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VOLTAIRE.

A LECTURE

BY

ROBERT G. INGERSOLL.

"Voltaire gave the death stab to modern superstition."—CARLYLE.

NEW YORK.

C. P. FARRELL, PUBLISHER,

1895.

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Voltaire was the greatest man of his century, and did more to free the human race than any other of the sons of men.

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VOLTAIRE.

I.

THE infidels of one age have often been the aureoled saints of the next.

The destroyers of the old are the creators of the new.

As time sweeps on the old passes away and the new in its turn becomes old.

There is in the intellectual world, as in the physical, decay and growth, and ever by the grave of buried age stand youth and joy.

The history of intellectual progress is written in the lives of infidels.

Political rights have been preserved by traitors ; the liberty of mind by heretics.

To attack the king was treason ; to dispute the priest was blasphemy.

For many centuries the sword and cross were .

allies. Together they attacked the rights of man. They defended each other.

The throne and altar were twins—two vultures from the same egg.

James I. said : “No bishop, no king.” He might have added : No cross, no crown. The King owned the bodies of men ; the priest, the souls. One lived on taxes collected by force, the other on alms collected by fear—both robbers, both beggars.

These robbers and these beggars controlled two worlds. The king made laws, the priest made creeds. Both obtained their authority from God, both were the agents of the infinite.

With bowed backs the people carried the burdens of one, and with wonder’s open mouth received the dogmas of the other.

If the people aspired to be free, they were crushed by the king, and every priest was a Herod, who slaughtered the children of the brain.

The king ruled by force, the priest by fear, and both by both.

The king said to the people : “God made you peasants, and He made me king ; He made you to labor, and me to enjoy ; He made rags and hovels for you, robes and palaces for me. He made you to

obey, and me to command. Such is the justice of God."

And the priest said: "God made you ignorant and vile; He made me holy and wise; you are the sheep, I am the shepherd; your fleeces belong to me. If you do not obey me here, God will punish you now and torment you forever in another world. Such is the mercy of God."

"You must not reason. Reason is a rebel. You must not contradict—contradiction is born of egotism; you must believe. He that hath ears to hear let him hear." Heaven was a question of ears.

Fortunately for us, there have been traitors and there have been heretics, blasphemers, thinkers, investigators, lovers of liberty, men of genius who have given their lives to better the condition of their fellow-men.

It may be well enough here to ask the question: "What is greatness?"

A great man adds to the sum of knowledge, extends the horizon of thought, releases souls from the Bastille of fear, crosses unknown and mysterious seas, gives new islands and new continents to the domain of thought, new constellations to the firmament of mind. A great man does not seek applause

or place ; he seeks for truth ; he seeks the road to happiness, and what he ascertains he gives to others.

A great man throws pearls before swine, and the swine are sometimes changed to men. If the great had always kept their pearls, vast multitudes would be barbarians now.

A great man is a torch in the darkness, a beacon in superstition's night, an inspiration and a prophecy.

Greatness is not the gift of majorities ; it cannot be thrust upon any man ; men cannot give it to another ; they can give place and power, but not greatness.

The place does not make the man, nor the sceptre the king. Greatness is from within.

The great men are the heroes who have freed the bodies of men ; they are the philosophers and thinkers who have given liberty to the soul ; they are the poets who have transfigured the common and filled the lives of many millions with love and song.

They are the artists who have covered the bare walls of weary life with the triumphs of genius.

They are the heroes who have slain the monsters of ignorance and fear, who have outgazed the Gorgon and driven the cruel gods from their thrones.

They are the inventors, the discoverers, the great

mechanics, the kings of the useful who have civilized this world.

At the head of this heroic army, foremost of all, stands Voltaire, whose memory we are honoring to-night.

Voltaire! a name that excites the admiration of men, the malignity of priests. Pronounce that name in the presence of a clergyman, and you will find that you have made a declaration of war. Pronounce that name, and from the face of the priest the mask of meekness will fall, and from the mouth of forgiveness will pour a Niagara of vituperation and calumny. And yet Voltaire was the greatest man of his Century, and did more to free the human race than any other of the sons of men.

On Sunday, the 21st of November, 1694, a babe was born—a babe so exceedingly frail that the breath hesitated about remaining, and the parents had him baptized as soon as possible. They were anxious to save the soul of this babe, and they knew that if death came before baptism the child would be doomed to an eternity of pain. They knew that God despised an unsprinkled child. The priest, who, with a few drops of water, gave the name of Francois-Marie Arouet, to this babe and saved his soul—little thought that before him, wrapped in

many folds, weakly wailing, scarcely breathing, was the one destined to tear from the white throat of Liberty the cruel, murderous claws of the "Triumphant Beast."

When Voltaire came to this "great stage of fools," his country had been christianized—not civilized—for about fourteen hundred years. For a thousand years the religion of peace and good-will had been supreme. The laws had been given by christian kings, and sanctioned by "wise and holy men."

Under the benign reign of universal love, every court had its chamber of torture, and every priest relied on the thumb-screw and rack.

Such had been the success of the blessed gospel that every science was an outcast.

To speak your honest thoughts, to teach your fellow-men, to investigate for yourself, to seek the truth, these were all crimes, and the "holy-mother church" pursued the criminals with sword and flame.

The believers in a God of love—an infinite father—punished hundreds of offences with torture and death. Suspected persons were tortured to make them confess. Convicted persons were tortured to make them give the names of their accomplices. Under the leadership of the Church, cruelty had become the only reforming power.

In this blessed year 1694 all authors were at the mercy of king and priest. The most of them were cast into prisons, impoverished by fines and costs, exiled or executed.

The little time that hangmen could snatch from professional duties was occupied in burning books.

The courts of justice were traps, in which the innocent were caught. The judges were almost as malicious and cruel as though they had been bishops or saints. There was no trial by jury, and the rules of evidence allowed the conviction of the supposed criminal by the proof of suspicion or hearsay.

The witnesses, being liable to be tortured, generally told what the judges wished to hear.

The supernatural and the miraculous controlled the world. Everything was explained, but nothing was understood. The Church was at the head. The sick bought from monks little amulets of consecrated paper. They did not send for a doctor, but for a priest, and the priest sold the diseased and the dying these magical amulets. These little pieces of paper with the help of some saint would cure diseases of every kind. If you would put one in a cradle, it would keep the child from being bewitched. If you would put one in the barn, the rats would not

eat your corn. If you would keep one in the house, evil spirits would not enter your doors, and if you buried them in the fields, you would have good weather, the frost would be delayed, rain would come when needed, and abundant crops would bless your labor. The Church insisted that all diseases could be cured in the name of God, and that these cures could be effected by prayers, exorcism, by touching bones of saints, pieces of the true cross; by being sprinkled with holy water or with sanctified salt, or touched with magical oil.

In that day the dead saints were the best physicians; St. Valentine cured the epilepsy; St. Gervasius was exceedingly good for rheumatism; St. Michael for cancer; St. Judas for coughs and colds; St. Ovidius restored the hearing; St. Sebastian was good for the bites of snakes and the stings of poisonous insects; St. Apollonia for toothache; St. Clara for any trouble with the eyes; and St. Hubert for hydrophobia. It was known that doctors reduced the revenues of the Church; that was enough—science was the enemy of religion.

The Church thought that the air was filled with devils; that every sinner was a kind of a tenement house inhabited by evil spirits; that angels were on

one side of men and evil spirits on the other, and that God would, when the subscriptions and donations justified the effort, drive the evil spirits from the field.

Satan had power over the air ; consequently he controlled the frost, the mildew, the lightning and the flood ; and the principal business of the Church was with bells, and holy water, and incense, and crosses, to defeat the machinations of that prince of the power of the air.

