul." That he believed in the immortality of the soul is a claim that cannot be clearly established; and even if it

could, would not confirm the assumption that he was a Christian. Deists, many of them, believe in the doctrine of immortality. Paine believed in immortality; Voltaire believed in immortality.

3. "Belief in the Bible as the revelation of God to man." This, if true, would be evidence of his Christianity; but, unfortunately for Mr. Arnold's claim, Lincoln did not entertain this belief.

4. "Belief in the efficacy and duty of prayer." This, in the orthodox sense of these terms, is not true; and if it were, would not furnish conclusive evidence that he was a Christian. Jews pray; Mohammedans pray; Buddhists pray; some Deists pray. Franklin believed in the efficacy and duty of prayer, and Franklin was an Infidel.

5. "Belief in reverence to the Almighty." This does not demonstrate a belief in Christianity, for all Deists believe in reverence to the Almighty.

6. "Belief in love and charity to man." When it can be shown that only Christians believe in love and charity, then will it be time to affirm that Lincoln was a Christian.

Arnold confounds Christianity with Deism. In the following words he admits that Lincoln was simply a Deist: "Not orthodox, not a man of creeds, he was a man of simple trust in God."

When the subject of Lincoln's belief was once mentioned to Mr. Arnold, he said: "Lincoln was a

rational Christian because he believed in morality." With equal propriety one might say of an upright Christian, "He is a rational Freethinker because he believes in morality."

"His reply to the Negroes of Baltimore," he says, "ought to silence forever those who charge him with unbelief." This alleged reply of Lincoln was as follows:

"In regard to the Great Book I have only to say that it is the best gift which God has given to man. All the good from the Savior of the world is communicated to us through this book. But for this book we could not know right from wrong. All those things desirable to man are contained in it" (Lincoln Memorial Album, p. 340).

The writer of this was in Washington when the colored deputation from Baltimore presented the President with a \$500 Bible. The papers mentioned the fact at the time, but no such speech as Lincoln is said to have made appeared in the reports. About two months later, this apocryphal version of his remarks on the occasion referred to, made its appearance.

The first two sentences contained in this speech (the only part of it that Arnold has quoted), Lincoln, if a Christian, might have uttered. They are words that any intelligent Christian might, from his standpoint, with propriety affirm. We are familiar with

these claims. We are also familiar with the claims embodied in the last two sentences. They are repeatedly made. But they are made only by very ignorant persons, or by clerical hypocrites who try to impose upon the ignorance and credulity of their hearers. Had Lincoln been a Christian he would not have used these words, because he was too intelligent to believe them, and too honest to pretend to believe them.

Concerning this speech, Lincoln's partner, Mr. Herndon, thus vigorously, yet truthfully, remarks :

“I am aware of the fraud committed on Mr. Lincoln in reporting some insane remarks supposed to have been made by him, in 1864, on the presentation of a Bible to him by the colored people of Baltimore. No sane man ever uttered such folly, and no sane man will ever believe it. In that speech Mr. Lincoln is made to say : ‘But for this book we could not know right from wrong.’ Does any human being believe that Lincoln ever uttered this? What did the whole race of man do to know right from wrong during the countless years that passed before this book was given to the world? How did the struggling race of man build up its grand civilizations in the world before this book was given to mankind? What do the millions of people now living, who never heard of this book, do to know how to distinguish right from wrong? Was Lincoln a fool, an

ass, a hypocrite, or a combination of them all? or is this speech—this supposed—this fraudulent speech—a lie?”

Arnold would have his readers believe that this speech is genuine. And yet it is plainly evident that he himself does not believe it. He mutilates it by omitting the more orthodox portion of it—the very portion he would have retained had he believed it to be genuine. The first part would suffice to serve his purpose; the remainder he knew was too incredible for belief and would stamp the whole as a fraud.

Arnold says: “The veil between him and the supernatural was very thin.” Yes, so thin that he easily saw through it and recognized the greater part of it to be a sham.

“His faith in a Divine Providence began at his mother’s knee, and ran through all the changes of his life.” I do not desire to charge Mr. Arnold with plagiarism, but the foregoing recalls the following much admired passage to be found in Holland: “This unwavering faith in a Divine Providence began at his mother’s knee, and ran like a thread of gold through all the inner experiences of his life” (Life of Lincoln, pp. 61, 62).

There is much in Arnold’s biography, aside from the above, to suggest that Holland’s work formed the basis and model of his own. While more accu-

rate in the main than Holland's "Life," Arnold's "Life" is in some respects equally unreliable, and less readable.

Adverting to the many fraudulent stories that have been circulated concerning Lincoln, in an address delivered in London, Mr. Arnold said: "The newspapers in America have always been full of Lincoln stories and anecdotes, some true and many fabulous." Unfortunately for the cause of truth, Mr. Arnold has himself recorded some of these fabulous stories, not because he deemed them authentic, but because they agreed with his preconceived prejudices, or the prejudices of those whom he wished to please.

Mr. Carpenter says: "I would scarcely have called Mr. Lincoln a religious man, and yet I believe him to have been a sincere Christian."

In a letter, Mr. Herndon makes the following correction in regard to his friend Carpenter's statement:

"Mr. Carpenter has not expressed his own ideas correctly. To say that a man is a Christian and yet not a religious man is absurd. *Religion* is the generic term including all forms of religion; *Christianity* is a specific term representing one form of religion. Carpenter means to say that Mr. Lincoln was a religious man but not a Christian, and this is the truth."

It is unfortunate that while in many cases we



have several words to express the same idea, the same word in many cases is employed to express different ideas. Ideas thus become confused. If the terms *morality*, *religion*, and *Christianity*, were always used in their legitimate sense—used to express the ideas of which they were the original signs—much trouble and ambiguity would be avoided. As it is, they are promiscuously used as interchangeable terms. Many use the word *religion* and even *Christianity* when they mean *morality*. Mr. Carpenter uses the word *religious* in its proper sense, and the word *Christian* to mean a *moral man*. The following examples will serve to illustrate the various forms employed to express the thought now under consideration :

“I would scarcely have called Mr. Lincoln a religious man, and yet I believe him to have been a sincere Christian.”—*Carpenter*.

“I would scarcely have called Mr. Lincoln a Christian, and yet I believe him to have been a truly religious man.”—*Herndon*.

I would scarcely have called Mr. Lincoln a religious man, and yet I believe him to have been a truly moral man.—*Author*.

We all desire to express substantially the same thought. I do not wish to dictate to Mr. Carpenter and Mr. Herndon what words they shall employ to convey an idea, but this explanation is essential to

a proper understanding of the question in dispute and will help to reconcile much of the apparently conflicting testimony presented in this work.

As Lincoln was in a certain sense a Deist, the religious element was not entirely wanting in him, and hence the statement of Mr. Herndon that he was a religious man is, in a degree, true.

The basis of Carpenter's work was a series of articles contributed to the *New York Independent*. When it was decided to publish these in book form, to swell them into a volume of the desired size, to his personal reminiscences he added many of the stories pertaining to Lincoln then going the rounds of the press. Although he was as it were a member of Lincoln's household six months he failed to hear from Lincoln's lips a word expressing a belief in Christianity. These apocryphal stories, and these alone, contain all the evidences of Lincoln's alleged piety to be found in Carpenter's book. And his admission that Lincoln was not a religious man disproves them.

Mr. Hawley professed to believe that Lincoln was a Christian, but he had no personal knowledge of the fact, although his neighbor for many years. The only reasons he was able to adduce upon which to predicate his belief were the Bateman story and his farewell speech on leaving Springfield. The former has been exploded, the latter proves nothing.

During all the later years of his life Lincoln generally refrained from expressing his anti-Christian opinions, except to friends who shared his views. This silence, in connection with his sterling moral character, might lead some of his Christian neighbors to suppose that he was a believer, the more especially as Christians are generally ignorant of the extent of unbelief, and are loath to believe that a person, unless he openly avows his disbelief, can be an Infidel.

According to Mr. Willets, Lincoln, during the war, had an attack of what he thought might be a "change of heart." He consulted a pious lady in regard to it and requested her to describe to him the symptoms attending this theological disease. She defined "a true religious experience" as "a conviction of one's own sinfulness and weakness, and personal need of the Savior for strength and support." She said that "when one was really brought to feel his need of divine help, and to seek the aid of the Holy Spirit for strength and guidance, it was satisfactory evidence of his having been born again." Lincoln replied that if what she had told him was "a correct view of this great subject," he hoped he was a Christian. But was this a correct view of it? I was not aware that conviction constituted conversion. We have been taught that conviction is but a preliminary step toward conversion. If Lincoln

relied upon this as a true exposition of this doctrine, the genuineness of his conversion may well be questioned.

It is to be regretted that Mr. Willets did not give the name of his informant. As it is, we do not know whether to credit "a lady acquaintance of his," or himself, with the invention of a first-class fiction.

In regard to the story of the "Pious Nurse," we have not even a clergyman to vouch for its authenticity. We do not know the name of this witness; we do not know whom she communicated the story to; we do not know when nor where it made its first appearance. We only know that for years it has been floating through the columns of the religious press, a companion-piece to Washington's devotional exercise at Valley Forge.

"History," said Napoleon, "is a set of lies agreed upon." Of the many lies agreed upon by Christian writers in making up the history of Lincoln, none has become more thoroughly established than the one originally published by the *Western Christian Advocate*. It has been incorporated into the works of a score of historians and biographers, and is almost universally accepted as a historical fact.

Nearly all the pious stories relating to Lincoln, while palpably false in the eyes of those who knew him, are yet of such a nature as to render a complete refutation of them extremely difficult. The

story under consideration, however, is of a different character. Its truthfulness or falsity could at the time of its publication have been easily ascertained. If true, any member of Lincoln's cabinet could have verified it. I knew that it was untrue—at least I knew that a Cabinet meeting had never been transformed into a prayer meeting at Lincoln's suggestion. I finally resolved to demonstrate its falsity if possible. But a quarter of a century had passed away, and every member of Lincoln's Cabinet was dead save one, Hugh McCulloch, his last Secretary of the Treasury. With the aid of a friend, Mr. N. P. Stockbridge, of Ft. Wayne, Ind., an old acquaintance of Mr. McCulloch's, I succeeded in bringing the matter before this only surviving witness, and received from his pen, in February, 1891, the following prompt denial:

“The description of what occurred at the Executive Mansion, when the intelligence was received of the surrender of the Confederate forces, which you quote from the *Western Christian Advocate*, is not only absolutely groundless, but absurd. After I became Secretary of the Treasury I was present at every Cabinet meeting, and I never saw Mr. Lincoln or any of his ministers upon his knees or in tears.

“We were not especially jubilant over Lee's surrender, for this we had been prepared for some days. The time for our great rejoicing was a little

earlier. After Sherman had commenced his celebrated march to the sea, and long and weary days had passed without any reliable reports from him, we were filled with anxiety and apprehension. It was when the news came that he and his army, in excellent condition, were in the neighborhood of Charleston, that our joy was irrepressible ; not only because of their safety, but because it was an assurance that the days of the Confederacy were nearly ended. With Grant before Richmond in command of superior forces, and Sherman with the finest army in the world, ready to move northward, everybody felt that the war must be soon concluded, and that the Union was safe.

“We were, of course, happy when General Lee and his severely tried soldiers laid down their arms, but this, as I have said, was not unexpected. It was when our anxiety in regard to Sherman was succeeded by hopefulness and confidence that our joy became exuberant. But there was no such exhibition of it as has been published by the *Advocate*.”

An “Illinois Clergyman” reports Lincoln as saying that when he left Springfield he was not a Christian, that when his son Willie died he was not a Christian, but that when he visited the battlefield of Gettysburg he gave his heart to Christ. Christians cite the testimony of this anonymous witness, seemingly unconscious of the fact that if true it refutes

the testimony of every other Christian witness. If this statement be true what becomes of the testimony of Holland and Bateman? What becomes of the testimony of Reed's witnesses? The testimony of Brooks invalidated the testimony of every other witness; the testimony of this Illinois clergyman invalidates the testimony of Brooks itself.

Reed did not present this evidence, doubtless aware that his lecture already contained a sufficient number of discrepancies. He was thoughtful enough, however, to anticipate it. He had Dr. Gurley refer to Lincoln's conversion as taking place "after the death of his son Willie and his visit to the battlefield of Gettysburg." These events are referred to as if they occurred in close proximity to each other; whereas the death of Willie occurred during the first year of his administration, his visit to Gettysburg less than seventeen months before his assassination.

The passage quoted from Dr. Barrows contains six specific affirmations.

1. "In the anxious uncertainties of the great war, he gradually rose to the heights where Jehovah became to him the sublimest of realities, the ruler of nations."

Collect all the utterances of Abraham Lincoln, all the letters he ever wrote, all the speeches he ever delivered, all the state papers he gave to the public;

and from this full store of words that fell from his lips and flowed from his pen, I challenge Dr. Barrows to produce one word expressing a recognition of Jehovah. Jehovah was to him, not "the sublimest of realities," not "the ruler of nations," but a hideous phantom. He recognized a God, but his God was not Jehovah, the God of Dr. Barrows.

2. "When he wrote his immortal Proclamation, he invoked upon it not only 'the considerate judgment of mankind,' but 'the gracious favor of Almighty God.'"

When he wrote his immortal Proclamation he did not invoke "the gracious favor of Almighty God." This instrument, as drafted by Lincoln, contained no allusion to God. The paragraph containing the words quoted was drafted by Secretary Chase and inserted in the Proclamation at his urgent request after it was printed and ready for delivery.

3. "When darkness gathered over the brave armies fighting for the nation's life, this strong man, in the early morning, knelt and wrestled in prayer with Him who holds in his hand the fate of empires."

A "Christian lady from Massachusetts" (name unknown), and a Christian gentleman from New York (Noah Brooks), declare that Lincoln was accustomed to pray. This declaration is echoed by Arnold, and reëchoed by Barrows. If true, is it not strange that



a hospital nurse and a newspaper reporter were in possession of the fact while his most intimate friends were entirely ignorant of it?

4. "When the clouds lifted above the carnage of Gettysburg, he gave his heart to the Lord Jesus Christ."

This is the fifth time that Lincoln gave his heart to Christ. The above statement is the vital one in Dr. Barrows's testimony—the keystone in the arch comprising "the religious aspects" of Lincoln's Presidential career. The others, even if true, only prove a Theistic belief. This statement affirms that he became a Christian—a statement evidently based upon the anonymous story of the "Illinois clergyman." Between the original presented by the "Illinois clergyman" at large, and that presented by the Illinois clergyman from Chicago, however, a grave discrepancy appears. From the time that "the clouds lifted above the carnage of Gettysburg" to the time that Lincoln visited its cemetery, a period of twenty weeks had elapsed. Now, did Lincoln give his heart to Christ when the battle ended on the 3rd of July, as stated by the one, or not until he stood upon the battle-field on the 19th of November, as asserted by the other? This is a question that we leave for the Illinois clergymen themselves to decide.

5. "When he pronounced his matchless oration on

the chief battle-field of the war, he gave expression to the resolve that 'this nation, under God, should have a new birth of freedom.'"

This simple Deistic phrase, "under God," is the only utterance of a religious character to be found in that oration. When this speech was delivered, Lincoln, it is claimed, had experienced a change of heart, and consecrated himself to Christ. This address furnishes an overwhelming refutation of the claim. At the dedication of a cemetery, surrounded by thousands of graves, he ignores Christianity, and even the doctrine of immortality.

6. "And when he wrote his last Inaugural Address, he gave to it the lofty tone of an old Hebrew psalm."

This is true; and it is likewise true that in that document he made no more reference to Christianity than did the Hebrew psalmist who lived and wrote a thousand years before it had its birth.

The "Lincoln Memorial Album," in which Dr. Barrows's article appears, contains the offerings of two hundred contributors, twenty of them divines, and among them Lyman Abbot, Dr. Bellows, Theodore L. Cuyler, Robert Collyer, Bishop Coxe, Dr. Crosby, Bishop Haven, Philip Schaaf, and Bishop Simpson. The work is prefaced with a biographical sketch of Lincoln, written by Isaac N. Arnold, in which he makes substantially the same statements

regarding Lincoln's belief as those made in his "Life of Lincoln." Aside from this, Dr. Barrows is the only one of these two hundred memorialists who ventures to affirm that Lincoln was a Christian.

The story of Dr. Vinton, too absurd to demand serious consideration—apparently too incredible for belief—is yet believed by thousands. When such fabulous tales are told by men who are looked upon as the exponents of morality, and published in papers and periodicals that are presumed to be the repositories only of truth, it is not strange that such stories as Washington's Praying at Valley Forge, Ethan Allen and His Daughter, Don't Unchain the Tiger, Paine's Recanting, and a thousand and one other pious fictions of a similar character, have gained popular credence. To read the fabrications of this class pertaining to Lincoln alone, one would suppose that this astute statesman, this Chief Magistrate of a great nation, this Commander-in-Chief of two millions of soldiers, engaged in the most stupendous civil conflict the world has known, occupied the greater portion of his time in studying the Scriptures, poring over doctrinal sermons, participating in prayer-meetings led by pious nurses, and weeping upon the necks of clerical visitors.

Bishop Simpson's remarks have been presented, not because they furnish any proofs of Lincoln's reputed Christianity, but because he was one of the

clergymen who officiated at Lincoln's funeral, and because his words on that occasion have been cited in support of this claim. But he does not assert that Lincoln was a Christian. He simply testifies to his belief and trust in God—to his Deistic faith—nothing more.

I am aware that in some of the published reports of his address there have been interpolated words intended to convey the idea that Lincoln accepted Christ. Bishop Simpson, I am sure, never authorized the insertion of these words. They express a claim he never made—a claim he certainly did not make on the day of Lincoln's interment.

In his funeral address at Washington, Dr. Gurley did not affirm that Lincoln was a Christian, or that he was intending to make a profession of religion. Bishop Simpson, in his oration at Springfield, made no mention of these claims, and Dr. Gurley and Bishop Simpson are known to have held a consultation before that oration was delivered.

This silence is conclusive evidence that these men knew that Lincoln was an unbeliever. Commenting on this notable omission, Mr. Herndon says :

“Bishop Simpson delivered the funeral oration, and in that oration there was not one word about Mr. Lincoln's Christianity. Bishop Simpson was Lincoln's friend; Dr. Gurley was Lincoln's pastor in Washington. Now these men knew, or had reason

to know, Lincoln's religion, and the world would have heard of his Christianity on the day of his burial if it had been known. But Simpson and Gurley are silent—dumb before the Christian world."

One of the most beautiful and exhaustive tributes ever paid to Lincoln, aside from the matchless tribute paid by Colonel Ingersoll, is that from the pen of Bishop Simpson which appears in the "Lincoln Memorial Album." In this tribute he does not make even the remotest allusion to Lincoln's religious belief. He appears to have heeded the advice tendered a less discreet Christian writer, and recognized the fact that, from his standpoint, the less said about the subject the better. Had all Christians acted as wisely and as honorably in this matter as Bishop Simpson, this controversy about Lincoln's religion would never have arisen.

I have now reviewed the testimony of these witnesses. Tested in the crucible of honest criticism, little remains of their statements save the dross of falsehood and error. I may be charged with unjust severity toward these witnesses, nearly all of whom are men of recognized respectability and distinction. But a majority of them have testified to what they know to be false, and against those who knowingly bear false witness no censure can be too severe. Thousands of Christian men and women, misled by this false testimony, honestly believe and contend

that Lincoln was a Christian. Against these I have not an unkind word to offer. But I am resolved to disabuse their minds of this erroneous belief. Painful as the birth of an unwelcome idea is, they shall know the truth.

## CHAPTER V.

TESTIMONY OF HON. WILLIAM H. HERNDON—PUBLISHED  
TESTIMONY.

Herndon's Association with Lincoln—Character—Writings—Competency as a Witness—The Abbott Letter—Contribution to the *Liberal Age*—Article in the *Truth Seeker*—Herndon's "Life of Lincoln."

HAVING presented and reviewed the evidence in behalf of the affirmative of this question, the evidence in support of the negative will next be given, and in consideration of his long and intimate association with Lincoln, and the character and comprehensiveness of his testimony, the first to testify will be Hon. Wm. H. Herndon, of Springfield, Ill.

In 1843, Lincoln formed a partnership with Mr. Herndon in the law business, which existed for a period of twenty-two years, and was only dissolved by the bullet of the assassin. The strong attachment that these men had for each other is illustrated in the following touching incident, related in "The Everyday Life of Lincoln:"

"When he was about to leave for Washington, he went to the dingy little law office which had sheltered his saddest hours. He sat down on the couch

and said to his law-partner, Herndon, 'Billy, you and I have been together more than twenty years, and have never "passed a word." Will you let my name stay on the old sign till I come back from Washington?' The tears started to Mr. Herndon's eyes. He put out his hand. 'Mr. Lincoln,' said he, 'I will never have any other partner while you live;' and to the day of the assassination all the doings of the firm were in the name of 'Lincoln & Herndon'" (Everyday Life of Lincoln, p. 377).

Mr. Herndon died in 1891. Though younger than his illustrious partner, he was at the time of his death well advanced in years. He had retired from the active practice of law, and resided at his country home near Springfield. He was noted for his rugged honesty, for his broad philanthropy, and for his strong and original mental qualities. He was one of the pioneers in the antislavery movement, and one of the founders of the Republican party. He was the Republican nominee for Presidential Elector of the Springfield district when the first Republican ticket, Fremont and Dayton, was placed in the field. Governor Bissell, Governor Yates and Governor Oglesby successively appointed him Bank Commissioner of Illinois. His talents were recognized and his friendship was sought by many of the most eminent men in the nation. Garrison stopped for weeks at his home; Theodore Parker was his guest; Hor-



ace Greeley was his devoted friend, and Charles Sumner was his friend and correspondent.

When Lincoln and Herndon were first thrown into each other's society, Lincoln's mind was dwelling, for the most part, in the theological (or rather anti-theological) world, while Herndon's found a most congenial habitation in the world of politics. They were destined to exercise an important influence in molding each other's characters. Herndon was indebted chiefly to Lincoln for the religious views he entertained, while Lincoln was indebted mainly to Herndon for the political principles which he finally espoused. Colonel Lamon, in his "Life of Lincoln," gives the following truthful sketch of the character of the man whom Lincoln made a Deist, and who in turn made an Abolitionist of Lincoln. Alluding to the Abolitionists of Illinois, as they appeared in 1854, when Lincoln took his stand on the side of freedom, Lamon says :

"Chief among them was Owen Lovejoy; and second to him, if second to any, was William H. Herndon. But the position of this latter gentleman was one of singular embarrassment. According to himself, he was an Abolitionist 'some time before he was born,' and hitherto he had made his 'calling and election sure' by every word and act of a life devoted to political philanthropy and disinterested political labors. While the two great national parties

divided the suffrages of the people, North and South, everything in his eyes was dead. He detested the bargains by which those parties were in the habit of composing sectional troubles, and sacrificing the principle of freedom. When the Whig party paid its breath to time, he looked upon its last agonies as but another instance of divine retribution. He had no patience with time-servers, and regarded with indignant contempt the policy which would postpone the natural rights of an enslaved race to the success of parties and politicians. He stood by at the sacrifice of the Whig party in Illinois with the spirit of Paul when he held the clothes of them that stoned Stephen. He believed it was for the best, and hoped to see a new party rise in its place, great in the fervor of its faith, and animated by the spirit of Wilberforce, Garrison, and the Lovejoys. He was a fierce zealot, and gloried proudly in his title of 'fanatic;' for it was his conviction that fanatics were at all times the salt of the earth, with power to save it from the blight that follows the wickedness of men. He believed in a God, but it was the God of Nature—the God of Socrates and Plato, as well as the God of Jacob. He believed in a Bible, but it was the open scroll of the universe; and in a religion clear and well defined, but it was a religion that scorned what he deemed the narrow slavery of verbal inspiration. Hot-blooded, impulsive, brave, morally

and physically, careless of consequences when moved by a sense of individual duty, he was the very man to receive into his inmost heart the precepts of Mr. Seward's 'higher law'" (Life of Lincoln, pp. 350, 351).

His literary abilities, both as a speaker and as a writer, were of a high order. He had written a meritorious work on Mental Philosophy, and a "Life of Lincoln," which had just been published when he died. In addition to numerous addresses upon historical, economical, and other subjects he prepared and delivered several able and interesting lectures on Lincoln: "Abraham Lincoln and Ann Rutledge," a beautiful and touching representation of that pathetic and romantic love episode which forms one of the saddest chapters in Lincoln's history; "The Analysis of Lincoln's Character," which appears in the "Lincoln Memorial Album," and "Lincoln's Religion," which was published in the *State Register*, of Springfield, Ill.

Carpenter, and in fact nearly every writer on Lincoln, has made free use of Herndon's writings. Carpenter declares that his "masterly 'Analysis of Lincoln's Character' has scarcely an equal in the annals of biographical literature." Both Holland and Lamon acknowledge that they were more deeply indebted to him in the preparation of their respective works than to any other person. The

Petersburg *Democrat*, published in Menard county, where Lincoln spent the first years of his manhood, says: "Mr. Herndon was the law partner of Mr. Lincoln from 1843 to 1860, and knew his inner life better than any other man." The Sangamon county *Monitor*, of Springfield, where Lincoln lived for a quarter of a century, says: "Herndon knew Lincoln's views better than any man in America." Judge David Davis, the lifelong friend of Lincoln, in whose court both Lincoln and Herndon practiced for years, declared that Herndon knew more about Lincoln's religion than any other man.

In this chapter will be reproduced the evidence of Mr. Herndon that has already been made public.

The first elaborate exposition of Lincoln's Free-thought views was made in 1870, in what is known as the "Abbott Letter," an article which Mr. Herndon by request contributed to the *Index*, a paper then published at Toledo, O., and edited by Francis E. Abbott. The article was extensively copied and commented upon, and produced a profound sensation in the religious world, which, to a great extent, had been misled by such writers as Holland. The first and more important part of Mr. Herndon's article will now be presented:

"MR. ABBOTT: Some time since I promised you that I would send a letter in relation to Mr. Lincoln's religion. I do so now. Before entering on

that question, one or two preliminary remarks will help us to understand why he disagreed with the Christian world in its principles as well as in its theology. In the first place, Mr. Lincoln's mind was a purely logical mind; secondly, Mr. Lincoln was a purely practical man. He had no fancy or imagination, and not much emotion. He was a realist as opposed to an idealist. As a general rule, it is true that a purely logical mind has not much hope, if it ever has faith in the unseen and unknown. Mr. Lincoln had not much hope and no faith in things that lie outside of the domain of demonstration; he was so constituted, so organized, that he could believe nothing unless his senses or logic could reach it. I have often read to him a law point, a decision, or something I fancied. He could not understand it until he took the book out of my hand, and read the thing for himself. He was terribly, vexatiously skeptical. He could scarcely understand anything, unless he had time and place fixed in his mind.

“I became acquainted with Mr. Lincoln in 1834, and I think I knew him well to the day of his death. His mind, when a boy in Kentucky, showed a certain gloom, an unsocial nature, a peculiar abstractedness, a bold and daring skepticism. In Indiana, from 1817 to 1830, it manifested the same qualities or attributes as in Kentucky: it only intensified, developed itself,

along those lines in Indiana. He came to Illinois in 1830, and, after some little roving, settled in New Salem, now in Menard county and state of Illinois. This village lies about twenty miles northwest of this city. It was here that Mr. Lincoln became acquainted with a class of men the world never saw the like of before or since. They were large men—large in body and large in mind; hard to whip and never to be fooled. They were a bold, daring, and reckless sort of men; they were men of their own minds—believed what was demonstrable; were men of great common sense. With these men Mr. Lincoln was thrown; with them he lived, and with them he moved and almost had his being. They were skeptics all—scoffers some. These scoffers were good men, and their scoffs were protests against theology—loud protests against the follies of Christianity. They had never heard of Theism and the newer and better religious thoughts of this age. Hence, being natural skeptics, and being bold, brave men, they uttered their thoughts freely. They declared that Jesus was an illegitimate child. They were on all occasions, when opportunity offered, debating the various questions of Christianity among themselves. They took their stand on common sense and on their own souls; and, though their arguments were rude and rough, no man could overthrow their homely logic. They riddled all divines, and not unfrequently

made them skeptics, disbelievers as bad as themselves. They were a jovial, healthful, generous, social, true, and manly set of people.

“It was here and among these people that Mr. Lincoln was thrown. About the year 1834 he chanced to come across Volney’s ‘Ruins’ and some of Paine’s theological works. He at once seized hold of them, and assimilated them into his own being. Volney and Paine became a part of Mr. Lincoln from 1834 to the end of his life.

“In 1835 he wrote out a small work on Infidelity, and intended to have it published. This book was an attack upon the whole grounds of Christianity, and especially was it an attack upon the idea that Jesus was the Christ, the true and only-begotten son of God, as the Christian world contends. Mr. Lincoln was at that time in New Salem, keeping store for Mr. Samuel Hill, a merchant and postmaster of that place. Lincoln and Hill were very friendly. Hill, I think, was a skeptic at this time. Lincoln, one day after the book was finished, read it to Mr. Hill, his good friend. Hill tried to persuade him not to make it public, not to publish it. Hill at that time saw in Mr. Lincoln a rising man, and wished him success. Lincoln refused to destroy it—said it should be published. Hill swore it should never see light of day. He had an eye on Lincoln’s popularity—his present and future success ; and be-

lieving that if the book was published it would kill Lincoln forever, he snatched it from Lincoln's hand when Lincoln was not expecting it, and ran it into an old-fashioned tinplate stove, heated as hot as a furnace; and so Lincoln's book went up to the clouds in smoke. It is confessed by all who heard parts of it that it was at once able and eloquent; and, if I may judge of it from Mr. Lincoln's subsequent ideas and opinions, often expressed to me and to others in my presence, it was able, strong, plain, and fair. His argument was grounded on the internal mistakes of the Old and New Testaments, and on reason and on the experiences and observations of men. The criticisms from internal defects were sharp, strong, and manly.

“Mr. Lincoln moved to this city in 1837, and here became acquainted with various men of his own way of thinking. At that time they called themselves Freethinkers, or free thinking men. I remember all these things distinctly; for I was with them, heard them, and was one of them. Mr. Lincoln here found other works—Hume, Gibbon, and others—and drank them in. He made no secret of his views; no concealment of his religion. He boldly avowed himself an Infidel.

“When Mr. Lincoln was a candidate for our Legislature, he was accused of being an Infidel and of having said that Jesus Christ was an illegitimate



child. He never denied his opinions nor flinched from his religious views. He was a true man, and yet it may be truthfully said that in 1837 his religion was low indeed. In his moments of gloom he would doubt, if he did not sometimes deny, God.

“Mr. Lincoln ran for Congress against the Rev. Peter Cartwright in the year 1846. In that contest he was accused of being an Infidel, if not an Atheist. He never denied the charge—would not—‘would die first.’ In the first place, because he knew it could and would be proved on him; and in the second place, he was too true to his own convictions, to his own soul, to deny it.

“When Mr. Lincoln left this city for Washington, I knew he had undergone no change in his religious opinions or views. He held many of the Christian ideas in abhorrence, and among them there was this one, namely, that God would forgive the sinner for a violation of his laws. Lincoln maintained that God could not forgive; that punishment has to follow the sin; that Christianity was wrong in teaching forgiveness.

“From what I know of Mr. Lincoln, and from what I have heard and verily believe, I can say, first, that he did not believe in a special creation, his idea being that all creation was an evolution under law; secondly, that he did not believe that the Bible was a special revelation from God, as the Christian world

contends ; thirdly, he did not believe in miracles as understood by Christians ; fourthly, he believed in universal inspiration and miracles under law ; fifthly, he did not believe that Jesus was the Christ, the son of God, as the Christian church contends ; sixthly, he believed that all things, both matter and mind, were governed by laws, universal, absolute, and eternal. All his speeches and remarks in Washington conclusively prove this. Law was to Lincoln everything, and special interferences, shams and delusions.”

In 1874 Mr. Herndon delivered in Springfield a lecture on “Lincoln’s Religion.” It was a reply to Reed’s lecture, and was published in the *State Register*, of Springfield. In this lecture he reaffirms the statements made in the “Abbott Letter,” supports them with substantial arguments and proofs, and completely overthrows the claims advanced by Reed. From it I quote the following :

“It is a curious fact that when any man by his genius, good fortune, or otherwise rises to public notice and to fame, it does not make much difference what life he has led, that the whole Christian world claims him as a Christian, to be forever held up to view as a hero and a saint during all the coming ages, just as if religion would die out of the soul of man unless the great dead be canonized as a model Christian. This is a species of hero or saint

worship. Lincoln they are determined to enthrone among the saints, to be forever worshiped as such."

"I believe that Mr. Lincoln did not late in life become a firm believer in the Christian religion. What! Mr. Lincoln discard his logical faculties and reason with his heart? What! Mr. Lincoln believe that Jesus was the Christ of God, the true and only begotten son of him, as the Christian creed contends? What! Mr. Lincoln believe that the New Testament is of special divine authority, and fully and infallibly inspired, as the Christian contends? What! Mr. Lincoln abandon his lifelong ideas of universal, eternal and absolute laws and contend that the New Testament is any more inspired than Homer's poems, than Milton's 'Paradise Lost,' than Shakspeare, than his own eloquent and inspired oration at Gettysburg? What! Mr. Lincoln believe that the great Creator had connection through the form and instrumentality of a shadow with a Jewish girl? Blasphemy! These things must be believed and acknowledged in order to be a Christian."

"One word concerning this discussion about Mr. Lincoln's religious views. It is important in this: 1. It settles a historic fact. 2. It makes it possible to write a true history of a man free from the fear of fire and stake. 3. It assures the reading public that the life of Mr. Lincoln will be truly written. 4. It will be a warning forever to all untrue men,

that the life they have lived will be held up to view. 5. It should convince the Christian pulpit and press that it is impossible in this day and generation, at least in America, to daub up sin, and make a hero out of a fool, a knave, or a villain, which Mr. Lincoln was not. Some true spirit will drag the fraud and lie out to the light of day. 6. Its tendency will be to arrest and put a stop to romantic biographies. And now let it be written in history, and on Mr. Lincoln's tomb: 'He died an unbeliever.'"

In January, 1883, Mr. Herndon contributed an article on "Lincoln's Religion" to the *Liberal Age*, of Milwaukee. From this article the following extracts are taken and submitted:

"In 1837, Mr. Lincoln moved to the city of Springfield, and there came across many people of his own belief. They called themselves at that time Free-thinkers. Some of these men were highly educated and polished gentlemen. Mr. Lincoln read in this city Hume, Gibbon, and other Liberal books. He was in this city from 1837 to 1861, an Infidel—Free-thinker—Liberal—Free Religionist—of the radical type."

"In his philosophy, he was a realist, as opposed to an idealist; he was a sensationalist, as opposed to an intuitionist; and was a materialist as opposed to a spiritualist."

"Some good men and women say that Mr. Lincoln

was a Christian, because he was a moral man. They say that he was a *rational* Christian, because he loved morality. Do not other people, who are not Christians, love morality? Morality is not *the* test of Christianity, by any means. If it is the test, then all moral men, Atheists, Agnostics, Infidels, Mohammedans, Buddhists, Mormons, and the rest, are Christians. A *rational* Christian is an anomaly, an impossibility; because when reason is left free, it demands proofs—it relies on experience, observation, logic, nature, laws. Why not call Mr. Lincoln a rational Buddhist, a rational Mohammedan, a rational Confucian, a rational Mormon, for all these, if true to their faith, love morality.”

“Did Mr. Lincoln believe in prayer as a means of moving God? It is said to me by Christians, touching his religion: ‘Did not he, in his parting speech in Springfield, in 1861, say, “I hope ~~you~~, my friends, will pray that I may receive,” etc.?’ and to which I say, yes. In his last Inaugural he said: ‘Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray.’ These expressions are merely conventional. They do not prove that Mr. Lincoln believed that prayer is a means of moving God. . . . He believed, as I understood him, that human prayer did the prayer good; that prayer was but a drum beat—the taps of the spirit on the living human soul, arousing it to acts of repentance for bad deeds done, or to inspire it to a

loftier and a higher effort for a nobler and a grander life."

"Did Mr. Lincoln, in his said Inaugural, say: 'Both read the same *Word of God*?' No, because that would be admitting revelation. He said: 'Both read the same *Bible*.' Did Mr. Lincoln say: 'Yet if God wills that it [the war] continue till all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn by the lash shall be paid with another drawn by the sword, *as was said by God* three thousand years ago?' He did not; he was cautious, and said: '*As was said* three thousand years ago.' Jove never nods."

A little later Mr. Herndon wrote an article entitled, "Abraham Lincoln's Religious Belief," which appeared in the *Truth Seeker* of New York. From this article I quote the following passages:

"In 1842 I heard Mr. Lincoln deliver a speech before the Washingtonian Temperance Society, of this city. . . . He scored the Christians for the position they had taken. He said in that lecture this: 'If they [the Christians] believe, as they profess—that Omnipotence condescended to take on himself the form of sinful man,' etc. This was spoken with energy. He scornfully and contemptuously emphasized the words *as they profess*. The rebuke was as much in the manner of utterance as

in the substance of what was said. I heard the criticisms of some of the Christians that night. They said the speech was an insult and an outrage.”

“It is my opinion that no man ever heard Mr. Lincoln pray, in the true evangelical sense of that word. His philosophy is against all human prayer, as a means of reversing God’s decrees.”

“He has told me often that there was no freedom in the human will, and no punishment beyond this world. He denied God’s higher law, and wrote on the margin of a newspaper to his friends in the Chicago convention in 1860, this: ‘Lincoln agrees with Seward in his irrepressible-conflict idea; but he is opposed to Seward’s *higher law*.’ This paper was handed to Judge Davis, Judge Logan, and other friends.”

“Mr. Lincoln and a minister, whose name is kept in the dark, had a conversation about religion. It appears that Mr. Lincoln said that when his son—bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, and blood of his own heart—died, though a severe affliction, it did not arouse him to think of Christ; but when he saw the graves of so many soldiers—strangers to him— . . . that sad sight aroused him to love Jesus. . . . It is a fine thing for the reputation of the ‘Illinois Clergyman’ that his name is to the world unknown. It is a most heartless thing, this supposed conversation of Lincoln with the Illinois clergyman. What!

Lincoln feel more for the *graves* of strangers than for the death of his once living, loving, and lovable son, now dead, moldering to ashes in the silent tomb! The charge is barbarous. To make Lincoln a lover of Jesus, whom he once ridiculed, this minister makes him a savage."

"I wish to give an illustration of the uncertainty and unreliability of those loose things that float around in the newspapers of the day, and how liable things are to be inaccurate—so made even by the best of men. Mr. Lincoln on the morning he started for Washington to take the oath of office, and be inaugurated President of this great Republic, gave a short farewell address to his old friends. It was eloquent and touching. That speech is copied in Holland's 'Life of Lincoln,' in Arnold's 'Lincoln and Slavery,' and in Lamon's 'Life of Lincoln,' and no two are exactly alike. If it is hard to get the exact truth on such an occasion as this, how impossible is it to get at Mr. Lincoln's sayings which have been written out by men weeks and months after what he did say have passed by! All these loose and foolish things that Mr. Lincoln is supposed to have said are like the cords of driftwood, floating on the bosom of the great Mississippi, down to the great gulf of—Forgetfulness. Let them go."

Herndon's "Life of Lincoln," is a most important contribution to biographical literature. It will



enable the present and future generations to become better acquainted with Lincoln the man than with any other prominent American. The author has performed substantially the same work for Lincoln that Boswell performed for Johnson; only he has performed it more faithfully. Political partisans and religious bigots may condemn the work, but impartial critics are almost unanimous in their praise of it.

The metropolitan journals of Lincoln's and Herndon's own state commend the work. The *Chicago Tribune* says: "All these loving adherents [of Lincoln] will hail Herndon's 'Lincoln' with unmixed, unbounded joy." The *Chicago Times* says: "Herndon's 'Life' is the best yet written." The *Inter Ocean* says that Herndon "knew more of Lincoln's inner life than any living man." The *Chicago Herald* says: "It enables one to approach more closely to the great President." The *Chicago Evening Journal* says: "It presents a truthful and living picture of the greatest of Americans."

The *Nation* thus refers to it: "The sincerity and honesty of the biographer appear on every page." The *New York Sun* says: "The marks of unflinching veracity are patent in every line." The *Washington Capital* says that it places "Lincoln before the world as he really was." The *Commercial Gazette*, of Cincinnati, says: "He describes the life

of his friend Lincoln just as he saw it." The *Morning Call*, of San Francisco, affirms that it "contains the only true history of the lamented President." The *St. Louis Republic* says: "It will do more to shape the judgment of posterity on Mr. Lincoln's character than all that has been written or will be hereafter written."

In this work Mr. Herndon states in brief the substance of the articles already quoted in this chapter. I quote as follows:

"No man had a stronger or firmer faith in Providence—God—than Mr. Lincoln, but the continued use by him late in life of the word *God* must not be interpreted to mean that he believed in a personal God. In 1854 he asked me to erase the word *God* from a speech which I had written and read to him for criticism, because my language indicated a personal God, whereas he insisted that no such personality ever existed" (Life of Lincoln. pp. 445, 446).

"The world has always insisted on making an orthodox Christian of him, and to analyze his language or sound his belief is but to break the idol" (Ibid).

"The benevolence of his impulses, the seriousness of his convictions, and the nobility of his character, are evidences unimpeachable that his soul was ever filled with the exalted purity and the sublime faith of natural religion" (Ib.).

## CHAPTER VI.

TESTIMONY OF HON. WILLIAM H. HERNDON—UNPUBLISHED  
TESTIMONY.

Extracts from Herndon's Letters—The Books Lincoln Read—His Philosophy—His Infidelity—Refutation of Christian Claims—Attempts to Invalidate Herndon's Testimony—Reed's Calumnies—Vindication.

IN the preceding chapter has been submitted the evidence of Mr. Herndon that has already been published. In this chapter will be presented some hitherto unpublished testimony.

The writer corresponded with Mr. Herndon for many years. Much of this correspondence related to Abraham Lincoln, and no inconsiderable portion of it to the subject under consideration. Permission was granted by Mr. Herndon to use such parts of this correspondence as may be deemed of value. The limits of this work preclude the presentation of much that is really interesting, but no apology is needed for devoting space to the following extracts from his letters, written at various intervals between 1880 and 1890 :

“I was the personal friend of Mr. Lincoln from 1834 to the day of his death. In 1843 we entered

into a partnership which was never formally dissolved. When he became unpopular in this Congressional district because of his speeches on the Mexican war, I was faithful to him. When he espoused the antislavery cause and in the eyes of most men had hopelessly ruined his political prospects, I stood by him, and through the press defended his course. In these dark hours, by our unity of sentiment and by political ostracism we were driven to a close and enduring friendship. You should take it for granted, then, that I knew Mr. Lincoln well. During all this time, from 1834 to 1862, when I last saw him, he never intimated to me, either directly or indirectly, that he had changed his religious opinions. Had he done so—had he let drop one word or look in that direction, I should have detected it.

“I had an excellent private library, probably the best in the city for admired books. To this library Mr. Lincoln had, as a matter of course, full and free access at all times. I purchased such books as Locke, Kant, Fichte, Lewes; Sir Wm. Hamilton’s ‘Discussions on Philosophy;’ Spencer’s ‘First Principles,’ ‘Social Statics,’ etc.; Buckle’s ‘History of Civilization,’ and Lecky’s ‘History of Rationalism.’ I also possessed the works of Parker, Paine, Emerson, and Strauss; Gregg’s ‘Creed of Christendom,’ McNaught on Inspiration, Volney’s ‘Ruins,’ Feuerbach’s ‘Essence of Christianity,’ and other

works on Infidelity. Mr. Lincoln read some of these works. About the year 1843 he borrowed 'The Vestiges of Creation' of Mr. James W. Keys, of this city, and read it carefully. He subsequently read the sixth edition of this work, which I loaned him. Mr. Lincoln had always denied special creation, but from his want of education he did not know just what to believe. He adopted the progressive and development theory as taught more or less directly in that work. He despised speculation, especially in the metaphysical world. He was purely a practical man. He adopted Locke's notions as his system of mental philosophy, with some modifications to suit his own views. He held that reason drew her inferences as to law, etc., from observation, experience, and reflection on the facts and phenomena of nature. He was a pure sensationalist, except as above. He was a materialist in his philosophy. He denied dualism, and at times immortality in any sense.

"Before I wrote my Abbott letter I diligently searched through Lincoln's letters, speeches, state papers, etc., to find the word *immortality*, and I could not find it anywhere except in his letter to his father. The word *immortality* appears but once in his writings."

"If he had been asked the plain question, 'Do you *know* that a God exists?' he would have said: 'I do *not know* that a God exists.'"

“At one moment of his life I know that he was an Atheist. I was preparing a speech on Kansas, and in it, like nearly all reformers, I invoked *God*. He made me wipe out that word and substitute the word *Maker*, affirming that said *Maker* was a principle of the universe. When he went to Washington he did the same to a friend there.”

“Mr. Lincoln told me, over and over, that man has no freedom of will, or, as he termed it, ‘No man has a freedom of mind.’ He was in one sense a fatalist, and so died. He believed that he was under the thumb of Providence (which to him was but another name for fate). The longer he lived the more firmly he believed it, and hence his out invocations of God. But these invocations are no evidence to a rational mind that he adopted the blasphemy that God seduced his own daughter, begat a son on purpose to have mankind kill him, in order that he, God, might become reconciled to his own mistakes, according to the Christian view.”

“Lincoln would wait patiently on the flow and logic of events. He believed that conditions make the man and not man the conditions. Under his own hand he says: ‘I attempt no compliment to my own sagacity. I claim not to have controled events, but confess plainly that events have controled me.’ He believed in the supreme reign of law. This law *fated* things, as he would express it. Now, how

could a man be a Christian—could believe that Jesus Christ was God—could believe in the efficacy of prayer—and entertain such a belief?”

“He did not believe in the efficacy of prayer, although he used that conventional language. He said in Washington, ‘God has his own purposes.’ If God has his own purposes, then prayer will not change God’s purposes.”

“I have often said to you, and now repeat it, that Lincoln was a scientific Materialist, *i.e.*, that this was his tendency as opposed to the Spiritualistic idea. Lincoln always contended that general and universal laws ruled the universe—always did—do now—and ever will. He was an Agnostic generally, sometimes an Atheist.”

“That Mr. Lincoln was an Infidel from 1834 to 1861, I know, and that he remained one to the day of his death, I honestly believe. I always understood that he was an Infidel, sometimes bordering on Atheism. I never saw any change in the man, and the change could not have escaped my observation had it happened.”

“Lincoln’s task was a terrible one. When he took the oath of office his soul was bent on securing harmony among all the people of the North, and so he chose for his Cabinet officers his opponents for the Presidential candidacy in order and as a means of creating a united North. He let all parties, profes-

sions, and callings have their way where their wishes did not cut across his own. He was apparently pliant and supple. He ruled men when men thought they were ruling him. He often said to me that the Christian religion was a dangerous element to deal with when aroused. He saw in the Kansas affairs—in the whole history of slavery, in fact—its rigor and encroachments, that Christianity was aroused. It must be controlled, and that in the right direction. Hence he bent to it, fed it, and kept it within bounds, well knowing that it would crush his administration to atoms unless appeased. His oft and oft invocations of God, his conversations with Christians, his apparent respect for Christianity, etc., were all means to an end. And yet sometimes he showed that he hated its nasal whines.”

“A gentleman of veracity in Washington told me this story and vouched for its truthfulness: ‘A tall saddle-faced man,’ said he, ‘came to Washington to pray with Lincoln, having declared this to be his intention at the hotel. About 10 o’clock A.M. the bloodless man, dressed in black with white cravat, went to the White House, sent in his card, and was admitted. Lincoln glanced at the man and knew his motives in an instant. He said to him angrily: “What, have you, too, come to torment me with your prayers?” The man was squelched—said, “No,



Mr. Lincoln"—lied out and out. Lincoln spoiled those prayers.'"

"Mr. Lincoln was thought to be understood by the mob. But what a delusion! He was one of the most reticent men that ever lived. All of us—Stuart, Speed, Logan, Matheny, myself, and others, had to guess at much of the man. He was a mystery to the world—a sphinx to most men. One peculiarity of Mr. Lincoln was his irritability when anyone tried to peep into his own mind's laboratory. Considering all this, what can be thought of the stories about what he is said to have confided to strangers in regard to his religion?"

"Not one of Lincoln's old acquaintances in this city ever heard of his conversion to Christianity by Dr. Smith or anyone else. It was never suggested nor thought of here until after his death."

"I never saw him read a second of time in Dr. Smith's book on Infidelity. He threw it down upon our table—spit upon it as it were—and never opened it to my knowledge."

"My opinion is, from what I have heard and know, that these men—Gurley and Simpson—refused to be a party to a fraud on the public touching Lincoln's religion. I think that they understood each other the day that the remains of Lincoln were put to rest."

"Holland came into my office, in 1865, and asked

me this question : ‘ What about Mr. Lincoln’s Christianity ? ’ To this, I replied : ‘ The less said about it the better. ’ Holland then said to me, ‘ Oh, never mind, I’ll fix that, ’ and went over to Bateman and had it fixed. ”

“ Lincoln never revealed to Judge Davis, Judge Matheny, Joshua F. Speed, Joseph Gillespie, nor myself that he was a Christian, or that he had a change of heart, or anything like it, at any time. Now, taking into consideration the fact that he was one of the most non-communicative of men—that Bateman was, as it were, a mere stranger to him—that Bateman was frightened, excited, conscience-smitten when I approached him on the subject, and that in after years he confessed to me that his notes in Holland’s ‘ Life of Lincoln ’ were colored—taking all this into consideration, I say, can you believe Bateman’s story to be true ? ”

“ I see quoted frequently a supposed speech made by Mr. Lincoln to the colored people of Baltimore, on the presentation of a Bible to him. This supposed speech contains the following : ‘ All the good from the Savior of the world is communicated to us through this book. ’ This idea is false and foolish. What becomes of nine-tenths of the life of Jesus of which we have no history—nine-tenths of the great facts of this grand man’s life not recorded in this book ? Mr. Lincoln was full and exact in his

language. He never used the word Savior, unless in a conventional sense ; in fact, he never used the word at all. Again, he is made to say : ‘ But for this book we could not know right from wrong.’ The lowest organized life, I was about to say, knows right from wrong in its particular sphere. Every good dog that comes into possession of a bone, knows that that bone belongs to him, and he knows that it is wrong for another dog to rob him of it. He protests with bristling hair and glistening teeth against such dog robbery. It requires no revelation to teach him right from wrong in the dog world ; yet it requires a special revelation from God to teach us right from wrong in the human world. According to this speech, the dog has the advantage. But Mr. Lincoln never uttered such nonsense.”

“ I do think that anyone who knew Mr. Lincoln—his history—his philosophy—his opinions—and still asserts that he was a Christian, is an unbounded falsifier. I hate to speak thus plainly, but I cannot respect an untruthful man.”

“ Let me ask the Christian claimant a few questions. Do you mean to say, when you assert that Mr. Lincoln was a Christian, that he believed that Jesus was the Christ of God, as the evangelical world contends ? If so, where do you get your information ? Do you mean to say that Mr. Lincoln was a converted man and that he so declared ? If so,

where, when, and before whom did he declare or reveal it? Do you mean to say that Mr. Lincoln joined a church? If so, what church did he join, and when did he join it? Do you mean to say that Mr. Lincoln was a secret Christian, acting under the cloak of the devil to advance Christianity? If so, what is your authority? If you will tell me when it was that the Creator caught with his almighty arms, Abraham, and held him fast while he poured the oil of grace on his rebellious soul, then I will know when it was that he was converted from his Infidel views to Christianity."

"The best evidence this side of Lincoln's own written statement that he was an Infidel, if not an Atheist, as claimed by some, is the fact that he never mentions the name of Jesus. If he was a Christian it could be proved by his letters and speeches. That man is a poor defender of a principle, of a person, or of a thing, who never mentions that principle, person, or thing. I have never seen the name of Jesus mentioned by Mr. Lincoln."

"Mr. Lincoln never mentioned the name of Christ in his letters and speeches as a Christian. I have searched for such evidence, but could not find it. I have had others search, but they could not find it. This dead silence on the part of Mr. Lincoln is overwhelming proof that he was an unbeliever."

"While Lincoln frequently, in a conventional

way, appeals to God, he never appeals to Christ nor mentions him. I know that he at first maintained that Jesus was a bastard, and later that he was the son of Joseph and not of God."

"Lincoln was not a Christian in any sense other than that he lived a good life and was a noble man. If a good life constitutes one a Christian, then Mill and a million other men who repudiated and denied Christianity were Christians, for they lived good and noble lives."

"If Mr. Lincoln changed his religious views he owed it to me to warn me, as he above all other men caused me to be an unbeliever. He said nothing to me, intimated nothing to me, either directly or indirectly. He owed this debt to many young men whom he had led astray, if astray the Christian calls it. I know of two young men of promise, now dead and gone—gone into endless misery, according to the evangelical creed—caused by Mr. Lincoln's teachings. I know some of the living here, men in prominent positions of life, who were made unbelievers by him."

"One by one, these apocryphal stories go by the board. Courageous and remorseless criticism will wipe out all these things. There will not be a vestige of them in fifty years to laugh at or to weep at."

Mr. Herndon's testimony, even in the absence of

all other evidence, is conclusive. This was recognized by the Christian claimants after the appearance of his "Abbott Letter." They employed various measures to break the force of his testimony by trying to induce him either to retract or modify his statements. But they were not successful. He was not to be coaxed, he was not to be purchased, he was not to be intimidated. He had stated the truth and by the truth he proposed to stand. Foiled in these efforts, their last resort was to destroy his credibility as a witness by destroying his character. The most brazen falsehoods were invented and the most cruel calumnies circulated in order to crush him. Some of these stated that he was a drunkard, others that he was a pauper, and still others that he had become insane.

These defamatory statements were usually first noticed in some religious paper or periodical. From this they were naturally copied into the secular papers and sent broadcast over the land. Journalists who had once known Mr. Herndon, either personally or by reputation, were surprised and shocked at the announcements, and wrote articles like the following which appeared in a Kansas paper :

"Bill Herndon is a pauper in Springfield, Ill. He was once worth considerable property. His mind was the most argumentative of any of the old lawyers in the state, and his memory was extraordinary

For several years before Lincoln was nominated for the Presidency, Herndon was in some respects the most active member of the firm, preparing the greatest number of cases for trial and making elaborate arguments in their behalf. It is said that he worked hard with Lincoln in preparing the memorable speeches delivered by the man who afterward became President, during the debates between Lincoln and Douglas in 1858, and in constructing the Cooper Institute address delivered by Lincoln a short time before the war. Herndon, with all his attainments, was a man who now and then went on a spree. This habit became worse after Lincoln's death, and, like poor Dick Yates, he went down step by step till his old friends and associates point to him as a common drunkard."

I was in Springfield the very week that this article was published, and passed a day with Mr. Herndon at his home. I was prepared to testify, as all his neighbors were, that the charges it contained, together with others that were being circulated, were false. I knew that he still possessed a sound and vigorous intellect; I knew that he was in comfortable circumstances financially; I knew that he was an earnest advocate of temperance, and that he practiced what he preached; in short, I knew him to be a man of pure morals and exemplary character. At the very time that he was declared to be an in-

mate of the insane asylum, the Old Settlers' Society selected him to examine and report upon the correctness of the "History of Sangamon County," which, as it included a history of the capital of the state where, at one time or another, had resided a majority of Illinois's most gifted sons, was an important work, and one whose revision would not likely be intrusted to a lunatic. At the very time that he was said to be a pauper in the county poorhouse, he was entertaining such distinguished guests as William Lloyd Garrison. At the very time that he was reported to be a common drunkard, his neighbors had just appointed him guardian of the educational interests of their children.

All efforts to trace these slanders to their source and discover their author proved futile until 1880, when the writer of this saw in an Ohio paper an article on Lincoln, in which was quoted a portion of a letter which the contributor of the article stated had just been received from the Rev. J. A. Reed, of Springfield. It related wholly to Mr. Herndon, and did not contain one fair, truthful statement. In thirty brief lines were concentrated, in addition to several statements calculated and intended to deceive, no less than sixteen deliberate falsehoods, some of them of the most cruel and infamous character. It was evident that Reed had intended that the substance of his letter should be given to the



public without disclosing its authorship. But, thanks to the innocent credulity and indiscreetness of the friend to whom it was sent, the defamer was discovered and exposed. And this sneaking, cowardly assassin was the "defender of Lincoln's Christian faith!" Could the inanimate remains of Abraham Lincoln have been revived when this exposure was made, he would have arisen from his mausoleum at Oak Ridge, have come into the city, and have kicked this pretended "defender," this base calumniator of his beloved friend and associate, out of Springfield.

The cause of all the vituperation which for years had been heaped upon Mr. Herndon was now apparent. He had replied to Reed's lecture, and openly, honestly, and courteously, but effectively, refuted it; and because the latter could not come forward with a successful rejoinder, he was thus heartlessly and covertly plunging a dagger into the reputation of his chivalrous opponent.

The intercession of friends secured for the culprit immunity from arrest for libel, but in the newspapers of his city he received such a castigation as he will not soon forget. The *Daily Monitor*, in an editorial replying to the slanders that were being circulated concerning Mr. Herndon, said:

"Mr. Herndon is not a pauper, is not a drunkard; whisky did not ruin him, and, in a word, the whole

thing is a lie. Mr. Herndon lives on his farm near this city. He is a great admirer of nature, loves flowers, and spends his whole time on the farm, except when doing his trading, or coming into the city to see his children and grandchildren. He don't drink, he don't chew tobacco, he don't gamble, he is honorable and truthful, and he is highly respected by his fellow-citizens. He is a great reader, a great thinker, loves his neighbors and his neighbors love him. He has a great, big, kind heart for his fellow-man in distress, and, while never worth 'considerable property,' he has always had enough for his generous purposes. Just why this thing should be allowed we are at a loss to know, and have waited to see if some of those who profess so much of the Christ-like in their composition would not have enough of the man-like to be men, and not allow a good and true man as Mr. Herndon is to be thus infamously maligned and belied by those whose works in the salvation of men would have more effect if more akin to Christ in practice."

After a life of honest toil, much of it in behalf of the poor and the weak, without reward and without the expectation of reward, to be in his old age thus shamefully robbed of his good name, was an outrage almost without a parallel, save in the treatment received by Thomas Paine. That Mr. Herndon was keenly sensitive to this great wrong is disclosed by

the tone of his letters written at the time. In one he says: "I have done nothing in the spirit of self-laudation. I prefer moving down the grooves of time unnoticed and unknown, except to friends. I have no ambition for fame or money. My ambition is to try to do good. I spent ten or more years of my best life for the negro, liberty, and union, not forgetting Kansas and her brave people. But let it all go; I make no complaint. I try to live a moral and a manly life, love my fellow man, love freedom, love justice, and would die for the eternal right."

As an index of public sentiment in the community where the defamed and the defamer resided, I will state two facts. On a pleasant September evening, in 1882, I attended Dr. Reed's church in Springfield. In that commodious edifice, built to accommodate an audience of nearly one thousand, I found assembled to listen to this renowned "defender of Lincoln's Christian faith," an audience of forty-four persons. About the same time, in the published report of a public meeting held near Springfield, appeared the following: "Five thousand people hovered around the speaker's stand for the purpose of listening to the able, eloquent, and well-known Hon. W. H. Herndon."

It has been charged that Mr. Herndon's statements concerning Lincoln's unbelief were inspired by a spirit of revenge in consequence of Lincoln's not

having recognized him with an appointment. This charge and this assumption are both false. There is now on file at Washington and at Springfield a telegram from Lincoln tendering him a judgeship, which he declined.

To know Lincoln was to love him. None knew him better than Mr. Herndon, and none entertained a deeper affection for his memory. In a letter to me, dated Nov. 4, 1881, he pays this tribute to his dead friend:

“Some people say that Mr. Lincoln was an ungrateful man. This is not true, and especially when applied to myself. He was always kind, tender, and grateful to me—clung to me with hooks of steel. I know that I was true to him. It is said that no man is great to his valet. If I was Mr. Lincoln’s valet, the rule does not apply in this case, for my opinion of him is too well known. His was a grand, noble, true, and manly life. He dreamed dreams of glory, and glory was justly his. He was growing and expanding to the day of his death. He was slow in his development, but strong and big when he did come. The last letter which I ever received from him concluded thus: ‘God bless you, says your friend.—*A. Lincoln.*’ He felt what he expressed, and in return I say, *God bless you, Lincoln.*”

## CHAPTER VII.

## TESTIMONY OF COL. WARD H. LAMON.

Lamon's "Life of Lincoln"—Lincoln's Early Skepticism—His Investigations at New Salem—His Book on Infidelity—His Religious Opinions Remain Unchanged—Holland's Condemnation of Lamon's Work—Holland's and Lamon's Works Compared.

IN 1872, seven years after the President's assassination, appeared the "Life of Abraham Lincoln," written by Col. Ward H. Lamon. As a faithful record of the life of one of the most sublime characters in the world's history, this work stands unrivaled. More accomplished writers have written biography—have written the biography of Lincoln. But no writer has ever been more thoroughly informed respecting his subject, and no writer has ever made a more conscientious use of the information in his possession than has Colonel Lamon in his "Life of Lincoln." In Illinois he was the friend and confidant of Lincoln. When the time approached for Lincoln to take the Executive chair, and the journey from Springfield to Washington was deemed a dangerous undertaking, to Colonel Lamon was intrusted the responsible duty of conducting him to the national

capital. During the eventful years that followed, he remained at the President's side, holding an important official position in the District of Columbia. When Lincoln died, at the great funeral pageant in Washington, he led the civic procession, and was, with Major General Hunter and Judge David Davis, selected to convey the remains to their final resting-place at Springfield.

The following extract, from the preface to his work, shows what an inexhaustible mine of materials he had with which to prepare a full and authentic record of Lincoln's life and character :

“At the time of Mr. Lincoln's death, I determined to write his history, as I had in my possession much valuable material for such a purpose. . . . Early in 1869, Mr. Herndon placed at my disposal his remarkable collection of materials—the richest, rarest, and fullest collection it was possible to conceive. . . . Mr. Herndon had been the partner in business and the intimate personal associate of Mr. Lincoln for something like a quarter of a century; and Mr. Lincoln had lived familiarly with several members of his family long before their individual acquaintance began. New Salem, Springfield, the old judicial circuit, the habits and friends of Mr. Lincoln, were as well known to Mr. Herndon as to himself. With these advantages, and from the numberless facts and hints which had dropped from

Mr. Lincoln during the confidential intercourse of an ordinary lifetime, Mr. Herndon was able to institute a thorough system of inquiry for every noteworthy circumstance and every incident of value in Mr. Lincoln's career. The fruits of Mr. Herndon's labors are garnered in three enormous volumes of original manuscripts and a mass of unarranged letters and papers. They comprise the recollections of Mr. Lincoln's nearest friends; of the surviving members of his family and his family-connections; of the men still living who knew him and his parents in Kentucky; of his schoolfellows, neighbors, and acquaintances in Indiana; of the better part of the whole population of New Salem; of his associates and relatives at Springfield; and of lawyers, judges, politicians, and statesmen everywhere, who had anything of interest or moment to relate. They were collected at vast expense of time, labor, and money, involving the employment of many agents, long journeys, tedious examinations, and voluminous correspondence. Upon the value of these materials it would be impossible to place an estimate. That I have used them conscientiously and justly is the only merit to which I lay claim."

Lamon's evidence concerning Lincoln's unbelief is complete and unanswerable. He did not present it because he was himself an unbeliever and wished to support his views with the prestige of Lincoln's

great name. While the Freethinker regards Lincoln's rejection of Christianity as in the highest degree meritorious—a proof of his strong logical acumen, his sterling common sense, and his broad humanity—Lamon considered it a grave defect in his character. He states the fact because it is a fact, and because the purpose of his work is to disclose and not conceal the facts of Lincoln's life. If he devotes considerable space to the subject, and exhibits a special earnestness in its presentation, the misrepresentations of Lincoln's Christian biographers have furnished a reasonable pretext for it.

In the pages immediately following will be given the individual testimony of Colonel Lamon :

“Any analysis of Mr. Lincoln's character would be defective that did not include his religious opinions. On such matters he thought deeply, and his opinions were positive. But perhaps no phase of his character has been more persistently misrepresented and variously misunderstood, than this of his religious belief. Not that the conclusive testimony of many of his intimate associates relative to his frequent expressions on such subjects has ever been wanting; but his great prominence in the world's history, and his identification with some of the great questions of our time, which, by their moral import, were held to be eminently religious in their character, have led many good people to trace in his



motives and actions similar convictions to those held by themselves. His extremely general expressions of religious faith called forth by the grave exigencies of his public life, or indulged in on occasions of private condolence, have too often been distorted out of relation to their real significance or meaning to suit the opinions or tickle the fancies of individuals or parties.

“ Mr. Lincoln was never a member of any church, nor did he believe in the divinity of Christ, or the inspiration of the Scriptures in the sense understood by evangelical Christians ” (Life of Lincoln, p. 486).

Holland and other Christian biographers have represented Lincoln as a youth of extreme piety, whose constant companion was the Bible. The concurrent testimony of the friends of his boyhood compels Colonel Lamont to affirm that the reverse of this is true—that Lincoln, at an early age, was noted for his skepticism. He says:

“ When a boy, he showed no sign of that piety which his many biographers ascribe to his manhood. . . . When he went to church at all, he went to mock, and came away to mimic ” (Ibid, pp. 486, 487).

“ At an early age he began to attend the ‘ preachings ’ roundabout, but principally at the Pigeon Creek church, with a view to catching whatever might be ludicrous in the preacher’s air or matter,

and making it the subject of mimicry as soon as he could collect an audience of idle boys and men to hear him. A pious stranger, passing that way on a Sunday morning, was invited to preach for the Pigeon Creek congregation; but he banged the boards of the old pulpit, and bellowed and groaned so wonderfully, that Abe could hardly contain his mirth. This memorable sermon was a great favorite with him; and he frequently reproduced it with nasal tones, rolling eyes, and all manner of droll aggravations, to the great delight of Nat Grigsby and the wild fellows whom Nat was able to assemble" (Ib., p. 55).

"His chronicles were many, and on a great variety of subjects. They were written, as his early admirers love to tell us, 'in the Scriptural style;' but those we have betray a very limited acquaintance with the model" (Ib., p. 63).

Of his Freethought reading and theological investigations at New Salem, and his book on Infidelity, Lamon says:

"When he came to New Salem, he consorted with Freethinkers, joined with them in deriding the gospel history of Jesus, read Volney and Paine, and then wrote a deliberate and labored essay, wherein he reached conclusions similar to theirs. The essay was burnt, but he never denied or regretted its composition. On the contrary, he made it the sub-

ject of free and frequent conversations with his friends at Springfield, and stated, with much particularity and precision, the origin, arguments, and objects of the work" (Ib., p. 487).

"The community in which he lived was pre-eminently a community of Freethinkers in matters of religion; and it was then no secret, nor has it been a secret since, that Mr. Lincoln agreed with the majority of his associates in denying to the Bible the authority of divine revelation. It was his honest belief, a belief which it was no reproach to hold at New Salem, Anno Domini 1834, and one which he never thought of concealing. It was no distinction, either good or bad, no honor, and no shame. But he had made himself thoroughly familiar with the writings of Paine and Volney—the 'Ruins' by the one, and 'The Age of Reason' by the other. His mind was full of the subject, and he felt an itching to write. He did write, and the result was a little book. It was probably merely an extended essay, but it is ambitiously spoken of as 'a book' by himself and by the persons who were made acquainted with its contents. In this work he intended to demonstrate—

"'First, that the Bible was not God's revelation;

"'Secondly, that Jesus was not the son of God.'

"No leaf of this little volume has survived. Mr. Lincoln carried it in manuscript to the store of Mr.

Samuel Hill, where it was read and discussed. Hill was himself an unbeliever, but his son considered his book 'infamous.' It is more than probable that Hill, being a warm personal friend of Lincoln, feared that the publication of the essay would some day interfere with the political advancement of his favorite. At all events, he snatched it out of his hand, and thrust it into the fire, from which not a shred escaped" (Ib., pp. 157, 158).

Colonel Lamon is confident that while Lincoln finally ceased to openly promulgate his Freethought opinions, he never abandoned them. He says :

"As he grew older, he grew more cautious ; and as his New Salem associates, and the aggressive Deists with whom he originally united at Springfield, gradually dispersed, or fell away from his side, he appreciated more and more keenly the violence and extent of the religious prejudices which freedom in discussion from his standpoint would be sure to arouse against him. He saw the immense and augmenting power of the churches, and in times past had practically felt it. The imputation of Infidelity had seriously injured him in several of his earlier political contests ; and, sobered by age and experience, he was resolved that that same imputation should injure him no more. Aspiring to lead religious communities, he foresaw that he must not appear as an enemy within their gates ; aspiring to

public honors under the auspices of a political party which persistently summoned religious people to assist in the extirpation of that which is denounced as the 'nation's sin,' he foresaw that he could not ask their suffrages whilst aspersing their faith. He perceived no reason for changing his convictions, but he did perceive many good and cogent reasons for not making them public" (Ib., pp. 497, 498).

"But he never told anyone that he accepted Jesus as the Christ, or performed a single one of the acts which necessarily follow upon such a conviction. At Springfield and at Washington he was beset on the one hand by political priests, and on the other by honest and prayerful Christians. He despised the former, respected the latter, and had use for both. He said with characteristic irreverence that he would not undertake to 'run the churches by military authority;' but he was, nevertheless, alive to the importance of letting the churches 'run' themselves in the interest of his party. Indefinite expressions about 'Divine Providence,' the 'Justice of God,' 'the favor of the Most High,' were easy, and not inconsistent with his religious notions. In this, accordingly, he indulged freely; but never in all that time did he let fall from his lips or his pen an expression which remotely implied the slightest faith in Jesus as the son of God and the Savior of men" (Ib., p. 502).

Lamon was Lincoln's intimate and trusted friend at Washington, and had he changed his belief, his biographer, as well as Noah Brooks and the Illinois clergyman, would have been in possession of the fact.

In 1851 Lincoln wrote a letter of consolation to his dying father, in which he counseled him to "confide in our great and good and merciful Maker." This letter was given to the public by Mr. Herndon, and has been cited by the orthodox to prove that Lincoln was a believer. Adverting to this letter Lamon says :

"If ever there was a moment when Mr. Lincoln might have been expected to express his faith in the atonement, his trust in the merits of a living Redeemer, it was when he undertook to send a composing and comforting message to a dying man. . . . But he omitted it wholly. He did not even mention the name of Jesus, or intimate the most distant suspicion of the existence of a Christ" (Ibid., p. 497).

Lincoln's mind was not entirely free from superstition, but though born and reared in Christendom, the superstitious element in his nature was not essentially Christian. His fatalistic ideas, so characteristic of the faith of Islam, have already been mentioned by Mr. Herndon, and are thus referred to by Colonel Lamon :

“Mr. Lincoln was by no means free from a kind of belief in the supernatural. . . . He lived constantly in the serious conviction that he was himself the subject of a special decree, made by some unknown and mysterious power, for which he had no name” (Ibid., p. 503).

“His mind was filled with gloomy forebodings and strong apprehensions of impending evil, mingled with extravagant visions of personal grandeur and power. His imagination painted a scene just beyond the veil of the immediate future, gilded with glory yet tarnished with blood. It was his ‘destiny’—splendid but dreadful, fascinating but terrible. His case bore little resemblance to those of religious enthusiasts like Bunyan, Cowper, and others. His was more like the delusion of the fatalist conscious of his star” (Ibid., p. 475).

When Lamon’s work appeared, Holland, backed by the Christian element generally, fell upon it like a savage and sought, as far as possible, to suppress it. Lamon had committed an unpardonable offense. He had declared to the world that Lincoln had died a disbeliever, and, what was worse, he had proved it. Holland’s attack was made in an eight-column review of Lamon’s “Life,” which was published in *Scribner’s Monthly*, for August, 1872. In order to give an air of candor and judicial fairness to his veno-

mous criticisms, he opens with this flattering recognition of its merits :

“It is not difficult to see how Colonel Lamon, who during Mr. Lincoln’s Presidency held an office in the District of Columbia, which must have brought him into somewhat frequent intercourse with the President, and who, indeed, had come with him from Springfield to the Capital, should feel that there rested on him a certain biographical duty. And certainly he was in possession of a mass of material so voluminous, so original, and so fresh that in this respect at least his fitness for the work was remarkably complete. Moreover, Mr. W. H. Herndon, who was Mr. Lincoln’s partner in the practice of the law at Springfield, and was, of course, closely intimate with his partner in a business way, . . . added to Colonel Lamon’s material the valuable documents which he had himself collected, and the memoranda which, with painstaking and lawyer-like ability, he had recorded from the oral testimony of living witnesses.

“As far as the story of Mr. Lincoln’s childhood and early life is concerned, down to the time when his political life began, it has never been told so fully, with such spirit and zest, and with such evident accuracy, as by Colonel Lamon.”

Nearly the entire review is devoted to a denunciation of Lamon’s exposition of Lincoln’s religious



opinions. He repeatedly pronounces this "an outrage on decency," and characterizes Lincoln's Free-thought companions as "heathen," "barbarians," and "savages." The review concludes as follows:

"The violent and reckless prejudice, and the utter want of delicacy and even of decency by which the book is characterized, in such instances as this, will more than counterbalance the value of its new material, its fresh and vigorous pictures of Western life and manners, and its familiar knowledge of the 'inside politics' of Mr. Lincoln's administration, and will even make its publication (by the famous publishers whose imprint imparts to it a prestige and authority which its authorship would fail to give) something like a national misfortune. In some quarters it will be readily received as the standard life of the good President. It is all the more desirable that the criticism upon it should be prompt and unsparing."

Christianity must have the support of Lincoln's great name. To secure it Holland is willing to misrepresent the honest convictions of Lincoln's lifetime, to traduce the characters of his dearest friends, and to rob a brother author and a publisher of their just reward.