Great reliance was placed upon the bells ; they were sprinkled with holy water, and their clangor cleared the air of imps and fiends. And bells also protected the people from storms and lightning. In that day the Church used to anathematize insects. Suits were commenced against rats, and judgment rendered. Every monastery had its master magician, who sold incense and salt and tapers, and consecrated palms and relics. Every science was regarded as an enemy ; every fact held the creed of the Church in scorn. Investigators were regarded as dangerous ; thinkers were traitors, and the Church exerted its vast power to prevent the intellectual progress of man.

There was no real liberty, no real education, no

real philosophy, no real science—nothing but credulity and superstition. The world was under the control of Satan and the Church.

The Church firmly believed in the existence of witches and devils and fiends. In this way the Church had every enemy within her power. It simply had to charge him with being a wizard, of holding communications with devils, and the ignorant mob were ready to tear him to pieces. So prevalent was this belief, this belief in the supernatural, that the poor people were finally driven to make the best possible terms they could with the spirit of evil. This frightful doctrine filled every friend with suspicion of his friend; it made the husband denounce the wife, children their parents, parents their children. It destroyed the amenities of humanity; it did away with justice in courts; it broke the bond of friendship; it filled with poison the golden cup of life; it turned earth into a very perdition peopled with abominable, malicious and hideous fiends. Such was the result of a belief in the supernatural; such was the result of giving up the evidence of their own senses and relying upon dreams, visions and fears. Such was the result of the attack upon the human reason; such the result of de-

pending on the imagination, on the supernatural; such the result of living in this world for another; of depending upon priests instead of upon ourselves. The Protestants vied with Catholics; Luther stood side by side with the priests he had deserted in promoting this belief in devils and fiends. To the Catholic every Protestant was possessed by a devil; to the Protestant every Catholic was the home of a fiend. All order, all regular succession of causes and effects were known no more; the natural ceased to exist; the learned and the ignorant were on a level. The priest was caught in the net he had spread for the peasant, and Christendom became a vast mad-house, with the insane for keepers.

When Voltaire was born the Church ruled and owned France. It was a period of almost universal corruption. The priests were mostly libertines, the judges cruel and venal. The royal palace was a house of prostitution. The nobles were heartless, proud, arrogant and cruel to the last degree. The common people were treated as beasts. It took the Church a thousand years to bring about this happy condition of things.

The seeds of the Revolution unconsciously were being scattered by every noble and by every priest.

They were germinating slowly in the hearts of the wretched; they were being watered by the tears of agony; blows began to bear interest. There was a faint longing for blood. Workmen, blackened by the sun, bowed by labor, deformed by want, looked at the white throats of scornful ladies and thought about cutting them.

In those days witnesses were cross-examined with instruments of torture; the Church was the arsenal of superstition; miracles, relics, angels and devils were as common as lies.

In order to appreciate a great man we must know his surroundings. We must understand the scope of the drama in which he played—the part he acted, and we must also know his audience.

In England George I. was disporting with the “May-pole” and “Elephant,” and then George II., jealous and choleric, hating the English and their language, making, however, an excellent image or idol before whom the English were glad to bow—snobbery triumphant—the criminal code getting bloodier every day—223 offences punishable with death—the prisons filled and the scaffolds crowded—efforts on every hand to repress the ambition of men to be men—the Church relying on supersti-

tion and ceremony to make men good—and the State dependent on the whip, the rope and axe to make men patriotic.

In Spain, the Inquisition in full control—all the instruments of torture used to prevent the development of the mind. Spain, that had driven out the Jews, that is, to say, her talent ; that had driven out the Moors ; that is to say, her taste and her industry, was still endeavoring by all religious means to reduce the land to the imbecility of the true faith.

In Portugal, they were burning women and children for having eaten meat on a holy day, and this to please the most merciful God,

In Italy, the nation prostrate, covered with swarms of cardinals and bishops and priests and monks and nuns and every representative of holy sloth. The Inquisition there also — while hands that were clasped in prayer or stretched for alms, grasped with eagerness and joy the lever of the rack, or gathered fagots for the holy flame.

In Germany, they were burning men and women charged with having made a compact with the enemy of man.

And in our own fair land, persecuting Quakers, stealing men and women from another shore, steal-

ing children from their mother's breasts, and paying labor with the cruel lash.

Superstition ruled the world!

There is but one use for law, but one excuse for government—the preservation of liberty—to give to each man his own, to secure to the farmer what he produces from the soil, the mechanic what he invents and makes, to the artist what he creates, to the thinker the right to express his thoughts. Liberty is the breath of progress.

In France, the people were the sport of a king's caprice. Everywhere was the shadow of the Bastille. It fell upon the sunniest field, upon the happiest home. With the king walked the headsman; back of the throne was the chamber of torture. The Church appealed to the rack, and Faith relied on the fagot. Science was an outcast, and Philosophy, so-called, was the pander of superstition.

Nobles and priests were sacred. Peasants were vermin. Idleness sat at the banquet, and Industry gathered the crumbs and the crusts.

II.

THE DAYS OF YOUTH.

VOLTAIRE was of the people. In the language of that day, he had no ancestors. His real name was Francois-Marie Arouet. His mother was Marguerite d'Aumard. This mother died when he was seven years of age. He had an elder brother, Armand, who was a devotee, very religious and exceedingly disagreeable. This brother used to present offerings to the Church, hoping to make amends for the unbelief of his brother. So far as we know, none of his ancestors were literary people.

The Arouets had never written a line. The Abbe de Chaulieu was his godfather, and, although an abbe, was a Deist who cared nothing about religion except in connection with his salary. Voltaire's father wanted to make a lawyer of him, but he had no taste for law. At the age of ten he entered the college of Louis Le Grand. This was a Jesuit school, and here he remained for seven years, leaving at seventeen, and never attending any other

school. According to Voltaire, he learned nothing at this school but a little Greek, a good deal of Latin and a vast amount of nonsense.

In this college of Louis Le Grand they did not teach geography, history, mathematics or any science. This was a Catholic institution, controlled by the Jesuits. In that day the religion was defended, was protected or supported by the State. Behind the entire creed were the bayonet, the ax, the wheel, the fagot and the torture chamber.

While Voltaire was attending the college of Louis Le Grand the soldiers of the king were hunting Protestants in the mountains of Cevennes for magistrates to hang on gibbets, to put to torture, to break on the wheel, or to burn at the stake.

At seventeen Voltaire determined to devote his life to literature. The father said, speaking of his two sons Armand and Francois, "I have a pair of fools for sons, one in verse and the other in prose."

In 1713 Voltaire, in a small way, became a diplomat. He went to The Hague attached to the French minister, and there he fell in love. The girl's mother objected. Voltaire sent his clothes to the young lady that she might visit him. Everything was discovered and he was dismissed. To this girl

he wrote a letter, and in it you will find the key note of Voltaire : " Do not expose yourself to the fury of your mother. You know what she is capable of. You have experienced it too well. Dissemble ; it is your only chance. Tell her that you have forgotten me, that you hate me ; then after telling her, love me all the more."

On account of this episode Voltaire was formally disinherited by his father. The father procured an order of arrest and gave his son the choice of going to prison or beyond the seas. He finally consented to become a lawyer, and says : " I have already been a week at work in the office of a solicitor learning the trade of a pettifogger."

About this time he competed for a prize, writing a poem on the king's generosity in building the new choir in the cathedral Notre Dame. He did not win it. After being with the solicitor a little while, he hated the law, began to write poetry and the outlines of tragedy. Great questions were then agitating the public mind, questions that throw a flood of light upon that epoch.

In 1552, Dr. Baius took it into his head to sustain a number of propositions touching predestination to the prejudice of the doctrine of free will. The Cor-

delian monks selected seventy-six of the propositions and denounced them to the Pope as heretical, and from the Pope obtained what was called a Bull. This Bull contained a doubtful passage, the meaning of which was dependent upon the position of a comma. The friends of Dr. Baius wrote to Rome to find where the comma ought to be placed. Rome, busy with other matter, sent as an answer a copy of the Bull in which the doubtful sentence was left without any comma. So the dispute continued.