Lamon states that during the last years of Lincoln's life he ceased to proclaim his Infidel opinions because they were unpopular. Referring to this

statement, Holland says: "The eagerness with which this volume strives to cover Mr. Lincoln's memory with an imputation so detestable is one of the most pitiable exhibitions which we have lately witnessed."

This outburst of righteous indignation, coming from the source it does, is peculiarly refreshing. To appreciate it, we have only to open Holland's work, and read such passages as the following: "I am obliged to appear different to them." "It was one of the peculiarities of Mr. Lincoln to hide these religious [Christian] experiences from the eyes of the world." "Who had never in their whole lives heard from his lips one word of all these religious convictions and experiences." "They [his friends] did not regard him as a religious man." "All this department of his life he had kept carefully hidden from them." "There was much of his conduct that was simply a cover to these thoughts—an effort to conceal them" (Holland's *Life of Lincoln*, pp. 239, 240).

Consummate hypocrisy in a Christian is all right with this moralist; but for a Freethinker to withhold his views from an intolerant religious world is a detestable crime.

As a biographer of Lincoln, Holland possessed many advantages over Lamon. His work was written and published immediately after the awful trag-

edy, when almost the entire reading public was deeply interested in everything that pertained to Lincoln's life. So far as Lincoln's religious views are concerned, he advocated the popular side of the question; for while those outside of the church cared but little about the matter, the church desired the influence of his great name, and was ready to reward those who assisted her in obtaining it. Holland, too, had an established reputation as an author—had nearly as large a class of readers as any writer in this country. His name alone was sufficient to guarantee a large circulation to any book he might produce. Lamon, on the other hand, possessed but a single advantage over his rival, that of having the truth on his side. And while "truth is mighty," and will in the end prevail, yet how often is it "crushed to earth" and for the time obscured. In view of all this, it is not strange that the public should be so slow to reject the fictions of Holland and accept the facts of Lamon.

That Lamon's "Life of Lincoln" is wholly undeserving of adverse criticism, is not claimed. He has, perhaps, given undue prominence to some matters connected with Lincoln's private affairs which might with propriety have been consigned to oblivion. A larger manifestation of charity, too, for the imperfections of those with whom Lincoln mingled, especially in the humbler walks of life,

would not have detracted from its merit. And yet, those who desire to know Lincoln as he really was, should read Lamon rather than Holland. In Lamon's work, Lincoln's character is a rugged oak, towering above its fellows and clothed in nature's livery ; in Holland's work, it is a dead tree with the bark taken off, the knots planed down, and varnished.

In the *New York World* appeared the following just estimate of these two biographies :

“ Mr. Ward H. Lamon is the author of one ‘ Life of Lincoln,’ and Dr. J. G. Holland is the author of another. Mr. Lamon was the intimate personal and political friend of Mr. Lincoln, trusting and trusted, from the time of their joint practice in the Illinois Quarter Sessions to the moment of Mr. Lincoln's death at Washington. Dr. Holland was nothing to Mr. Lincoln—neither known nor knowing. Dr. Holland rushed his ‘ Life’ from the press before the disfigured corpse was fairly out of sight, while the public mind lingered with horror over the details of the tragedy, and, excited by morbid curiosity, was willing to pay for its gratification. Mr. Lamon waited many years, until all adventitious interest had subsided, and then with incredible labor and pains, produced a volume founded upon materials which for their fulness, variety, and seeming authenticity are unrivaled in the history of biographies.

Dr. Holland's single volume professed to cover the whole of Mr. Lincoln's career. Mr. Lamon's single volume was modestly confined to a part of it. Dr. Holland's was an easy, graceful, off-hand performance, having but the one slight demerit of being in all essential particulars untrue from beginning to end. Mr. Lamon's was a labored, cautious, and carefully verified narrative which seems to have been accepted by disinterested critics as entirely authentic.

"Dr. Holland would probably be very much shocked if anybody should ask him to bear false witness in favor of his neighbor in a court of justice, but he takes up his pen to make a record which he hopes and intends shall endure forever, and in that record deliberately bears false witness in favor of a public man whom he happened to admire, with no kind of offense to his serene and 'cultured' conscience. If this were all—if Dr. Holland merely asserted his own right to compose and publish elaborate fictions on historical subjects—we might comfort ourselves with the reflection that such literature is likely to be as evanescent as it is dishonest, and let him pass in silence. But this is not all. He maintains that it is everybody's duty to help him to deceive the public and to write down his more conscientious competitor. He turns up the nose of 'culture' and curls the lip of 'art' at

Mr. Lamon's homely narrative of facts, and gravely insists that all other noses and all other lips shall be turned up and curled because his are. He implores the public, which he insulted and gulled with his own book, to damn Mr. Lamon's, and he puts his request on the very ground that Mr. Lamon has stupidly gone and narrated undeniable truths, whereby he has demolished an empty shrine that was profitable to many, and broken a painted idol that might have served for a god.

“The names of Holland and Lamon are not of themselves and by themselves illustrious; but starting from the title-pages of the two Lives of Lincoln, and representing, as they do, the two schools of biography writers, the one stands for a principle and the other for the want of it.”

## CHAPTER VIII.

TESTIMONY OF HON. JOHN T. STUART AND COL. JAMES  
H. MATHENY.

Testimony of Hon. John T. Stuart—Testimony of Col. James H. Matheny—Stuart's Disclaimer—Matheny's Disclaimer—Examination and Authorship of Disclaimers, Including the Edwards and Lewis Letters.

BESIDES his own testimony concerning Lincoln's unbelief, Colonel Lamon cites the testimony of ten additional witnesses: Hon. Wm. H. Herndon, Hon. John T. Stuart, Col. James H. Matheny, Dr. C. H. Ray, Wm. H. Hannah, Esq., Mr. Jas. W. Keys, Hon. Jesse W. Fell, Col. John G. Nicolay, Hon. David Davis and Mrs. Mary Lincoln. The testimony of Mr. Herndon having already been presented, the testimony of Mr. Stuart and Colonel Matheny will next be given. This testimony was procured by Mr. Herndon for the purpose of refuting the erroneous statements of Dr. Holland.

Hon. John T. Stuart, who was for a time a member of Congress from Illinois, was the first law partner of Lincoln. He says:

“Lincoln went further against Christian beliefs and doctrines and principles than any man I ever

heard: he shocked me. I don't remember the exact line of his argument—suppose it was against the inherent defects, so called, of the Bible, and on grounds of reason. Lincoln always denied that Jesus was the Christ of God—denied that Jesus was the son of God, as understood and maintained by the Christian church. The Rev. Dr. Smith, who wrote a letter, tried to convert Lincoln from Infidelity so late as 1858, and couldn't do it" (Lamon's Life of Lincoln, p. 488).

Col. James H. Matheny was one of Lincoln's most intimate friends, and was for many years his chief political manager. He testifies as follows :

"I knew Mr. Lincoln as early as 1834-7; know he was an Infidel. He and W. D. Herndon used to talk Infidelity in the Clerk's office in this city, about the years 1837-40. Lincoln attacked the Bible and the New Testament on two grounds: first, from the inherent or apparent contradictions under its lids; second, from the grounds of reason. Sometimes he ridiculed the Bible and the New Testament, sometimes seemed to scoff it, though I shall not use that word in its full and literal sense. I never heard that Lincoln changed his views, though his personal and political friend from 1834 to 1860. Sometimes Lincoln bordered on Atheism. He went far that way and shocked me. I was then a young man, and believed what my good mother told me. Stuart and



Lincoln's office was in what is called Hoffman's Row, on North Fifth street, near the public square. It was in the same building as the Clerk's office, and on the same floor. Lincoln would come into the Clerk's office, where I and some young men—Evan Butler, Newton Francis and others—were writing or staying, and would bring the Bible with him; would read a chapter, argue against it. Lincoln then had a smattering of geology, if I recollect it. Lincoln often, if not wholly, was an Atheist; at least, bordered on it. Lincoln was enthusiastic in his Infidelity. As he grew older, he grew more discreet, didn't talk much before strangers about his religion; but to friends, close and bosom ones, he was always open and avowed, fair and honest; but to strangers, he held them off from policy. Lincoln used to quote Burns. Burns helped Lincoln to be an Infidel, as I think; at least he found in Burns a like thinker and feeler.

“From what I know of Mr. Lincoln and his views of Christianity, and from what I know as honest, well-founded rumor; from what I have heard his best friends say and regret for years; from what he never denied when accused, and from what Lincoln has hinted and intimated, to say no more, he did write a little book on Infidelity, at or near New Salem, in Menard county, about the year 1834 or 1835. I have stated these things to you often.

Judge Logan, John T. Stuart, yourself, know what I know, and some of you more.

“ Mr. Herndon, you insist on knowing something which you know I possess, and got as a secret, and that is, about Lincoln’s little book on Infidelity. Mr. Lincoln *did* tell me that he *did* write a little book on Infidelity. This statement I have avoided heretofore; but, as you strongly insist upon it—probably to defend yourself against charges of misrepresentations—I give it to you as I got it from Lincoln’s mouth ” (Life of Lincoln, pp. 487, 488).

The evidence of Stuart and Matheny, as recorded in Lamon’s work, having been presented, it is now proper to state that this evidence has, in a measure, been repudiated by them. Dr. Reed, in his lecture, produced letters from them disclaiming in part or modifying the statements imputed to them. Dr. Reed says: “ I have been amazed to find that the principal persons whose testimony is given in this book to prove that their old friend lived and died an Infidel, never wrote a word of it, and never gave it as their opinion or allowed it to be published as covering their estimate of Mr. Lincoln’s life and religious views.” Alluding to Stuart’s evidence, he says: “ Mr. Lamon has attributed to Mr. Stuart testimony the most disparaging and damaging to Mr. Lincoln’s character and opinions—testimony which Mr. Stuart utterly repudiates, both as to

language and sentiment." Regarding Matheny's testimony, he says: "Mr. Matheny testifies that he never wrote a word of what is attributed to him; that it is not a fair representation of either his language or his opinions, and that he never would have allowed such an article to be published as covering his estimate of Mr. Lincoln's life and character."

The following is the disclaimer of Mr. Stuart:

"Springfield, Dec. 17th, 1872.

"Rev. J. A. Reed:

"Dear Sir—

"My attention has been called to a statement in relation to the religious opinions of Mr. Lincoln, purporting to have been made by me, and published in Lamon's 'Life of Lincoln.' The language of that statement is not mine; it was not written by me, and I did not see it until it was in print. I was once interviewed on the subject of Mr. Lincoln's religious opinions, and doubtless said that Mr. Lincoln was in the earlier part of his life an Infidel. I could not have said that 'Dr. Smith tried to convert Lincoln from Infidelity so late as 1858, and couldn't do it.' In relation to that point I stated, in the same conversation, some facts which are omitted in that statement, and which I will briefly repeat. That Eddie, a child of Mr. Lincoln, died in 1848 or 1849, and that he and his wife were in deep grief on the

account. That Dr. Smith, then pastor of the First Presbyterian church of Springfield, at the suggestion of a lady friend of theirs, called upon Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln, and that first visit resulted in great intimacy and friendship between them, lasting till the death of Mr. Lincoln, and continuing with Mrs. Lincoln till the death of Dr. Smith. I stated that I had heard at the time that Dr. Smith and Mr. Lincoln had much discussion in relation to the truth of the Christian religion, and that Dr. Smith had furnished Mr. Lincoln with books to read on that subject, and among others one which had been written by himself, sometime previous, on Infidelity; and that Dr. Smith claimed that after this investigation Mr. Lincoln had changed his opinions, and became a believer in the truth of the Christian religion; that Mr. Lincoln and myself never conversed upon that subject, and I had no personal knowledge as to his alleged change of opinion. I stated, however, that it was certainly true that up to that time Mr. Lincoln had never regularly attended any place of religious worship, but that after that time he rented a pew in the First Presbyterian church, and with his family constantly attended the worship in that church until he went to Washington as President. This much I said at the time, and I can now add that the Hon. Ninian W. Edwards, the brother-in-law of Mr. Lincoln, has, within a few days, informed

me that when Mr. Lincoln commenced attending the First Presbyterian church he admitted to him that his views had undergone the change claimed by Dr. Smith. I would further say that Dr. Smith was a man of great ability, and on theological and metaphysical subjects had few superiors and not many equals. Truthfulness was a prominent trait in Mr. Lincoln's character, and it would be impossible for any intimate friend of his to believe that he ever aimed to deceive, either by his words or his conduct.

“Yours truly,

“John T. Stuart.”

Col. Matheny's disclaimer is as follows :

“Springfield, Dec. 16th, 1872.

“Rev. J. A. Reed :

“Dear Sir—

“The language attributed to me in Lamon's book is not from my pen. I did not write it, and it does not express my sentiments of Mr. Lincoln's entire life and character. It is a mere collection of sayings gathered from private conversations that were only true of Mr. Lincoln's earlier life. I would not have allowed such an article to be printed over my signature as covering my opinion of Mr. Lincoln's life and religious sentiments. While I do believe Mr. Lincoln to have been an Infidel in his former life, when his mind was as yet unformed, and his

associations principally with rough and skeptical men, yet I believe he was a very different man in later life, and that after associating with a different class of men and investigating the subject, he was a firm believer in the Christian religion.

“ Yours truly,

“ Jas. H. Matheny.”

This disclosure startles you, my dear reader. But be patient. I will show you that this apparently mortal thrust of Dr. Reed's was made, not with a lance, but with a boomerang.

When Reed made his assault upon Lamon's witnesses, all stood firm but two—two old Springfield politicians whose political aspirations had not yet become extinct—John T. Stuart and James H. Matheny. These men had been among the first to testify in regard to Lincoln's unbelief. His Christian biographers had misrepresented his religious views; they believed that the fraud ought to be exposed, and they were ready and willing to aid in the work. Their testimony exhibits a frankness that is truly commendable. They knew that lying was a vice, but they did not know that truth-telling was a crime. They had yet to learn that the church tolerates murder more readily than the promulgation of a truth that is antagonistic to her creed. But this fact they were destined to learn. Lamon's work had scarcely been issued from the press before he

was anathematized and his book proscribed. The merciless attack that had already been commenced upon Herndon portended danger to them. Nor had they long to wait. In December, 1872, they were approached by Reed and his coadjutors. They were informed that the idol which their ruthless iconoclasm had helped to break must be repaired. They were given to understand that if they repented of the part they had performed and recanted, peace would be their portion here and endless bliss hereafter; but that if they did not, endless misery would begin on Jan. 1, A.D. 1873.

The situation was critical. They did not like to tell the world that they had borne false witness against the dead, nor did they, any more than Galileo, wish to wear a martyr's crown. A compromise was finally effected. It was incidentally ascertained by Reed that their evidence as presented by Lamont was not originally given in the shape of a letter or a written statement, but orally. A happy thought suggested itself—one worthy of the unscrupulous theological pettifogger that he is. The thought was this: "Say to the public, or rather let me say it for you, that you did not *write* a word of the testimony attributed to you." Just as a witness in court might point to the stenographer's report of his testimony and say, "I did not write a word of that."

In addition to this, Mr. Stuart, in endeavoring to

explain away, as far as possible, the obnoxious character of his testimony, declared that some things which he did say at the time his testimony was given had been omitted ; while something he did not say was inserted. They were both trivial matters, hardly worthy of notice, even if true, and having no especial bearing upon the case. But they served an admirable purpose in enabling Reed to say that the testimony adduced by Lamon was "abridged and distorted."

Stuart's disclaimer, then, divested of its misleading verbiage, contains but two points. In the first place, he says: "I could not have said that 'Dr. Smith tried to convert Lincoln from Infidelity so late as 1858, and couldn't do it.'" This sentence, like everything else in these disclaimers, is cunningly worded and intended to deceive. One would naturally suppose the idea he intends to convey is that he never declared that Dr. Smith tried to convert Lincoln and couldn't do it. This, it has been ascertained, is not his meaning. What he means is this: "I could not have said that 'Dr. Smith tried to convert Lincoln from Infidelity, *so late as* 1858, and couldn't do it.'" His denial is a mere quibble about a date. He did undoubtedly say just what he is reported to have said. But admitting a doubt, and giving him the benefit of this doubt, by throwing out the disputed date, the passage is not less damaging



than it was before: "Dr. Smith tried to convert Lincoln from Infidelity, and couldn't do it." But let us omit the entire sentence, and the testimony of Mr. Stuart that remains, about which there is no dispute, that portion of his testimony which he admits to be correct—is as follows:

"Lincoln went further against Christian beliefs and doctrines and principles than any man I ever heard; he shocked me. I don't remember the exact line of his argument; suppose it was against the inherent defects, so called, of the Bible, and on grounds of reason. Lincoln always denied that Jesus was the Christ of God—denied that Jesus was the Son of God, as understood and maintained by the Christian church."

In the second place, Mr. Stuart complains that the rumors concerning Dr. Smith's attempted conversion of Lincoln which he had mentioned to Mr. Herndon at the time of giving his testimony, were omitted. They were, and very properly, too. Mr. Stuart, or any other good lawyer, would have omitted them. Mr. Herndon desired him to testify about what he *knew*, and not about what he had *heard*, especially as he was going to headquarters in regard to these rumors. He wrote to Dr. Smith himself about them, received his testimony, and gave it to the public.

Stuart affects to believe that this story, which

Ninian Edwards is dragged around by Reed to verify, may possibly have been true. But in the same sentence, he refutes this idea, and refutes the claim itself, by saying: "I had no personal knowledge as to his alleged change of opinion." Stuart was a family connection of Lincoln, and if Lincoln had been converted, he, as well as every other person in Springfield, would have known it.

He states that Dr. Smith's first visit to Lincoln was "at the suggestion of a lady friend." To have avoided another glaring contradiction in the evidence of his witnesses, Reed should have had Major Stuart state that this "lady friend" was Thomas Lewis. As it is, the account given by Stuart of Dr. Smith's first visit and acquaintance with Lincoln is entirely at variance with the account given by Mr. Lewis in his letter, quoted in chapter I.

Mr. Stuart evidently entertained no very kind opinion of Colonel Lamon's work, and this made him all the more disposed to accede to Reed's demands. His position on the slavery question, for a time, was one which, in the light of subsequent events, he had no reason to be proud of, and Lamon in narrating the acts of Lincoln's life found it necessary frequently to refer to this. Such passages as the following were calculated not only to make him offended at Lamon, but jealous of Herndon: "John T. Stuart was keeping his eye on Lincoln, with the

view of keeping him on his side—the totally dead conservative side.” “Mr. Lincoln was beset by warm friends and by old coadjutors, and besought to pause in his anti-slavery course while there was yet time. Among these there was none more earnest or persuasive than John T. Stuart, who was but the type of a class. . . . But Mr. Herndon was more than a match for the full array against him. An earnest man, instant in season and out of season, he spoke with the eloquence of apparent truth and of real personal love” (Life of Lincoln, pp. 374, 352).

Colonel Matheny was not prepared to deny the correctness of a single statement in his testimony, but was forced to modify its bearing as a whole. He was made to say: “It does not express my sentiments of Mr. Lincoln’s entire life and character.” Now, anyone who reads his evidence cannot fail to observe that he did intend to cover Lincoln’s entire life and character. There is not in it the slightest intimation that he referred merely to a part of his life. Indeed, there is one statement in his evidence which utterly precludes such an assumption. He expressly says: “I never heard that Lincoln changed his views, though his personal and political friend from 1834 to 1860.” But Reed must have a sufficient portion of his life reserved in which to inject the story of his alleged conversion; and so Matheny’s offense was condoned on the condition

that he retain the earlier part of Lincoln's life for his testimony to rest upon, and concede the remainder to Reed for "The Later Life and Religious Sentiments of Lincoln." This division of Lincoln's life is quite indefinite, but Reed would have us believe that Colonel Matheny's evidence relates wholly to that portion of his life anterior to 1848, when Dr. Smith began the task of Christianizing him. Matheny's disclaimer is dated Dec. 16, 1872. On Dec. 9, 1873, he made the following explanation, which was published in a Springfield paper:

"What I mean, in my Reed letter, by Mr. Lincoln's earlier life, is his whole life and history in Illinois. In Illinois, and up to the time he left for Washington, he was, as I understand it, a confirmed Infidel. What I mean by Mr. Lincoln's later life, is his Washington life, where he associated with religious people, when and where I believe he thought he became a Christian. I told Mr. Reed all this just before signing the letter spoken of. I knew nothing of Mr. Lincoln's investigation into the subject of Christianity."

He says that his evidence "is a mere collection of sayings gathered from private conversations." It is doubtless true that he had many private conversations with Mr. Herndon on this subject; but his published testimony was all given at one sitting, and more, *he signed that testimony.* Every word attributed

to him in Lamon's work, and repeated in this chapter, originally appeared above his signature.

The concluding words of his disclaimer are as follows :

“ While I do believe Mr. Lincoln to have been an Infidel in his former life, when his mind was as yet unformed, and his associations principally with rough and skeptical men, yet I believe he was a very different man in later life ; and that after associating with a different class of men, and investigating the subject, he was a firm believer in the Christian religion.”

These words, as modified by the following, constitute a most remarkable statement :

“ In Illinois, and up to the time he left for Washington, he was, as I understand it, a confirmed Infidel. What I mean by Mr. Lincoln's later life, is his Washington life, where he associated with religious people.”

Colonel Matheny confines Lincoln's Infidelity to that portion of his life “ when his mind was as yet unformed,” and affirms that this portion comprised all the years preceding his removal to Washington in 1861. Thus during the first fifty-two years of Lincoln's life, “ his mind was as yet unformed.” His enviable reputation as one of the foremost lawyers of Illinois was achieved while “ his mind was as yet unformed ;” when his friends sent him to Con-

gress "his mind was as yet unformed;" when he made his Bloomington speech, "his mind was as yet unformed;" when he delivered his famous Springfield speech, "his mind was as yet unformed;" when he conducted his masterly debates with Stephen A. Douglas, "his mind was as yet unformed;" when he prepared and delivered that model of political addresses, the Cooper Institute address, "his mind was as yet unformed;" when at the Chicago Convention he outstripped in the race for Presidential nominee such eminent leaders as Seward and Chase, "his mind was as yet unformed;" when he was elected Chief Magistrate of this great nation, "his mind was as yet unformed."

It was only by leaving Illinois and going to Washington that he was thrown into religious society. Washington politicians are noted for their piety, you know. According to Matheny *et al.*, New Salem was a second Sodom, Springfield a second Gomorrah and Washington a sort of New Jerusalem, inhabited chiefly by saints

Neither in Matheny's letter, nor in his interpretation of this letter, is there a word to indicate that he recognized the fact that Lincoln went to Washington to assume the office and perform the duties of President. On the contrary, the whole tenor of his remarks is to the effect that he believed the people

sent him there on account of his wickedness, and while "his mind was as yet unformed," to attend a reform school, and that subsequently he entered a theological seminary, and there died.

The most amusing feature of Matheny's letter is that he unwittingly certifies that his own character was not good. He declares that Lincoln was an Infidel because his associations were "with rough and skeptical men;" but that after removing to Washington and "associating with a different class of men" he became a Christian. Now, it is well known that one of the most conspicuous of his "rough and skeptical" associates in Illinois was James H. Matheny.

Colonel Matheny, in his explanatory remarks, says: "I *believe* he *thought* he became a Christian;" and in almost the next breath says, "I knew nothing of Mr. Lincoln's investigation into the subject of Christianity." Can anything be more unreasonable than this? Colonel Matheny knowing that Lincoln was a confirmed Infidel—an Infidel when he went to Washington—knowing nothing about his having afterward investigated Christianity—knowing that he had no time for such an investigation, and yet believing that Lincoln thought he became a Christian! Why did he not mention this when he gave his testimony? The fact is, he did not believe that Lincoln became a Christian; but with an orthodox

club raised above his head, he found it very convenient to *profess* to believe it.

As Mr. Reed has endeavored to prove that Lamon and Herndon did not faithfully report the evidence of Stuart and Matheny, it is but just that Mr. Herndon, who took down their testimony, be permitted to speak in his own defense. In his Springfield lecture, delivered in Major Stuart's town, if not in his presence, referring to Stuart's testimony, he says :

“Mr. Stuart did not write the note and no one ever said he did. What is there stated was the substance of a conversation between Mr. Stuart and myself about Mr. Lincoln's religion. I took down in a note in his office and in his presence his words and ideas as I did in other cases. The conversation spoken of took place in Mr. Stuart's office, and in the east room. Mr. Stuart does not deny that the note is substantially correct. He simply says he could not have said that Dr. Smith tried to convert Mr. Lincoln, and couldn't do it. I well remember that he did use this language. It seemed to do him good to say it. . . . It seems that Mr. Stuart had heard that Mr. Lincoln and Dr. Smith had much discussion about Christianity, but he failed to hear of Mr. Lincoln's conversion, or anything like it, and well might he say, *as he did*, that ‘Dr. Smith tried to convert Mr. Lincoln, *but couldn't do it.*’”

Any charitably disposed person, knowing the gen-



eral good character of both men, instead of crying "Fraud!" as Reed has done, will readily conclude that Mr. Herndon was mistaken, or that Mr. Stuart had forgotten just what he did say, and is it not more reasonable to suppose that the latter gentleman, in the lapse of six years, should have forgotten some things he said, than that Mr. Herndon, who recorded them the moment they were uttered, should be mistaken?

Alluding to Colonel Matheny's evidence, in the same lecture, Mr. Herndon says :

"The next gentleman introduced by Mr. Reed is Col. James H. Matheny. He is made to say, in a letter addressed to Mr. Reed, that he did not write the statement in Lamon's 'Life of Lincoln.' I do not claim that he did. I wrote it in the court house—this hall—in Mr. Matheny's presence, and at his dictation. I read it over to him and he approved it. I wrote it all at once as he spoke it to me; it is not made up of scraps—'a mere collection of sayings gathered from private conversations, that were only true of Mr. Lincoln's earlier life.' I say that this statement was written all at one time and place, and not at different times and places. Let any critic, any man of common sense, read it and he will say: 'This was all written at once.' I appeal to the manner—the close connection of words and ideas in which it runs—word with word, sentence with sen-

tence, and idea with idea, for the proof that it was made at one sitting. Mr. Matheny has often told me that Mr. Lincoln was an Infidel. He admits this in his letter to Mr. Reed. He never intimated in that or any other conversation with me that he believed that Mr. Lincoln in his later life became a Christian."

In a letter dated Sept. 14, 1887, Mr. Herndon writes:

"I acted in this matter honestly, and I will always abide by my notes taken down at the time. I was cautious—very careful of what I did, because I knew that the church would damn me and prove me false if it could. I stood on the exactness of truth squarely."

I have thus far assumed that Stuart and Matheny really wrote the letters of disclaimer addressed to Reed. Mr. Reed states that he is "amazed to find" that they did not write the statements attributed to them by Lamon. The reader is by this time sufficiently familiar with this reverend gentleman's methods that he will *not* be "amazed to find" that Stuart and Matheny did not write these disclaimers. I now affirm that James H. Matheny did not write a word of the letter purporting to have been written by him. *It was written by the Rev. J. A. Reed!* We have not the expressed declaration of Mr. Stuart that this is true of the letter imputed to him, but

there is other evidence which makes it clearly apparent that this letter was also written by Mr. Reed.

Nor is this all. I shall now endeavor to show that the greater part of the evidence presented by Reed, in his lecture, was composed and written by himself. Let us take the four letters credited respectively to Edwards, Lewis, Stuart, and Matheny. I shall attempt to demonstrate the common origin of these letters, first, by their form; secondly, by the language of their contents.

The different forms employed in epistolary correspondence are numerous, far more numerous than generally supposed. To illustrate: four hundred letters, written by as many different persons, and all addressed to the same person, were, without examination, divided into one hundred parcels of four letters each. They were then examined in regard to the form employed by the writer. The heading, the address, the introduction, and the subscription were noted—no attention being paid to the body of the letter, or the signature. In not one of these one hundred parcels were found four letters having the same form. The heading of these letters exhibited nine different forms; the address, fourteen; the introduction, eight; and the subscription, eleven.

Again, nearly every writer employs certain idioms of language that are peculiar to him, and which reveal his identity, even though he tries to conceal it.

Let us now institute a brief analysis of the four letters under consideration. Errors will be noticed, not for the purpose of reflecting upon the literary attainments of the writer, but solely with a view of discovering his identity. These are mostly of a trivial character, confined to marks of punctuation, etc.; and it is a recognized fact that a majority of educated persons, including many professional writers, are more or less deficient in the art of punctuation. In proof of the common authorship of these four letters, the following reasons are submitted:

1. In all of them we recognize a stiff formality—a studied effort to conform to one ideal standard.

2. All of them were written at Springfield, Ill., and all omit the name of the state.

3. In each of them, the day of the month is followed by the suffix "th." This, if not wholly improper, is not common usage. Had these letters been written by the four persons to whom they are ascribed, at least three of them would have omitted it.

4. In all, but one, the address is "Rev. J. A. Reed," and in the exception the writer merely substitutes "Jas." for "J."

5. In each of them the address is followed by a colon instead of a comma, the proper mark to use. **Had they been written by four persons, it is possible**

that a part, or even all, would have made an error, but it is highly improbable that all would have made the *same* error.

6. In these letters, the introductory words are uniformly "Dear Sir"—the most common form of introduction, and the one that a writer, in drafting a letter addressed to himself, would most naturally employ.

7. In every instance, the introduction is followed by a dash instead of a colon—a uniformity of error, again.

8. In the subscription, the term, "Yours truly," is invariably used, except in the Lewis letter, which concludes with "Yours, etc."

9. The Edwards letter and the Lewis letter begin with the same idea, expressed in nearly the same words. Edwards is made to say, "A short time after the Rev. Dr. Smith," etc.; and Lewis—"Not long after Dr. Smith."

10. Omitting the introductory sentence in the Stuart letter, which is merely the expansion of an idea used in writing the Matheny letter on the preceding day, the Stuart and Matheny letters begin with the same idea. Stuart says: "The language of that statement is not mine; it was not written by me." Matheny says: "The language attributed to me . . . is not from my pen. I did not write it." Reed himself uses substantially the same lan-

guage that is ascribed to them. Had their statements, as published in Lamon's work, been forgeries, or grossly inaccurate, they might have used the language quoted above. Under the circumstances they would not have used it. Major Stuart and Colonel Matheny were lawyers, not pettifoggers.

11. These prefatory sentences of Stuart and Matheny both begin with the same words—"the language."

12. In both the Edwards and Lewis letters, reference is made to a theological work which Dr. Smith is said to have written. The writer of neither letter is able to state the name of the book; Dr. Reed is unable to state the name of it; Dr. Smith himself does not mention the name of it; but he does plainly state that it was a work on the Bible. For "the business he had on hand," however, it suited Reed's purpose better to give a semi-erroneous impression of its character, and so he affirms that it was a work on "the evidences of Christianity." Curiously enough, in the Edwards letter and again in the Lewis letter, the book is described as a work on "the evidences of Christianity."

13. The Edwards letter reports Lincoln as saying: "I have been reading *a work of Dr. Smith on the evidences of Christianity.*" The Lewis letter represents him as saying that "He had seen and partially read *a work of Dr. Smith on the evidences of Christian-*

*ity.*" Here are ten consecutive words in the two letters identical.

14. Mr. Reed, in his lecture, never once uses the word "Christianity," except as above noticed to describe Dr. Smith's book; he always uses the words "the Christian religion"—employing this term no less than seven times. This usage is not common. An examination of various theological writings shows that "Christianity" is used twenty times where "the Christian religion" is used once. Yet in these letters the word "Christianity" is not to be found, except in the same sense as used by Dr. Reed, while "the Christian religion" occurs in each of the four letters.

15. "The truth of the Christian religion" is a favorite phrase with Reed, occurring three times in his lecture. This phrase also occurs three times in these letters—once in the Edwards letter, and twice in the Stuart letter.

16. Reed has much to say about Lincoln's "life and religious sentiments;" in fact, his lecture is entitled, "The Later Life and Religious Sentiments of Abraham Lincoln." In the Matheny letter, too, we find "Mr. Lincoln's life and religious sentiments."

17. The words "earlier" and "later" are frequently used by Reed in connection with Lincoln's life. The same words are used in the Stuart and Matheny letters, and in the same connection.

18. The Stuart letter is, for the most part, devoted to the narration of "some facts" which Mr. Stuart is said to have presented to Mr. Herndon, beginning with this: "That Eddie, a child of Mr. Lincoln, died in 1848 or 1849," etc. Now, Mr. Stuart well knew that, during all this time, Mr. Herndon was the intimate associate of Lincoln and thoroughly familiar with every event in his history. The "facts" given in this letter are not such as Mr. Stuart would have communicated to Mr. Herndon, but they are such as Mr. Reed would naturally desire to place before the public.

19. Nothing in Dr. Reed's career has excited his vanity more than the fact that he was pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Springfield—the church which Lincoln once attended. Consequently, the "First Presbyterian Church" is a conspicuous object in his lecture, and nowhere is it more conspicuous than in these letters. In the Stuart letter it appears three times, and the writer never fails to state that it was the "*First* Presbyterian Church"—the church of which Dr. Reed was pastor.

20. According to the principle of accretion, if two articles or letters are written on the same subject, the second will usually be longer than the first. This is true of these letters. The Lewis letter, relating to Smith's reputed conversion of Lincoln, was written after the Edwards letter relative to the



same subject, and is longer. The Stuart disclaimer, which is the longer of the two, was written after the Matheny disclaimer.

From the foregoing, is it not clearly evident that these four letters were all written by the same person? If so, then knowing that Dr. Reed wrote one of them, the Matheny letter, does it not necessarily follow that he wrote them all?

In the Gurley testimony, such expressions as "the Christian religion" and "the truth of the Christian religion," together with the Reed story concerning Lincoln's intention of making a profession of religion, reveal the authorship of this testimony also.

## CHAPTER IX.

TESTIMONY OF THE REMAINING WITNESSES PRESENTED  
BY LAMON.

Dr. C. H. Ray—Wm. H. Hannah, Esq.—James W. Keys—Hon. Jesse W. Fell—Col. John G. Nicolay—Hon. David Davis—Mrs. Mary Lincoln—Injustice to Mrs. Lincoln—Answer to Reed's Pretended Refutation of the Testimony of Lamon's Witnesses.

SEVEN of Lamon's witnesses—Ray, Hannah, Keys, Fell, Nicolay, Davis, and Mrs. Lincoln—remain to testify. The testimony of these witnesses will now be presented.

## DR. C. H. RAY.

Dr. Ray, editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, a prominent figure in Illinois politics thirty years ago, and a personal friend and admirer of Lincoln, testifies as follows:

“You knew Mr. Lincoln far better than I did, though I knew him well; and you have served up his leading characteristics in a way that I should despair of doing, if I should try. I have only one thing to ask: that you do not give Calvinistic theology a chance to claim him as one of its saints and martyrs. He went to the Old School Church; but,

in spite of that outward assent to the horrible dogmas of the sect, I have reason from himself to know that his 'vital purity,' if that means belief in the impossible, was of a negative sort" (Lamon's *Life of Lincoln*, pp. 489, 490).

Dr. Ray states that Lincoln held substantially the same theological opinions as those held by Theodore Parker.

*WILLIAM H. HANNAH.*

A leading member of the Bloomington bar, when Lincoln practiced there, was Wm. H. Hannah. He was an honest, truthful man, and knew Lincoln well. Concerning Lincoln's views on the doctrine of endless punishment, Mr. Hannah says:

"Since 1856 Mr. Lincoln told me that he was a kind of immortalist; but that he never could bring himself to believe in eternal punishment; that man lived but a little while here, and that, if eternal punishment were man's doom, he should spend that little life in vigilant and ceaseless preparation by never-ending prayer" (*Life of Lincoln*, p. 489).

*JAMES W. KEYS.*

Mr. Jas. W. Keys, an old and respected citizen of Springfield, who became acquainted with Lincoln soon after his removal there, and who had many con-

versations with him on the subject of theology, says:

“As to the Christian theory, that Christ is God, or equal to the Creator, he said that it had better be taken for granted; for, by the test of reason, we might become Infidels on that subject, for evidence of Christ’s divinity came to us in a somewhat doubtful shape” (Life of Lincoln, p. 490).

HON. JESSE W. FELL.

Jesse W. Fell, who died at Bloomington in the spring of 1887, was one of the best known and most highly respected citizens of Illinois. He was Secretary of the Republican State Central Committee during the memorable Lincoln-Douglas campaign, and was largely instrumental in bringing Lincoln forward as a candidate for the Presidency in 1860. It was for him that Lincoln wrote an autobiographical sketch of his life, which formed the basis of his campaign biographies, the *fac-simile* of which appears in Lamon’s “Life of Lincoln,” and in the “Lincoln Memorial Album.” Mr. Fell was a Christian of the Unitarian denomination, and there were few men for whom Lincoln had a more profound respect. The following is his testimony:

“Though everything relating to the character of this extraordinary personage is of interest, and should be fairly stated to the world, I enter upon the

performance of this duty—for so I regard it—with some reluctance, arising from the fact that, in stating my convictions on the subject, I must necessarily place myself in opposition to quite a number who have written on this topic before me, and whose views largely pre-occupy the public mind. This latter fact, whilst contributing to my embarrassment on this subject, is, perhaps, the strongest reason, however, why the truth in this matter should be fully disclosed; and I therefore yield to your request. If there were any traits of character that stood out in bold relief in the person of Mr. Lincoln, they were those of truth and candor. He was utterly incapable of insincerity, or professing views on this or any other subject he did not entertain. Knowing such to be his true character, that insincerity, much more duplicity, were traits wholly foreign to his nature, many of his old friends were not a little surprised at finding, in some of the biographies of this great man, statements concerning his religious opinions so utterly at variance with his known sentiments. True, he may have changed or modified those sentiments after his removal from among us, though this is hardly reconcilable with the history of the man, and his entire devotion to public matters during his four years' residence at the national capital. It is possible, however, that this may be the proper solution of this conflict of

opinions; or, it may be, that, with no intention on the part of anyone to mislead the public mind, those who have represented him as believing in the popular theological views of the times may have misapprehended him, as experience shows to be quite common where no special effort has been made to attain critical accuracy on a subject of this nature. This is the more probable from the well-known fact that Mr. Lincoln seldom communicated to anyone his views on this subject. But, be this as it may, I have no hesitation whatever in saying that, whilst he held many opinions in common with the great mass of Christian believers, he did not believe in what are regarded as the orthodox or evangelical views of Christianity.

“On the innate depravity of man, the character and office of the great head of the church, the atonement, the infallibility of the written revelation, the performance of miracles, the nature and design of present and future rewards and punishments (as they are popularly called) and many other subjects, he held opinions utterly at variance with what are usually taught in the church. I should say that his expressed views on these and kindred topics were such as, in the estimation of most believers, would place him entirely outside the Christian pale. Yet, to my mind, such was not the true position, since his principles and practices and the spirit of his whole

life were of the very kind we universally agree to call Christian; and I think this conclusion is in no wise affected by the circumstance that he never attached himself to any religious society whatever.

“His religious views were eminently practical, and are summed up, as I think, in these two propositions: ‘the fatherhood of God, and the brotherhood of man.’ He fully believed in a superintending and overruling Providence that guides and controls the operations of the world, but maintained that law and order, and not their violation or suspension, are the appointed means by which this Providence is exercised.

“I will not attempt any specification of either his belief or disbelief on various religious topics, as derived from conversations with him at different times during a considerable period; but, as conveying a general view of his religious or theological opinions, will state the following facts: Some eight or ten years prior to his death, in conversing with him on this subject, the writer took occasion to refer, in terms of approbation, to the sermons and writings generally of Dr. W. E. Channing; and, finding he was considerably interested in the statement I made of the opinions held by that author, I proposed to present him a copy of Channing’s entire works, which I soon after did. Subsequently, the contents of these volumes, together with the writings of

Theodore Parker, furnished him, as he informed me, by his friend and law-partner, Mr. Herndon, became naturally the topics of conversation with us; and though far from believing there was an entire harmony of views on his part with either of those authors, yet they were generally much admired and approved by him.

“No religious views with him seemed to find any favor, except of the practical and rationalistic order; and if, from my recollections on this subject, I was called upon to designate an author whose views most nearly represented Mr. Lincoln’s on this subject, I would say that author was Theodore Parker.

“As you have asked from me a candid statement of my recollections on this topic, I have thus briefly given them, with the hope that they may be of some service in rightly settling a question about which—as I have good reason to believe—the public mind has been greatly misled. Not doubting that they will accord, substantially, with your own recollections, and that of his other intimate and confidential friends, and with the popular verdict after this matter shall have been properly canvassed, I submit them” (Life of Lincoln, pp. 490–492).

Mr. Fell’s testimony is full and explicit. He affirms that Lincoln rejected nearly all the leading tenets of orthodox Christianity; the inspiration of the Scriptures, the divinity of Christ, the innate de-



pravity of man, the atonement, the performance of miracles, and future rewards and punishments. "His expressed views on these and kindred topics," Mr. Fell says, "were such as, in the estimation of most believers, would place him entirely outside the Christian pale." Mr. Fell, himself, was not disposed to withhold from Lincoln the appellation of Christian, but it was only because he stood upon the broad Liberal Christian, or rather non-Christian, platform which permitted him to welcome a Theist, like Parker; a Pantheist, like Emerson; or even an Agnostic, like Ingersoll.

*COL. JOHN G. NICOLAY.*

The next witness introduced by Lamon, is Col. John G. Nicolay, Lincoln's private secretary at the White House. Nicolay's relations with the President were more intimate than those of any other man. To quote the words of Lincoln's partner, "Mr. Lincoln loved him and trusted him." His testimony is among the most important that this controversy has elicited. It proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that all these stories concerning Lincoln's alleged conversation at Washington are false, that he did not change his belief, that he died as he had always lived—a Freethinker. In a letter written May 27, 1865, just six weeks after Lincoln's death, Colonel Nicolay says:

“Mr. Lincoln did not, to my knowledge, in any way, change his religious ideas, opinions or beliefs, from the time he left Springfield till the day of his death. I do not know just what they were, never having heard him explain them in detail, but I am very sure he gave no outward indications of his mind having undergone any change in that regard while here” (Life of Lincoln, p. 492).

*HON. DAVID DAVIS.*

One of the most important, and in some respects the most eminent witness summoned to testify in regard to this question, is the Hon. David Davis. In moral character he stood above reproach, in intellectual ability, almost without a peer. Every step in his career was marked by unswerving integrity and freedom from prejudice. His rulings and decisions in the lower courts of Illinois, and on the bench of the Supreme Court of the United States, commanded universal respect. As a legislator, his love of truth and justice prevented him from being a political partisan. As United States Senator and Vice-President of the United States, the party that elected him could obtain his support for no measure that he deemed unjust. Referring to his acquaintance with Lincoln, Judge Davis says: “I enjoyed for over twenty years the personal friendship of Mr. Lincoln. We were admitted to the bar about the same time,

and traveled for many years what is known in Illinois as the Eighth Judicial Circuit. In 1848, when I first went on the bench, the circuit embraced fourteen counties, and Mr. Lincoln went with the court to every county." A large portion of this time they passed in each other's company. They often rode in the same vehicle, generally ate at the same table, and not infrequently slept together in the same bed. The closest intimacy existed between them as long as Lincoln lived, and when he died, Mr. Davis became his executor. Judge Davis would not intentionally have misrepresented the opinions of an enemy, much less the opinions of his dear dead friend. Briefly, yet clearly, he defines the theological views of Lincoln :

"He had no faith, in the Christian sense of the term—had faith in laws, principles, causes, and effects—philosophically" (Life of Lincoln, p. 489).

Speaking of the many stories that had been circulated concerning Lincoln's religious belief, such as the Bateman and Vinton interviews, together with the various pious speeches he is reported to have made to religious committees and delegations that visited him, such as his reputed speech to the Negroes of Baltimore, Judge Davis says :

"The idea that Lincoln talked to a stranger about his religion or religious views, or made such speeches, remarks, &c., about it as are published, is

to me absurd. I knew the man so well. He was the most reticent, secretive man I ever saw, or expect to see" (Ibid).

*MRS. MARY LINCOLN.*

But one of Lamon's witnesses remains—the wife of the martyred President. Her testimony ought of itself to put this matter at rest forever. Mrs. Lincoln says:

"Mr. Lincoln had no hope, and no faith, in the usual acceptation of those words" (Life of Lincoln, p. 489).

In addition to what Colonel Lamon has presented, Mrs. Lincoln also stated the following:

"Mr. Lincoln's maxim and philosophy were, 'What is to be, will be, and no prayers of ours can arrest the decree.' He never joined any church. He was a religious man always, I think, but was not a technical Christian" (Herndon's "Religion of Lincoln").

It may be charged that Mrs. Lincoln subsequently repudiated a portion of this testimony. In anticipation of such a charge I will here state a few facts. This testimony was given by Mrs. Lincoln in 1865. When it was given, while her heart was pierced by the pangs of her great grief, her mind was sound. About Jan. 1, 1874, a brief article, purporting to come from her pen, appeared, in which the testimony

attributed to her was in part denied. At the time this denial was written, Mrs. Lincoln had been for more than two years insane. The chief cause in dethroning her reason was the death of her universally beloved Tad (Thomas), which occurred on July 15, 1871. Referring to this sad event, Mr. Arnold, one of the principal witnesses on the Christian side of this controversy, says: "From this time Mrs. Lincoln, in the judgment of her most intimate friends, was never entirely responsible for her conduct" (Life of Lincoln, p. 439).

The only effect of this denial on the minds of those acquainted with the circumstances, was to excite a mingled feeling of pity and disgust—pity for this unfortunate woman, and disgust for the contemptible methods of those who would take advantage of her demented condition and make her contradict the honest statements of her rational life.

Before dismissing this witness, I wish to advert to a subject with which many of my readers are familiar. For years, both before and after Lincoln's death, the religious press of the country was continually abusing Mrs. Lincoln. If a ball was held at the White House, she became at once the recipient of unlimited abuse. If Lincoln attended the theater, she was accused of having dragged him there against his will. It was almost uniformly asserted that he would not have gone to the theater on that fatal

night had it not been for her, and in not a few instances it was infamously hinted that she was cognizant of the plot to murder him. But even the Rev. Dr. Miner, who was acquainted with the facts, is willing to vindicate her from these imputations. He says : " It has been said that Mrs. Lincoln urged her husband to go to the theater against his will. This is not true. On the contrary, she tried to persuade him not to go."

Lincoln's biographers have, for the most part, endeavored to do his wife justice, and have rebuked the insults showered upon her. Alluding to President and Mrs. Lincoln, Mr. Herndon says: "All that I know ennobles both." Colonel Lamon says: "Almost ever since Mr. Lincoln's death a portion of the press has never tired of heaping brutal reproaches upon his wife and widow, whilst a certain class of his friends thought they were honoring his memory by multiplying outrages and indignities upon her at the very moment when she was broken by want and sorrow, defamed, defenseless, in the hands of thieves, and at the mercy of spies." Mr. Arnold says: "There is nothing in American history so unmanly, so devoid of every chivalric impulse as the treatment of this poor, broken-hearted woman."

The evidence of Colonel Lamon's ten witnesses has now been presented. This evidence includes, in addition to the testimony of other intimate friends,

the testimony of his wife ; the testimony of his first law partner, Hon. John T. Stuart ; the testimony of his last law partner, Hon. Wm. H. Herndon ; the testimony of his friend and political adviser, Col. James H. Matheny ; the testimony of his private secretary, Col. John G. Nicolay ; and the testimony of his lifelong friend and executor after death, Judge David Davis. No one can read this evidence and then honestly affirm that Abraham Lincoln was a Christian. This is the evidence, the perusal of which so thoroughly enraged that good Christian biographer, Dr. J. G. Holland ; this is the evidence, the truthfulness of which the Rev. J. A. Reed, unmindful of the fate of Ananias, attempted to deny.

As a full and just answer to this attempted refutation of Lamon's witnesses by Reed, I quote from the *New York World* the following :

“This individual testimony is clear and overwhelming, without the documentary and other evidence scattered profusely through the rest of the volume. How does Mr. Reed undertake to refute it? In the first place, firstly, he pronounces it a ‘libel,’ and in the second place, secondly, he is ‘amazed to find’—and he says he has found—that the principal witnesses take exception to Mr. Lamon's report of their evidence. This might have been true of many or all of Mr. Lamon's witnesses without exciting the wonder of a rational man. Few

persons, indeed, are willing to endure reproach merely for the truth's sake, and popular opinion in the Republican party of Springfield, Ill., is probably very much against Mr. Lamon. It would, therefore, be quite in the natural order if some of his witnesses who find themselves unexpectedly in print should succumb to the social and political terrorism of their place and time, and attempt to modify or explain their testimony. They zealously assisted Mr. Herndon in ascertaining the truth, and while they wanted him to tell it in full they were prudently resolved to keep their own names snugly out of sight. But Mr. Reed's statement is not true, and his amazement is entirely simulated. Two only out of the ten witnesses have gratified him by inditing, at his request, weak and guarded complaints of unfair treatment. These are John T. Stuart, a relative of the Lincolns and Edwardses, and Jim Matheny, both of Springfield, whom Mr. Lincoln taught his peculiar doctrines, but who may by this time be deacons in Mr. Reed's church. Neither of them helps Mr. Reed's case a particle. Their epistles open, as if by concert, in form and words almost identical. They say they did not *write* the language attributed to them. The denial is wholly unnecessary, for nobody affirms that they did write it. They talked and Mr. Herndon wrote. His notes were made when the conversation occurred, and



probably in their presence. At all events, they are both so conscious of the general accuracy of his report that they do not venture to deny a single word of it, but content themselves with lamenting that something else, which they did *not* say, was excluded from it. They both, however, in these very letters, repeat emphatically the material part of the statements made by them to Mr. Herndon, namely, that Mr. Lincoln was to their certain knowledge, until a very late period of his life, an 'Infidel,' and neither of them is able to tell when he ceased to be an Infidel and when he began to be a Christian. And this is all Mr. Reed makes by his re-examination of the two persons whom he is pleased to exalt as Mr. Lamon's 'principal witnesses.' They are but two out of the ten. What of the other eight? They have no doubt been tried and plied by Mr. Reed and his friends to no purpose; they stand fast by the record. But Mr. Reed is to be shamed neither by their speech nor their silence."

## CHAPTER X.

## TESTIMONY OF LINCOLN'S RELATIVES AND INTIMATE ASSOCIATES.

Mrs. Sarah Lincoln—Dennis F. Hanks—Mrs. Matilda Moore—John Hall—Wm. McNeely—Wm. G. Green—Joshua F. Speed—Green Caruthers—John Decamp—Mr. Lynan—James B. Spaulding—Ezra Stringham—Dr. G. H. Ambrose—J. H. Chenery—Squire Perkins—W. Perkins—James Gorley—Dr. Wm. Jayne—Jesse K. Dubois—Hon. Joseph Gillespie—Judge Stephen T. Logan—Hon. Leonard Swett.

WERE I to rest my case here, the evidence already adduced is sufficient, I think, to convince any unprejudiced mind that Lincoln was not a Christian. But I do not propose to rest here. I have presented the testimony of half a score of witnesses; before I lay down my pen I shall present the testimony of nearly ten times as many more.

In this chapter will be given the testimony of some of the relatives and intimate associates of Lincoln. The testimony of his relatives confirms the claim that he was not religious in his youth; the others testify to his unbelief while a resident of New Salem and Springfield.

*MRS. SARAH LINCOLN.*

If there was one person to whom Lincoln was more indebted than to any other, it was his step-mother, Sally Lincoln, a beautiful woman—beautiful not only in face and form, but possessed of a most lovely character. She was not highly educated, but she loved knowledge, and inspired in her step-son a love for books. She was a Christian, but she attached more importance to deed than to creed. She loved Lincoln. After his death she said: "He was dutiful to me always. I think he loved me truly. I had a son, John, who was raised with Abe. Both were good boys; but I must say, both now being dead, that Abe was the best boy I ever saw, or expect to see." Lincoln was too good and too great not to appreciate this woman's care and affection.

When the materials for Lincoln's biography were being collected, Mrs. Lincoln was considered the most reliable source from which to obtain the facts pertaining to his boyhood. Her recollections of him were recorded with the utmost care. His Christian biographers, in order to make a Sunday-school hero of him, have declared him to be a youth remarkable for his Christian piety and his love of the Bible. The statements of Mrs. Lincoln disprove this claim. The substance of her testimony, as given by Lamon, is given as follows:

“His step-mother—herself a Christian, and longing for the least sign of faith in him—could remember no circumstance that supported her hope. On the contrary, she recollected very well that he never went off into a corner, as has been said, to ponder the sacred writings, and to wet the page with his tears of penitence” (Life of Lincoln, pp. 486, 487).

“The Bible, according to Mrs. Lincoln, was not one of his studies; ‘he sought more congenial books.’ At that time he neither talked nor read upon religious subjects. If he had any opinions about them, he kept them to himself” (Ibid, p. 38).

*DENNIS F. HANKS.*

The next witness is Lincoln’s cousin, Dennis Hanks. Mr. Hanks held “the pulpy, red, little Lincoln” in his arms before he was “twenty-four hours old,” and remained his constant companion during all the years that he lived in Kentucky and Indiana. He lived a part of the time in the Lincoln family, and married one of Lincoln’s step-sisters. I met him recently at Charleston, Ill. With evident delight he rehearsed the story of Lincoln’s boyhood, and reaffirmed the truthfulness of the following statements attributed to him by Lincoln’s biographers :

“Abe wasn’t in early life a religious man. He was a moral man strictly. . . . In after life he be-

came more religious; but the Bible puzzled him, especially the miracles" (Every-Day Life of Lincoln, p. 54).

"'Religious songs did not appear to suit him at all,' says Dennis Hanks; but of profane ballads and amorous ditties he knew the words of a vast number.

. . . . .

"Another was:

' Hail Columbia, happy land!  
If you ain't drunk, I'll be damned,'—

a song which Dennis thinks should be warbled only in the 'fields;' and tells us they knew and enjoyed 'all such songs as this'" (Lamon's Life of Lincoln, pp. 58, 59).

The fitness of the above coarse travesty to be warbled, even in the fields, may well be doubted. Lamon would hardly have recorded it, and I certainly should not quote it, but for the fact that it strikingly illustrates one phase of Lincoln's "youthful piety."

Among the many Christian hymns which Lincoln parodied, Mr. Hanks recalls the following:

" How tedious and tasteless the hours."  
" When I can read my title clear."  
" Oh! to grace how great a debtor!"  
" Come, thou fount of every blessing."

*MRS. MATILDA MOORE.*

Mrs. Lincoln's first husband was named Johnston. By him she had three children, a son and two daughters. The latter, like their mother, developed into noble specimens of womanhood; and both loved Lincoln as tenderly as though he had been their own brother. The elder was married to Dennis Hanks; the younger, Matilda, married Lincoln's cousin, Levi Hall, and, after his death, a gentleman named Moore.

Lamon says that Lincoln in his youth made a mockery of the popular religion; not from any lack of reverence for what he believed to be good, but because "he thought that a person had better be without it." That he was accustomed to turn so-called sacred subjects into ridicule is attested by his step-sister, Mrs. Moore. She says:

"When father and mother would go to church, Abe would take down the Bible, read a verse, give out a hymn, and we would sing. Abe was about fifteen years of age. He preached and we would do the crying" (Every-Day Life of Lincoln, p. 71).

*JOHN HALL.*

On the 28th of April, 1888, the writer, in company with Mr. Charles Biggs, of Westfield, Ill., visited the old Lincoln homestead, near Farmington, Ill. We dined with Mr. John Hall, a son of Lincoln's step-

sister Matilda, in the old log-house built by Lincoln's father sixty years ago, and in which his father and step-mother died. Mr. Hall, who owns the homestead and preserves with zealous care this venerable relic, is an intelligent farmer over sixty years of age. He greatly reveres the memory of his illustrious uncle and loves to dwell on his many noble traits of character. He stated that the family tradition is that while Abe was a most honest and humane boy he was not religious. He referred to the mock sermons he is said to have preached. "At these meetings," said Mr. Hall, "my mother would lead in the singing while Uncle Abe would lead in prayer. Among his numerous supplications, he prayed God to put stockings on the chickens' feet in winter."

*WILLIAM McNEELY.*

William McNeely, of Petersburg, Ill., who became acquainted with Lincoln in 1831, when he arrived at New Salem on a flatboat, says :

"Lincoln said he did not believe in total depravity, and although it was not popular to believe it, it was easier to do right than wrong; that the first thought was: what was right? and the second—what was wrong? Therefore it was easier to do right than wrong, and easier to take care of, as it would take care of itself. It took an effort to do wrong, and a

still greater effort to take care of it ; but do right and it would take care of itself.

“ I was acquainted with him a long time, and I never knew him to do a wrong act ” (Lincoln Memorial Album, pp. 393-395).

*WILLIAM G. GREEN.*

One of Lincoln's early companions at New Salem was William G. Green. He and Lincoln clerked in the same store and slept together on the same cot. The testimony of Mr. Green has not been preserved. We have simply an observation of his, incidentally made, the substance of which is thus presented by Lamon :

“ Lincoln's incessant reading of Shakspeare and Burns had much to do in giving to his mind the ‘ skeptical ’ tendency so fully developed by the labors of his pen in 1834-5, and in social conversations during many years of his residence at Springfield ” (Life of Lincoln, p. 145).

Mr. Green's conclusion, especially in regard to Burns, is quite generally shared by Lincoln's friends. Burns's satirical poems were greatly admired by Lincoln. “ Holy Willie's Prayer, ” one of the most withering satires on orthodox Christianity ever penned, was memorized by him. Every one of its sixteen stanzas, beginning with the following, was



an Infidel shaft which he delighted to hurl at the heads of his Christian opponents :

“ O thou, wha in the heavens dost dwell,  
 Wha, as it pleases best thyself,  
 Sends ano to heaven and ten to hell,  
     A' for thy glory,  
 And no for ony guid or ill  
     They've done afore thee!”

*JOSHUA F. SPEED.*

Another of Lincoln's earliest and best friends was Joshua F. Speed. When he was licensed as a lawyer and entered upon his professional career at Springfield without a client and without a dollar, Speed assisted him to get a start. W. H. Herndon was clerking for Speed at the time, and for more than a year Lincoln, Herndon and Speed roomed together. Referring to the religious views held by Lincoln at that time, Mr. Speed, in a lecture, says :

“ I have often been asked what were Mr. Lincoln's religious opinions. When I knew him, in early life, he was a skeptic. He had tried hard to be a believer, but his reason could not grasp and solve the great problem of redemption as taught.”

This is the testimony of an orthodox Christian, and a church-member. Mr. Speed, during the years that he was acquainted with Lincoln, was not a member of any church; but late in life he united with the Methodist church. As “ the wish is father

to the thought," Mr. Speed professed to believe that Lincoln before his death modified, to some extent, the radical views of his early manhood.

*GREEN CARUTHERS.*

Soon after Lincoln removed to Springfield, he became acquainted with Mr. Green Caruthers and remained on intimate terms with him during all the subsequent years of his life. Mr. Caruthers was a quiet, unobtrusive old gentleman, universally respected by those who knew him. The substance of his testimony is as follows :

"Lincoln, Bledsoe, the metaphysician, and myself, boarded at the Globe hotel in this city. Bledsoe tended toward Christianity, if he was not a Christian. Lincoln was always throwing out his Infidelity to Bledsoe, ridiculing Christianity, and especially the divinity of Christ."

*JOHN DECAMP.*

Another of Lincoln's most intimate Springfield friends was John Decamp. Mr. Decamp was interviewed by Mr. Herndon regarding Lincoln's religious views in July, 1887. His statement was brief, but to the point. He says :

"Lincoln was an Infidel."

*MR. LYNAN.*

In 1880, at Bismarck Grove, Kan., the writer of this delivered a lecture entitled, "Four American

Infidels," a portion of which was devoted to a presentation of Lincoln's religious views. In its report of the lecture, the *Lawrence Standard*, edited by Hon. E. G. Ross, formerly United States Senator from Kansas, and more recently Governor of New Mexico, said:

"In regard to Abraham Lincoln being an Infidel, the evidence adduced was overwhelming, and was confirmed by a gentleman present, Mr. Lynan, who had known him intimately for thirty years. Mr. Lynan declared that none but personal acquaintance could enable one to realize the nobility and purity of Lincoln's character, but that he was beyond doubt or question a thorough disbeliever in the Christian scheme of salvation to the end of his life" (*Lawrence Standard*, Sept. 4, 1880).

*JAMES B. SPAULDING.*

Mr. J. B. Spaulding, well known as one of the leading nurserymen and horticulturists of the United States, a man of broad culture and refinement, who resides near Springfield, became intimately acquainted with Lincoln as early as 1851, and for a long time resided on the same street with him in Springfield. Mr. Spaulding says:

"Lincoln perpetrated many an irreverent joke at the expense of church doctrines. Regarding the miraculous conception, he was especially sarcastic.

He wrote a manuscript as radical as Ingersoll which his political friends caused to be destroyed."

*EZRA STRINGHAM.*

A short time since I was conversing with a party of gentlemen in Riverton, Ill. It being near Lincoln's old home, the subject of his religious belief was introduced. An old gentleman, who up to this time had not been taking part in the conversation, quietly observed: "I think I knew Lincoln's religious views about as well as any other man." "What was he?" said one of the party. "An Infidel of the first water," was the prompt response. The old gentleman was Ezra Stringham, one of Lincoln's early acquaintances in Illinois.

*DR. G. H. AMBROSE.*

Dr. G. H. Ambrose, of Waldo, Fla., who was associated in the law business at Springfield from 1846 to 1849 with a relative of Mrs. Lincoln, says :

"Mr. Lincoln was an Infidel—an outspoken one."

*J. H. CHENERY.*

Mr. J. H. Chenery, one of Springfield's pioneers—for many years owner and proprietor of the leading hotel of Springfield—says :

"Reed tried to prove that Lincoln was a church man; but everybody here knows that he was not. Once in a great while, and only once in a great

while, I saw him accompany his wife and children to church. His attacks upon the church were most bitter and sarcastic. He wrote a book against Christianity, but his friends got away with it."

*SQUIRE PERKINS.*

A few years ago there died near Atchison, Kan., an old gentleman named Perkins. He was poor, but honest, and a bright man intellectually. He was a son of Major Perkins who was killed in the Black Hawk war. Lincoln after the fight discovered the scalp of Major Perkins, which his savage assassin had taken but lost. His first impulse was to keep it and take it home to the family of the dead soldier. Then realizing that it would only tend to intensify their grief, he opened the grave and deposited it with the body. This incident led to an intimate acquaintance between Lincoln and the younger Perkins. In June, 1880, Mr. Perkins made the following statement relative to Lincoln's religious belief:

"During all the time that I was acquainted with Abraham Lincoln I know that he was what the church calls an Infidel. I do not believe that he ever changed his opinions. When Colfax was in Atchison I had a talk with him about Lincoln. Among other things, I asked him if Lincoln had ever been converted to Christianity. He told me that he had not."

*W. PERKINS.*

Mr. Perkins, an old lawyer and journalist of Illinois, who was acquainted with Lincoln for upward of twenty years, and who was his associate counsel in several important cases, writing from Belleview, Fla., under date of August 22, 1887, says:

“The unfair efforts that Christians have been putting forth to drag Lincoln into their waning faith betray a pitiable imbecility. Were it possible for them to get the world to believe that Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln, all prayed, had faith, and were washed in the blood of the Lamb, would that prove the inspiration of their Bible, harmonize its contradictions, put a ray of reason in its gross absurdities, or humanize the first one of its numerous bloody barbarities?”

“I knew Mr. Lincoln from the spring of 1838 till his death. Like Archibald Williams, our contemporary, an able Lord Coke lawyer, he no more believed in the inspiration of the Bible than Hume, Paine, or Ingersoll. Less inclined openly to denounce its absurdities and cruelties, or to antagonize the well-meaning credulous professors, than was Williams. Mr. Lincoln had no faith whatever in the first miracle of the Bible, or the scheme of bloody redemption it teaches. To attribute such sentiments to him, is to tarnish his well-earned reputation for common sense, and to impair the estimation of his

countrymen and the world of his high sense of humanity, justice, and honor.

“Two of my Presbyterian friends at Indian Point, near Petersburg, told me that they had interviewed Mr. Lincoln to prevent his impending duel with Shields—claiming that it was contrary to the Bible and Christianity. He admitted that the dueling code was barbarous and regretted much to find himself in its toils, but said he, ‘The Bible is not my book, nor Christianity my profession.’”

In some reminiscences of Lincoln, recently published, referring to a celebrated murder case in which they were counsel for the defendant, Mr. Perkins says :

“I reminded him that from the first I had seen, and to him said, the case is hopeless, and that he must have expected to work a miracle to save the accused. He answered that I did him injustice, *since he had no faith in miracles.*”

Alluding to Lincoln’s alleged change of heart, he writes :

“He never changed a sentiment on the subject up to his final sleep.”

**JAMES GORLEY.**

Mr. Gorley, who was the confidential friend of Lincoln, and who spent much time with him, both at home and abroad, made the following statement :

“Lincoln belonged to no religious sect. He was religious in his own way—not as others generally. I do not think he ever had a change of heart, religiously speaking. Had he ever had a change of heart he would have told me. He could not have neglected it.”

*WILLIAM JAYNE, M.D.*

Dr. Jayne, who was appointed Governor of Dakota by Lincoln, is one of the most prominent citizens of Springfield, and was one of Lincoln's ablest and most faithful political friends. He secured Lincoln's nomination for the Legislature once, and was one of the first to pit him against Douglas. In a letter to me, dated August 18, 1887, Dr. Jayne says :

“His general reputation among his neighbors and friends of twenty-five years' standing was that of a disbeliever in the accepted faith of orthodox Christians. His mind was purely logical in its construction and action. He believed nothing except what was susceptible of demonstration. . . . His most intimate friends here, and close to him in the confidential relations of life, assert, in regard to those who claim for Lincoln a faith in the orthodox Christian belief, that the claim is a fraud and utter nonsense.”

*HON. JESSE K. DUBOIS.*

Jesse K. Dubois, for a time State Auditor of Illinois, a noble and gifted man, and one whom Lincoln



dearly loved, once related an anecdote which shows that if Lincoln did believe in a Supreme Being, he had little reverence for the God of Christianity. In company with Dubois, he was visiting a family in or near Springfield. It was summer, and while Dubois was in the house with the family, Lincoln occupied a seat in the yard with his feet resting against a tree, as was his wont. The lady, who was a very zealous Christian, called attention to his appearance and commented rather severely upon his ugliness. When they returned home Dubois referred to the lady's remarks. Lincoln was silent for a moment, and then said: "Dubois, I know that I am ugly, but she worships a God who is uglier than I am."

*HQN. JOSEPH GILLESPIE.*

Judge Gillespie, of Edwardsville, Ill., one of Lincoln's most valued friends, writes as follows:

"Mr. Lincoln seldom said anything on the subject of religion. He said once to me that he never could reconcile the prescience of Deity with the uncertainty of events."

"It was difficult," says Judge Gillespie, "for him to believe without demonstration."

*JUDGE STEPHEN T. LOGAN.*

Lincoln was admitted to the bar in 1837, when he was twenty-eight years of age, Judge Logan being on the bench at the time. Soon after his admission

he formed a partnership with John T. Stuart which existed nearly four years, or until Mr. Stuart entered Congress. He then became the partner of Judge Logan, and continued in business with him until 1843, when he united his practice with that of Mr. Herndon. The testimony of Mr. Stuart and Mr. Herndon has already been given. No formal statement of Judge Logan concerning this question has been preserved. All that I have been able to find is contained in a letter from Mr. Herndon dated Dec. 22, 1888. Mr. Herndon wrote in relation to Lincoln's letter of consolation to his dying father. In Lincoln's letter, while Christ and Christianity are wholly ignored, there is an implied recognition of immortality and an expressed hope that he may meet his father again. Lincoln's friends, for the most part, consider the letter merely conventional, not an expression of his real sentiments, but simply an effort to console his Christian father whom he could never meet again on earth. Mr. Herndon, however, is inclined to believe that while the tone of the letter is not exactly in accordance with the views generally held by Lincoln, it is yet a sincere expression of the feelings he entertained at the time. Referring to this letter, Mr. Herndon says :

“ I showed the letter to Logan, Stuart, *et al.* Logan laughed in my face as much as to say : ‘ Herndon, are you so green as to believe that letter to be Lincoln's

real ideas?' I cannot give the exact words of Logan, but he in substance said: 'Lincoln was an Infidel of the most radical type.'"

*HON. LEONARD SWETT.*

I close this division of my evidence with the testimony of that gifted lawyer and honored citizen of Illinois, Leonard Swett. Previous to his removal to Chicago, in 1865, Mr. Swett resided in Bloomington, and for a dozen years traveled the old Eighth Judicial Circuit with Lincoln. Few men knew Lincoln better than did Swett, and none was held in higher esteem by Lincoln than he. It was he who placed Lincoln in nomination for the Presidency at Chicago in 1860. I quote from a letter written by Mr. Swett in 1866:

"You ask me whether he [Lincoln] changed his religious opinions toward the close of his life. I think not. As he became involved in matters of the greatest importance, full of great responsibility and great doubt, a feeling of religious reverence, a belief in God and his justice and overruling providence increased with him. He was always full of natural religion. He believed in God as much as the most approved church member, yet he judged of him by the same system of generalization as he judged everything else. He had very little faith in ceremonials or forms. In fact he cared nothing for the form of

anything. . . . If his religion were to be judged by the lines and rules of church creeds, he would fall far short of the standard."

## CHAPTER XI.

TESTIMONY OF FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCES OF LINCOLN  
WHO KNEW HIM IN ILLINOIS.

Hon. W. H. T. Wakefield—Hon. D. W. Wilder—Dr. B. F. Gardner—Hon. J. K. Vandemark—A. Jeffrey—Dr. Arch E. McNeal—Charles McGrew—Edward Butler—Joseph Stafford—Judge A. D. Norton—J. L. Morrell—Mahlon Ross—L. Wilson—H. K. Magie—Hon. James Tuttle—Col. F. S. Rutherford—Judge Robert Leachman—Hon. Orin B. Gould—M. S. Gowin—Col. R. G. Ingersoll—Leonard W. Volk—Joseph Jefferson—Hon. E. B. Washburn—Hon. E. M. Haiues.

I WILL next present the evidence that I have gleaned from the lips or pens of personal friends of Lincoln who were acquainted with him in Illinois. The relations of these persons to Lincoln were, for the most part, less intimate than were those of the persons named in the preceding chapter; but all of them enjoyed in no small degree his confidence and esteem.

*HON. W. H. T. WAKEFIELD.*

Mr. Wakefield, our first witness, is a son of the distinguished jurist, Judge J. A. Wakefield. He is a prominent journalist, and was the nominee of the United Labor party, for Vice-President, in the Presi-

dential contest of 1888. In a letter to the author, dated Lawrence, Kan., Sept. 28, 1880, Mr. Wakefield says :

“ My father, the late Judge J. A. Wakefield, was a life-long friend of Lincoln’s, they having served through the Black Hawk war together and been in the Illinois Legislature together, during which latter time Lincoln boarded with my father in Vandalia, which was then the state capital. I remember of his visiting my father at Galena, in 1844 or 1845. They continued to correspond until Lincoln’s death.

“ My father was a member of the Methodist church and frequently spoke of and lamented Lincoln’s Infidelity, and referred to the many arguments between them on the subject.

“ The noted minister, Peter Cartwright, boarded with my father at the same time that Lincoln did, and my father and mother told me of the many theological and philosophical arguments indulged in by Lincoln and Cartwright, and of the fact that they always attracted many interested listeners and usually ended by Cartwright’s getting very angry and the spectators being convulsed with laughter at Lincoln’s dry wit and humorous comparisons.”

Lincoln’s legislative career at Vandalia extended from 1834 to 1837. It was about the beginning of this period that he wrote his book against Christianity. He was thoroughly informed and enthusiastic

in his Infidel views, and it is not to be wondered at that on theological questions, he was able to vanquish in debate even so eminent a theologian as Peter Cartwright. Ten years later, Lincoln was the Whig, and Cartwright the Democratic candidate for Congress. In this campaign a determined effort was made by the church to defeat Lincoln on account of his Infidelity. But his popularity, his reputation for honesty, his recognized ability, and his transcendent powers on the stump, carried him successfully through, and he was triumphantly elected.

*HON. D. W. WILDER.*

One of the most gifted and honorable of Western journalists is D. W. Wilder, of Kansas. He was Surveyor General of Kansas before it was admitted into the Union, and after it became a state, he held the office of State Auditor. Many years ago Gen. Wilder wrote and published an editorial on Lincoln's religious views in which he affirmed that Lincoln was a disbeliever in Christianity. The article excited the wrath of the clergy, among them the Rev. D. P. Mitchell, the leading Methodist divine of Kansas, who replied with much warmth, but without refuting the statements of Gen. Wilder. Some of my Western readers will recall the article and the controversy it provoked. I have been unable to procure a copy of it, but in its place I present the

following extract from a letter received from Gen. Wilder, dated St. Joseph, Mo., Dec. 29, 1831 :

“Lincoln believed in God, but not in the divinity of Christ. At first, like Franklin, he was probably an Atheist. Although a ‘forgiving’ man himself, he did not believe that any amount of ‘penitence’ could affect the logical effects of violated law. He has a remarkable passage on that theme.”

Concerning Lincoln’s partner, Mr. Herndon, with whom he was acquainted, Gen. Wilder says :

“Write to Wm. H. Herndon, a noble man, Springfield, Ill. Send him your book [‘Life of Paine’] He will reply. The stories told about him are lies.’

*B. F. GARDNER, M.D.*

Dr. Gardner, an old and respected resident of Atlanta, Ill., in March, 1887, made the following statement in regard to Lincoln’s views :

“I knew Lincoln from 1854 up to the time he left Springfield. He was an Infidel. He did not change his belief. Herndon told the truth in his lecture. Lincoln did not believe that prayer moved God. When he requested the prayers of his neighbors on leaving Springfield for Washington, he saw that a storm was coming and that he must have the support of the church.”