Then, there was the great controversy between the Jansenists and Molinists. Molini was a Spanish Jesuit, who sustained the doctrine of free will with a subtlety of his own, "man's will is free, but God sees exactly how he will use it." The Presbyterians of our country are still wrestling with this important absurdity.

Jansenius was a French Jesuit who carried the doctrine of predestination to the extreme, asserting that God commands things that are impossible, and that Christ did not die for all.

In 1641 the Jesuits obtained a Bull condemning five propositions of Jansenius. The Jansenists thereupon denied that the five propositions—or any of them—were found in the works of Jansenius.

This question of Jansenism and Molinism occupied France for about two hundred years.

In Voltaire's time the question had finally dwindled down to whether the five propositions condemned by the Papal Bull were in fact in the works of Jansenius. The Jansenists proved that the five propositions were not in his book, because a niece of Pascal had a diseased eye cured by the application of a thorn from the crown of Christ.

The Bull *Unigenitus* was launched in 1713, and then all the prisons were filled with Jansenists. This great question of predestination and free will, of free moral agency and accountability, and being saved by the grace of God, and damned for the glory of God, have occupied the mind of what we call the civilized world for many centuries. All these questions were argued pro and con through Switzerland; all of them in Holland for centuries; in Scotland and England and New England, and millions of people are still busy harmonizing foreordination and free will, necessity and morality, predestination and accountability.

Louis XIV. having died, the Regent took possession, and then the prisons were opened. The Regent called for a list of all persons then in the prisons

sent there at the will of the King. He found that, as to many prisoners, nobody knew any cause why they had been in prison. They had been forgotten. Many of the prisoners did not know themselves, and could not guess why they had been arrested. One Italian had been in the Bastille thirty-three years without ever knowing why. On his arrival in Paris, thirty-three years before, he was arrested and sent to prison. He had grown old. He had survived his family and friends. When the rest were liberated he asked to remain where he was, and lived there the rest of his life. The old prisoners were pardoned; but in a little while their places were taken by new ones.

At this time Voltaire was not interested in the great world—knew very little of religion or of government. He was busy writing poetry, busy thinking of comedies and tragedies. He was full of life. All his fancies were winged, like moths.

He was charged with having written some cutting epigrams. He was exiled to Tulle, three hundred miles away. From this place he wrote in the true vein—"I am at a chateau, a place that would be the most agreeable in the world if I had not been exiled to it, and where there is nothing wanting for

my perfect happiness except the liberty of leaving. It would be delicious to remain, if I only were allowed to go."

At last the exile was allowed to return. Again he was arrested ; this time sent to the Bastille, where he remained for nearly a year. While in prison he changed his name from Francois-Marie Arouet to Voltaire, and by that name he has since been known.

Voltaire, as full of life as summer is full of blossoms, giving his ideas upon all subjects at the expense of prince and king, was exiled to England. From sunny France he took his way to the mists and fogs of Albion. He became acquainted with the highest and the best in Britain. He met Pope, a most wonderful verbal mechanic, a maker of artificial flowers, very much like natural ones, except that they lack perfume and the seeds of suggestion. He made the acquaintance of Young, who wrote the "Night Thoughts ;" Young, a fine old hypocrite with a virtuous imagination, a gentleman who electioneered with the king's mistress that he might be made a bishop. He became acquainted with Chesterfield—all manners, no man ; with Thompson, author of "The Seasons," who loved to see the sun

rise in bed and visit the country in town ; with Swift, whose poisoned arrows were then festering in the flesh of Mr. Bull—Swift, as wicked as he was witty, and as heartless as he was humorous—with Swift, a dean and a devil ; with Congreve, whom Addison thought superior to Shakespeare, and who never wrote but one great line, “The cathedral looking tranquillity.”

III.

THE MORN OF MANHOOD.

VOLTAIRE began to think, to doubt, to inquire. He studied the history of the Church, of the creed. He found that the religion of his time rested on the inspiration of the scriptures — the infallibility of the Church — the dreams of insane hermits — the absurdities of the Fathers — the mistakes and falsehoods of saints — the hysteria of nuns — the cunning of priests and the stupidity of the people. He found that the Emperor Constantine, who lifted Christianity into power, murdered his wife Fausta and his eldest son Crispus, the same year that he convened the Council of Nice, to decide whether Christ was a man or the Son of God. The Council decided, in the year 325, that Christ was consubstantial with the Father. He found that the Church was indebted to a husband who assassinated his wife — a father who murdered his son, for settling the vexed question of the divinity of the Savior. He found that Theodosius called a council at Constanti-

nople in 381, by which it was decided that the Holy Ghost proceeded from the Father — that Theodosius, the younger, assembled a council at Ephesus in 431, that declared the Virgin Mary to be the mother of God — that the Emperor Marcian called another council at Chalcedon in 451, that decided that Christ had two wills — that Pognatius called another in 680, that declared that Christ had two natures to go with his two wills — and that in 1274, at the council of Lyons, the important fact was found that the Holy Ghost “proceeded,” not only from the Father, but also from the Son at the same time.

So, it took about 1,300 years to find out a few things that had been revealed by an infinite God to his infallible Church.

Voltaire found that this insane creed had filled the world with cruelty and fear. He found that vestments were more sacred than virtues — that images and crosses — pieces of old bones and bits of wood were more precious than the rights and lives of men, and that the keepers of these relics were the enemies of the human race.

With all the energy of his nature — with every faculty of his mind — he attacked this “Triumphant Beast.”

Voltaire was the apostle of common sense. He knew that there could have been no primitive or first language from which all other languages had been formed. He knew that every language had been influenced by the surroundings of the people. He knew that the language of snow and ice was not the language of palm and flower. He knew also that there had been no miracle in language. He knew that it was impossible that the story of the Tower of Babel should be true. He knew that everything in the whole world had been natural. He was the enemy of alchemy, not only in language but in science. One passage from him is enough to show his philosophy in this regard. He says : "To transmute iron into gold, two things are necessary. First, the annihilation of the iron ; second, the creation of gold."

Voltaire gave us the philosophy of history.

Voltaire was a man of humor, of good nature, of cheerfulness. He despised with all his heart the philosophy of Calvin, the creed of the sombre, of the severe, of the unnatural. He pitied those who needed the aid of religion to be honest, to be cheerful. He had the courage to enjoy the present and the philosophy to bear what the future might bring.

And yet for more than a hundred and fifty years the christian world has fought this man and has maligned his memory. In every christian pulpit his name has been pronounced with scorn, and every pulpit has been an arsenal of slander. He is one man of whom no orthodox minister has ever told the truth. He has been denounced equally by Catholics and Protestants.

Priests and ministers, bishops and exhorters, presiding elders and popes have filled the world with slanders, with calumnies about Voltaire. I am amazed that ministers will not or cannot tell the truth about an enemy of the Church. As a matter of fact, for more than one thousand years, almost every pulpit has been a mint in which slanders have been coined.

Voltaire made up his mind to destroy the superstition of his time.

He fought with every weapon that genius could devise or use. He was the greatest of all caricaturists, and he used this wonderful gift without mercy. For pure crystallized wit, he had no equal. The art of flattery was carried by him to the height of an exact science. He knew and practiced every subterfuge. He fought the army of hypocrisy and pretense, the army of faith and falsehood.

Voltaire was annoyed by the meaner and baser spirits of his time, by the cringers and crawlers, by the fawners and pretenders, by those who wished to gain the favor of priests, the patronage of nobles. Sometimes he allowed himself to be annoyed by these wretches ; sometimes he attacked them. And, but for these attacks, long ago they would have been forgotten. In the amber of his genius Voltaire preserved these insects, these tarantulas, these scorpions.