These words of Lincoln in his farewell speech requesting the prayers of his friends, though used



merely in a conventional way, have been cited by Holland, Arnold, and others, to prove that he believed in the efficacy of prayer. That no such import was attached to them at the time is admitted by Holland himself. He says: "This parting address was telegraphed to every part of the country, and was strangely misinterpreted. So little was the man's character understood that his simple and earnest request that his neighbors should pray for him was received by many as an evidence both of his weakness and his hypocrisy. No President had ever before asked the people, in a public address, to pray for him. It sounded like the cant of the conventicle to ears unaccustomed to the language of piety from the lips of politicians. The request was tossed about as a joke—'old Abe's last'" (Holland's *Life of Lincoln*, p. 254).

*HON. J. K. VANDEMARK.*

J. K. Vandemark, who formerly resided near Springfield, Ill., and who was well acquainted with Lincoln, on the 13th of October, 1887, at Valparaiso, Neb., testified as follows:

"I met Lincoln often—had many conversations with him in his office. To assert that he was a believer in Christianity is absurd. He had no faith in the dogmas of the church."

Mr. Vandemark at the time his testimony was

given was a member of the State Senate of Nebraska.

*A. JEFFREY.*

Mr. Jeffrey, who has resided near Waynesville, Ill., for a period of fifty years, and who was in the habit of attending court with Lincoln, year after year, in an interview on the 1st of March, 1887, made the following statement :

“Lincoln was decidedly Liberal. He admitted that he wrote a book against Christianity. In later years he seldom talked on this subject, but he did not change his belief. A thrust at the doctrine of endless punishment always pleased him. This doctrine he abhorred.”

*DR. ARCH E. McNEALL.*

Dr. McNeall, an old physician of Bowen, Ill., who was a delegate to the Decatur Convention which brought Lincoln forward as a candidate for the Presidency, says :

“I met Lincoln often during our political campaigns, and was quite well acquainted with him. I know that he was a Liberal thinker.”

*CHARLES McGREW.*

Dr. McGrew is a resident of Coles County, Ill.—the county in which nearly all of Lincoln’s relatives have resided for sixty years. He is a cousin of Hon.

Allen G. Thurman, and is a man of sterling character. He was for a time related to Lincoln, in a business way, and met him frequently. I met Dr. McGrew in 1888, and when I propounded the question, "Was Lincoln a Christian?" he replied:

"Lincoln was not a Christian. He was cautious and reserved and seldom said anything about religion except when he was alone with a few companions whose opinions were similar to his. On such occasions he did not hesitate to express his unbelief."

*EDWARD BUTLER.*

Early in 1858, Lincoln delivered his memorable Springfield speech which prepared the way for his debates with Douglas, and made him President of the United States. Mr. Edward Butler, who resided in Springfield for a period of twenty-six years, and who was well acquainted with Lincoln, was leader of the band which furnished the music on this occasion. In a letter written at Lyons, Kan., Jan. 16, 1890, Mr. Butler relates some incidents connected with the meeting, and quotes a passage from Lincoln's speech to the effect that from the agitation of the slavery question, truth would in the end prevail. Alluding to this passage, Mr. Butler says:

"Shortly after the meeting referred to, I chanced to be talking with Lincoln and quizzingly enquired how he could reconcile this and similar utterances

with Holy Writ? Without committing himself, he enquired if I had read Gregg's 'Creed of Christendom.' I informed him that I had not. 'Then,' said he, 'read that book and perhaps you may ascertain my views about truth prevailing.' I never conversed with Lincoln afterwards, but I obtained the book, which I keep treasured in my library. I am well convinced that no man who is used to weighing evidence, especially of Lincoln's humane and unbiased disposition, can read the book in question without truth coming to the surface."

It is hardly necessary to state that Gregg's "Creed of Christendom" is a standard work in Infidel literature, one of the most scholarly, powerful and convincing arguments against orthodox Christianity ever written.

*JOSEPH STAFFORD.*

Joseph Stafford, a resident of Galesburg, Ill., and an acquaintance of Lincoln, says:

"I know that Lincoln was a Liberal."

*JUDGE A. D. NORTON.*

In April, 1893, at Ardmore, I. T., I met Judge Norton, of Gainesville, Tex., an old acquaintance of Lincoln and Douglas. Judge Norton related many interesting reminiscences of these noted men. Speaking of Lincoln's religion, he said:

“For nearly fifty years I was a resident of Illinois. I practiced for many years in the same courts with Lincoln and knew him well. He was an Infidel. In his early manhood he wrote a book against Christianity which his friends prevented him from publishing. Because he had become famous, the church preached him from a theatre to heaven.”

*J. L. MORRELL.*

Mr. J. L. Morrell, a worthy citizen of Virden, Ill., who came to Illinois soon after Lincoln did, settled in the adjoining county to him, and like him followed for a time the avocation of surveyor, in a conversation with the writer, on the 8th of February, 1889, made the following statement :

“I knew Lincoln well—met him often. His religion was the religion of common sense. He went into this subject as deep as any man. He did not believe the inconsistencies of theology. He was not a Christian.”

*MAHLON ROSS, ESQ.*

Squire Ross, another old resident of Virden, Ill., a lawyer, and a writer of some repute, says :

“I was acquainted with Lincoln, but never talked with him on religion. He did not belong to church, and his friends say that he was not a Christian.”

*LUSK WILSON.*

Similar to the above is the testimony of Mr. Lusk Wilson, a prominent and respectable citizen of Litchfield, Ill. :

“I was acquainted with Abraham Lincoln, but never heard him give his views on the subject of religion. His partner, Herndon, and other friends, state that he was not a believer in Christianity.”

*HON. JAMES TUTTLE.*

Two miles east of Atlanta, Ill., resides one of the pioneers of Illinois, James Tuttle, now over eighty years of age. He was a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1847, and is a man universally esteemed for his love of truth and honesty. Mr. Tuttle's residence is situated on the state road leading from Springfield to Bloomington. In going from Springfield to Bloomington, to attend court, and in returning home again, Lincoln always stopped over night with Mr. Tuttle. Theological questions were favorite topics with both of them, and the evening hours were usually spent in conversations of this character. Mr. Tuttle accordingly became well acquainted with Lincoln's religious views. Feb. 26, 1887, at Minier, Ill., he made the following statement relative to them :

“Mr. Lincoln did not believe in Christianity. He denounced it unsparingly. He had the greatest con-

tempt for religious revivals, and called those who took part in them a set of ignoramuses. He was one of the most ardent admirers of Thomas Paine I ever met. He was continually quoting from the 'Age of Reason.' Said he, 'I never tire of reading Paine.'"

Mr. Tuttle is confident that Lincoln always remained a Freethinker, and believes that those who claim to have evidence from him to the contrary, willfully affirm what they know to be false.

*H. K. MAGIE.*

Mr. Magie formerly lived in Illinois, and was for a time connected with the State Department at Springfield. Writing from Brooklyn, N. Y., March 19, 1888, he says :

"My acquaintance with Mr. Lincoln was limited, as I did not reside in Springfield during his residence there. I met him during his campaign with Douglas at different times, and was with him once for three days. . . . Mr. Lincoln was a Freethinker of the Thomas Paine type. There have been picked up some of Mr. Lincoln's utterances about 'Providence,' 'God,' and the like, on which an attempt is made to make him out a Christian. Those who knew him intimately agree in the statement that he was a pronounced skeptic."

Mr. Magie also refers to the Infidel pamphlet

written by Lincoln. His knowledge regarding this, however, was derived, not from Lincoln himself, but from his friends. He says:

“At one time he wrote a criticism of the New Testament which he proposed to publish and which his friends succeeded in having suppressed, solely because of their regard for his political future.”

In a recent contribution to a New York paper from Washington, D. C., Mr. Magie writes as follows:

“I have always been fully persuaded in my own mind that it would have been utterly impossible for a man possessing that intuitive wisdom, keenness of logic, and discernment of truth, which were the marked characteristics of Mr. Lincoln’s mind, ever to have subscribed to the atrocious doctrines of the Christian church. He was developed far above it, and although making no war upon the church, he did not hesitate to speak his mind freely upon these subjects upon all proper occasions. I lived in Springfield among his old neighbors for many years, and I have talked with many of them, and to those who had good opportunity to know his views touching religious matters. All, without exception, classed him among the skeptics. It was not until after his death that he was claimed as a Christian.

“I am sorry for Newton Bateman. He has placed himself in a most awkward predicament by trying to keep out of one. . . . He permitted Mr. Holland



to circulate an atrocious falsehood in his 'Life of Lincoln' rather than incur 'unpleasant notoriety' by a firm and courageous denial."

"It is not a matter of much importance as to just what Abraham Lincoln did believe concerning God, the Bible, or the man Jesus, but when we discover an earnest, persistent, mean, and wicked attempt by lying and deceitful men to pervert the truth in this matter, in order that their 'holy religion' shall profit by their lies, the matter does become of some importance, and I am glad that Mr. —— has taken hold of this subject with that zeal and earnestness which usually characterize his great ability, and from what I know in this matter I can assure all whom it may concern that by the time he is through with the subject it will be deemed settled that Mr. Lincoln was not a hypocrite, neither was he a believer in the monstrous and superstitious doctrines of the Christian church."

The foregoing evidence, with the exception of a portion of Mr. Magie's testimony, was all given to the writer by the witnesses themselves, either by letter or orally, and he hereby certifies to its faithful transcription. This evidence is from men whose characters as witnesses cannot be impeached, and it is hardly possible that one of them will ever favor the other side with a disclaimer.

*COL. F. S. RUTHERFORD.*

I wish now to record a statement from Colonel Rutherford, a well-known citizen and soldier of Illinois. It was not made to the writer, but was made during the war to Mr. W. W. Fraser, a member of his regiment, and a man of unquestionable veracity. I will let Mr. Fraser present it, together with the circumstances which called it out. I quote from a letter dated Ottawa, Kan., Dec. 16, 1881 :

“During the siege of Vicksburg our colonel, F. S. Rutherford, Colonel of the 97th Ill. Vol. Inf., was about to leave us, and I went to see him about taking a small package to Alton—his home and mine. He had been sick and quite unable to do active service. During our conversation I said that many of the Alton boys did not like to be left under the command of — —. Colonel Rutherford then said: ‘If my life is worth anything I owe it as much to my family as my country, and it will be worthless to either if I stay much longer in camp, but I hate to leave the boys.’ Colonel Rutherford said that he had stumped his district for Mr. Lincoln, and had expected, from Mr. Lincoln’s promises, something better than a coloneley. I told Colonel Rutherford that I was sorry to hear that, as I had always thought so well of Mr. Lincoln. Mr. Rutherford then said: ‘What more could you expect of an Infidel?’ I said: ‘Why, Colonel, doesn’t Lincoln believe in a God?’

He replied: 'Well, he may believe in God, but he doesn't believe in the Bible nor Christ. I know it, for I have heard him make fun of them and say that Christ was a bastard if Joseph was not his father, and I have some sheets of paper now at home that he wrote, making fun of the Bible.'

*JUDGE ROBERT LEACHMAN.*

The venerable Southern jurist, Judge Leachman, was one of Lincoln's intimate and valued friends. He is a Christian, but candidly confesses that Lincoln was not a believer. In the autumn of 1889, at Anniston, Ala., Judge Leachman made the following statement to Mr. W. S. Andres, of Portsmouth, O.:

"Lincoln was not such a Christian as the term is used to imply by church members and church-going people. He was in the strictest sense a moralist. He looked to actions and not to belief. He greatly admired the Golden Rule, and was one of those who thought that 'One world at a time' was a good idea. . . . He thought this a good place to be happy as is shown by his wonderful love for liberty and mercy. No, I can truthfully say, Abraham Lincoln was not a Christian."

*HON. ORIN B. GOULD.*

Another friend and admirer of Lincoln was Orin B. Gould, of Franklin Furnace, O. Mr. Gould was

one of the noted men of Southern Ohio. He was a man of sterling worth and extensive knowledge, and was familiarly known as the "Sage of the Furnace." He became acquainted with Lincoln in Illinois at an early day, and a close friendship existed between them while Lincoln lived. Mr. Gould survived his illustrious friend nearly a quarter of a century, dying recently at his beautiful home on the banks of the Ohio. Previous to his death the question of Lincoln's religion was presented to him and his own views on the subject solicited. His response was as follows :

"He, like myself, recognized no monsters for Gods. He, like myself, discarded the divinity of Christ, and the idea of a hell's fire. He, like myself, admired Christ as a man, and believed the devil and evil to be simply 'truth misunderstood.' He, like myself, thought good wherever found should be accepted and the bad rejected."

*M. S. GOWIN.*

Mr. Gowin, an old and prominent citizen, and Justice of the Peace, of McCune, Kan., in a recent article, has this to say regarding Lincoln :

"I lived near Springfield, Ill., from the time that I was a child, and at the time Lincoln came before the people, and during the time he was President,

his enemies called him an Infidel, and his friends did not deny it."

*COL. ROBERT G. INGERSOLL.*

On the eighty-fourth anniversary of Lincoln's birth, Col. Ingersoll delivered in New York his masterly oration on Abraham Lincoln. In this oration he affirmed that the religion of Lincoln was the religion of Voltaire and Paine. Immediately after its delivery Gen. Collis, of New York, addressed the following note to Col. Ingersoll:

"Dear Col. Ingersoll: I have just returned home from listening to your most entertaining lecture upon the life of Abraham Lincoln. I thank you sincerely for all that was good in it, and that entitles me to be frank in condemning what I consider was bad. You say that Lincoln's religion was the religion of Voltaire and Tom Paine. I know not where you get your authority for this, but if the statement be true Lincoln himself was untrue, for no man invoked 'the gracious favor of Almighty God' in every effort of his life with more apparent fervor than did he, and this God was not the Deists' God but the God whom he worshiped under the forms of the Christian Church, of which he was a member.

"I do not write this in defense of his religion or as objecting to yours, but I think it were better for the

truth of history that you should blame him for what he was than commend him for what he was not.

“Sincerely yours,

“Charles H. T. Collis.”

In answer to the above Col. Ingersoll penned the following reply :

“Gen. Charles H. T. Collis,

“My dear sir :

“I have just received your letter in which you criticise a statement made by me to the effect that Lincoln’s religion was the religion of Voltaire and Thomas Paine, and you add, ‘I know not where you get your authority for this, but if the statement be true Lincoln himself was untrue, for no man ever invoked the gracious favor of Almighty God in every effort of his life with more apparent fervor than did he.’

“You seem to be laboring under the impression that Voltaire was not a believer in God, and that he could not have invoked the gracious favor of Almighty God. The truth is that Voltaire was not only a believer in God, but even in special Providence. I know that the clergy have always denounced Voltaire as an Atheist, but this can be accounted for in two ways : (1) By the ignorance of the clergy, and (2) by their contempt of truth. Thomas Paine was also a believer in God, and wrote his creed as follows : ‘I believe in one God and no

more, and hope for immortality.' The ministers have also denounced Paine as an Atheist.

"You will, therefore, see that your first statement is without the slightest foundation in fact. Lincoln could be perfectly true to himself if he agreed with the religious sentiments of Voltaire and Paine, and yet invoke the gracious favor of Almighty God.

"You also say, 'This God' (meaning the God whose favor Lincoln invoked) 'was not the Deists' God.' The Deists believe in an Infinite Being, who created and preserves the universe. The Christians believe no more. Deists and Christians believe in the same God, but they differ as to what this God has done, and to what this God will do. You further say that 'Lincoln worshiped his God under the forms of the Christian Church, of which he was a member.' Again you are mistaken. Lincoln was never a member of any church. Mrs. Lincoln stated a few years ago that Mr. Lincoln was not a Christian. Hundreds of his acquaintances have said the same thing. Not only so, but many of them have testified that he was a Freethinker; that he denied the inspiration of the Scriptures, and that he always insisted that Christ was not the son of God, and that the dogma of the atonement was and is an absurdity.

"I will very gladly pay you one thousand dollars for your trouble to show that one statement in

your letter is correct—even one. And now, to quote you, ‘Do you not think it were better for the truth of history that you should state the facts about Lincoln, and that you should commend him for what he was rather than for what he was not?’

“Yours truly,

“R. G. Ingersoll.”

*LEONARD W. VOLK.*

In the spring of 1860, just before Lincoln was nominated for the Presidency, the celebrated sculptor, Volk, made a bust of him. He spent a week in Chicago and made daily sittings in the artist's studio. Mr. Volk relates the following incident, which hardly accords with the tales told about Lincoln's reverence for the Sabbath, and his love for church services :

“He entered my studio on Sunday morning, remarking that a friend at the hotel had invited him to go to church. ‘But,’ said Mr. Lincoln, ‘I thought I'd rather come and sit for the bust. The fact is,’ he continued, ‘I don't like to hear cut-and-dried sermons.’”

*JOSEPH JEFFERSON.*

It is difficult for orthodox Christians to reconcile Lincoln's fondness for the play with his reputed piety. That his last act was a visit to the theater is



a fact that stands out in ghastly prominence to them. To break its force they offer various explanations. Some say that he went to avoid the office-seekers; others that Mrs. Lincoln compelled him to go; and still others that he was led there by fate. The truth is he was a frequent attendant at the theater. He went there much oftener than he went to church. The visit of a clergyman annoyed him, but the society of actors he enjoyed. He greatly admired the acting of Edwin Booth. He sent a note to the actor Hackett, praising him for his fine presentation of Falstaff. He called John McCulloch to his box one night and congratulated him on his successful rendition of the part he was playing.

In his autobiography, which recently appeared in the *Century Magazine*, Joseph Jefferson gives some interesting reminiscences of Lincoln. In the earlier part of his dramatic career he was connected with a theatrical company, the managers of which, one of whom was his father, built a theater in Springfield, Ill. A conflict between the preachers and players ensued. The church was powerful then, and the city joined with the church to suppress the theater. The history of the struggle and its termination, as narrated by Mr. Jefferson, is as follows:

“In the midst of their rising fortunes a heavy blow fell upon them. A religious revival was in progress at the time, and the fathers of the church

not only launched forth against us in their sermons, but by some political maneuver got the city to pass a new law enjoining a heavy license against our 'unholy' calling; I forget the amount, but it was large enough to be prohibitory. Here was a terrible condition of affairs—all our available funds invested, the Legislature in session, the town full of people, and by a heavy license denied the privilege of opening the new theater!

"In the midst of their trouble a young lawyer called on the managers. He had heard of the injustice, and offered, if they would place the matter in his hands, to have the license taken off, declaring that he only desired to see fair play, and he would accept no fee whether he failed or succeeded. The case was brought up before the council. The young man began his harangue. He handled the subject with tact, skill, and humor, tracing the history of the drama from the time when Thespis acted in a cart to the stage of to-day. He illustrated his speech with a number of anecdotes, and kept the council in a roar of laughter; his good humor prevailed, and the exorbitant tax was taken off.

"This young lawyer was very popular in Springfield, and was honored and beloved by all who knew him, and, after the time of which I write, he held rather an important position in the Government of the United States. He now lies buried near Spring-

field, under a monument commemorating his greatness and his virtues—and his name was Abraham Lincoln.”

*HON. ELIHU B. WASHBURN.*

The ball-room, too, had its attractions for him. Some years ago Hon. E. B. Washburn contributed to the *North American Review* a lengthy article on Lincoln. When President Taylor was inaugurated, Lincoln was serving his term in Congress. Alluding to the inaugural ball, Mr. Washburn says :

“A small number of mutual friends—including Mr. Lincoln—made up a party to attend the inauguration ball together. It was by far the most brilliant inauguration ball ever given. . . . We did not take our departure until three or four o'clock in the morning” (Reminiscences of Lincoln, p. 19).

*HON. ELIJAH M. HAINES.*

In February, 1859, Governor Bissell gave a reception in Springfield which Lincoln attended. Hon. E. M. Haines, then a member of the Legislature, and one of Lincoln's supporters for the Senate, referring to the affair, says :

“Dancing was going on in the adjacent rooms, and Mr. Lincoln invited my wife to join him in the dancing, which she did, and he apparently took

much pleasure in the recreation" (Every-Day Life of Lincoln, p. 308).

Early in January, 1863, President and Mrs. Lincoln gave a reception and ball at the White House. This was a severe shock to the Christians of the country, and provoked a storm of censure from the religious press.

According to Ninian Edwards, Lincoln is converted to Christianity about 1848. In March, 1849, he attends the inauguration ball and "Won't go home till morning." According to Dr. Smith, he is converted in 1858. In February, 1859, he attends and participates in a ball at Springfield. According to Noah Brooks, he is converted in 1862. In January, 1863, he gives a ball himself. In every instance he retires from the altar only to enter the ball-room.

## CHAPTER XII.

TESTIMONY OF FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCES OF LINCOLN  
WHO KNEW HIM IN WASHINGTON.

Hon. Geo. W. Julian—Hon. John B. Alley—Hon. Hugh McCulloch—Donn Piatt—Hon. Schuyler Colfax—Hon. Geo. S. Boutwell—Hon. Wm. D. Kelly—E. H. Wood—Dr. J. J. Thompson—Rev. James Shrigley—Hon. John Covode—Jas. E. Murdock—Hon. M. B. Field—Harriet Beecher Stowe—Hon. J. P. Usher—Hon. S. P. Chase—Frederick Douglas—Mr. Defrees—Hon. Wm. H. Seward—Judge Aaron Goodrich—Nicolay and Hay's "Life of Lincoln"—Warren Chase—Hon. A. J. Grover—Judge James M. Nelson.

THE evidence of more than fifty witnesses has already been adduced to prove that Lincoln was not a Christian in Illinois. Those who at first were so forward to claim that he was, have generally recognized the futility of the claim. They have abandoned it, and content themselves with affirming that he became a Christian after he went to Washington. These claimants, being for the most part rigid sectarians themselves, endeavor to convince the world that he not only became a Christian, but an orthodox Christian, and a sectarian; that even from a Calvinistic standpoint, he was "sound not only on the truth of the Christian religion but on all its fundamental doctrines and teachings." The testimony of

Colonel Lamon, Judge Davis, Mrs. Lincoln, and Colonel Nicolay, not only refutes this claim, but shows that he was not in any just sense of the term a Christian when he died. In addition to this evidence, I will now present the testimony of a score of other witnesses who knew him in Washington. These witnesses do not all affirm that he was a total disbeliever in Christianity; but a part of them do, while the testimony of the remainder is to the effect that he was not orthodox as claimed.

*HON. GEORGE W. JULIAN.*

Our first witness is George W. Julian, of Indiana. Mr. Julian was for many years a leader in Congress, was the Anti-Slavery candidate for Vice-President, in 1852, and one of the founders of the party that elected Lincoln to the Presidency. He was one of Lincoln's warmest personal friends and intimately acquainted with him at Washington. Writing to me from Santa Fe, N. M., under date of March 13, 1888, Mr. Julian says:

"I knew him [Lincoln] well, and I know that he was not a Christian in any old-fashioned orthodox sense of the word, but only a religious Theist. He was, substantially, such a Christian as Jefferson, Franklin, Washington, and John Adams; and it is perfectly idle to assert the contrary."

HON. JOHN B. ALLEY.

In 1886, the publishers of the *North American Review* issued one of the most unique, original, and interesting works on Lincoln that has yet appeared—"Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln." It was edited by Allen Thorndike Rice, and comprises, in addition to a biographical sketch of Lincoln's life by the editor, thirty-three articles on Lincoln written by as many distinguished men of his day. One of the best articles in this volume is from the pen of one of Boston's merchant princes, John B. Alley. Mr. Alley was for eight years a member of Congress from Massachusetts, serving in this capacity during all the years that Lincoln was President. To his ability and integrity as a statesman this remarkable yet truthful tribute has been paid: "No bill he ever reported and no measure he ever advocated during his long term of service failed to receive the approbation of the House." Lincoln recognized his many sterling qualities, and throughout the war his relations with the President were of the most intimate character. Mr. Alley is one of the many who know that Lincoln was not a Christian, and one of the few who have the courage to affirm it. He says:

"In his religious views Mr. Lincoln was very nearly what we would call a Freethinker. While he reflected a great deal upon religious subjects he com-

municated his thoughts to a very few. He had little faith in the popular religion of the times. He had a broad conception of the goodness and power of an overruling Providence, and said to me one day that he felt sure the Author of our being, whether called God or Nature, it mattered little which, would deal very mercifully with poor erring humanity in the other, and he hoped better, world. He was as free as possible from all sectarian thought, feeling, or sentiment. No man was more tolerant of the opinions and feelings of others in the direction of religious sentiment or had less faith in religious dogmas" (*Reminiscences of Lincoln*, pp. 590, 591).

In conclusion, Mr. Alley says :

"While Mr. Lincoln was perfectly honest and upright and led a blameless life, he was in no sense what might be considered a religious man" (*Ibid*).

*HON. HUGH McCULLOCH.*

Hon. Hugh McCulloch, a member of Lincoln's Cabinet, his last Secretary of the Treasury, writes :

"Grave and sedate in manner, he was full of kind and gentle emotion. He was fond of poetry. Shakspeare was his delight. Few men could read with equal expression the plays of the great dramatist. The theater had great attractions for him, but it was comedy, not tragedy, he went to hear. He had great enjoyment of the plays that made him



laugh, no matter how absurd and grotesque, and he gave expression to his enjoyment by hearty and noisy applause. He was a man of strong religious convictions, but he cared nothing for the dogmas of the churches and had little respect for their creeds " (Reminiscences of Lincoln, pp. 412, 413).

*DONN PIATT.*

The distinguished lawyer, soldier and journalist, Donn Piatt, who knew Lincoln in Illinois and who met him often in Washington, writes :

" I soon discovered that this strange and strangely gifted man, while not at all cynical, was a skeptic. His view of human nature was low, but good-natured. I could not call it suspicious, but he believed only what he saw " (Reminiscences of Lincoln, p. 480).

Those who are disposed to believe that Lincoln's Christian biographers have observed an inflexible adherence to truth in their statements concerning his religious belief would do well to ponder the following words of Mr. Piatt :

" History is, after all, the crystallization of popular beliefs. As a pleasant fiction is more acceptable than a naked fact, and as the historian shapes his wares, like any other dealer, to suit his customers, one can readily see that our chronicles are only a duller sort of fiction than the popular novels so

eagerly read; not that they are true, but that they deal in what we long to have—the truth. Popular beliefs, in time, come to be superstitions, and create gods and devils. Thus Washington is deified into an impossible man, and Aaron Burr has passed into a like impossible monster. Through the same process Abraham Lincoln, one of our truly great, has almost gone from human knowledge” (Ibid, p. 478).

*HON. SCHUYLER COLFAX.*

Previous to the war no class of persons were louder in their denunciation of Abolitionism than the clergy of the North. When at last it became evident that the institution of slavery was doomed, in their eagerness to be found on the popular side, they were equally loud in their demands for its immediate extirpation. In September, 1862, a deputation of Chicago clergymen waited upon the President for the purpose of urging him to proclaim the freedom of the slave. Notwithstanding he had matured his plans and was ready to issue his Proclamation, he gave them no intimation of his intention. In connection with their visit, Colfax relates the following :

“One of these ministers felt it his duty to make a more searching appeal to the President’s conscience. Just as they were retiring, he turned, and said to

Mr. Lincoln, 'What you have said to us, Mr. President, compels me to say to you in reply, that it is a message to you from our Divine Master, through me, commanding you, sir, to open the doors of bondage that the slave may go free!' Mr. Lincoln replied, instantly, 'That may be, sir, for I have studied this question, by night and by day, for weeks and for months, but if it is, as you say, a message from your Divine Master, is it not odd that the only channel he could send it by was that roundabout route by that awfully wicked city of Chicago?' (Reminiscences of Lincoln, pp. 334, 335).

In a lecture delivered in Brooklyn, N. Y., in 1886, Mr. Colfax stated that Lincoln was not a Christian, in the evangelical sense. To a gentleman who visited him at his home in South Bend, Ind., he declared that Lincoln was not a believer in orthodox Christianity. Again at Atchison, Kan., he informed Mr. Perkins that Lincoln had never been converted to Christianity, as claimed.

*HON. WILLIAM D. KELLEY.*

William D. Kelley, for thirty years a member of Congress from Pennsylvania, relates an incident similar to the one related by Mr. Colfax. A "Quaker preacher" called at the White House to urge the President to proclaim at once the freedom

of the slave. To illustrate her argument and emphasize her plea, she cited the history of Deborah.

“Having elaborated this Biblical example,” says Mr. Kelley, “the speaker assumed that the President was, as Deborah had been, the appointed minister of the Lord, and proceeded to tell him that it was his duty to follow the example of Deborah, and forthwith abolish slavery, and establish freedom throughout the land, as the Lord had appointed him to do.

“‘Has the Friend finished?’ said the President, as she ceased to speak. Having received an affirmative answer, he said: ‘I have neither time nor disposition to enter into discussion with the Friend, and end this occasion by suggesting for her consideration the question whether, if it be true that the Lord has appointed me to do the work she has indicated, it is not probable that he would have communicated knowledge of the fact to me as well as to her’” (Reminiscences of Lincoln, pp. 284, 285).

*HON. GEORGE S. BOUTWELL.*

A great many pious stories have been circulated in regard to the Emancipation Proclamation. We are told that he made a “solemn vow to God” that if Lee was defeated at Antietam he would issue the Preliminary Proclamation. And yet this document contains no recognition of God. He even completed the draft of it on what Christians are pleased

to regard as God's holy day. Mr. Boutwell states that Lincoln once related to him the circumstances attending the promulgation of the instrument. He quotes the following as Lincoln's words :

"The truth is just this: When Lee came over the river, I made a resolution that if McClellan drove him back I would send the Proclamation after him. The battle of Antietam was fought Wednesday, and until Saturday I could not find out whether we had gained a victory or lost a battle. It was then too late to issue the Proclamation that day, and the fact is *I fixed it up a little Sunday*, and Monday I let them have it" (Reminiscences of Lincoln, p. 126).

*E. H. WOOD.*

Mr. E. H. Wood, one of Lincoln's old Springfield neighbors, who visited him at Washington during the war, made the following statement to Mr. Hern-  
don, in October, 1881 :

"I came from Auburn, N. Y.—knew Seward well—knew Lincoln very well—lived for three years just across the alley from his residence. I had many conversations with him on politics and religion as late as 1859 and '60. He was a broad religionist—a Liberal. Lincoln told me Franklin's story. Franklin and a particular friend made an agreement that when the first one died he would come back and tell how things went. Well, Franklin's friend died, but

never came back. 'It is a doubtful question,' said Lincoln, 'whether we get anywhere to get back.' Lincoln said, 'There is no hell.' He did not say much about heaven. I met him in Washington and saw no change in him."

I have given the testimony of two of Lincoln's nearest neighbors in Springfield, Isaac Hawley and E. H. Wood. Mr. Hawley *believes* that Lincoln was a Christian; Mr. Wood *knows* that he was not. Mr. Hawley never heard Lincoln utter a word to support his belief; Mr. Wood obtained his knowledge from Lincoln himself. Mr. Hawley's belief is of little value compared with Mr. Wood's knowledge. Mr. Hawley never heard Lincoln defend Christianity and probably never heard him oppose it. Lincoln knew that Mr. Hawley was a Christian—that he had no sympathy with his Freethought views. He did not desire to offend or antagonize him, and hence he refrained from introducing a subject that he knew was distasteful to him. Mr. Wood, on the other hand, was a man of broad and Liberal ideas, and Lincoln did not hesitate to express to him his views with freedom.

J. J. THOMPSON, M.D.

Dr. J. J. Thompson, an old resident of Illinois, now in Colorado, in a letter, dated March 18, 1888, writes as follows :

"I knew Abraham Lincoln from my boyhood up to the time of his death. I was in his law office many times and met him several times in Washington. He was a Liberal, outspoken, and seemed to feel proud of it."

"This great and good man," concludes Dr. Thompson, "claimed Humanity as his religion."

*REV. JAMES SHRIGLEY.*

Rev. Jas. Shrigley, of Philadelphia, who was acquainted with President Lincoln in Washington, and who received a hospital chaplaincy from him, says :

"President Lincoln was also remarkably tolerant. He was the friend of all, and never, to my knowledge, gave the influence of his great name to encourage sectarianism in any of its names and forms" (Lincoln Memorial Album, p. 335).

*HON. JOHN COVODE.*

In connection with Mr. Shrigley's appointment, the following anecdote is related. Mr. Shrigley was not orthodox, and when it became known that his name had been sent to the Senate, a Committee of "Young Christians" waited upon the President for the purpose of inducing him to withdraw the nomination. Hon. John Covode, of Pennsylvania, was present during the interview and gave it to the press. It is as follows :

“ ‘ We have called, Mr. President, to confer with you in regard to the appointment of Mr. Shrigley, of Philadelphia, as hospital chaplain.’ ”

“ The President responded : ‘ Oh, yes, gentlemen ; I have sent his name to the Senate, and he will no doubt be confirmed at an early day.’ ”

“ One of the young men replied : ‘ We have not come to ask for the appointment, but to solicit you to withdraw the nomination.’ ”

“ ‘ Ah,’ said Lincoln, ‘ that alters the case ; but on what ground do you ask the nomination withdrawn ?’ ”

“ The answer was, ‘ Mr. Shrigley is not sound in his theological opinions.’ ”

“ The President inquired : ‘ On what question is the gentleman unsound ?’ ”

“ Response : ‘ He does not believe in endless punishment ; not only so, sir, but he believes that even the rebels themselves will finally be saved.’ ”

“ ‘ Is that so ?’ inquired the President.

“ The members of the committee both responded, ‘ Yes,’ ‘ Yes.’ ”

“ ‘ Well, gentlemen, if that be so, and there is any way under heaven whereby the rebels can be saved, then, for God’s sake and their sakes, let the man be appointed ’ ” (L. M. A., pp. 336, 337).

**And he was appointed.**



*JAMES E. MURDOCH.*

It is claimed that few public men have made greater use of the Bible than Lincoln. This is true. He was continually quoting Scripture or alluding to Scriptural scenes and stories, sometimes to illustrate or adorn a serious speech, but more frequently to point or emphasize a joke. The venerable actor and elocutionist, James E. Murdoch, who had met Lincoln, both in Springfield and Washington, relates an anecdote of him while at Washington which serves to illustrate this propensity :

“ One day a detachment of troops was marching along the avenue singing the soul-stirring strain of ‘John Brown.’ They were walled in on either side by throngs of citizens and strangers, whose voices mingled in the roll of the mighty war-song. In the midst of this exciting scene, a man had clambered into a small tree, on the sidewalk, where he clung, unmindful of the jeers of the passing crowd, called forth by the strange antics he was unconsciously exhibiting in his efforts to overcome the swaying motion of the slight stem which bent beneath his weight. Mr. Lincoln’s attention was attracted for a moment, and he paused in the serious conversation in which he was deeply interested and in an abstracted manner, yet with a droll cast of the eye, and a nod of the head in the direction of the man, he re-

peated, in his dry and peculiar utterance, the following old-fashioned couplet:

‘ And Zaccheous he did climb a tree,  
His Lord and Master for to see.’ ”

(L. M. A., pp. 349, 350).

Mr. Murdoch states that in connection with this incident Lincoln was charged “with turning sacred subjects into ridicule.” He apologizes for, and attempts to palliate this levity, and affects to believe that Lincoln was a Christian. But almost daily Lincoln indulged in jokes at the expense of the Bible and Christianity, many of them ten-fold more sacrilegious in their character than this trifling incident related by Mr. Murdoch. If the scrupulously pious considered this simple jest, uttered in the midst of a mixed crowd, irreverent, what would have been their horror could they have listened to some of his remarks made when alone with a skeptical boon companion? With Christians and with strangers he was generally guarded in his speech, lest he should give offense; but with his unbelieving friends, up to the end of his career, his keenest shafts of wit were not infrequently aimed at the religion of his day. This shows that the popular faith had no more sacredness for Lincoln, the President, in Washington, than it had for Lincoln, the farmer’s boy, who mocked and mimicked it in Indiana, or

Lincoln, the lawyer, who scoffed at it and argued against it in Illinois.

HON. MAUNSELL B. FIELD.

Mr. Field, who had met nearly all the noted characters of his day, both of Europe and America, in his "Memories of Many Men," has this significant sentence respecting Lincoln :

"Mr. Lincoln was entirely deficient in what the phrenologists call *reverence* [*veneration*]."

This made it easy for him to emancipate himself from the slavery of priestcraft and become and remain a Freethinker. Professor Beall, one of the ablest of living phrenological writers, says :

"No man can 'enjoy religion,' as the Methodists express it, unless he has well developed veneration and wonder" (The Brain and the Bible, p. 109).

"All those who rebel against any form of government which in childhood they were taught to revere, must of necessity do so in opposition to the faculty of veneration. Thus it is obvious that the less one possesses of the conservative restraining faculties, the more easily he becomes a rebel or an Infidel to that which his reason condemns. On the other hand, the profoundly conscientious and reverential man, who sincerely regards unbelief as a sin, of course instinctively antagonizes every skeptical thought, and is thus likely to remain a slave to the

religion learned at his mother's knee" (Ibid, p. 228).

Mr. Field also relates the following anecdote of Lincoln:

"I was once in Mr. Lincoln's company when a sectarian controversy arose. He himself looked very grave, and made no observation until all the others had finished what they had to say. Then with a twinkle of the eye he remarked that he preferred the Episcopalians to every other sect, because they are equally indifferent to a man's religion and his politics."

HARRIET BEECHER STOWE.

The noted author of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" had several interviews with the President. She wrote an article on him which has been cited in proof of his "deeply religious nature." But if her words prove anything, they prove that he was not an evangelical Christian. They are as follows:

"But Almighty God has granted to him that clearness of vision which he gives to the true-hearted, and enabled him to set his honest foot in that promised land of freedom which is to be the patrimony of all men, black and white; and from henceforth nations shall rise up and call him blessed. *We believe he has never made any religious profession*, but we see evidence that in passing through this dreadful national

crisis, he has been forced by the very anguish of the struggle to look upward, where any rational creature must look for support. No man in this agony has suffered more and deeper, albeit with a dry, weary, patient pain, that seemed to some like insensibility. 'Whichever way it ends,' he said to the writer, 'I have the impression that *I* shan't last long after it's over'" (Every-Day Life of Lincoln, pp. 575, 576).

Mrs. Stowe was herself an orthodox Christian communicant, but her store of good sense was too great to allow her to inflict her religious notions upon the unbelieving President, and, as a consequence, she did not see him rush out of the room with a Bible under his arm to—I was going to say—pray God to deliver him from an intolerable nuisance.

That the mighty burden which pressed upon Lincoln made him a sadder and more serious man at Washington than he had been before is true. Christians are always mistaking sadness for penitence and seriousness for piety, and so they claim that he experienced a change of heart.

HON. JOHN P. USHER.

Christians and Theists are wont to speak of Lincoln's constant and firm reliance upon God. But it is a little remarkable that in the preparation of his greatest work he did not rely upon God. In the

supreme moments of his life he forgot God. Dr. Barrows says:

“When he wrote his immortal Proclamation, he invoked upon it . . . ‘the gracious favor of Almighty God.’”

When he wrote his immortal Proclamation he had no thought of God. Judge Usher, a member of his Cabinet, tells us how God came to be invoked:

“In the preparation of the final Proclamation of Emancipation, of January 1, 1863, Mr. Lincoln manifested great solicitude. He had his original draft printed and furnished each member of his Cabinet with a copy, with the request that each should examine, criticise, and suggest any amendments that occurred to them. At the next meeting of the Cabinet Mr. Chase said: ‘This paper is of the utmost importance—greater than any state paper ever made by this Government. A paper of so much importance, and involving the liberties of so many people, ought, I think, to make some reference to Deity. I do not observe anything of the kind in it.’ Mr. Lincoln said: ‘No; I overlooked it. Some reference to Deity must be inserted. Mr. Chase, won’t you make a draft of what you think ought to be inserted?’ Mr. Chase promised to do so, and at the next meeting presented the following: ‘And upon this Act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice warranted by the Constitution upon military neces-

sity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God' " (Reminiscences of Lincoln, pp. 91, 92).

*HON. SALMON P. CHASE.*

In the New York *Tribune* of Feb. 22d, 1893, appeared an article on "How the Emancipation Proclamation was made," written by Mrs. Janet Chase Hoyt, daughter of Salmon P. Chase. In this article Mrs. Hoyt gives the following extract from a letter written to her by her father in 1867:

"Looking over old papers, I found many of my memoranda, etc., of the war, and among them my draft of a proclamation of emancipation submitted to Mr. Lincoln the day before his own was issued. He asked all of us for suggestions in regard to its form and I submitted mine in writing, and among other sentences the close as it now stands, which he adopted from my draft with a modification. It may be interesting to you to see precisely what I said, and I copy it. You must remember that in the original draft there was no reference whatever to Divine or human sanction of the act. What I said was this at the conclusion of my letter: 'Finally, I respectfully suggest that on an occasion of such interest there can be no imputation of affectation against a solemn recognition of responsibility before men and before God, and that some such

close as this will be proper: "And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice warranted by the Constitution (and of duty demanded by the circumstances (of the country), I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God.'" Mr. Lincoln adopted this close, substituting only for the words inclosed in parentheses these words: 'upon military necessity,' which I think was not an improvement.'"

*MR. DEFREES.*

During his Presidency the clergy petitioned him to recommend in his message to Congress an amendment to the Constitution recognizing the existence of God. In preparing his message it seems that he inserted the request. Referring to this, Mr. Defrees, Superintendent of Public Printing during Lincoln's administration, says:

"When I assisted him in reading the proof he struck it out, remarking that he had not made up his mind as to its propriety" (*Westminster Review*, Sept. 1891).

*HON. WILLIAM H. SEWARD.*

In his "Travels Around the World," Seward records one of Lincoln's sarcastic hits at the doctrine of endless punishment. Speaking of England's jealousy of the United States in certain matters, Seward says:



“That hesitation and refusal recall President Lincoln’s story of the intrusion of the Universalists into the town of Springfield. The several orthodox churches agreed that their pastors should preach down the heresy. One of them began his discourse with these emphatic words: ‘My Brethren, there is a dangerous doctrine creeping in among us. There are those who are teaching that all men will be saved; but my dear brethren, *we* hope for better things’” (Travels Around the World, p. 513).

*JUDGE AARON GOODRICH.*

Judge Goodrich, of Minnesota, Lincoln’s minister to Belgium, who was one of the most accomplished scholars in the West, and an author of note, and who was on terms of close intimacy with Lincoln, both before and after he became President, says:

“He [Lincoln] believed in a God, *i.e.*, Nature; but he did not believe in the Christ, nor did he ever affiliate with any church.”

*FREDERICK DOUGLAS.*

Abraham Lincoln believed in a Supreme Being, but he did not believe in the God of Christians. The God of Christians was to him the most hideous monster that the imagination of man had ever conceived. There were two doctrines taught in connection with this deity which he especially abhorred—the doctrine of endless punishment, and the doctrine

of vicarious atonement. That the innocent should suffer for the guilty—that God should permit his sinless son to be put to a cruel death to atone for the sins of wicked men—was to him an act of the most infamous injustice. His whole nature rebelled against the idea. Frederick Douglas narrates an incident which, while it has no direct reference to this theological doctrine, yet tends to disclose his abhorrence of the idea. Mr. Douglas was engaged in recruiting colored troops and visited the President for the purpose of securing from him a pledge that colored soldiers would be allowed the same privileges accorded white soldiers. As the Confederate Government had declared that they would be treated as insurgents, he also urged upon him the necessity of retaliating, if colored prisoners were put to death. But to the latter proposition Lincoln would not listen. Mr. Douglas says :

“I shall never forget the benignant expression of his face, the tearful look of his eye and the quiver of his voice, when he deprecated a resort to retaliatory measures. He said he could not take men out and kill them in cold blood for what was done by others. If he could get hold of the persons who were guilty of killing the colored prisoners in cold blood, the case would be different, but *he could not kill the innocent for the guilty*” (Reminiscences of Lincoln, pp. 188, 189).

*NICOLAY AND HAY'S "LIFE OF LINCOLN."*

Of the numerous biographies of Lincoln that have been published, the authors of three, above all others, were specially qualified and possessed the necessary materials for a reliable biography of him—Herndon, Lamon, and Nicolay and Hay.

As Colonel Lamon's "Life" covers but a part of Lincoln's career, and as Mr. Herndon's "Life" deals more with his private life than with his public history, the biography of Lincoln that is likely to be accepted as the standard authority, is the work written by his private secretaries, Col. John G. Nicolay and Col. John Hay, which originally appeared in the *Century Magazine*. In the chapter on "Lincoln and the Churches," the religious phase of Lincoln's character is presented. In dealing with this question the authors have carefully avoided the rock upon which Lamon's "Life" was wrecked, and at the same time have refrained from repeating the misrepresentations of Holland and Arnold. They do not offend the church by openly declaring that Lincoln was an Infidel; neither do they outrage truth by asserting that he was a Christian. They affirm that during the latter years of his life he recognized a "superior power," but they do not intimate that he recognized Jesus Christ as this power, or any part of it, nor that he accepted the Bible as a special revelation of this power. In the following passage

they impliedly deny both his alleged Atheism and his alleged orthodoxy :

“ We have no purpose of attempting to formulate his creed ; we question if he himself ever did so. There have been swift witnesses who, judging from expressions uttered in his callow youth, have called him an Atheist, and others who, with the most laudable intentions, have remembered improbable conversations which they bring forward to prove at once his orthodoxy and their own intimacy with him.”

As it is not claimed that Lincoln was an Atheist, especially during the last years of his life, the above can very properly be brought forward in support of the negative of this question. In the last clause it is intended by the authors to administer a sarcastic rebuke to such witnesses as Brooks, Willets and Vinton, as well as deny the truthfulness of their statements.

In regard to Lincoln's youth, the following from Nicolay and Hay's work corroborates Lamon's statements and refutes those of Holland:

“ We are making no claim of early saintship for him. He was merely a good boy, with sufficient wickedness to prove his humanity. . . . It is also reported that he sometimes impeded the celerity of harvest operations by making burlesque speeches, or worse than that, comic sermons, from the top of

some tempting stump, to the delight of the hired hands and the exasperation of the farmer."

*HON. WARREN CHASE.*

In 1888, I received a brief letter from Warren Chase pertaining to Lincoln's religious belief. Mr. Chase was acquainted with Lincoln in Washington. His letter has been mislaid, but I recall the principal points in it, which are as follows: 1. Lincoln was not a believer in Christianity; 2. He was much interested in the phenomena of Spiritualism.

*HON. A. J. GROVER.*

A. J. Grover, a life-long reformer, an old-time Abolitionist, an able advocate of human liberty, and a personal friend and admirer of Lincoln, in a letter written April 13, 1888, sends me the following as his testimony:

"Mr. Lincoln was not a religious man in the church sense. He was an Agnostic. He did not believe in the Bible as the infallible word of God. He believed that Nature is God's word, given to all men in a universal language which is equally accessible to all, if all are equally intelligent. That this great lesson, God's word in his works, is infinite, and that men have only learned a very little of it, and have yet the most to learn. That the religions of all ages and peoples are only very feeble and imperfect

attempts to solve the great problems involved in nature and her laws. Mr. Lincoln heartily disliked the narrow and silly pretensions of the church and priesthood who now falsely claim him, as they do Washington, Franklin and others.

“I knew Mr. Lincoln from the Douglas campaign in Illinois in 1858 until his death, and I never heard him on any occasion use a single pious expression in the sense of the church—not a word that indicated that he believed in the church theology. But I have heard him use many expressions that indicated that he did not know much, or pretend to know much, and had no settled convictions concerning the great questions that theology deals so flippantly with, and pretends to know all about. And I know to my own knowledge that the claim the church now sets up that he was a Christian is false—as false as it is in regard to Washington.”

Writing to me again under date of Jan. 12, 1889, Mr. Grover says :

“I knew Mr. Lincoln in Illinois and in Washington. I was in the War office, for a time, in a department which had charge of the President’s books, so-called. I met him in passing between the White House and the buildings then occupied by the War Department, almost every day. I often had to go to Mr. Stanton’s office, and have often seen Mr. Lincoln there. I frequently had to go to the White House to see

him. It was known to all of his acquaintances that he was a Liberal or Rationalist."

*JUDGE JAMES M. NELSON.*

The last, and in some respects the most important, of our Washington witnesses is Judge James M. Nelson. Judge Nelson for many years has been a resident of New York, but he formerly lived in Kentucky and Illinois, Lincoln's native and adopted states. He is a son of Thomas Pope Nelson, a distinguished member of Congress from Kentucky, and the first United States Minister to Turkey. His great grandfather was Thomas Nelson, Jr., a signer of the Declaration of Independence from Virginia. He was long and intimately acquainted with Lincoln both in Illinois and Washington. About the close of 1886, or early in 1887, Judge Nelson published his "Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln" in the Louisville, Ky., *Times*. In reference to Lincoln's religious opinions he says :

"In religion, Mr. Lincoln was about of the same belief as Bob Ingersoll, and there is no account of his ever having changed. He went to church a few times with his family while he was President, but so far as I have been able to find out he remained an unbeliever."

"Mr. Lincoln in his younger days wrote a book," says Judge Nelson, "in which he endeavored to

prove the fallacy of the plan of salvation and the divinity of Christ."

I have yet another passage from Judge Nelson's "Reminiscences" to present, a passage which, more than anything else in this volume, perhaps, is calculated to provoke the wrath of Christian claimants. To lend an air of plausibility to their claims these claimants are continually citing expressions of a seemingly semi-pious character occasionally to be met with in his speeches and state papers. These expressions, in a measure accounted for by Mr. Herndon, Colonel Lamon, and others, are still further explained by a revelation from his own lips. Judge Nelson says :

"I asked him once about his fervent Thanksgiving Message and twitted him with being an unbeliever in what was published. 'Oh,' said he, 'that is some of Seward's nonsense, and it pleases the fools.'"



## CHAPTER XIII.

### OTHER TESTIMONY AND OPINIONS.

*New York World*—*Boston Globe*—*Chicago Herald*—*Manford's Magazine*—*Herald and Review*—Chambers's Encyclopedia—Encyclopedia Britannica—People's Library of Information—The World's Sages—Every-Day Life of Lincoln—Hon. Jesse W. Weik—Chas. W. French—Cyrus O. Poole—A Citizen of Springfield—Henry Walker—Wm. Bissett—Frederick Heath—Rev. Edward Eggleston—Rev. Robert Collyer—Allen Thorndike Rice—Robert C. Adams—Theodore Stanton—Geo. M. McCrie—Gen. M. M. Trumbull—Rev. David Swing, D.D.—Rev. J. Lloyd Jones—Rev. John W. Chadwick.

THE matter selected for this chapter is of a miscellaneous nature, consisting of the statements of those who, for the most part, are not known to have been personally acquainted with Lincoln. It embraces the opinions of journalists, encyclopedists, biographers, and others. If their words cannot be accepted as the testimony of competent witnesses, they may at least be regarded as the verdict of honest jurors.

#### NEW YORK WORLD.

In the *New York World*, fifteen years ago, appeared the following :

“ While it may fairly be said that Mr. Lincoln entertained many Christian sentiments, it cannot be

said that he was himself a Christian in faith or practice. He was no disciple of Jesus of Nazareth. He did not believe in his divinity and was not a member of his church.

“He was at first a writing Infidel of the school of Paine and Volney, and afterward a talking Infidel of the school of Parker and Channing.”

Alluding to the friendly attitude he assumed toward the church and Christianity during the war, this article concludes :

“If the churches had grown cold—if the Christians had taken a stand aloof—that instant the Union would have perished. Mr. Lincoln regulated his religious manifestations accordingly. He declared frequently that he would do *anything* to save the Union, and among the many things he did was the partial concealment of his individual religious opinions. Is this a blot upon his fame? Or shall we all agree that it was a conscientious and patriotic sacrifice?”

**BOSTON GLOBE.**

As evidence of Lincoln's piety, we are referred to a picture where Lincoln, with his son Tad, is supposed to be reverentially poring over the pages of the Bible. The history of this picture, however, has often been explained, and its apparently religious

character shown to be quite secular. The *Boston Globe*, in a recent issue, says :

“The pretty little story about the picture of President Lincoln and his son Tad reading the Bible is now corrected for the one-hundredth time. The Bible was Photographer Brady’s picture album, which the President was examining with his son while some ladies stood by. The artist begged the President to remain quiet and the picture was taken. The truth is better than fiction, even if its recital conflicts with a pleasing theory.”

*CHICAGO HERALD.*

During February, 1892, the *Chicago Herald* published an editorial on Lincoln’s religion. Being one of the latest contributions to this subject, and appearing in one of the principal journals of Lincoln’s own state, it is of especial importance. It is a candid statement of what nearly every journalist of Illinois knows or believes to be the facts. From it I quote as follows :

“He was without faith in the Bible or its teachings. On this point the testimony is so overwhelming that there is no basis for doubt. In his early life Lincoln exhibited a powerful tendency to aggressive Infidelity. But when he grew to be a politician he became secretive and non-committal in his religious belief. He was shrewd enough to

realize the necessity of reticence with the convictions he possessed if he hoped to succeed in politics.

“It is matter of history that in 1834, at New Salem, Ill., Lincoln read and circulated Volney’s ‘Ruins’ and Paine’s ‘Age of Reason,’ giving to both books the sincere recommendation of his unqualified approval. About that time or a little later he wrote an extensive argument against Christianity, intending to publish it. In this argument he contended that the Bible was not inspired and that Jesus Christ was not the son of God. He read this compilation of his views to numerous friends, and on one occasion when so engaged his friend and employer, Samuel Hill, snatched the manuscript from the author’s hands and threw it into the stove, where it was quickly consumed. A Springfield friend said of him in 1838, ‘Lincoln was enthusiastic in his Infidelity.’ John T. Stuart, who was his first law partner, declares : ‘Lincoln was an avowed and open Infidel. He went further against Christian belief than any man I ever heard. He always denied that Jesus was the Christ of God.’ David Davis stated that ‘Lincoln had absolutely no faith in the Christian sense of the term.’

“These authorities ought to be conclusive, but there is further testimony. This latter is important as explanatory of Lincoln’s frequent allusions in his

Presidential messages and proclamations to the Supreme Being. To the simplicity of his nature there was added a poetic temperament. He was fond of effective imagery, and his references to the Deity are due to the instinct of the poet. After his death Mrs. Lincoln said: 'Mr. Lincoln had no faith and no hope in the usual acceptation of those words. He never joined a church.' She denominates what has been mistaken for his expressions of religious sentiment as 'a kind of poetry in his nature,' adding 'he was never a Christian.' Herndon, who was his latest law partner and biographer, is even more explicit. He says: 'No man had a stronger or firmer faith in Providence—God—than Mr. Lincoln, but the continued use by him late in life of the word God must not be interpreted to mean that he believed in a personal God. In 1854 he asked me to erase the word 'God' from a speech which I had written and read to him for criticism, because my language indicated a personal God, whereas he insisted no such personality ever existed.'

"So it must be accepted as final by every reasonable mind that in religion Mr. Lincoln was a skeptic. But above all things he was not a hypocrite or pretender. He was a plain man, rugged and earnest, and he pretended to be nothing more. He believed in humanity, and he was incapable of Phariseeism. He had great respect for the feelings and convictions

of others, but he was not a sniveler. He was honest and he was sincere, and taking him simply for what he was, we are not likely soon to see his like again."

*MANFORD'S MAGAZINE.*

There are two Christian publications that have had the fairness to admit the truth respecting Lincoln's belief. *Manford's Magazine*, a religious periodical published in Chicago, in its issue for January, 1869, contained the following:

"That Mr. Lincoln was a believer in the Christian religion, as understood by the so-called orthodox sects of the day, I am compelled most emphatically to deny; that is, if I put faith in the statements of his most intimate friends in this city [Springfield]. All of them with whom I have conversed on this subject, agree in indorsing the statements of Mr. Herndon. Indeed, many of them unreservedly call him an Infidel."

"The evidence on this subject is sufficient, the writer says, to place the name of Lincoln by the side of Franklin, Washington, Jefferson, and [Ethan] Allen, of Revolutionary notoriety, as Rationalists; besides being in company with D'Alembert, the great mathematician, Diderot, the geometrician, poet, and metaphysician; also with Voltaire, Hume, Gibbon, and Darwin."

Referring to the Infidel book, written by Lincoln, the writer says :

“This work was subsequently thrown in Mr. Lincoln’s face while he was stumping this district for Congress against the celebrated Methodist preacher, Rev. Peter Cartwright. But Mr. Lincoln never publicly or privately denied its authorship, or the sentiments expressed therein. Nor was he known to change his religious views any, to the latest period of his life.”

The article concludes with these truthful words :

“Mr. Lincoln was too good a man to be a Pharisee ; too great a man to be a sectarian ; and too charitable a man to be a bigot.”

#### HERALD AND REVIEW.

This work, in an abridged form, originally appeared in the *Truth Seeker* in 1889 and 1890. After its appearance, the Adventist *Herald and Review*, one of the fairest and most ably conducted religious journals in this country, said :

“The *Truth Seeker* has just concluded the publication of a series of fifteen contributed articles designed to prove that Abraham Lincoln, instead of being a Christian, as has been most strongly claimed by some, was a Freethinker. The testimony seems conclusive. . . . The majority of the great men of the world have always rejected Christ,

and, according to the Scriptures, they always will; and the efforts of Christians to make it appear that certain great men who never professed Christianity were in reality Christians, is simply saying that Christianity cannot stand on its merits, but must have the support of great names to entitle it to favorable consideration."

*CHAMBERS'S ENCYCLOPEDIA.*

Alden's American Edition of "Chambers's Encyclopedia," one of the most popular as well as one of the most reliable of encyclopedias, says :

"He [Lincoln] was never a member of a church ; he is believed to have had philosophical doubts of the divinity of Christ, and of the inspiration of the Scriptures, as these are commonly stated in the system of doctrines called evangelical. In early life he read Volney and Paine, and wrote an essay in which he agreed with their conclusions. Of modern thinkers he was thought to agree nearest with Theodore Parker" (Art. Lincoln, Abraham).

*ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA.*

By whom the article on Lincoln in "Chambers's Encyclopedia" was written, whether by one of Lincoln's personal friends, or by a stranger, I know not. The article in the "Britannica" was written by his private secretary, Colonel Nicolay. In this



article his religion is briefly summed up in the following words :

“His [Lincoln’s] nature was deeply religious, but he belonged to no denomination; he had faith in the eternal justice and boundless mercy of Providence; and made the Golden Rule of Christ his practical creed” (Am. Ed., vol. xiv, p. 669).

This statement at first glance presents a Christian appearance, and the reader is liable to infer that the writer aims to state that Lincoln was a Christian. But he does not. He aims to state in the least offensive manner possible that he was not—that he was simply a Deist. A person may have a “deeply religious” nature, and not be a Christian. He may have “faith in the eternal justice and boundless mercy of Providence,” and yet have no faith whatever in Christianity. He may make “the Golden Rule of Christ [or Confucius] his practical creed,” and at the same time wholly reject the dogma of Christ’s divinity. The above statement is substantially true as applied to Lincoln, and it would be equally true if applied to that prince of Infidels, Thomas Paine. His nature was deeply religious; he had faith in the justice and mercy of Providence; and he, too, made the Golden Rule his practical creed.

*PEOPLE’S LIBRARY OF INFORMATION.*

Mrs. Lincoln was nominally a Presbyterian, and

frequently, though not regularly, attended the Rev. Dr. Gurley's church in Washington. Lincoln usually accompanied her, not because he derived any pleasure or benefit from the services, but because he believed it to be a duty he owed to his wife who, in turn, generally accompanied him when he went to his church, the theater. "The People's Library of Information" contains the following relative to his church attendance :

"Lincoln attended service once a day. He seemed always to be in agony while in church. . . . His pastor, Dr. Gurley, had the 'gift of continuance,' and the President writhed and squirmed and gave unmistakable evidence of the torture he endured."

#### *THE WORLD'S SAGES.*

In "The World's Sages," Mr. Bennett writes as follows concerning Lincoln's belief :

"Upon the subject of religious belief there is some diversity of claims. All his friends and acquaintances readily admit that in early manhood and middle age he was an unbeliever, or a Deist. In fact, he wrote a book or pamphlet vindicating this view. His most intimate friends that knew him best, claim that his opinions underwent no change in this respect ; while a certain number of Christians have, since his death, undertaken to make out that

he had become a convert to Christianity" (World's Sages, p. 773).

"When the contradictory character of the evidence is taken into consideration, together with the fact that his nearest and most intimate friends would be most likely the ones to know of Mr. Lincoln's change, had any such taken place, the incredibility of the asserted change is easily appreciated" (Ibid, p. 774).

#### *THE EVERY-DAY LIFE OF LINCOLN.*

In the Emancipation Proclamation appears the following paragraph, which contains the only allusion to Deity to be found in this immortal document:

"And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God."

The appearance of the above paragraph in the Proclamation is thus accounted for in Francis F. Brown's "Every-Day Life of Lincoln," and agrees with Judge Usher's and Chief Justice Chase's account of it:

"It is stated that Mr. Lincoln gave the most earnest study to the composition of the Emancipation Proclamation. He realized, as he afterward said, that the Proclamation was the central act of

his administration, and the great event of the Nineteenth Century. When the document was completed, a printed copy of it was placed in the hands of each member of the Cabinet, and criticisms and suggestions were invited. Mr. Chase remarked: "This paper is of the utmost importance, greater than any state paper ever made by this Government. A paper of so much importance, and involving the liberties of so many people, ought, I think, to make some reference to Deity. I do not observe anything of the kind in it" (*Every-Day Life of Lincoln*, pp. 549, 550).

The amendment suggested was allowed by the President, and Mr. Chase requested to supply the words he desired to be inserted. The paragraph quoted was accordingly prepared by him and included in the Proclamation. This fact is also admitted by Holland in his "*Life of Lincoln*" (p. 401).

*HON. JESSE W. WEIK.*

Judge Weik, of Greencastle, Ind., who was associated with Mr. Herndon in the preparation of his "*Life of Lincoln*," in a lecture on "*Lincoln's Boyhood and Early Manhood*," delivered in Plymouth Church, Indianapolis, Feb. 4, 1891, said :

"As a young man he sat back of the country store stove and said the Bible was not inspired, and

Christ was not the Son of God" (*Indianapolis News*, Feb. 5, '91).

*CHARLES WALLACE FRENCH.*

One of the last biographies of Lincoln that has appeared is "Abraham Lincoln The Liberator," written by Charles W. French. After citing with approval some of Mr. Herndon's statements regarding Lincoln's belief, Mr. French says :

"The world was his [Lincoln's] church. His sermons were preached in kindly words and merciful deeds" (p. 91).

*CYRUS O. POOLE.*

I quote next from a monograph on "The Religious Convictions of Abraham Lincoln," written by Cyrus O. Poole. Referring to Arnold's and Holland's biographies of Lincoln, Mr. Poole says :

"Most sectarians now think, write, and act as if they had a copyright to apply 'Christian' to everything good and God-like about this President; yet no one presumed to call him a Christian until after his death.

"It may be a soul-saving process like the ancient one of Pope Gregory in the sixth century. It is related that one day he was meditating on an anecdote of the Pagan Emperor Tragan's having turned back, when at the head of his legions on his way to battle, to render justice to a poor widow who flung herself

at his horse's feet. It seemed to Gregory that the soul of a prince so good could not be forever lost, Pagan though he was ; and he prayed for him, till a voice declared Tragan to have been saved through his intercession. And thus, through the prayer of a Christian Pope, a pagan of the first, was materialized into a Christian in the sixth century, and was, of course, transferred from hell to heaven. Now behold how a modern politician [Arnold] can play theologian in Christianizing Abraham Lincoln.

“There is now hope for Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson, as well as the chieftains, Red Jacket, Tecumseh, and Black Hawk.”

Respecting Lincoln's message to his dying father, Mr. Poole, himself a firm believer in the doctrine of immortality, says :

“This prophetic affirmation of a continued existence, is the only written evidence of his views on this momentous question that can be found.”

In addition to the above, I cull from the same work the following brief extracts :

“He lived in a remarkably formative and progressive period, and was in all matters fully abreast with his time. As a truthful thinker, he greatly excelled any of the statesmen of his day.”

“Lincoln, like Socrates, was a man so natural, so thoughtful, rational, and sagacious, that he clearly

saw that the popular traditional theology of his day and age was not religion.”

*A CITIZEN OF SPRINGFIELD.*

A gentleman residing in Springfield, Ill., who was intimately acquainted with Lincoln from the time he located in that city up to the time he removed to Washington, a period of nearly twenty-five years, in a letter dated Aug. 20, 1887, writes as follows :

“I will say in regard to Mr. Lincoln’s religious views that he was not orthodox in his belief, unless he changed after he left Springfield. He was heterodox—did not believe in the divinity of Christ—in short, was a Freethinker. Now I do not want to be brought into public notice in this matter.”

In deference to this writer’s request his name is omitted, and this omission destroys, to a great extent, the value of his testimony. It is inserted not because it adds any particular weight to the evidence already adduced, but as a specimen of a very large amount of evidence of the same character that must be withheld simply because the persons writing or interviewed shrink from publicity. A chapter, yes, a volume, of this anonymous testimony might be given. At least a hundred personal friends of Lincoln, living in and about Springfield, privately and confidentially assert that he was an Infidel, but will not permit their names to be used. Twenty years ago a majority

of them would not have objected to their statements being published ; but the relentless war waged by the church against those who have publicly certified to the facts has sealed their lips.

*HENRY WALKER.*

I now present to the reader another citizen of Springfield, one who is not afraid to publicly express an honest opinion. Mr. Henry Walker, who has resided in that city for many years, writes as follows concerning Lincoln's religious belief :

“ After inquiring of those who were intimate and familiar with him, I arrive at the conclusion that he was a Deist.”

“ There is a rumor current here that he once wrote an anti-Christian pamphlet, but his friends persuaded him not to publish it.”

Mr. Walker was not personally acquainted with Lincoln. His conclusion is simply based upon the information obtained from those who were acquainted with him. His statement, like the preceding one, is introduced not so much because of any especial value attaching to it as mere testimony, but because it fairly represents the common sentiment of those who have investigated this subject, and particularly those who are on familiar terms with Lincoln's old associates in Illinois. The knowledge of our anonymous witness was shared by Dr. Smith,



Mr. Arnold, and Mr. Edwards; the opinion expressed by Mr. Walker was the opinion privately entertained by Dr. Holland, it is the opinion privately entertained by Mr. Bateman, yes, and unquestionably the opinion privately entertained by Mr. Reed himself.

*WILLIAM BISSETT.*

An article on Lincoln's religion written by Mr. Wm. Bissett, of Santa Ana, Cal., and recently published in *The Truth Seeker*, contains some evidence that deserves to be recorded. Mr. Bissett narrates the following:

“In the Spring of 1859 we moved into Livingston county, Mo., near Chillicothe. We at once became acquainted with a man by the name of William Jeeter. Mr. Jeeter was a native of Kentucky, and if I mistake not, was born and raised in the same part of the country that Mr. Lincoln was, but about that I am not sure. Mr. Jeeter told me that Lincoln and himself settled in Illinois when they were young men, and boarded together for a number of years. He says he knew every act of Lincoln's life up to the time he (Jeeter) left Illinois, a few years before Mr. Lincoln's nomination for the Presidency. I was helping Jeeter build a house for himself when we received the news of Mr. Lincoln's nomination; that is why we came to speak so particularly about him.

Mr. Jeeter told me that Mr. Lincoln was not a believer in the Christian religion; that is, he did not believe the Bible was an inspired work, nor that Jesus Christ was the son of God. 'Nevertheless,' said Mr. Jeeter, 'he was one of the most honest men I ever knew. If I had a million dollars I wouldn't be afraid to trust it to Lincoln without the scratch of a pen, I know the man so well.' Mr. Jeeter was a strong believer in the Christian religion and a member of the Cumberland Presbyterian church, and a very fine and reliable man."

*FREDERICK HEATH.*

The following is from an article on Lincoln by Mr. Frederick Heath, of Milwaukee, Wis.:

"Two years ago I was associated with Major Geo. H. Norris, a wealthy orange-grower of Florida, in that state, and was in a degree his *confidant*. In earlier years, while a lawyer in Illinois, Major Norris (he was at one time mayor of Ottawa, Ill.) was quite closely associated with Mr. Lincoln, and he gave me to understand that Mr. Lincoln was an extreme skeptic. They were thrown together a good deal at Springfield, where they were trying cases before the supreme court. Lincoln would frequently keep them from sleep by his stories and arguments, and frequently spoke of religious matters in a way

that showed that he was convinced of the delusion of faith. I wish I could quote the Major's words as to Lincoln's remarks on religion, but will not venture to frame them, as this is a subject that demands truth and exactness."

*REV. EDWARD EGGLESTON.*

When Lincoln went to New York in the winter of 1860, to deliver his Cooper Institute address, he had occasion to remain over Sunday in that city. At the suggestion of a friend, he visited the famous Five Points, and attended a Sunday-school where the spawn of New York's worst inhabitants to the number of several hundred were assembled. Importuned for a speech, he made a few remarks to the children, and the fact was published in the papers. The idea of this Infidel politician addressing a Sunday-school was so ludicrous that it caused much merriment among his friends at Springfield. When he returned home one of them, probably Colonel Matheny, called on him to learn what it all meant. The conversation that followed, including Lincoln's explanation of the affair, is thus related by the noted preacher and author, Edward Eggleston:

"He started for 'Old Abe's' office; but bursting open the door impulsively, found a stranger in conversation with Mr. Lincoln. He turned to retrace

his steps, when Lincoln called out, 'Jim! What do you want?' 'Nothing.' 'Yes, you do; come back.' After some entreaty Jim approached Mr. Lincoln, and remarked, with a twinkle in his eye, 'Well, Abe, I see you have been making a speech to Sunday-school children. What's the matter?' 'Sit down, Jim, and I'll tell you all about it.' And with that Lincoln put his feet on the stove and began: 'When Sunday morning came, I didn't know exactly what to do. Washburne asked me where I was going. I told him I had nowhere to go; and he proposed to take me down to the Five Points Sunday-school, to show me something worth seeing. I was very much interested by what I saw. Presently, Mr. Pease came up and spoke to Mr. Washburne, who introduced me. Mr. Pease wanted us to speak. Washburne spoke, and then I was urged to speak. I told them I did not know anything about talking to Sunday-schools, but Mr. Pease said many of the children were friendless and homeless, and that a few words would do them good. Washburne said I must talk. And so I rose to speak; but I tell you, Jim, I didn't know what to say. I remembered that Mr. Pease said that they were homeless and friendless, and I thought of the time when I had been pinched by terrible poverty. And so I told them that I had

been poor; that I remembered when my toes stuck out through my broken shoes in winter; when my arms were out at the elbows; when I shivered with the cold. And I told them there was only one rule. That was, always do the very best you can. I told them that I had always tried to do the very best I could; and that, if they would follow that rule, they would get along somehow. That was about what I said' ” (Every-Day Life of Lincoln, pp. 322, 323).

The foregoing is significant. Lincoln was not an advocate of Sunday-schools. He had probably never visited one before. As generally conducted, he regarded them simply as nurseries of superstition. He could not indorse the religious ideas taught in them, and he was not there that day to antagonize them. As a consequence, this ready talker—this man who had been making speeches all his life—was, for the first time, at a loss to know what to say. He could not talk to them about the Bible—he could not tell them that “it is the best gift which God has given to man”—that “all the good from the Savior of world is communicated to us through this book”—that “but for this book we could not know right from wrong”—he could not tell them how Jesus had died for little children, and all this, because he did not believe it. But he obeyed his

own life-long rule, did the best he could under the embarrassing circumstances, and gave them a little wholesome advice entirely free from the usual Sunday-school cant.

*REV. ROBERT COLLYER.*

Robert Collyer states that Lincoln, just before he was elected President, visited the office of the *Chicago Tribune*, and picking up a volume of Theodore Parker's writings, turned to Dr. Ray and remarked: "I think that I stand about where that man stands."

*ALLEN THORNDIKE RICE.*

The lamented Allen Thorndike Rice, whose brilliant editorial management of the *North American Review* has placed this periodical in the front rank of American magazines, in his Introduction to the "Reminiscences of Lincoln," says: "The Western settlers had no respect for English traditions, whether of Church or State. Accustomed all their lives to grapple with nature face to face, they thought and they spoke, with all the boldness of unrestrained sincerity, on every topic of human interest or sacred memory, without the slightest recognition of any right of external authority to impose restrictions, or even to be heard in protest against their intellectual independence. As their life developed the utmost independence of creed and individuality, he whose originality was the most fearless and self-contained was chief among them.

Among such a people, blood of their blood and bone of their bone, differing from them only in stature, Abraham Lincoln arose to rule the American people with a more than kingly power, and received from them a more than feudal loyalty."

So eager is the church for proofs of Lincoln's piety that the most incredible anonymous story in support of this claim is readily accepted and published by the religious press as authentic history. By this means the masses have gradually come to regard Lincoln as a devout Christian. It is evident that Mr. Rice had these fabulous tales in mind when he wrote the following: "Story after story and trait after trait, as varying in value as in authenticity, has been added to the *Lincolniana*, until at last the name of the great war President has come to be a biographic lodestone, attracting without distinction or discrimination both the true and false."

ROBERT C. ADAMS.

The noted author, Capt. Robert C. Adams of Montreal, Can., says: "It is significant that in political revolution it is the Freethinker who is usually the leader. Franklin, Paine, Jefferson, Washington, were the chief founders of the American Republic, and *Lincoln presided at its second birth*. Mazzini and Garibaldi are the heroes of United

Italy; Rousseau, Voltaire, and Victor Hugo have been the chief inspirers of Democratic France" (*New Ideal*).

THEODORE STANTON.