It is fashionable to say that he was not profound. This is because he was not stupid. In the presence of absurdity he laughed, and was called irreverent. He thought God would not damn even a priest forever — this was regarded as blasphemy. He endeavored to prevent Christians from murdering each other, and did what he could to civilize the disciples of Christ. Had he founded a sect, obtained control of some country, and burned a few heretics at slow fires, he would have won the admiration, respect and love of the Christian world. Had he only pretended to believe all the fables of antiquity, had he mumbled Latin prayers, counted beads, crossed himself, devoured now and then the flesh of God, and carried fagots to the feet of Philosophy in the name of

VOLTAIRE.

He might have been in Heaven this moment,
giving a sight of the damned.

He had only adopted the creed of his time — if he had asserted that a God of infinite power and mercy had created millions and billions of human beings to suffer eternal pain, and all for the sake of his glorious justice — that he had given his power of attorney to a cunning and cruel Italian Pope, authorizing him to save the soul of his mistress and send honest wives to hell — if he had given to the nostrils of this God the odor of burning flesh — the incense of the fagot — if he had filled his ears with the shrieks of the tortured — the music of the rack, he would now be known as Saint Voltaire.

For many years this restless man filled Europe with the product of his brain. Essays, epigrams, epics, comedies, tragedies, histories, poems, novels, representing every phase and every faculty of the human mind. At the same time engrossed in business, full of speculation, making money like a millionaire, busy with the gossip of courts, and even with the scandals of priests. At the same time alive to all the discoveries of science and the theories of philosophers, and in this Babel never forgetting for one moment to assail the monster of superstition.

Sleeping and waking he hated the Church. With the eyes of Argus he watched, and with the arms of Briareus he struck. For sixty years he waged continuous and unrelenting war, sometimes in the open field, sometimes striking from the hedges of opportunity — taking care during all this time to remain independent of all men. He was in the highest sense successful. He lived like a prince, became one of the powers of Europe, and in him, for the first time, literature was crowned.

It has been claimed by the Christian critics that Voltaire was irreverent ; that he examined sacred things without solemnity ; that he refused to remove his shoes in the presence of the Burning Bush ; that he smiled at the geology of Moses, the astronomical ideas of Joshua, and that the biography of Jonah filled him with laughter. They say that these stories, these sacred impossibilities, these inspired falsehoods, should be read and studied with a believing mind in humbleness of spirit ; that they should be examined prayerfully, asking God at the same time to give us strength to triumph over the conclusions of our reason. These critics imagine that a falsehood can be old enough to be venerable, and that to stand covered in its presence is the act of an

irreverent scoffer. Voltaire approached the mythology of the Jews precisely as he did the mythology of the Greeks and Romans, or the mythology of the Chinese or the Iroquois Indians. There is nothing in this world too sacred to be investigated, to be understood. The philosopher does not hide. Secrecy is not the friend of truth. No man should be reverent at the expense of his reason. Nothing should be worshipped until the reason has been convinced that it is worthy of worship.

Against all miracles, against all holy superstition, against sacred mistakes, he shot the arrows of ridicule:

These arrows, winged by fancy, sharpened by wit, poisoned by truth, always reached the centre.

It is claimed by many that anything, the best and holiest, can be ridiculed. As a matter of fact, he who attempts to ridicule the truth, ridicules himself. He becomes the food of his own laughter.

The mind of man is many-sided. Truth must be, and is, willing to be tested in every way, tested by all the senses.

But in what way can the absurdity of the "real presence" be answered, except by banter, by railery, by ridicule, by persiflage? How are you going

to convince a man who believes that, when he swallows the sacred wafer, he has eaten the entire Trinity, and that a priest drinking a drop of wine has devoured the Infinite? How are you to reason with a man who believes that, if any of the sacred wafers are left over, they should be put in a secure place, so that mice should not eat God?

What effect will logic have upon a religious gentleman who firmly believes that a God of infinite compassion sent two bears to tear thirty or forty children in pieces for laughing at a bald-headed prophet?

How are such people to be answered? How can they be brought to a sense of their absurdity? They must feel in their flesh the arrows of ridicule.

So Voltaire has been called a mocker.

What did he mock? He mocked kings that were unjust; kings who cared nothing for the sufferings of their subjects. He mocked the titled fools of his day. He mocked the corruption of courts; the meanness, the tyranny and the brutality of judges. He mocked the absurd and cruel laws, the barbarous customs. He mocked popes and cardinals and bishops and priests, and all the hypocrites on the earth. He mocked historians who filled their books

with lies, and philosophers who defended superstition. He mocked the haters of liberty, the persecutors of their fellow-men. He mocked the arrogance, the cruelty, the impudence, and the unspeakable baseness of his time.

He has been blamed because he used the weapon of ridicule.

Hypocrisy has always hated laughter, and always will. Absurdity detests humor, and stupidity despises wit. Voltaire was the master of ridicule. He ridiculed the absurd, the impossible. He ridiculed the mythologies and the miracles, the stupid lives and lies of the saints. He found pretense and mendacity crowned by credulity. He found the ignorant many controlled by the cunning and cruel few. He found the historian, saturated with superstition, filling his volumes with the details of the impossible, and he found the scientists satisfied with "they say."

Voltaire had the instinct of the probable. He knew the law of average, the sea level; he had the idea of proportion, and so he ridiculed the mental monstrosities and deformities — the non sequiturs — of his day. Aristotle said women had more teeth than men. This was repeated again and again by the Catholic scientists of the Eighteenth Century.

Voltaire counted the teeth. The rest were satisfied with "they say."

Voltaire for many years, in spite of his surroundings, in spite of almost universal tyranny and oppression, was a believer in God and what he was pleased to call the religion of Nature. He attacked the creed of his time because it was dishonorable to his God. He thought of the Deity as a father, as the fountain of justice, intelligence and mercy, and the creed of the Catholic Church made him a monster of cruelty and stupidity. He attacked the Bible with all the weapons at his command. He assailed its geology, its astronomy, its ideas of justice, its laws and customs, its absurd and useless miracles, its foolish wonders, its ignorance on all subjects, its insane prophecies, its cruel threats and its extravagant promises.

At the same time he praised the God of nature, the God who gives us rain and light, and food and flowers, and health and happiness — he who fills the world with youth and beauty.

Attacked on every side, he fought with every weapon that wit, logic, reason, scorn, contempt, laughter, pathos and indignation could sharpen, form, devise or use. He often apologized, and the

apology was an insult. He often recanted, and the recantation was a thousand times worse than the thing recanted. He took it back by giving more. In the name of eulogy he flayed his victim. In his praise there was poison. He often advanced by retreating, and asserted by retraction.

He did not intend to give priests the satisfaction of seeing him burn or suffer. Upon this very point of recanting he wrote :

“They say I must retract. Very willingly. I
“will declare that Pascal is always right. That if St.
“Luke and St. Mark contradict one another, it is
“only another proof of the truth of religion to those
“who know how to understand such things ; and
“that another lovely proof of religion is that it is
“unintelligible. I will even avow that all priests
“are gentle and disinterested ; that Jesuits are hon-
“est people ; that monks are neither proud nor
“given to intrigue, and that their odor is agreeable ;
“that the Holy Inquisition is the triumph of human-
“ity and tolerance. In a word, I will say all that
“may be desired of me, provided they leave me in
“repose, and will not persecute a man who has done
“harm to none.”

He gave the best years of his wondrous life to

succor the oppressed, to shield the defenseless, to reverse infamous decrees, to rescue the innocent, to reform the laws of France, to do away with torture, to soften the hearts of priests, to enlighten judges, to instruct kings, to civilize the people, and to banish from the heart of man the love and lust of war.