In the *Westminster Review* for September, 1891, Mr. Stanton had an article discussing the moral character and religious belief of Abraham Lincoln. Of his religious belief, he says: "If Lincoln had lived and died an obscure Springfield lawyer and politician he would unquestionably have been classed by his neighbors among Freethinkers. But, as is customary with the church, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant, when Lincoln became one of the great of the world an attempt was made to claim him. In trying to arrive at a correct comprehension of Lincoln's theology this fact should be borne in mind in sifting the testimony. Another very important warping influence which should not be lost sight of was Lincoln's early ambition for political preferment. Now, the shrewd American politician with an elastic conscience joins some church, and is always seen on Sunday in the front pews. But the shrewd politician who has not an elastic conscience—and this was Lincoln's case—simply keeps mum on his religious views, or, when he must touch on the subject, deals only in platitudes."



After citing the testimony of many of Lincoln's friends, Mr. Stanton concludes: "A man about whose theology such things can be said is of course far removed from orthodoxy. It may even be questioned whether he is a Theist, whether he is a Deist. That he is a Freethinker is evident; that he is an Agnostic is probable."

*GEO. M. McCRIE.*

In the *Open Court* for Nov. 26, 1891, Mr. McCrie contributes an article on "What Was Abraham Lincoln's Creed?" Concerning Lincoln's allusions to God, he says: "A Deity thus shelved or not shelved, according to the dictates of political expediency, or of individual opinion as to the 'propriety' of either course is no Deity at all. He is as fictional as the 'John Doe' or 'Richard Roe' of a legal writ, and anyone making use of such a creation—the puppet, not the parent, of his own Egoity—is supposed to know with what he is dealing. Orthodox religionism may well despair of Abraham Lincoln as of George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, or President Jefferson."

*GEN. M. M. TRUMBULL.*

General Trumbull, of Chicago, in the *Open Court* of Dec, 3, 1891, writes: The religion that begs the patronage of presidents doubts its own theology, for

the true God needs not the favor of men. . . . Some of his [Lincoln's] tributes to Deity are merely rhetorical emphasis, but others were not. Cicero often swore 'By Hercules,' as in the oration against Catiline, although he believed no more in Hercules than Abraham Lincoln believed in any church-made God."

*REV. DAVID SWING, D.D.*

In a sermon on "Washington and Lincoln," the most eminent and popular divine of Chicago, Dr. Swing, said: "It is often lamented by the churchmen that Washington and Lincoln possessed little religion except that found in the word 'God.' All that can here be affirmed is that what the religion of those two men lacked in theological details it made up in greatness. Their minds were born with a love of great principles. . . . There are few instances in which a mind great enough to reach great principles in politics has been satisfied with a fanatical religion. . . . It must not be asked for Washington and Lincoln that, having reached greatness in political principles, they should have loved littleness in piety."

*REV. JENKIN LLOYD JONES.*

The Rev. J. Lloyd Jones, one of Chicago's most eloquent divines, in a sermon preached in All Souls

Church, Dec. 9, 1888, gave utterance to the following: "Are there not thousands who have loved virtue who did not accept Jesus Christ in any supernatural or miraculous fashion, who if they knew of him at all knew of him only as the Nazarene peasant—the man Jesus? Such was Abraham Lincoln, the tender prophet of the gospel of good will upon earth; Charles Sumner, the great apostle of human liberty; Gerrit Smith, the St. John of political reform; William Ellery Channing, our sainted preacher; Theodore Parker, the American Luther, hurling his defiance at the devils of bigotry; John Stuart Mill and Harriet Martineau—yes, to take an extreme case, the genial and over-satirical Robert G. Ingersoll, are among those who love goodness and foster nobility, though they have no clear vision into futurity and confess no other lordship in him of Nazareth save the dignity of aim and tenderness of life."

*REV. JOHN W. CHADWICK.*

In an address delivered in Tremont Temple, Boston, May 30, 1872. the Rev. John W. Chadwick, of Brooklyn, N. Y., referring to the proposed religious amendment to the Constitution of the United States, said: "Of the six men who have done most to make America the wonder and the joy she is to all of us,

not one could be the citizen of a government so constituted; for Washington and Franklin and Jefferson, certainly the three mightiest leaders in our early history, were heretics in their day, Deists, as men called them; and Garrison and Lincoln and Sumner, certainly the three mightiest in these later times, would all be disfranchised by the proposed amendment.

. . . . .

“Lincoln could not have taken the oath of office had such a clause been in the Constitution.”

## CHAPTER XIV.

EVIDENCE GATHERED FROM LINCOLN'S LETTERS,  
SPEECHES, AND CONVERSATIONS.

The Bible and Christianity—Christ's Divinity—Future Rewards and Punishments—Freedom of Mind—Fatalism—Providence—Lines in Copy-book—Parker—Paine—Opposition of Church—Clerical Officiousness Rebuked—Irreverent Jokes—Profanity—Temperance Reform—Indorsement of Lord Bolingbroke's Writings—Golden Rule.

THE testimony of one hundred witnesses will now be supplemented by evidence from the tongue and pen of Lincoln himself. The greater portion of what he wrote and uttered against Christianity has perished; but enough has been preserved to demonstrate, even in the absence of other evidence, that he was not a Christian. From his letters, speeches, and recorded conversations, the following radical sentiments have been extracted.

Notwithstanding the efforts of Holland and Bateman to prove that Lincoln was a believer in Christianity, it is admitted that in his conversation with Bateman, he said: "I am not a Christian" (Holland's Life of Lincoln, pp. 236, 237).

When his Christian friends at Petersburg interfered to prevent his proposed duel with Shields, and told him that it was contrary to the teachings of the Bible and Christianity, he remarked :

“The Bible is not my book, nor Christianity my profession” (Letter of W. Perkins).

While at Washington, in a letter to his old friend, Judge Wakefield, written in 1862, in answer to inquiries respecting his belief and the expressed hope that he had become convinced of the truth of Christianity, he replied as follows :

“My earlier views of the unsoundness of the Christian scheme of salvation and the human origin of the Scriptures have become clearer and stronger with advancing years and I see no reason for thinking I shall ever change them.”

In a discussion touching upon the paternity of Jesus, he said : “There must have been sexual intercourse between man and woman, and not between God and his daughter.”

The above words were uttered in the presence of Mr. Green Caruthers and Mr. W. A. Browning, of Springfield. Lincoln contended that Jesus was either the son of Joseph and Mary, or the illegitimate son of Mary.

In a conversation with his friend, Mr. E. H.

Wood, of Springfield, concerning the doctrine of endless punishment, he said :

“ There is no hell.”

In regard to this subject, he often observed :

“ If God be a just God, all will be saved or none ”

(*Manford's Magazine*).

The orthodox idea of God—a God that creates poor, fallible beings, and then forever damns them for failing to believe what it is impossible for them to believe—he abhorred. The Golden Rule was his moral standard, and by this standard he measured not only the conduct of man, but of God himself. Like the irrepressible Dr. T. L. Brown, he wanted God to “ damn others as he would be damned himself.” He delighted to repeat the epitaph of the old Kickapoo Indian, Johnnie Kongapod :

“ Here lies poor Johnnie Kongapod;  
Have mercy on him, gracious God,  
As he would do if he were God  
And you were Johnnie Kongapod.”

Lincoln thought that God ought at least to be as merciful as a respectable savage.

Many contend that the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, even if untrue, has a restraining influence upon the masses of mankind. That Lincoln did not share this fallacious opinion, is shown by the following extract from an address delivered in Springfield in 1842 :

“Pleasures to be enjoyed, or pains to be endured, after we shall be dead and gone, are but little regarded. . . . There is something so ludicrous, in promises of good, or threats of evil, a great way off, as to render the whole subject with which they are connected, easily turned into ridicule. ‘Better lay down that spade you’re stealing, Paddy—If you don’t, you’ll pay for it at the Day of Judgment.’ ‘Be the powers, if ye’ll credit me so long I’ll take another’ ” (Lincoln Memorial Album, p. 91).

Commenting upon the question of one’s returning and communicating with his friends after death, he observed :

“It is a doubtful question whether we ever get anywhere to get back ” (Statement of E. H. Wood).

He did not believe in the freedom of the will. An observation which he repeatedly made was the following : No man has freedom of mind ” (Testimony of W. H. Herndon).

His fatalistic notions are confirmed by his own words : “I have all my life been a fatalist. What is to be will be ; or, rather, I have found all my life, as Hamlet says :

‘There’s a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will.’ ”

(Every-Day Life of Lincoln, p. 198).



The following was a favorite maxim with him :

“ What is to be will be, and no prayers of ours can arrest the decree ” (Statement of Mrs. Lincoln).

In a speech on Kansas, delivered in 1856, he used the following words in regard to Providence :

“ Friends, I agree with you in Providence ; but I believe in the Providence of the most men, the largest purse, and the longest cannon ” (Lincoln’s Speeches, p. 140).

The writer has in his possession, among others of Lincoln’s papers, a leaf from his copybook, tattered and yellow from age, on which, seventy years ago, Lincoln, a school-boy of fourteen, wrote the following characteristic lines :

“ Abraham Lincoln, his hand and pen ;  
He will be good, but God knows when.”

If by *good* he meant *pious*, the prophecy was never fulfilled.

But a short time before he was elected President, he said to Dr. Ray : “ I think that I stand about where that man [Theodore Parker] stands ” (Statement of Rev. Robert Collyer).

The author whose writings exerted the greatest influence upon Lincoln’s mind, in a theological way, was Thomas Paine. Ah ! that potential “ Age of Reason ! ” Criticise it as you may, no one ever yet

carefully perused its pages and then honestly affirmed that the Bible is the infallible word of God. Hurdon and others declare that Paine was a part of Lincoln from 1834 till his death. To a friend he said :

“I never tire of reading Paine” (Statement of James Tuttle).

In the later years of his life, when the subject of religion was mentioned, with a knowing smile, he was wont to remark :

“It will not do to investigate the subject of religion too closely, as it is apt to lead to Infidelity” (*Manford's Magazine*).

It has been stated that Lincoln was opposed in his political campaigns on account of his disbelief. This is confirmed by a letter he wrote to Martin M. Morris, of Petersburg, Ill., March 26, 1843. In this letter, he says :

“There was, too, the strangest combination of church influence against me. Baker is a Campbellite; and therefore, as I suppose, with few exceptions, got all that church. My wife has some relatives in the Presbyterian churches, and some with the Episcopal churches; and therefore, wherever it would tell, I was set down as either the one or the other, while it was everywhere contended that no Christian ought to go for me, because I belonged to no church —was suspected of being a Deist. . . . Those

influences levied a tax of a considerable per cent upon my strength throughout the religious controversy" (Lamon's *Life of Lincoln*, p. 271).

He never changed his opinions, and the church never ceased to oppose him. In the Bateman interview, seventeen years later, he was compelled to note its relentless intolerance:

"Here are twenty-three ministers of different denominations, and all of them are against me but three; and here are a great many prominent members of the churches, a very large majority of whom are against me" (Holland's *Life of Lincoln*, p. 236).

For thirty years the church endeavored to crush Lincoln, but when, in spite of her malignant opposition, he achieved a glorious immortality, this same church, to hide the mediocrity of her devotees, attempts to steal his deathless name.

In a speech delivered in Springfield, in 1857, alluding to the negro, he said:

"All the powers of the earth seem rapidly combining against him. Mammon is after him, . . . and the theology of the day is fast joining in the cry" (*Lincoln Memorial Album*, p. 100).

The theology of the day was orthodox Christianity. "In this sentence," says Mr. Herndon, "he intended to hit Christianity a left-handed blow, and a hard one."

In his Second Inaugural address, referring to the

contending Christian elements in the civil war, he says :

“Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes his aid against the other.”

What a commentary upon the hypocritical assumption that Christians possess an infallible moral standard, is contained in the above words !

The “Lincoln Memorial Album” pretends to give the Second Inaugural complete, but omits the words quoted. As this address comes almost immediately after his reputed speech to the “Illinois clergyman,” the editor probably noticed a lack of harmony between the two, and thought that the retention of these heretical words would cast suspicion upon the genuineness of that remarkable confession. The “Memorial Album” is a meritorious work, but had Mr. Oldroyd manifested as great a desire to present the genuine utterances of Lincoln as the apocryphal, its value would have been enhanced. The unmutated version of the last Inaugural may be found in Holland’s “Life of Lincoln,” pp. 503, 504 ; Arnold’s “Life of Lincoln,” pp. 403, 404 ; Arnold’s “Lincoln and Slavery,” pp. 625-627 ; and “The Every-Day Life of Lincoln,” pp. 681, 682.

No President, probably, was ever so much annoyed by the clergy as Lincoln. The war produced an increased religious fervor, and theological tramps innumerable, usually labeled “D. D.,” visited the

White House, each with a mission to perform and a precious morsel of advice to offer. In the following caustic words, he expresses his contempt for their officiousness :

“ I am approached with the most opposite opinions and advice, and by religious men who are certain they represent the Divine will. . . . I hope it will not be irreverent in me to say, that if it be probable that God would reveal his will to others, on a point so connected with my duty, it might be supposed he would reveal it directly to me ” (Religious Convictions of Abraham Lincoln).

Equally pertinent, and, indeed, similar was his language to a pious lady, a Friend, who came as God's agent to instruct him what to do :

“ I have neither time nor disposition to enter into discussion with the Friend, and end this occasion by suggesting for her consideration the question, whether, if it be true that the Lord has appointed me [she claimed that he had] to do the works she has indicated, it is not probable that he would have communicated knowledge of the fact to me as well as to her ? ” (Every-Day Life of Lincoln, pp. 536, 537).

He steadily prohibited his generals from meddling with the religious affairs of those residing within the limits of their respective departments, and at the same time counseled them not to permit the pre-

tended sanctity of the church to shield offenders from justice.

In a letter to General Curtis, censuring the provost marshal of St. Louis for interfering with church matters, he writes :

“The United States Government must not undertake to run the churches. When an individual in a church, or out of it, becomes dangerous to the public interest he must be checked” (Nicolay and Hay’s Life of Lincoln).

In an order relating to a church in Memphis, issued May 13, 1864, he said :

“If there be no military need for the building, leave it alone, neither putting any one in or out of it, except on finding some one preaching or practicing treason, in which case lay hands upon him, just as if he were doing the same thing in any other building” (Ibid).

During the war his attention was called to the notoriously bad character of army chaplains. He expressed his contempt for them, and for orthodox preachers generally, by relating the following story :

“Once, in Springfield, I was going off on a short journey, and reached the depot a little ahead of time. Leaning against the fence just outside the depot was a little darky boy, whom I knew, named Dick, busily digging with his toe in a mud-puddle. As I came up, I said, ‘Dick, what are you about?’

‘Making a church,’ said he. ‘A church?’ said I; ‘what do you mean?’ ‘Why, yes,’ said Dick, pointing with his toe, ‘don’t you see? there is the shape of it; there’s the steps and front door—here’s the pews, where the folks set—and there’s the pulpit.’

Yes, I see,’ said I, ‘but why don’t you make a minister?’ ‘Laws,’ answered Dick, with a grin, ‘I haix’t got *mul* enough’” (Anecdotes of Lincoln, p. 86).

The most highly aristocratic church in Washington is St. John’s Episcopal church. So very aristocratic is it that applicants for membership deem it necessary to give references respecting their social standing in the community. The New York *Star* relates the following joke which Lincoln once perpetrated at the expense of this church:

“One day during the war a young officer called on him to secure an appointment in the army, and brought with him letters of recommendation signed by the F. F. V.’s in the District of Columbia. There had been no application for office before President Lincoln so strongly supported by the aristocracy, and, turning to the young man, he said he would give him the appointment and handed him back the papers. ‘Don’t you want to place the papers on file?’ asked the office-seeker. ‘I supposed that was the custom.’ ‘Yes, that is the custom,’ said President Lincoln, ‘but you had better take them

with you, as you might want to join St. John's church.' ”

Did Lincoln ever use profane language? If he did, this fact will afford no evidence to Freethinkers that he was a disbeliever in Christianity. Freethinkers are as free from this vice, if vice it be, as Christians. Very pious persons, however, such as Lincoln is represented to have been by his Christian biographers, are very careful about their use of profane words. Christ commanded his followers to pray in private, and bade them swear not at all. Devout Christians usually pray in public and swear in private. Lincoln was but little addicted to profanity, but if he had occasion to use a word of this character he did not go to his closet to use it. In a business letter to a friend, he said :

“A d——d hawk-billed Yankee is here besetting me at every turn” (Lamon's Life of Lincoln, p. 316).

In a letter to Speed, concerning an alleged murder case, he wrote :

“Hart, the little drayman that hauled Molly home once, said it was too *damned* bad to have so much trouble and no hanging” (Ibid, p. 321).

For the sake of pleasing the “fools,” he attached his signature to “the pious nonsense of Seward.” With equal readiness he indorsed the profane nonsense (?) of Stanton. During the war the patriotic Lovejoy had devised a military scheme which he



believed would prove beneficial to the Union cause, and obtained an order from the President for its execution. He took the order to Stanton, but all that ever resulted from it was the following spirited colloquy:

“‘Did Lincoln give you an order of that kind?’ said Stanton. ‘He did, sir.’ ‘Then he is a d——d fool,’ said the irate Secretary. ‘Do you mean to say the President is a d——d fool?’ asked Lovejoy, in amazement. ‘Yes, sir, if he gave you such an order as that.’ The bewildered Illinoisan betook himself at once to the President, and related the result of his conference. ‘Did Stanton say I was a d——d fool?’ asked Lincoln at the close of the recital. ‘He did, sir, and repeated it.’ After a moment’s pause, and looking up, the President said: ‘If Stanton said I was a d——d fool, then *I must be one*, for he is nearly always right, and generally says what he means’” (Every-Day Life of Lincoln, pp. 483, 484).

At a Cabinet meeting, in 1863, when a conflict between the President and Congress regarding the admission of certain representatives from loyal districts of the South, which he favored, was threatened, he turned to Secretary Chase, and exclaimed:

“There it is, sir. I am to be bullied by Congress, am I? If I do I’ll be d——d!”

When Lincoln visited New Orleans he attended a

slave sale. A beautiful girl, almost white, was placed upon the auction block and exposed to the grossest indignities. As he turned to leave, boiling with indignation, he exclaimed:

“By God, if I ever get a chance to hit that institution, I will hit it hard” (Arnold’s Life of Lincoln, Note).

Thirty years later the chance came. He struck the blow—a mortal one.

The following is a prayer which Lincoln, while at the White House, put into the mouth of a belated traveler who was caught in a violent thunderstorm:

“O Lord, if it is all the same to you, give us a little more light and a little less noise!” (Six Months at the White House, p. 49).

Is it possible that a Christian and a Calvinist would repeat such an irreverent, not to say blasphemous, supplication? According to the Brooklyn Calvinist, God visits such supplicants with paralysis and petrification.

Like most Freethinkers, Lincoln was a genuine reformer. The Antislavery reform was not the only reform that enlisted his support. At an early day he espoused the Temperance cause. When the church was the ally of intemperance as it was of slavery—when, to use his own words, “From the sideboard of the parson down to the ragged pocket

of the houseless loafer intoxicating liquor was constantly found," he was laboring and lecturing in behalf of the Washingtonian movement. With the fervor of an enthusiast, he exclaims in true Free-thought language :

"Happy day, when, all appetites controlled, all passions subdued, all matter subjugated, mind, all-conquering mind, shall live and move, the monarch of the world! Glorious consummation! Hail, fall of fury! *Reign of Reason, all hail!*" (Lincoln Memorial Album, p. 96).

To sumptuary laws and to the denunciatory methods so common among orthodox Christians to-day, he was, however, strenuously opposed. He says :

"It is not much in the nature of man to be driven to anything ; still less to be driven about that which is exclusively his own business" (Ibid, p. 86).

"When the conduct of men is designed to be influenced, persuasion, kind, unassuming persuasion, should ever be adopted" (Ib., p. 87).

His nephew, Mr. Hall, informed me that Lincoln once made it cost a meddlesome clergyman, of Coles County, eighty dollars for seizing and destroying a quart of whisky, valued at twelve and a half cents, and belonging to a relative of theirs.

In this chapter I wish to present some radical thoughts, not from the pen of Lincoln himself, but

which in the work from which they are taken bear unmistakable signs of his approval. Mr. D. W. C. Shattuck, an old and respected merchant of Wayland, Mich., has in his possession a book which belonged to Lincoln. Its history is as follows : Shortly after Lincoln's election to the Presidency a young man from Springfield, Ill., and a relative or intimate acquaintance of Lincoln's, came to board with Mr. Shattuck, who then resided in Kalamazoo. Looking over the contents of his trunk one day the young man picked up a book and at the same time remarked : "That book belongs to Abe Lincoln. I forgot to return it to him before leaving Springfield. It is his favorite book, and I must not fail to return it." Mr. Shattuck expressing a desire to peruse the work, it was handed to him, and the young man being soon after unexpectedly called away, it was forgotten. It proved to be a volume of the writings of Lord Bolingbroke, the great English Infidel. On a fly-leaf was the signature of Abraham Lincoln. In the work certain passages which seem to have especially impressed Lincoln are marked with a pencil and in a manner peculiar to him. The following are the passages he marked, which I have copied from the book, and which evidently received his unqualified indorsement :

"Abbadie says in his famous book, that the Gospel of St. Matthew is cited by Clemens Bishop

of Rome, a disciple of the Apostles ; that Barnabas cites it in his epistle ; that Ignatius and Polycarp receive it ; and that the same Fathers, that give testimony for Matthew, give it likewise for Mark. Nay, your lordship will find, I believe, that the present Bishop of London, in his third pastoral letter, speaks to the same effect. I will not trouble you nor myself with any more instances of the same kind. Let this, which occurred to me as I was writing, suffice. It may well suffice ; for I presume the fact advanced by the minister and the Bishop is a mistake. If the Fathers of the First Century do mention some passages that are agreeable to what we read in our Evangelists, will it follow that these Fathers had the same gospels before them ? To say so is a manifest abuse of history, and quite inexcusable in writers that knew, or should have known, that these Fathers made use of other gospels, wherein such passages might be contained, or they might be preserved in unwritten tradition. Besides which I could almost venture to affirm that these Fathers of the First Century do not expressly name the gospels we have of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John."

"Writers of the Roman religion have attempted to show, that the text of the Holy Writ is on many accounts insufficient to be the sole criterion of orthodoxy ; I apprehend too that they have shown it.

Sure I am that experience, from the first promulgation of Christianity to this hour, shows abundantly with how much ease and success the most opposite, the most extravagant, nay the most impious opinions, and the most contradictory faiths, may be founded on the same text; and plausibly defended by the same authority. Writers of the Reformed religion have erected their batteries against tradition; and the only difficulty they had to encounter in this enterprise lay in leveling and pointing their cannon so as to avoid demolishing, in one common ruin, the traditions they retain, and those they reject. Each side has been employed to weaken the cause and explode the system of his adversary; and, whilst they have been so employed, they have jointly laid their axes to the root of Christianity; for thus men will be apt to reason upon what they have advanced. 'If the text has not that authenticity, clearness, and precision which are necessary to establish it as a divine and a certain rule of faith and practice; and if the tradition of the church from the first ages of it till the days of Luther and Calvin, has been corrupted itself, and has served to corrupt the faith and practice of Christians; there remains at this time no standard at all of Christianity. By consequence either this religion was not originally of divine institution, or else God has not provided effectually for preserving the genuine purity of it, and the gates of

hell have prevailed, in contradiction to his promise, against the church.' ”

“ I have read somewhere, perhaps in the works of St. Jerome, that this Father justifies the opinion of those who think it impossible to fix any certain chronology on that of the Bible ; and this opinion will be justified still better, to the understanding of every man that considers how grossly the Jews blunder whenever they meddle with chronology.”

“ The resurrection of letters was a fatal period ; the Christian system has been attacked, and wounded too, very severely since that time.”

When interrogated as to why he had never united with any church, Lincoln replied :

“ When you show me a church based on the Golden Rule as its only creed, then I will unite with it.”

He never joined a church, because of all the Christian sects, not one could show such a creed. The Golden Rule—conceding to others the same rights he claimed for himself—was, however, the very cornerstone of Freethought, and hence he remained a Freethinker.

## CHAPTER XV.

## RECAPITULATION AND CONCLUSION.

Character of Christian Testimony—Summary of Evidence Adduced in Proof of Lincoln's Unbelief—Douglas an Unbeliever—Theodore Parker's Theology—Fallacy of Claims Respecting Lincoln's Reputed Conversion—His Invocations of Deity—His Alleged Regard for the Sabbath—The Church and Hypocrisy—Lincoln's Religion.

IN the prosecution of this inquiry, the testimony of one hundred and twenty witnesses has been presented. The testimony of twenty of these witnesses is to the effect that Lincoln was a Christian; the testimony of one hundred is to the effect that he was not.

Of those who have testified in support of the claim that Lincoln was a Christian, ten admit that during a part of his life he was a disbeliever in Christianity, while not one of the remaining ten disputes the fact. If he never changed his belief then he died an unbeliever. Did he change his belief and become a convert to Christianity? It devolves upon those who affirm that he did to prove it. Have they done this? They have not. Their attempts have been in every instance pitiable failures. The unreasonable and



conflicting character of the testimony adduced refutes itself. When was he converted? No less than five different dates have been assigned. One witness states that it was in 1848; one, that it was in 1858; another, that it was in 1862; another, that it was in July, 1863; and still another, that it was in November, 1863.

The remarkable character of the statements recorded in Chapter I.—remarkable when compared with the statements given in the preceding ten chapters, and not less remarkable when compared with each other—may be variously accounted for. A part of them are based upon a false premise, an erroneous conception of what the term *Christian* means; a portion of them are merely the expressions of beliefs unsupported by actual knowledge; while a not inconsiderable share of them are the statements of those who have knowingly and deliberately borne false witness. These witnesses comprise: 1. Those who do not know what constitutes a Christian—who confound Christianity with morality—who affirm that he was a Christian simply because he was a moral man. 2. Those who do not know what his religious views were, but who infer that he was a Christian because others have declared that he was, and because of the frequent allusions to Deity that occur in his speeches and state papers. 3. **Those who know that he was not a Christian, but**

who believe it to be right and proper to lie for the glory of Christianity and the profit of its priests.

The testimony advanced in support of the claim of Lincoln's Christianity is, for the most part, the testimony of orthodox Christians—a majority of them orthodox clergymen. Dr. Holland, the chief of these Christian claimants, says: "The fact is a matter of history that he never exposed his own religious life to those who had no sympathy with it." This, so far as the later years of his life are concerned, is substantially true; and this very fact precludes the possibility of these orthodox witnesses being able to state from personal knowledge what his religious views were.

In refutation of this claim, I have presented the testimony of those who were nearest to Lincoln, in the confidential relations of life. I have presented the testimony of his wife, the testimony of his step-mother, the testimony of his step-sister, the testimony of his cousin, the testimony of his nephew, the testimony of his three law partners, the testimony of four members of his Cabinet, the testimony of his private secretary, the testimony of his executor, the testimony of seven of his biographers, and the testimony of many more of his most intimate friends both in Illinois and at Washington.

That he was not an orthodox Christian, as claimed, is attested by nearly all of the one hundred witnesses

whose testimony has been given; that he was not in any sense of the term a Christian is proved by the testimony of a majority of them.

I affirmed that he was not religious in his youth—that he was a skeptic in Indiana. In proof of this I have adduced the testimony of his step-mother, Sarah Lincoln; his step-sister, Matilda Moore; his cousin, Dennis F. Hanks; his nephew, John Hall; his law partner, W. H. Herndon, and his biographer, Col. Ward H. Lamon.

I affirmed that he was an Infidel or Freethinker, during the thirty years that he resided in Illinois. In support of this I have given the testimony of Colonel Lamon, W. H. Herndon, Maj. John T. Stuart, Col. James H. Matheny, Dr. C. H. Ray, W. H. Hannah, James W. Keys, Jesse W. Fell, Judge David Davis, Wm. McNeely, Mr. Lynan, Wm. G. Green, Joshua F. Speed, Green Caruthers, Squire Perkins, Judge Gillespie, John Decamp, James Gorley, Dr. Wm. Jayne, Jesse K. Dubois, Judge Logan, Leonard Swett, W. H. T. Wakefield, D. W. Wilder, Dr. B. F. Gardner, J. K. Vandemark, Judge Leachman, Orin B. Gould, Edward Butler, M. S. Gowin, J. H. Chenery, J. B. Spalding, Ezra Stringham, Col. R. G. Ingersoll, A. Jeffrey, Dr. McNeal, Charles McGrew, J. L. Morrell, Judge A. D. Norton, W. W. Perkins, H. K. Magie, James Tuttle, Leonard Volk, Col. F. S. Rutherford, E. H. Woods, Dr.

J. J. Thompson, A. J. Grover, Judge Nelson, and others.

I affirmed that he did not change his belief after leaving Illinois—that he was not converted to Christianity in Washington—that he died an unbeliever. In confirmation of this I have presented the testimony of his wife, Mary Lincoln; of his private secretary, Colonel Nicolay; of his executor, Judge Davis; of his biographer, Colonel Lamon; and of his intimate associates, Geo. W. Julian, John B. Alley, Schuyler Colfax, Hugh McCulloch, A. J. Grover, Donn Piatt, Judge Nelson, and others.

Many of these witnesses simply testify to his disbelief in the Christian system as a whole without reference to his particular views concerning its individual tenets. Every statement of his unbelief as presented in the introduction has, however, been substantiated by the testimony of one or more witnesses.

That he did not believe in the Christian Deity, that he even held Agnostic and Atheistic views, at times, is proved by the testimony of W. H. Herndon, Colonel Matheny, Judge Nelson, Jesse K. Dubois, and D. W. Wilder.

That he was an Agnostic in regard to the immortality of the soul it attested by E. H. Wood, Judge Nelson, and W. H. Herndon.

That he did not believe that the Bible is the word

of God is affirmed by Colonel Lamon, John T. Stuart, Judge Matheny, W. H. Herndon, Jesse W. Fell, Dennis Hanks, W. Perkins, Colonel Rutherford, and Chambers' Encyclopedia.

That he did not believe that Jesus Christ was the son of God is affirmed by Colonel Lamon, W. H. Herndon, Jesse W. Fell, Colonel Matheny, John T. Stuart, Jas. W. Keys, Judge Nelson, D. W. Wilder, Green Caruthers, Colonel Rutherford, Rev. J. Lloyd Jones, Chambers' Encyclopedia, and the *New York World*.

That he did not believe in a special creation, the statements of Mr. Herndon clearly prove.

That he accepted the theory of Evolution, so far as this theory had been developed in the "Vestiges of Creation" and other writings of his day, is attested by the same witness.

That he did not admit the possibility of miracles is confirmed by the statement of Jesse W. Fell, W. Perkins, Dennis Hanks, and Mr. Herndon.

That he rejected the Christian doctrine of total or inherent depravity, William McNeely and Jesse W. Fell affirm.

That he repudiated the doctrine of vicarious atonement is sustained by the testimony of Jesse W. Fell, Joshua F. Speed, W. Perkins, and Colonel Lamon.

That he condemned the doctrine of forgiveness for sin, General Wilder and Mr. Herndon both testify.

That he opposed the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, Wm. H. Hannah, E. H. Wood, A. Jeffrey, Jesse W. Fell, and *Manford's Magazine*, all testify.

That he denied the freedom of the will, Mr. Herndon explicitly affirms.

That he did not believe in the efficacy of prayer is fully established by the evidence of Mrs. Lincoln, Mr. Herndon, and Dr. Gardner.

That he was a disciple of Thomas Paine and Theodore Parker is shown by the evidence of Colonel Lamon, W. H. Herndon, James Tuttle, Jesse W. Fell, Dr. Ray, Robert Collyer, the *New York World*, and Chambers' Encyclopedia.

That he wrote a book against Christianity is sustained by the testimony of Colonel Matheny, Judge Nelson, W. H. Herndon, Colonel Lamon, J. B. Spalding, A. Jeffrey, J. H. Chenery, *Chicago Herald*, *Manford's Magazine*, and Chambers' Encyclopedia.

That Lincoln did not believe in the inspiration of the Scriptures, that he did not believe in the divinity of Christ, that he did not believe in the freedom of the will, that he did not believe in future rewards and punishments, that he did not believe in the efficacy of prayer, that he was, in short, a disbeliever in Christianity, is also attested by the evidence cited from his own recorded words.

In connection with this controversy the signifi-

cance of the following facts cannot be overlooked: 1. Notwithstanding the strong temptation to credit Lincoln to the popular faith, a majority of his biographers have either declared that he was not a Christian, or have refrained from affirming that he was. 2. The secular press, fearing to offend the church, has generally been silent regarding the question. When it has ventured to express an opinion, however, it has been to concede his unbelief. 3. The leading encyclopedias, such as the Britannica, Chambers', New American, etc., have either admitted that he was a Freethinker, or have made no reference to his religious belief. 4. In the "Lincoln Memorial Album" appear two hundred tributes to Lincoln, the greater portion of them from the pens of Christians. In but two of these two hundred tributes is it claimed that Lincoln was a believer in Christianity. 5. The "Reminiscences of Lincoln" contain thirty-three articles on Lincoln, written by as many distinguished men who were acquainted with him. In not a single instance in this work, is it asserted that he was a Christian. 6. In none of the leading eulogies pronounced upon his character, at the time of his demise, is it affirmed that he accepted Christ.

It is stated that during the last years of his life Lincoln held substantially the same theological opinions held by Theodore Parker. His own words

are, referring to Parker: "I think that I stand about where that man stands." Where did Theodore Parker stand? The following extracts from his writings will show:

"To obtain a knowledge of duty, a man is not sent away, outside of himself, to ancient documents; for the only rule of faith and practice, the Word, is very nigh him, even in his heart, and by this Word he is to try all documents."

"There is no intercessor, angel, mediator, between man and God; for man can speak and God hear, each for himself. He requires no advocates to plead for men."

"Manly, natural religion—it is not joining the church; it is not to believe in a creed, Hebrew, Christian, Catholic, Protestant, Trinitarian, Unitarian, Nothingarian. It is not to keep Sunday idle; to attend meeting; to be wet with water; to read the Bible; to offer prayers in words; to take bread and wine in the meeting-house; love a scape-goat Jesus, or any other theological claptrap."

If Lincoln was known to be a Freethinker, it may be asked why this fact was not more generally published and urged against him during the Presidential campaign of 1860. The answer is easy. His chief opponent, Douglas, was himself a Freethinker. Stephen A. Douglas, like Abraham Lincoln, died an unbeliever. Like Washington, he declined the serv-



ices of a clergyman in his last hours. The following is an extract from a monograph on "The Deathbed of Douglas," published in the *Boston Budget*:

"When Stephen A. Douglas lay stricken with death at Chicago, his wife, who was a devout Roman Catholic, sent for Bishop Duggan, who asked whether he had ever been baptized according to the rites of any church. 'Never,' replied Mr. Douglas. 'Do you desire to have mass said after the ordinances of the holy Catholic church?' inquired the Bishop. 'No, sir!' answered Douglas; 'when I do I will communicate with you freely.'

"The Bishop withdrew, but the next day Mrs. Douglas sent for him again, and, going to the bedside, he said: 'Mr. Douglas, you know your own condition fully, and in view of your dissolution do you desire the ceremony of extreme unction to be performed?' 'No!' replied the dying man, 'I have no time to discuss these things now.'

"The Bishop left the room, and Mr. Rhodes, who was in attendance, said: 'Do you know the clergymen of this city?' 'Nearly every one of them.' 'Do you wish to have either or any of them to call to see you to converse on religious topics?' 'No, I thank you,' was the decided answer."

Among America's most eminent statesmen none probably ever possessed a more logical mind than

Lincoln. Judge Davis says: "His mind was logical and direct." James G. Blaine says: "His logic was severe and faultless." George S. Boutwell says: "He takes rank with the first logicians and orators of every age." In his funeral oration at Springfield, Bishop Simpson said:

"If you ask me on what mental characteristic his greatness rested, I answer, on a quick and ready perception of facts; on a memory unusually tenacious and retentive; and on a logical turn of mind, which followed sternly and unwaveringly every link in the chain of thought on every subject he was called to investigate."

Lincoln was once called to investigate the subject of Christianity. He "followed sternly and unwaveringly every link in the chain of thought" suggested by this subject, and the result was its rejection by him.

If he was subsequently converted to Christianity, it was only after a re-examination and a thorough and exhaustive investigation of its claims. This his friends positively state never took place, and the circumstances associated with each and every period assigned for his reputed conversion confirm their statements. In 1848 he was a member of Congress, his mind absorbed with the novelties, the duties, and the aspirations that usually attend a first term in this important capacity. In 1858, and for years pre-

ceding and following, the great political questions of the day occupied his mind. He was engaged in a mortal struggle with one of the most powerful intellectual athletes of his time. He was contending with Douglas for a prize, and that prize was the Presidency. He must be ever on the alert. He must crush his antagonist or his antagonist would crush him. Think of Lincoln sitting down in the very crisis of this conflict and engaging in the study of theology! In 1862, and 1863, the other years assigned for his conversion, he was in the midst of the great Rebellion, all his thoughts and all his energies enlisted in the mighty task of saving the Union.

That Lincoln was a Freethinker in Illinois, that he was for a time a zealous propagandist of his faith, that he was instrumental in making unbelievers of many of his associates, it is useless to deny. If he was afterward converted to Christianity, his friends were ignorant of his conversion. He failed to notify them of his previous mistake and warn them of their impending danger. If it could be shown that he renounced his former views and became a Christian, this fact would be one of the most damaging arguments against Christianity that could be advanced. As a Freethinker he was one of the most tender and humane of men, ever solicitous for the welfare of his fellow-beings. Did Christianity transform him into a selfish, heartless being, who coolly disregarded

even the eternal welfare of his best and dearest friends? Think of a man directing a friend to take a road which he afterwards discovers leads to certain death, and then not lifting a finger of warning to save him from destruction, when it is in his power to do so!

The Freethinker will require no other evidence to convince him that Lincoln died a disbeliever than the fact that he once fully investigated this subject and proclaimed himself an Infidel. The mere skeptic who has no settled convictions—who has never examined the evidences against historical Christianity—may become a sincere believer in the Christian religion. The confirmed Freethinker never can, albeit a Thomas Cooper, a Joseph Barker and a George Chainey may profess to. As Col. Thomas Wentworth Higginson happily expresses it: "You may take the robin's egg from the nest in yonder tree, and so near is the bird to being hatched you may crack it with the edge of your nail, and the bird is free. But all your power, and all your patient fidelity, and all the mucilage and sticking plaster you can put on it, will never get that birdling back into that little egg again. So complete is the sense of satisfaction, such is the feeling of freedom, which comes from once finding yourself, not merely out of these little sectarian names, but out of the name of the larger and grander sect, which is Christianity,

that you will find when the egg is once broken, the bird is free forever.”

From the church steward's standpoint, there is nothing so desirable as the early conversion of one who is destined to become rich. From the evangelist's point of view, there is nothing like the death-bed repentance of one who has become great. Had the bullet of the assassin not immediately destroyed consciousness, all these stories that we have heard about Lincoln's conversion—the Edwards story, the Smith story, the Brooks story, the Willets story, the Vinton story, and the story of the Illinois clergyman—would never have been invented. Instead of these we would have the story of some domestic, or some intruding priest who saw him during his dying hours. Aaron Burr was kinder to the church than John Wilkes Booth.

But whatever the religious opinions of Lincoln were when he died, whether he had changed his belief or not, in view of the fact that he never thought enough of the church to unite with it, the frantic efforts of clergymen and church-members to claim him seem quite uncalled for, if not ridiculous.

The opinion of a writer previously quoted in this work, is that the bitter war waged against the persons who have declared that Lincoln was not a Christian arises, not from a belief that they have stated what is false, but from a consciousness that

they have "demolished an empty shrine that was profitable to many, and broken a painted idol that might have served for a god." It is strange how Christians tend toward fetichism. Not satisfied with three Gods, they must canonize and deify men and make saints and demi-gods. They have already deified three Americans—Washington, Grant, and Lincoln—and what is remarkable, in each instance they have selected an unbeliever—an Infidel. It is said that men have stolen the livery of heaven in which to serve the devil; but it seems hardly consistent with the pretensions of the church that she should be compelled to appropriate the beadroll of Infidelity in order to make her appear respectable.

Lincoln's speeches and state papers contain many allusions to Deity. As Colonel Lamon observes, "These were easy, and not inconsistent with his religious notions." But it is a mistake to attribute all the Deistic expressions that appear in his state papers to him. Just how much of this was the work of his private secretaries, how much of it was "Seward's nonsense," or how much of it was suggested by Chase or other Cabinet ministers, can never be determined. It is significant, however, that in those documents of least importance, those which he would most likely leave to his secretaries or other officials to draft, these expressions are chiefly to be found. In his debates with Douglas,

and his other great political speeches delivered in Illinois, he seldom refers to Deity. In his carefully prepared Cooper Institute address, that model of political addresses, the name of Deity does not once occur. In his First Inaugural Address, he refers to God, and makes a complimentary reference to Christianity intended to conciliate the church and gain for his administration its support in the coming struggle with the South. One paragraph of the second Inaugural contains allusions to Deity and quotations from the Bible; but in this address he makes no recognition of Christ or Christianity. Even his quotations from the Bible are made in a guarded manner which clearly indicates that he did not believe in its divinity. In the Preliminary Proclamation of Emancipation, which was drafted by himself, the name of Deity does not appear. In the final Proclamation, an acknowledgment of God was inserted only at the urgent request of Secretary Chase. The Emancipation Proclamation, with the possible exception of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States, is the most important political document ever issued in America. He knew that this was the crowning act of his career, that it would place him among the immortals. In the preparation of this work he expended much thought and labor, and it was his desire that it should be free from religious verbiage. In

that masterpiece of eloquence, the Gettysburg oration, the name of God occurs but once, while not the remotest reference to Christianity or even immortality appears. When we take into consideration the fact that this address was made at the dedication of a cemetery, the significance of this omission can not be overlooked. This speech was the product of Lincoln's own mind free from the suggestions and emendations of others, and the occasion was too sacred to indulge in pious cant in which he did not believe.

The clergy parade Lincoln's recognitions of a Supreme Being as a triumphant refutation of the claim that he was an Infidel. Yet, at the same time, they do not hesitate to denounce as Infidels, Paine and Voltaire, when they know, or ought to know, that two more profound and reverential believers in God never lived and wrote than Paine and Voltaire.

If Infidelity and Atheism were synonymous terms it would be difficult to maintain that Lincoln, during the last years of his life at least, was an Infidel. But Infidelity and Atheism are not synonymous terms. An Atheist is an Infidel, but an Infidel is not necessarily an Atheist. A Presbyterian is a Christian, but all Christians are not Presbyterians. Christians themselves coined the word *Infidel*, and they have used it to denote a disbeliever in Christianity. A disbelief or denial of Christianity is not



necessarily a denial of God. Christians, many of them, regard the term as odious and as carrying with it the idea of immorality, notwithstanding the most intelligent and the most highly moral class in Christendom are these so-called Infidels. "Who are to-day's Infidels?" says the Rev. William Channing Gannett. He answers: "Very many of the brightest minds, the warmest hearts, the most loyal consciences, the most zealous seekers after God, the most honest tellers of what they find—yes, and the most successful finders. Infidels to what are they? Not to morality: Infidels to morality are too wise to train with them."

It is not claimed that Lincoln was wholly free from a belief in the supernatural. He possessed in some respects a simple, childlike nature, and carried with him through life some of the superstitions of childhood. But the dogmas of Christianity were not among them; these he had examined and discarded.

As a proof of Lincoln's regard for Christian institutions, great prominence is given to his proclamation to the army enjoining the observance of the Sabbath. This document gives expression to sentiments regarding the sanctity of the Christian Sabbath that Lincoln personally did not entertain. It was issued to appease the clamor of the clergy who demanded it, and was drafted, not by Lincoln, but

by some pious Sabbatarian. Lincoln himself attached no more sanctity to Sunday than to other days. He worked on Sunday himself. In Springfield his Sundays were frequently spent in preparing cases for court. In company with his boys he often passed the entire day making excursions into the country or rambling through the woods that skirted the Sangamon. He seldom went to church either in Springfield or Washington, the claims of some of his Christian biographers to the contrary notwithstanding. Previous to his nomination, in 1860, we find him sitting for a bust on Sunday in preference to attending church. On the Sunday immediately following his nomination an artist was busy with him molding his hands and taking negatives for a statue. The draft of the preliminary Proclamation of Emancipation was finished on Sunday. The last Sunday of his life was spent, not in studying the Scriptures, but in reading his beloved Shakespere.

It was stated by friends of Lincoln that he generally refrained from giving publicity to his religious opinions while in public life because of their unpopularity. In answer to this the Christian claimant retorts: "If this be true then he was a hypocrite." But let us be honest. Nearly every person entertains opinions which he does not deem it discreet or necessary to make public. You, my Christian friend, entertain doubts and heresies concerning your creed

which you keep a secret or disclose only to your most intimate associates. If you, in private life, and not dependent upon the public, hide your unpopular thoughts from the world, can you consistently blame Lincoln for his silence when the fate of a nation depended upon him and the alienation even of a few bigots might turn the scales against him? A Christian general does not hesitate to deceive the enemy or withhold his plans even from his own soldiers. Again, the clergy are forever advising and entreating men not to publish their doubts and heresies. Is it consistent in them to condemn a man for following their advice?

The church should learn to respect honesty herself before she charges others with dishonesty. It is the shame of Christianity that men have been obliged to conceal their honest convictions in order to escape ostracism and persecution. When the church herself becomes honest enough to tolerate and respect the honest opinions of those who cannot conscientiously accept her creed, then will it be time for her to charge Lincoln with hypocrisy for having partially withheld his unpopular views from religious ruffians. It does not evince a want of honesty, nor even a lack of moral courage, to flee from a tiger or avoid a skunk.

To do good was Lincoln's religion. To live an honest, manly life—to add to the sum of human

happiness—to make the world better for his having lived—this was the aspiration of his life and the essence of his faith.

In youth, the meanest creature found in him a friend, and if need be, a defender. He wrote essays and made speeches against cruelty to animals, and sought to impress upon his playmates' minds the sacredness of life. The same tender regard for the weak and unfortunate characterized his manhood. Whilst riding through a forest once with a party of friends, he saw a brood of young birds on the ground which a storm had blown from their nest. He dismounted from his horse, and after a laborious search, found the nest and placed the birdlings snugly in their little home. When he reached his companions, and was chided by them for his delay, he said: "I could not have slept to-night if I had not given those birds to their mother."

The narration of his many deeds of kindness and mercy while at Washington would fill a volume. He loved to rescue an erring soldier boy from the jaws of death and fill a mother's eyes with tears of joy. He loved to dispel the clouds of sorrow from a wife's sad heart and warm it with the sunshine of happiness. He loved to take the child of poverty upon his knee and plant within its little breast the seeds of confidence and hope.

**A giant in stature, and a lion in strength and**

courage, he possessed the gentleness of a child and the tenderness of a woman. The sufferings, even of a stranger, would fill his eyes with tears, and the death of a friend would overwhelm him. In his tenth year his mother died, and for a time his heart was desolate and he could not be consoled. In his fifteenth year his only sister, a lovely, fragile flower, just blooming into womanhood, drooped and died, and life seemed purposeless to him again. Of his four children, two died while he was living—Eddie, a fair-haired babe, and his beloved Willie. When death took these his sorrow was unutterable. The untimely death of his young friend, the gallant Colonel Ellsworth, at Alexandria, and the death of his life-long friend, the lamented Edwin F. Baker, at Ball's Bluff, were blows that staggered him. At the death of his good friend, Bowlin Green, he was chosen to deliver a funeral address. When the hour arrived, and he stepped forward to perform the sacred task, his eyes fell upon the coffin of his dead friend and for a time he stood transfixed—helpless and speechless. The only tribute he could pay was the tribute of his tears. When he turned for the last time from the bedside of the beautiful Ann Rutledge, his betrothed, it was with a broken heart and a mind dethroned. "Oh! I can never be reconciled to have the snow, the rain, and the storm beat upon her grave," was the pitiful burden of his plaint for

weeks. Reason after a time returned, but his wonted gladness never; and down through all those eventful years to that fatal April night when his own sweet life-blood slowly oozed away, beneath that sparkling surface of feigned mirth, drifted the memory and the agonies of that great grief.

In the social relations of life, he was a most exemplary man. He was a devoted husband, an indulgent father, an obliging neighbor, and a faithful friend. Mrs. Colonel Chapman, a lady who lived for a time in his family, pays this tribute to his private life: "He was all that a husband, father, and neighbor should be, kind and affectionate to his wife and child, and very pleasant to all around him. Never did I hear him utter an unkind word." "His devotion to wife and children," says George W. Julian, "was as abiding and unbounded as his love of country." The strong attachment always manifested by him for his friends has often been remarked. Rich and poor, great and humble, all were equally dear to him and alike the recipients of his regard and love. The prince he treated like a man, the humblest man he treated like a prince. Nothing in his career exhibits the greatness and nobleness of his character in a loftier degree than the cordial and unaffected manner in which, at Washington, in the midst of wealth, and splendor, and refinement, he was accustomed to

receive and entertain the plain, uncultured friends of other days.

Upon his rugged honesty, I need not dwell. The *sobriquet* of "Honest Abe" was early won by him and never lost. In his profession—a profession in which, too often, cunning and deceit, falsehood and dishonesty, are the means, and robbery the end—a profession in which, too often, Injustice is a purpled Dives sitting at a bounteous board, and Justice, a ragged Lazarus lying at the gate—he never wavered in his loyalty to truth, to justice, and to honesty. Engaged in a just cause, he was one of the most powerful advocates that ever addressed a judge or jury; engaged in an unjust cause, he was the weakest member of his bar. In fact, he could not be induced to plead a cause in which he did not see some element of justice, even though the technicalities of law insured success. To one who had sought his services and had stated his case, he replied: "Yes, I can win it; but there are some things *legally* right that are not *morally* right; this is one: I cannot take your case." He was once employed to defend a person accused of murder. As the trial progressed, it became apparent to him that his client had done the deed. Turning to his associate counsel, with a look of disappointment and pain, he said: "Swett, the man is guilty; you defend him; I cannot." On another occasion, when he discovered

that his client had grossly imposed upon his confidence and instituted an unjust suit, he left the court-room, and when the bailiff called for him, he answered: "Tell Judge Treat that I can't come; *I have to wash my hands.*"

He was the most magnanimous of men. William H. Seward, his chief opponent for the Presidential nomination, he made the Premier of his Cabinet. Secretary Chase became his political, if not his personal, enemy. Yet, recognizing his fitness for the place, he waived all personal grievances and appointed him to the exalted position of Chief Justice of the United States, the highest gift within the power of a President to bestow. During his professional career he was sent to Cincinnati to assist Edwin M. Stanton in an important legal case. The grim Stanton had never met this plain, Western lawyer before, and displeased at his uncouth appearance, and apparent lack of ability, treated him so discourteously that Lincoln's self-respect compelled him to practically withdraw from the case. It was a brutal affront, too poignant for him ever to forget, but not to forgive, and linked together on one of the most momentous pages of history stand the names of Lincoln and Stanton, an enduring witness to his sublime magnanimity.

The murder of this loving savior of our Union was a disastrous blow, not to the victorious North alone,



but to the vanquished South as well. Could he have lived, the balm of his great, kindly nature would have quickly healed the nation's wounds. At the commencement of the conflict, in pleading tones, he said: "We are not enemies, but friends." And at its close, notwithstanding all the cruel, bitter anguish he had endured during those four long years of fratricidal strife, "With malice toward none, with charity for all," he died, and many a brave Confederate deplored

The deep damnation of his taking off.

When Stonewall Jackson died, he paid a touching tribute to his gallantry, and said: "Let us forget his errors over his fresh-made grave." In the darkness of night, on a bloody field of the Peninsula, he bent beside the prostrate form of a dying soldier of the South, and while the hot tears rolled down his furrowed cheeks, soothed him with words of tenderest sympathy, and, by the dim rays of a lantern, took down from his lips a message to his mother, and sent it by a flag of truce into the enemies' lines to be transmitted to his home.

Glorious apostle of humanity! When shall we look upon his like again? so honest, so truthful, so just, so charitable, so loving, so merciful! Law was his God, justice his creed, and liberty his heaven. If he sinned, mercy prompted him. In the presence of such a man, and in the presence of

such a religion, how contemptible your puny theologians and their narrow creeds appear! Born in the cabin of a Western wild, dying in a nation's capital, its honored chief, enshrined in the hearts of an admiring world, Abraham Lincoln stands to-day the gentlest, purest, noblest character in human history. Millenniums may pass away, unnumbered generations come and go, creeds rise and fall; but the divine faith of Freedom's martyr—a faith based upon immutable law, eternal justice, universal liberty—a faith formulated not in perishable words, but in immortal deeds, will live through all the years to come, a torch of hope to every son of toil.

ULYSSES S. GRANT





ULYSSES S. GRANT



## THE RELIGIOUS OPINIONS OF ULYSSES S. GRANT.

In the preceding pages of the *Fathers and Saviors of our Republic* I have shown that Paine, Jefferson, Washington, Franklin and Lincoln were Freethinkers. In the following pages of this work I shall present some of the evidences of Grant's unbelief.

The Rev. Dr. J. P. Newman (during the last years of his life a Methodist bishop), whose church General Grant with his wife had attended, and who was with Grant during his last illness, gave to the public a statement of his religious opinions, the most important of which are the following:

"Reared in the Methodist Episcopal church and baptized in his last illness by one of her ministers, his religious nature was sincere, calm, and steadfast."

"His calm faith in a future state was undisturbed by anxious doubt."

"He said to me, 'I believe in the Holy Scriptures.'"

“His faithful attendance at church was largely inspired by his respect for the Sabbath day.”

“It was his custom and habit to call to prayers.”

These claims have been given wide publicity, and are generally accepted as a truthful presentation of General Grant's religious views. Yet those who were intimately acquainted with him, those to whom he had confided his religious opinions, know that they are either wholly or in part untrue and intended to deceive.

“Reared in the Methodist Episcopal Church and baptized in his last illness by one of her ministers,” etc.

These words were designed to convey the impression that Grant was a member of the Methodist Church. All the truth there is in this statement is that Grant's mother was a Methodist, and when it was supposed that he was dying, a Methodist minister, without his solicitation, sprinkled him with a few drops of water.

But it requires something more than this to be a member of the Methodist Church. It requires the religious experience known as a change of heart. It is not pretended that Grant ever experienced this change. It requires the partaking of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Grant never communed, not even on his death-bed. It requires the sacrament of Baptism. The fact that



Newman performed this ceremony when he did shows that it had never been performed before—that Grant had never been baptized.

Grant's biographers, for the most part, make no mention of this baptizing incident; Newman's friends were ashamed of it, the secular press ridiculed it, and many of the religious papers condemned it. Had this baptism been genuine instead of the farcical mummery that it was; had it been performed with the knowledge and consent of Grant, he would have allied himself with the church. Yet, although he survived three months, he refused to be taken into the church, and died, as he had always lived, outside of it.

The Rev. H. C. Meyers of the Methodist Episcopal Church, a man of broad and liberal views, deprecating and protesting against the narrowness of the Orthodox creed, writes:

“Men are not all on their way to the bottomless pit who refuse to bow to the creeds composed by a few claimers of infallibility. Is Abraham Lincoln in the bottomless pit? Where are the greatest men this nation ever saw? Was General Grant ever on the record of the Methodist Church?”

Rev. J. L. Cram, chaplain of Grant's regiment, says:

“Grant belonged to no church.”

Grant was not a Methodist, he was not a church member, he was not a Christian.

“His calm faith in a future state was undisturbed by anxious doubt.”

It was claimed by Grant's intimate friends, General Sherman, Senator Chaffee, and others, that he was not a positive believer in immortality, but simply an Agnostic who hoped for immortality.

In his posthumous letter to his wife, written two weeks before his death, he expresses a hope, if not a belief, in a future life. The letter reads as follows:

“Look after our dear children and direct them in the paths of rectitude. It would distress me far more to think that one of them could depart from an honorable, upright, and virtuous life than it would to know that they were prostrated on a bed of sickness from which they were never to arise alive. They have never given us any cause for alarm on this account, and I trust they never will. With these few injunctions and the knowledge I have of your love and affection, and the dutiful affection of all our children, I bid you a final farewell, until we meet in another and, I trust, better world. You will find this on my person after my demise.”

Lincoln, in a letter of consolation to his dying

father, expresses a sentiment regarding a future existence almost identical with that expressed by Grant in his parting words to his wife. And yet Lincoln was an Agnostic in regard to immortality. The Agnostic professes to have no knowledge of a future existence. He may be a believer or a disbeliever in it, or he may be neither. Probably a majority of Agnostics hope for immortality. To be separated forever from those we love is the saddest thought that ever occupied the mind of man. When brought face to face with this terrible possibility, the desire to meet again is intensified; this strengthens hope, belief asserts itself, and in the moments of its ascendancy the Agnostic may exclaim, "We shall meet again!"

Even if Dr. Newman's statement be true, it does not prove that Grant was a Christian. The same may be said of Thomas Paine. "His calm faith in a future state was undisturbed by anxious doubt." He says: "I trouble not myself about the manner of future existence. I content myself with believing, even to positive conviction, that the power that gave me existence is able to continue it in any form and manner he pleases" (*Age of Reason*, p. 71).

"I believe in the Holy Scriptures."

Dr. Newman would have us accept this as a profession of belief in the Bible as the divinely in-

spired word of God. Yet he and every other friend of Grant knew that he did not believe the Bible to be such a book. If General Grant uttered these words he qualified them at the time. He could have expressed his belief in a hundred books without acknowledging them to be divine or infallible.

Grant, if correctly reported, had on other occasions expressed a certain admiration for the Bible. But never did he express the belief that it was in the evangelical sense the word of God.

Colonel Ingersoll says: "Grant was not a believer in Christianity as a revealed religion, and none of his language applying to the point goes further than to mean that he accepted the moral teachings of Christ and the Bible as beneficial to mankind."

"His faithful attendance at church was largely inspired by his respect for the Sabbath day."

"His faithful attendance at church" was not "inspired by his respect for the Sabbath day," but chiefly, if not wholly, by the respect he had for the feelings and wishes of his wife, who was a church member.

In regard to the alleged piety of the six men whose religious opinions we are considering, the claims made with the greatest assurance by the clergy and accepted with the greatest confidence

by the people, are those pertaining to Washington, Lincoln, and Grant.

While it is claimed that Paine died confessing Christ, it is admitted that he lived an Infidel, and there is a vague suspicion in the minds of many that Jefferson and Franklin were not strictly orthodox. And yet Washington, Lincoln and Grant were certainly as unorthodox as Paine, Jefferson, and Franklin. The reason the former have been considered the more pious is because they attended church and contributed to its support; and the reason they did this was because their wives were church members. Mrs. Washington was an Episcopalian, Mrs. Lincoln was a Presbyterian, and Mrs. Grant a Methodist. As dutiful husbands they accompanied their wives to church and paid their church dues. Paine, Jefferson and Franklin, being free to follow their own inclinations, abstained from church going. Lincoln certainly, and Washington and Grant probably, would have done the same thing under similar circumstances.

If a noted man is accustomed to attend a certain church, this, with many biographers and newspaper writers, is considered a valid pretext for setting him down as a member of that church. The pulpit, with the well meant aid of the secular press, continues to keep before the public a state-

ment purporting to give the church membership of the Presidents of the United States. All, with an occasional exception of Jefferson, are represented as members of various orthodox churches. And yet, prior to 1880, no church member had ever been elected to this office.

It has been asserted that Grant was such a zealous advocate of Sabbath observance that he would not, while President, allow his horses to be hitched up on Sunday—that the family walked to church. This is contradicted by Mr. W. H. Burr, of Washington, who states that he frequently saw the President and his family in their carriage on Sunday.

It has also been asserted that “he would not allow his servants to work on that day.” The truth is he did not require his servants to work on Sunday, aside from the necessary duties of the day. Out of consideration for their happiness he allowed them, as far as possible, to devote the day to rest and pleasure. He respected the Sabbath, not because he believed there was any sanctity attached to it, but because he believed in a day of rest.

During the war Grant was not a stickler for Sabbath observance. When the army was in camp the customary regulations regarding Sunday were observed; when engaged in active oper-

ations he paid no more respect to it than to any other day. During the last year of his presidential administration he visited the Centennial Exposition on Sunday, and this fact shows that these stories are false.

“It was his custom and habit to call to prayers.”

General Grant did not believe in the efficacy of prayer. Newman prayed, but it was not because the sick man desired his prayers. Newman was his wife’s pastor; she believed in prayer, and so he was allowed to pray.

Ex-Senator Chaffee of Colorado, whose daughter was married to one of General Grant’s sons, and who was with Grant during his illness, says:

“There has been a good deal of nonsense in the papers about Dr. Newman’s visits. General Grant does not believe that Dr. Newman’s prayers will save him. He allows the doctor to pray simply because he does not want to hurt his feelings. He is indifferent on his own account to everything.”

Another, writing at the time of General Grant’s death, said:

“His acceptance of the effusive and offensive ministrations of the peripatetic preacher was probably due as much to his regard for the feelings of his family and his tolerance of his ministerial friend as to any faith in religion. All that

the press can gather now about his religious belief is filtered through Dr. Newman, and must, therefore, largely be discounted. . . . As to his regard for the Sabbath and his love of prayer, Dr. Newman has overdone the matter. His anecdotes to show the General's piety bear very strong internal evidence that they originated with himself."

There is one thing that Newman does not claim, and that is that Grant acknowledged Christ to be the Son of God. Had Grant accepted Christ he would have avowed it, and this is the claim above all other claims that Newman would have made if true. Grant did not acknowledge Jesus Christ, and this fact proves that he was not a Christian.

The Christian Statesman says: "It is not on record that he [Grant] spoke at any time of the Savior, or expressed his sense of dependence on his atonement and mediation."

In his published claims Newman went as far as he felt that he could go with safety. To assert that Grant was a Christian in the evangelical sense, that he accepted Jesus Christ as the divinely begotten son of God, would be so manifestly false that he knew it would be denied. In the cunningly devised statements made, which meant one thing to the friends of Grant and another to the world at large, he effected as much as he could



hope to effect, the general recognition of the claim that Grant was at least a nominal believer in Christianity.

Newman's description of General Grant's entry into Heaven is quite dramatic:

"They came at last. They came to greet him with the kiss of immortality. They came to escort the conqueror over the 'last enemy' to a coronation never seen on thrones of earthly power and glory. Who came? His martyred friend, Lincoln. . . . His great predecessor in camp and cabinet, Washington."

From a rhetorical standpoint this may be all right; but from a theological standpoint it is certainly all wrong. It must require a vivid, if not a perverted imagination, for an orthodox parson to see two Infidels coming from Heaven to convey a third one there.

Adverting to his death, Newman says: "Who does not regret the death of such a man? Heaven may be richer, but earth is poorer."

Why does he express this in the potential mood? Has he doubts as to whether Grant was permitted to enter Heaven or not? Or has he doubts as to the existence of Heaven itself?

When Grant rallied from his sinking spell in April, Dr. Newman said: "If the improvement in his health continues, the General will soon be able

to go to bed like a Christian and believe there is a divine Providence behind all this."

To this the Sunday Mercury replied: "Does the eloquent preacher intend the public to infer that his distinguished patient has heretofore gone to bed like a heathen and held the creed of Bob Ingersoll in regard to Providence?"

Grant's health did not continue to improve, and so it is to be presumed that he never went to bed like a Christian, or believed there was a divine Providence in the case.

On the same occasion Dr. Newman asked him what the supreme thought of his mind was when death seemed so near. To this interrogatory came the prompt answer of the Freethinker: "The comfort of the consciousness that I have tried to live a good and honorable life."

No religious cant in this. No consolation for the Christian claimant here. Commenting on Grant's answer, the New York Independent said:

"The honest effort 'to live a good and honorable life' may well be a source of comfort at any time, and especially so in the hour and article of death; and we see no impropriety in referring to it as such. But it would be a great mistake to make such an effort, or such a life even though the best that any man ever lived, the basis on which sinners are to rest for their peace with God and their

hope of salvation. Sinners are saved, if at all, through grace, and by the suffering and death of Christ, and upon the condition of their repentance toward God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the gospel plan of salvation as Christ himself taught it and the Apostles preached it. There is no other plan known to the Bible. Great men and small men viewed simply as men, as subjects of the moral government of God, and as sinners, stand at a common level in respect to their wants and the method of their relief; and they must alike build their hopes on Christ and his work, accepting him by faith, or they will build in vain. 'A good and honorable life' is no substitute for Christ."

Newman says that "Reason was the dominant faculty in him." This is true. Reason is the dominant faculty in Freethinkers. When reason is unusually strong, faith is correspondingly weak.

Grant's life has been a series of great conflicts and great triumphs. We see him at Fort Donnellson, at Shiloh, at Vicksburg, at Chattanooga, in Virginia—one unbroken chain of victories. Another battle remains—that long conflict with death, beginning in New York in October, 1884, and ending at Mount McGregor in July, 1885. The anxieties of a thousand battles, the agonies of a thousand deaths are crowded in that last year

of life. Thus writes one of his biographers: "Sitting in silence and almost motionless, hour by hour he stared in the face of the coming death of untellable pain, and with it were bankruptcy, poverty, disgrace, calumny, a bitter sense of private wrong, and of public misconception and neglect" (Stoddard's *Life of Grant*, p. 355).

It was not a fight with death alone. During those sad months he fought a triple fight; a fight with death, a fight with adversity, and a fight with superstition. Death alone triumphed. In two of these conflicts he was victorious.

Day after day, at his bedside, two agents of the church were at work, the sorrowing wife and a priest in the guise of "a friend of the family." Both were desirous of his conversion; the one sincerely laboring for what she believed to be the eternal welfare of her beloved and suffering companion; the other for his own selfish glory and the glory of the church he represented. "Great men may gain nothing from religion, but religion can gain much from great men," was the plea he advanced when rebuked for forcing his religious ministrations upon the pain-racked General.

If ever the conditions were favorable for a death-bed repentance they were here. It is in these hours of anguish and gloom that the mere skeptic succumbs to superstition. When nature

seems to forsake him he turns to the supernatural. Had Grant been a mere Nothingarian with leanings toward the church, as was commonly supposed, nothing would have been more probable than his conversion. But the good sense and the strong will of the great soldier triumphed.

There was a touch of comedy in this pathetic tragedy. When Grant died Newman was at breakfast and was much chagrined when he learned that the curtain had fallen on the last scene during his absence.

Describing this incident the New York Commercial Advertiser says: "About 7:15 o'clock on the morning that Grant died Dr. Newman said he thought he would go over to the hotel and get a little breakfast. The physicians warned him that a change might occur at any moment, and that he had better not go. He turned to Henry, the nurse, and asked his advice. Henry thought the general would live for an hour. So off the doctor went and ate his breakfast. In the mean time Dr. Sands, who had left the cottage at ten o'clock the evening previous in order to have a good night's rest, came back about 7:50, just in time. Dr. Newman was not so fortunate. After breakfast he came up the path at so quick a rate, his arms waving, that he was short of breath. Dr. Shradly saw him coming, walked out,

“In many of his orders and dispatches, Grant devoutly recognizes the providence of God, and his reliance upon it as being the chief strength of nations and men; and if he ever swears, the religious world may be certified that his oaths are in the same category with those of my Uncle Toby and of Washington at Monmouth” (Life of Grant, p. 314).

His man's statements concerning Grant's religion appear in an introduction which the publishers of Burr's biography of Grant had him write for that work. Mr. Burr himself does not claim that Grant was a believer. Stoddard, Dana, and other biographers are also silent.

In Grant's "Memoirs" there is not a word to indicate that he reposed the least faith in Christianity. He advocated freedom of thought, warned his readers against the encroachments of sectarian influence, and criticized the churches for their sympathy with the Rebellion. He says:

“There were churches in that part of Ohio where treason was preached regularly, and where, to secure membership, hostility to the government, to the war, and to the liberation of the slaves was far more essential than a belief in the authenticity or credibility of the Bible” (Memoirs, Vol. i., p. 36).

His last letter to his wife has been cited to

prove that he was a believer in Christianity. This letter affords the strongest proof that he was an unbeliever. Had he been a Christian he would have proclaimed it in this letter. The consolation it would have given his believing wife would have compelled him to avow it. He would have impressed it upon his children. There is not a word to indicate that he wished his children to become Christians—not a word of religious advice. Religion is utterly ignored. He desires his children to be upright and honorable, to be moral, but he does not desire them to be religious.

On the morning following Grant's death, the *New York World* contained the following:

“General Grant, as it would appear, had no settled conviction on the subject of religion. . . . Having been interrogated during his illness on the question of religion, he replied that he had not given it any deep study, and was unprepared to express an opinion. He intimated that he saw no use of devoting any special thought to theology at so late a day, and that he was prepared to take his chances with the millions of people who went before him.”

General Grant will live in history rather as a great soldier than as a great statesman. Yet there is much in his career as a statesman to admire, especially his attitude in regard to church

and state. No president, with the possible exception of Jefferson, has occupied more advanced grounds or advocated more radical measures of reform in this respect.

Grant is the only president, I believe, who has in his official capacity contended for the taxation of church property. In his message to Congress in 1875 he made the following earnest plea for this just demand:

“I would also call your attention to the importance of correcting an evil that, if permitted to continue, will probably lead to great trouble in our land before the close of the nineteenth century. It is the acquisition of vast amounts of untaxed church property. In 1850, I believe, the church property of the United States, which paid no tax, municipal or state, amounted to about \$83,000,000. In 1860 the amount had doubled. In 1875 it is about \$1,000,000,000. By 1900, without a check, it is safe to say this property will reach a sum exceeding \$3,000,000,000. So vast a sum, receiving all the protection and benefits of government without bearing its proportion of the burdens and expenses of the same, will not be looked upon acquiescently by those who have to pay the taxes. In a growing country, where real estate enhances so rapidly with time as in the United States, there is scarcely a limit to the wealth that may be ac-



quired by corporations, religious or otherwise, if allowed to retain real estate without taxation. The contemplation of so vast a property as here alluded to, without taxation, may lead to sequestration without constitutional authority, and through blood. I would suggest the taxation of all property equally, whether church or corporation."

Equally radical and pronounced are his recommendations, in the same message, in favor of the complete secularization of our public schools.

"We are a Republic whereof one man is as good as another before the law. Under such a form of government, it is of the greatest importance that all should be possessed of education and intelligence enough to cast a vote with a right understanding of its meaning. A large association of ignorant men cannot for any considerable period oppose a successful resistance to tyranny and oppression from the educated few, but will inevitably sink into acquiescence to the will of intelligence, whether directed by the demagogue or by priestcraft. Hence the education of the masses becomes the first necessity for the preservation of our institutions. They are worth preserving because they have secured the greatest good for the greatest proportion of the population of any form of government yet devised. All other forms of gov-

ernment approach it just in proportion to the general diffusion of education and independence of thought and action. As the primary step, therefore, to our advancement in all that has marked our progress in the past century, I suggest for your earnest consideration, and most earnestly recommend it, that a constitutional amendment be submitted to the legislatures of the several states to establish and forever maintain free public schools adequate to the education of all the children in the rudimentary branches within their respective limits, irrespective of sex, color, birth-place or religion, forbidding the teaching in said schools of religious, Atheistic, or Pagan tenets, and prohibiting the granting of any school funds or school taxes or any part thereof, either by legislative, municipal, or other authority, for the benefit, or in aid, directly or indirectly, of any religious sect or denomination."

His speech before the Army of the Tennessee, at Des Moines, in 1875, was one of the noblest, one of the bravest, and one of the most opportune utterances ever delivered in this country. In this speech he said:

"The free school is the promoter of that intelligence which is to preserve us as a nation. If we are to have another contest in the near future of our national existence, I predict that the dividing line will not be Mason's and Dixon's, but between patriotism and intelligence on the one side, and

superstition, ambition, and ignorance on the other. . . . Let us all labor to add all needful guarantees for the more perfect security of **FREE THOUGHT, FREE SPEECH, AND FREE PRESS**, pure morals, unfettered religious sentiments, and of equal rights and privileges to all men, irrespective of nationality, color, or religion. Encourage free schools, and resolve that not one dollar of money shall be appropriated to the support of any sectarian school. Resolve that neither the state nor nation, or both combined, shall support institutions of learning other than those sufficient to afford every child growing up in the land the opportunity of a good common school education, unmixed with sectarian, Pagan, or Atheistical tenets. Leave the matter of religion to the family altar, the church, and the private schools, supported entirely by private contributions. **KEEP THE CHURCH AND THE STATE FOREVER SEPARATE.**"

It has been claimed that this speech was aimed chiefly at the Roman Catholic Church. It was not. It was directed not so much against the avowed enemy of the public school as against its professed friends, who would destroy its usefulness by making it the handmaid of Protestantism and the nursery of superstition. Referring to this speech, General Sherman, to whom Grant confided his intention of delivering it, says:

"The Des Moines speech was prompted by a

desire to defend the freedom of our public schools from sectarian influence, and, as I remember the conversation which led him to write that speech, it was because of the ceaseless clamor for set religious exercises in the public schools, not from Catholic, but from Protestant denominations" (Packard's "Grant's Tour Around the World," p. 566).

One of the first products of Grant's pen that has been preserved is a letter to his cousin, McKinstry Griffith, written at West Point, Sept. 22, 1839. With the exception of a few brief lines, the last that he wrote was his "Memoirs." It is significant that in each of these—in the one written in the first year of his manhood and in the other, written in the last year of his existence—there is to be found a protest against ecclesiastical domination of our government and its institutions. In the letter alluded to, referring to the demerit marks received by the cadets, he writes:

"To show how easily one can get these, a man by the name of Grant, of this State, got eight of these marks for not going to church to-day. He was put under arrest, so he cannot leave his room perhaps for a month; all this for not going to church. We are not only obliged to go to church, but we must march there by companies. This is not republican" (Brown's Life of Grant, p. 329).

The following is from his "Memoirs":

"No political party can, or ought to, exist when

one of its corner-stones is opposition to freedom of thought. . . . If a sect sets up its laws as binding above the state laws, whenever the two come in conflict, this claim must be resisted and suppressed at whatever cost" (Memoirs, Vol. i., p. 213).

Instead of being a believer in the Christian religion and in favor of Christianizing our government, as many suppose, General Grant was an unbeliever and a zealous advocate of state secularization.

















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