You may think that I have said too much ; that I have placed this man too high. Let me tell you what Goethe, the great German, said of this man :

“ If you wish depth, genius, imagination, taste, “ reason, sensibility, philosophy, elevation, original- “ ity, nature, intellect, fancy, rectitude, facility, flexi- “ bility, precision, art, abundance, variety, fertility, “ warmth, magic, charm, grace, force, an eagle sweep “ of vision, vast understanding, instruction rich, tone “ excellent, urbanity, suavity, delicacy, correctness, “ purity, clearness, eloquence, harmony, brilliancy, “ rapidity, gaiety, pathos, sublimity and universality, “ perfection indeed, behold Voltaire.”

Even Carlyle, that old Scotch terrier, with the growl of a grizzly bear, who attacked shams, as I have sometimes thought, because he hated rivals, was forced to admit that Voltaire gave the death stab to modern superstition !

It is the duty of every man to destroy the superstitions of his time, and yet there are thousands of men and women, fathers and mothers, who repudiate with their whole hearts the creeds of superstition, and still allow their children to be taught these lies. They allow their imaginations to be poisoned with the dogma of eternal pain. They allow arrogant and ignorant parsons, meek and foolish teachers, to sow the seeds of barbarism in the minds of their children — seeds that will fill their lives with fear and pain. Nothing can be more important to a human being than to be free and to live without fear.

It is far better to be a mortal free man than an immortal slave.

Fathers and mothers should do their utmost to make their children free. They should teach them to doubt, to investigate, to inquire, and every father and mother should know that by the cradle of every child, as by the cradle of the infant Hercules, crawls the serpent of superstition.

IV.

THE SCHEME OF NATURE.

AT that time it was pretended by the believers in God that the plan, or the scheme of nature, was not cruel ; that the lower was sacrificed for the benefit of the higher ; that while life lived upon life, while animals lived upon each other, and while man was the king or sovereign of all, still the higher lived upon the lower. Consequently, a lower life was sacrificed that a higher life might exist. This reasoning satisfied many. Yet there were thousands that could not see why the lower should be sacrificed, or why all joy should be born of pain. But, since the construction of the microscope, since man has been allowed to look toward the infinitely small, as well as toward the infinitely great, he finds that our fathers were mistaken when they laid down the proposition that only the lower life was sacrificed for the sake of the higher.

Now, we find that the lives of all visible animals are liable to be, and in countless cases are, destroyed by a far lower life ; that man himself is destroyed by

the microbes, the bacilli, the infinitesimal. We find that for the sake of preserving the yellow fever germs millions and millions have died, and that whole nations have been decimated for the sake of the little beast that gives us the cholera. We have also found that there are animals, call them what you please, that live on the substance of the human heart, others that prefer the lungs, others again so delicate in their palate that they insist on devouring the optic nerve, and when they have destroyed the sight of one eye have sense enough to bore through the cartilage of the nose to attack the other. Thus we find the other side of this proposition. At first sight the lower seemed to be sacrificed for the sake of the higher, but on closer inspection the highest are sacrificed for the sake of the lowest.

Voltaire was, for a long time, a believer in the optimism of Pope — “All partial evil, universal good.” This is a very fine philosophy for the fortunate. It suits the rich. It is flattering to kings and priests. It sounds well. It is a fine stone to throw at a beggar. It enables you to bear with great fortitude the misfortunes of others.

It is not the philosophy for those who suffer — for industry clothed in rags, for patriotism in prison, for

honesty in want, or for virtuous outcasts. It is a philosophy of a class, of a few, and of the few who are fortunate ; and, when misfortune overtakes them, this philosophy fades and withers.

In 1755 came the earthquake at Lisbon. This frightful disaster became an immense interrogation. The optimist was compelled to ask, "What was my God doing? Why did the Universal Father crush to shapelessness thousands of his poor children, even at the moment when they were upon their knees returning thanks to him?"

What could be done with this horror? If earthquake there must be, why did it not occur in some uninhabited desert, on some wide waste of sea? This frightful fact changed the theology of Voltaire. He became convinced that this is not the best possible of all worlds. He became convinced that evil is evil here, now, and forever.

The Theist was silent. The earthquake denied the existence of God.

V.

HIS HUMANITY.

TOULOUSE was a favored town. It was rich in relics. The people were as ignorant as wooden images, but they had in their possession the dried bodies of seven apostles—the bones of many of the infants slain by Herod—part of a dress of the Virgin Mary, and lots of skulls and skeletons of the infallible idiots known as saints.

In this city the people celebrated every year with great joy two holy events: The expulsion of the Huguenots, and the blessed massacre of St. Bartholomew. The citizens of Toulouse had been educated and civilized by the church.

A few Protestants, mild because in the minority, lived among these jackals and tigers.

One of these Protestants was Jean Calas—a small dealer in dry goods. For forty years he had been in this business, and his character was without a stain. He was honest, kind and agreeable. He

had a wife and six children—four sons and two daughters. One of the sons became a Catholic. The eldest son, Marc Antoine, disliked his father's business and studied law. He could not be allowed to practice unless he became a Catholic. He tried to get his license by concealing that he was a Protestant. He was discovered—grew morose. Finally he became discouraged and committed suicide, by hanging himself one evening in his father's store.

The bigots of Toulouse started the story that his parents had killed him to prevent his becoming a Catholic.

On this frightful charge the father, mother, one son, a servant, and one guest at their house, were arrested.

The dead son was considered a martyr, the church taking possession of the body.

This happened in 1761.

There was what was called a trial. There was no evidence, not the slightest, except hearsay. All the facts were in favor of the accused.

The united strength of the defendants could not have done the deed.

Jean Calas was doomed to torture and to death upon the wheel. This was on the 9th of March.

1762, and the sentence was to be carried out the next day.

On the morning of the 10th the father was taken to the torture room. The executioner and his assistants were sworn on the cross to administer the torture according to the judgment of the Court.

They bound him by the wrists to an iron ring in the stone wall four feet from the ground, and his feet to another ring in the floor. Then they shortened the ropes and chains until every joint in his arms and legs was dislocated. Then he was questioned. He declared that he was innocent. Then the ropes were again shortened until life fluttered in the torn body ; but he remained firm.

This was called the question ordinaire.

Again the magistrates exhorted the victim to confess, and again he refused, saying that there was nothing to confess.

Then came the question extraordinaire.

Into the mouth of the victim was placed a horn holding three pints of water. In this way thirty pints of water were forced into the body of the sufferer. The pain was beyond description, and yet Jean Calas remained firm.

He was then carried to the scaffold in a tumbrel.

He was bound to a wooden cross that lay on the scaffold. The executioner then took a bar of iron, broke each leg and each arm in two places, striking eleven blows in all. He was then left to die if he could. He lived for two hours, declaring his innocence to the last. He was slow to die, and so the executioner strangled him. Then his poor lacerated, bleeding and broken body was chained to a stake and burned.

All this was a spectacle — a festival for the savages of Toulouse. What would they have done if their hearts had not been softened by the glad tidings of great joy — peace on earth and good will to men.

But this was not all. The property of the family was confiscated ; the son was released on condition that he become a Catholic ; the servant if she would enter a convent. The two daughters were consigned to a convent, and the heart-broken widow was allowed to wander where she would.

Voltaire heard of this case. In a moment his soul was on fire. He took one of the sons under his roof. He wrote a history of the case. He corresponded with kings and queens, with chancellors and lawyers. If money was needed, he advanced

it. For years he filled Europe with the echoes of the groans of Jean Calas. He succeeded. The horrible judgment was annulled—the poor victim declared innocent and thousands of dollars raised to support the mother and family.

This was the work of Voltaire.

THE SIRVEN FAMILY.

Sirven, a Protestant, lived in Languedoc with his wife and three daughters. The housekeeper of the bishop wanted to make one of the daughters a Catholic.

The law allowed the bishop to take the child of Protestants from their parents for the sake of its soul. This little girl was so taken and placed in a convent. She ran away and came back to her parents. Her poor little body was covered with the marks of the convent whip.

“Suffer little children to come unto me.”

The child was out of her mind—suddenly she disappeared, and a few days after her little body was found in a well, three miles from home.

The cry was raised that her folks had murdered her to keep her from becoming a Catholic.

This happened only a little way from the Christian City of Toulouse while Jean Calas was in prison. The Sirvens knew that a trial would end in conviction. They fled. In their absence they were convicted, their property confiscated. The parents sentenced to die by the hangman, the daughters to be under the gallows during the execution of their mother, and then to be exiled.

The family fled in the midst of winter ; the married daughter gave birth to a child in the snows of the Alps ; the mother died, and, at last reaching Switzerland, the father found himself without means of support.

They went to Voltaire. He espoused their cause. He took care of them, gave them the means to live, and labored to annul the sentence that had been pronounced against them for nine long and weary years. He appealed to kings for money, to Catharine II. of Russia, and to hundreds of others. He was successful. He said of this case : The Sirvens were tried and condemned in two hours in January, 1762, and now in January, 1772, after ten years of effort, they have been restored to their rights.

This was the work of Voltaire. Why should the worshippers of God hate the lovers of men?

THE ESPENASSE CASE.

Espenasse was a Protestant, of good estate. In 1740 he received into his house a Protestant clergyman, to whom he gave supper and lodging.

In a country where priests repeated the parable of the "Good Samaritan," this was a crime.

For this crime Espenasse was tried, convicted and sentenced to the galleys for life.

When he had been imprisoned for twenty-three years his case came to the knowledge of Voltaire, and he was, through the efforts of Voltaire, released and restored to his family.

This was the work of Voltaire. There is not time to tell of the case of General Lally, of the English General Byng, of the niece of Corneille, of the Jesuit Adam, of the writers, dramatists, actors, widows and orphans, for whose benefit he gave his influence, his money and his time. But I will tell another case :

In 1765, at the town of Abbeville, an old wooden cross on a bridge had been mutilated—whittled with a knife—a terrible crime. Sticks, when crossing each other, were far more sacred than flesh and blood. Two young men were suspected—the Chevalier de la Barre and D'Etallonde. D'Etallonde fled to Prussia and enlisted as a common soldier.

La Barre remained and stood his trial.

He was convicted without the slightest evidence, and he and D'Etallonde were both sentenced :

First, to endure the torture, ordinary and extraordinary.

Second, to have their tongues torn out by the roots with pincers of iron.

Third, to have their right hands cut off at the door of the church.

Fourth, to be bound to stakes by chains of iron and burned to death by a slow fire.

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Remembering this, the Judges mitigated the sentence by providing that their heads should be cut off before their bodies were given to the flames.

The case was appealed to Paris ; heard by a

Court composed of twenty-five Judges, learned in the law, and the judgment was confirmed.

The sentence was carried out on the first day of July, 1766.

When Voltaire heard of this judicial infamy he made up his mind to abandon France. He wished to leave forever a country where such cruelties were possible.

He wrote a pamphlet, giving the history of the case.

He ascertained the whereabouts of D'Etallonde, wrote in his behalf to the King of Prussia ; got him released from the Army ; took him to his own house ; kept him for a year and a half ; saw that he was instructed in drawing, mathematics, engineering, and had at last the happiness of seeing him a captain of engineers in the army of Frederick the Great.

Such a man was Voltaire. He was the champion of the oppressed and the helpless. He was the Cæsar to whom the victims of Church and State appealed. He stood for the intellect and heart of his time.

And yet for a hundred and fifty years those who love their enemies have exhausted the vocabulary

of hate, the ingenuity of malice and mendacity, in their efforts to save their stupid creeds from the genius of Voltaire.

From a great height he surveyed the world. His horizon was large. He had some vices—these he shared in common with priests—his virtues were his own.

He was in favor of universal education—of the development of the brain. The church despised him. He wished to put the knowledge of the whole world within the reach of all. Every priest was his enemy. He wished to drive from the gate of Eden the cherubim of superstition, so that the children of Adam might return and eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. The church opposed this because it had the fruit of the tree of ignorance for sale.

He was one of the foremost friends of the Encyclopedia—of Diderot, and did all in his power to give information to all. So far as principles were concerned, he was the greatest lawyer of his time. I do not mean that he knew the terms and decisions, but that he clearly perceived not only what the law should be, but its application and administration. He understood the philosophy of evidence, the difference between suspicion and proof, between belief

and knowledge, and he did more to reform the laws of the kingdom and the abuses at Courts than all the lawyers and statesmen of his time.

At school, he read and studied the works of Cicero—the lord of language—probably the greatest orator that has uttered speech, and the words of the Roman remained in his brain. He became, in spite of the spirit of caste, a believer in the equality of men. He said :

“ Men are born equal.”

“ Let us respect virtue and merit.”

“ Let us have it in the heart that men are equal.”

He was an abolitionist—the enemy of slavery in all its forms. He did not think that the color of one man gave him the right to steal from another man on account of that man's color. He was the friend of serf and peasant, and did what he could to protect animals, wives and children from the fury of those who loved their neighbors as themselves.

It was Voltaire who sowed the seeds of liberty in the heart and brain of Franklin, of Jefferson and Thomas Paine.

Puffendorf had taken the ground that slavery was, in part, founded on contract.

Voltaire said : “ Show me the contract, and if it is

signed by the party to be the slave, I may believe you."

He thought it absurd that God should drown the fathers, and then come and die for the children. This is as good as the remark of Diderot: "If Christ had the power to defend himself from the Jews and refused to use it, he was guilty of suicide."

He had sense enough to know that the flame of the fagot does not enlighten the mind. He hated the cruel and pitied the victims of Church and State. He was the friend of the unfortunate—the helper of the striving. He laughed at the pomp of kings—the pretensions of priests. He was a believer in the natural and abhorred with all his heart the miraculous and absurd.

Voltaire was not a saint. He was educated by the Jesuits. He was never troubled about the salvation of his soul. All the theological disputes excited his laughter, the creeds his pity, and the conduct of bigots his contempt. He was much better than a saint.

Most of the christians in his day kept their religion not for every day use but for disaster, as ships carry life boats to be used only in the stress of storm.

Voltaire believed in the religion of humanity—of good and generous deeds. For many centuries the church had painted virtue so ugly, sour and cold, that vice was regarded as beautiful. Voltaire taught the beauty of the useful, the hatefulness and hideousness of superstition.

He was not the greatest of poets, or of dramatists, but he was the greatest man of his time, the greatest friend of freedom and the deadliest foe of superstition.

He did more to break the chains of superstition—to drive the phantoms of fear from the heart and brain, to destroy the authority of the church and to give liberty to the world than any other of the sons of men. In the highest, the holiest sense he was the most profoundly religious man of his time.

VI.

THE RETURN.

AFTER an exile of twenty-seven years, occupying during all that time a first place in the civilized world, Voltaire returned to Paris. His journey was a triumphal march. He was received as a conqueror. The Academy, the Immortals, came to meet him—a compliment that had never been paid to royalty. His tragedy of “Irene” was performed. At the theatre he was crowned with laurel, covered with flowers; he was intoxicated with perfume and with incense of worship. He was the supreme French poet, standing above them all. Among the literary men of the world he stood first—a monarch by the divine right of genius. There were three mighty forces in France—the throne, the altar and Voltaire.

The king was the enemy of Voltaire. The Court could have nothing to do with him. The Church, malign and morose, was waiting for her revenge, and

yet, such was the reputation of this man—such the hold he had upon the people—that he became, in spite of Throne, in spite of Church, the idol of France.

He was an old man of eighty-four. He had been surrounded with the comforts, the luxuries of life. He was a man of great wealth, the richest writer that the world had known. Among the literary men of the earth he stood first. He was an intellectual king—one who had built his own throne and had woven the purple of his own power. He was a man of genius. The Catholic God had allowed him the appearance of success. His last years were filled with the intoxication of flattery—of almost worship. He stood at the summit of his age.

The priests became anxious. They began to fear that God would forget, in a multiplicity of business, to make a terrible example of Voltaire.

Towards the last of May, 1778, it was whispered in Paris that Voltaire was dying. Upon the fences of expectation gathered the unclean birds of superstition, impatiently waiting for their prey.

“Two days before his death, his nephew went to seek the Curé of Saint Sulpice and the Abbé Guatier, and brought them into his uncle’s sick chamber.

‘Ah, well!’ said Voltaire, ‘give them my compliments and my thanks.’ The Abbé spoke some words to him, exhorting him to patience. The Curé of Saint Sulpice then came forward, having announced himself, and asked of Voltaire, elevating his voice, if he acknowledged the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. The sick man pushed one of his hands against the Curé’s coif, shoving him back and cried, turning abruptly to the other side, ‘Let me die in peace.’ The Curé seemingly considered his person soiled and his coif dishonored by the touch of a philosopher. He made the nurse give him a little brushing and went out with the Abbé Guatier.”

He expired, says Wagnière, on the 30th of May, 1778, at about a quarter-past eleven at night, with the most perfect tranquillity. A few moments before his last breath he took the hand of Morand, his valet de chambre, who was watching by him, pressed it, and said: “Adieu, my dear Morand, I am gone.” These were his last words. Like a peaceful river with green and shaded banks, he flowed without a murmur into the waveless sea, where life is rest.

From this death, so simple and serene, so kind, so philosophic and tender, so natural and peaceful; from these words, so utterly destitute of cant or

dramatic touch, all the frightful pictures, all the despairing utterances, have been drawn and made. From these materials, and from these alone, or rather, in spite of these facts, have been constructed by priests and clergymen and their dupes all the shameless lies about the death of this great and wonderful man. A man, compared with whom all of his calumniators, dead and living, were, and are, but dust and vermin.

Let us be honest. Did all the priests of Rome increase the mental wealth of man as much as Bruno? Did all the priests of France do as great a work for the civilization of the world as Voltaire or Diderot? Did all the ministers of Scotland add as much to the sum of human knowledge as David Hume? Have all the clergymen, monks, friars, ministers, priests, bishops, cardinals and popes, from the day of Pentecost to the last election, done as much for human liberty as Thomas Paine?

What would the world be if infidels had never been?

The Infidels have been the brave and thoughtful men; the flower of all the world; the pioneers and heralds of the blessed day of liberty and love; the generous spirits of the unworthy past; the seers and

prophets of our race ; the great chivalric souls, proud victors on the battlefields of thought, the creditors of all the years to be.

Why should it be taken for granted that the men who devoted their lives to the liberation of their fellow-men should have been hissed at in the hour of death by the snakes of conscience, while men who defended slavery—practiced polygamy—justified the stealing of babes from the breasts of mothers, and lashed the naked back of unpaid labor, are supposed to have passed smilingly from earth to the embraces of the angels ? Why should we think that the brave thinkers, the investigators, the honest men, must have left the crumbling shore of time in dread and fear, while the instigators of the massacre of St. Bartholomew ; the inventors and users of thumb-screws, of iron boots and racks ; the burners and tearers of human flesh ; the stealers, the whippers and the enslavers of men ; the buyers and beaters of maidens, mothers and babes ; the founders of the Inquisition ; the makers of chains ; the builders of dungeons ; the calumniators of the living ; the slanderers of the dead, and even the murderers of Jesus Christ, all died in the odor of sanctity, with white, forgiven hands folded upon the breasts of peace, while the

destroyers of prejudice, the apostles of humanity, the soldiers of liberty, the breakers of fetters, the creators of light, died surrounded by the fierce fiends of God?

In those days the philosophers—that is to say, the thinkers—were not buried in holy ground. It was feared that their principles might contaminate the ashes of the just. And they also feared that on the morning of the Resurrection they might, in a moment of confusion, slip into heaven. Some were burned, and their ashes scattered; and the bodies of some were thrown naked to beasts, and others buried in unholy earth.

Voltaire knew the history of Adrienne Le Couvreur, a beautiful actress, denied burial.

After all, we do feel an interest in what is to become of our bodies. There is a modesty that belongs to death. Upon this subject Voltaire was infinitely sensitive. It was that he might be buried that he went through the farce of confession, of absolution, and of the last sacrament. The priests knew that he was not in earnest, and Voltaire knew that they would not allow him to be buried in any of the cemeteries of Paris.

His death was kept a secret. The Abbé Mignot

made arrangements for the burial at Romilli-on-the-Seine, more than 100 miles from Paris. On Sunday evening, on the last day of May, 1778, the body of Voltaire, clad in a dressing gown, clothed to resemble an invalid, posed to simulate life, was placed in a carriage; at its side, a servant, whose business it was to keep it in position. To this carriage were attached six horses, so that people might think a great lord was going to his estates. Another carriage followed, in which were a grand nephew and two cousins of Voltaire. All night they traveled, and on the following day arrived at the courtyard of the Abbey. The necessary papers were shown, the mass was performed in the presence of the body, and Voltaire found burial. A few moments afterwards, the Prior, who "for charity had given a little earth," received from his Bishop a menacing letter forbidding the burial of Voltaire. It was too late.

Voltaire was dead. The foundations of State and Throne had been sapped. The people were becoming acquainted with the real kings and with the actual priests. Unknown men born in misery and want, men whose fathers and mothers had been pavement for the rich, were rising towards the light, and their

shadowy faces were emerging from darkness. Labor and thought became friends. That is, the gutter and the attic fraternized. The monsters of the Night and the angels of the Dawn—the first thinking of revenge, and the others dreaming of equality, liberty and fraternity.

VII.

THE DEATH-BED ARGUMENT.

ALL kinds of criminals, except infidels, meet death with reasonable serenity. As a rule, there is nothing in the death of a pirate to cast any discredit on his profession. The murderer upon the scaffold, with a priest on either side, smilingly exhorts the multitude to meet him in heaven. The man who has succeeded in making his home a hell, meets death without a quiver, provided he has never expressed any doubt as to the divinity of Christ, or the eternal "procession" of the Holy Ghost. The king who has waged cruel and useless war, who has filled countries with widows and fatherless children, with the maimed and diseased, and who has succeeded in offering to the Moloch of ambition the best and bravest of his subjects, dies like a saint.

All the believing kings are in heaven—all the doubting philosophers in perdition. All the persecutors sleep in peace, and the ashes of those who

burned their brothers, sleep in consecrated ground. Libraries could hardly contain the names of the Christian wretches who have filled the world with violence and death in defence of book and creed, and yet they all died the death of the righteous, and no priest, no minister, describes the agony and fear, the remorse and horror with which their guilty souls were filled in the last moments of their lives. These men had never doubted—they had never thought—they accepted the creed as they did the fashion of their clothes. They were not infidels, they could not be—they had been baptized, they had not denied the divinity—of Christ—they had partaken of the “last supper.” They respected priests—they admitted that Christ had two natures and the same number of wills; they admitted that the Holy Ghost had “proceeded,” and that, according to the multiplication table of heaven, once one is three, and three times one is one, and these things put pillows beneath their heads and covered them with the drapery of peace.

That, while kings and priests did nothing worse than to make their fellows wretched, that so long as they only butchered and burnt the innocent and helpless, God would maintain the strictest neutrality ;

but, when some honest man, some great and tender soul, expressed a doubt as to the truth of the Scriptures, or prayed to the wrong God, or to the right one by the wrong name, then the real God leaped like a wounded tiger upon his victim, and from his quivering flesh tore his wretched soul.

There is no recorded instance where the uplifted hand of murder has been paralyzed — no truthful account in all the literature of the world of the innocent child being shielded by God. Thousands of crimes are being committed every day — men are at this moment lying in wait for their human prey — wives are whipped and crushed, driven to insanity and death — little children begging for mercy, lifting imploring, tear-filled eyes to the brutal faces of fathers and mothers — sweet girls are deceived, lured and outraged, but God has no time to prevent these things — no time to defend the good and protect the pure. He is too busy numbering hairs and watching sparrows. He listens for blasphemy; looks for persons who laugh at priests; examines baptismal registers; watches professors in college who begin to doubt the geology of Moses and the astronomy of Joshua. He does not particularly object to stealing, if you won't swear. A great many

persons have fallen dead in the act of taking God's name in vain, but millions of men, women and children have been stolen from their homes and used as beasts of burden, but no one engaged in this infamy has ever been touched by the wrathful hand of God.

Now and then a man of genius, of sense, of intellectual honesty, has appeared. Such men have denounced the superstitions of their day. They have pitied the multitude. To see priests devour the substance of the people — priests who made begging one of the learned professions — filled them with loathing and contempt. These men were honest enough to tell their thoughts, brave enough to speak the truth. Then they were denounced, tried, tortured, killed by rack or flame. But some escaped the fury of the fiends who love their enemies, and died naturally in their beds. It would not do for the Church to admit that they died peacefully. That would show that religion was not essential at the last moment. Superstition gets its power from the terror of death. It would not do to have the common people understand that a man could deny the Bible — refuse to kiss the cross — contend that Humanity was greater than Christ, and then die as sweetly as Torquemada did, after pouring molten lead into the

ears of an honest man ; or as calmly as Calvin after he had burned Servetus ; or as peacefully as King David after advising with his last breath one son to assassinate another.

The Church has taken great pains to show that the last moments of all infidels (that Christians did not succeed in burning) were infinitely wretched and despairing. It was alleged that words could not paint the horrors that were endured by a dying infidel. Every good Christian was expected to, and generally did, believe these accounts. They have been told and retold in every pulpit of the world. Protestant ministers have repeated the lies invented by Catholic priests, and Catholics, by a kind of theological comity, have sworn to the lies told by the Protestants. Upon this point they have always stood together, and will as long as the same falsehood can be used by both.

Instead of doing these things, Voltaire wilfully closed his eyes to the light of the gospel, examined the Bible for himself, advocated intellectual liberty, struck from the brain the fetters of an arrogant faith, assisted the weak, cried out against the torture of man, appealed to reason, endeavored to establish universal toleration, succored the indigent, and defended the oppressed.

He demonstrated that the origin of all religions is the same, the same mysteries — the same miracles — the same imposture — the same temples and ceremonies — the same kind of founders, apostles and dupes — the same promises and threats — the same pretence of goodness and forgiveness and the practice of the same persecution and murder. He proved that religion made enemies — philosophy friends — and that above the rights of Gods were the rights of man.

These were his crimes. Such a man God would not suffer to die in peace. If allowed to meet death with a smile, others might follow his example, until none would be left to light the holy fires of the *auto da fe*. It would not do for so great, so successful an enemy of the Church, to die without leaving some shriek of fear, some shudder of remorse, some ghastly prayer of chattered horror, uttered by lips covered with blood and foam.

For many centuries the theologians have taught that an unbeliever — an infidel — one who spoke or wrote against their creed, could not meet death with composure ; that in his last moments God would fill his conscience with the serpents of remorse.

For a thousand years the clergy have manufac-

tured the facts to fit this theory— this infamous conception of the duty of man and the justice of God.

The theologians have insisted that crimes against man were, and are, as nothing compared with crimes against God.

Upon the death-bed subject the clergy grow eloquent. When describing the shudderings and shrieks of the dying unbeliever, their eyes glitter with delight.

It is a festival.

They are no longer men. They become hyenas. They dig open graves. They devour the dead.

It is a banquet.

Unsatisfied still, they paint the terrors of Hell. They gaze at the souls of the infidels writhing in the coils of the worm that never dies. They see them in flames — in oceans of fire — in gulfs of pain — in abysses of despair. They shout with joy. They applaud.

It is an *auto da fe*, presided over by God.

VIII.

THE SECOND RETURN.

FOR four hundred years the Bastile had been the outward symbol of oppression. Within its walls the noblest had perished. It was a perpetual threat. It was the last, and often the first, argument of king and priest. Its dungeons, damp and rayless, its massive towers, its secret cells, its instruments of torture, denied the existence of God.

In 1789, on the 14th of July, the people, the multitude, frenzied by suffering, stormed and captured the Bastile. The battle-cry was "Vive Voltaire."

In 1791 permission was given to place in the Pantheon the ashes of Voltaire. He had been buried 110 miles from Paris. Buried by stealth, he was to be removed by a nation. A funeral procession of a hundred miles; every village with its flags and arches; all the people anxious to honor the philosopher of France—the Savior of Calas—the Destroyer of Superstition.

On reaching Paris the great procession moved along the Rue St. Antoine. Here it paused, and

for one night upon the ruins of the Bastile rested the body of Voltaire — rested in triumph, in glory — rested on fallen wall and broken arch, on crumbling stone still damp with tears, on rusting chain and bar and useless bolt — above the dungeons dark and deep, where light had faded from the lives of men and hope had died in breaking hearts.

The conqueror resting upon the conquered.—
Throned upon the Bastile, the fallen fortress of Night, the body of Voltaire, from whose brain had issued the Dawn.

For a moment his ashes must have felt the Promethean fire, and the old smile must have illumined once more the face of death.

The vast multitude bowed in reverence, hushed with love and awe heard these words uttered by a priest: “God shall be avenged.”

The cry of the priest was a prophecy. Priests skulking in the shadows with faces sinister as night, ghouls in the name of the Gospel, desecrated the grave. They carried away the ashes of Voltaire.

The tomb is empty.

God is avenged.

The world is filled with his fame.

Man has conquered.

Was there in the Eighteenth Century, a man wearing the vestments of the church, the equal of Voltaire?

What cardinal, what bishop, what priest in France raised his voice for the rights of men? What ecclesiastic, what nobleman, took the side of the oppressed — of the peasant? Who denounced the frightful criminal code — the torture of suspected persons? What priest pleaded for the liberty of the citizen? What bishop pitied the victims of the rack? Is there the grave of a priest in France on which a lover of liberty would now drop a flower or a tear? Is there a tomb holding the ashes of a saint from which emerges one ray of light?

If there be another life — a day of judgment, no God can afford to torture in another world the man who abolished torture in this. If God be the keeper of an eternal penitentiary, he should not imprison there the men who broke the chains of slavery here. He cannot afford to make an eternal convict of Voltaire.

Voltaire was a perfect master of the French language, knowing all its moods, tenses and declinations, in fact and in feeling — playing upon it as skillfully as Paganini on his violin, finding expres-

sion for every thought and fancy, writing on the most serious subjects with the gayety of a harelequin, plucking jests from the crumbling mouth of death, graceful as the waving of willows, dealing in double meanings that covered the asp with flowers and flattery—master of satire and compliment—mingling them often in the same line, always interested himself, and therefore interesting others—handling thoughts, questions, subjects as a juggler does balls, keeping them in the air with perfect ease—dressing old words in new meanings, charming, grotesque, pathetic, mingling mirth with tears, wit and wisdom, and sometimes wickedness, logic and laughter. With a woman's instinct knowing the sensitive nerves—just where to touch—hating arrogance of place, the stupidity of the solemn—snatching masks from priest and king, knowing the springs of action and ambition's ends—perfectly familiar with the great world—the intimate of kings, and their favorites, sympathizing with the oppressed and imprisoned, with the unfortunate and poor, hating tyranny, despising superstition, and loving liberty with all his heart. Such was Voltaire writing "Œdipus" at seventeen, "Irene" at eighty-three, and crowding between these two tragedies the accomplishment of a thousand lives.

From his throne at the foot of the Alps, he pointed the finger of scorn at every hypocrite in Europe. For half a century, past rack and stake, past dungeon and cathedral, past altar and throne, he carried with brave hands the sacred torch of Reason, whose light at last will flood the world.

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