

TORCH OF



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THE BEGINNING

Prior to the great beginning
 When there was no heaven or earth,
 When there was no starlight, sunlight,
 When creation had no birth,
 When a black and boundless nothing,
 Breathless, lifeless 'round him fell:
 What occurred to wake his slumber,
 What occurred to break the spell?

Starless, worldless, all pervading,
 Breathless, lifeless, boundless night,
 Was the nothing at beginning
 Out of which sprang worlds of light,
 Out of which were made the heavens,
 Countless worlds remote and near,
 And all living, moving creatures
 In the depth of sea and air.

Yet we know not what aroused him
 To begin this mighty plan
 Of creation, in its vastness,
 Forming lastly sinful man.
 Why did he not leave great nothing
 In its sinless, silent space,
 Rather than make man so sinful
 As to damn the human race?

But 'tis said that man was sinless
 Until tempted, when he fell,—
 Tempted by a subtle serpent,
 Crawling from the depth of hell—
 Pure and spotless as a lily,
 In its early opening bloom,
 Until tempted by the devil
 Into shades of sin and gloom.

When that black and boundless nothing,
 Harmless, voiceless round him fell,
 Why did he create the devil,
 Or conceive an endless hell?
 If creation sent forth evil,
 Or an evil comes of good,
 Then where is the point dividing
 Satan's works from works of God?

When there was no starlight, sunlight,
 When there was no heaven or hell,
 When there was no place for sinning,
 Nor for sinful man to dwell,
 Why was silence ever broken?
 Why was man to weakness born?
 Why were devils made to tempt him
 And then leave him here to mourn?

Vast and searching are these questions,
 Piercing, probing to the core;
 Peering back beyond creation,
 To great nothing, nothing more.
 Vast though simple is this question,
 Piercing, probing to the core.
 Is it true there once was nothing,
 Nothing, nothing, nothing more?

—Selected.

WAS LINCOLN A CHRISTIAN?

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, Ohio:

"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 the 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."

MARRIAGES AND FUNERALS.

There are no rights more sacred than the right to be married without meaningless mummery, and the right not to be misrepresented at one's funeral.

The importance of secular funerals and marriages cannot be fully estimated, for the world will still sneer at our inconsistency, and the church folks still smile complacently and declare that "liberalism is neither fit to live by nor to die by," so long as professed liberals continue to call on the clergy to solemnize their marriages and bury their dead.

Doubtless this is often done not through choice, but because there is no one near, except the preacher, who is prepared to officiate.

A. R. AYRES.

SECULAR FLASHES.

The profoundest of all infidelity is the fear lest the truth be bad.—Herbert Spencer.

The civilization of man increases as the secular power of the church decreases.—Ingersoll.

Error of opinion may be tolerated when reason is left free to combat it.—Thomas Jefferson.

Skepticism is the highest of duties, and blind faith the one unpardonable sin.—T. H. Huxley.

What an immense book might be composed on all the things once believed, of which it is necessary to doubt.—Voltaire.

All truth is safe, and nothing else is safe, and he who keeps back the truth, or withholds it from motives of expediency, is either a coward or a criminal, or both. He who knows only one religion, knows none.—Prof. Max Muller.

If any man is able to convince me and show me that I do not think or act right, I will gladly change; for I seek the truth, by which no man was ever injured. But he is injured who abides in his error and ignorance.—M. Aurelius Antoninus.

Though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do ingloriously, by licensing and prohibiting, to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falsehood

grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter?—John Milton.

Some tell us that it is the desire of God that we should worship him. What for? Why does he desire worship? We cannot assist the infinite, but we can assist our fellow men. We can feed the hungry and cloth the naked, and enlighten the ignorant, and we can help, in some degree at least, toward covering this world with the mantle of joy. I do not believe there is any being in this universe who gives rain for praise, who gives sunshine for prayer, or who blesses a man simply because he kneels.—Ingersoll.

Man can never be so sufficiently assured of the course of his thoughts as to swear fidelity to this or that system, which for the time being he may regard as the true one. All that he can do is to consecrate himself to the service of Truth whatever she may be, and to incline his heart to follow her wherever he thinks that he sees her, and this though at the cost of the most painful sacrifices.—Earnest Renan.

Reason, Observation and Experience the Holy Trinity of Science—have taught us that happiness is the only good; that the time to be happy is now, and the way to be happy is to make others so. This is enough for us. In this belief we are content to live and die. If by any possibility the existence of a power superior to, and independent of, nature shall be demonstrated, there will then be time enough to kneel. Until then let us stand erect.—Ingersoll.

Table-talk proves that nine out of ten people read what amuses them rather than what instructs them; and proves, also, that the last thing they read is something which tells them disagreeable truths or dispels groundless hopes. That popular education results in an extensive reading of publications which foster pleasant illusions rather than those which insist on hard realities, is beyond question.—The Man vs the State.

To the mass of people nothing is so costly as thought. The fact that, taking the world over, ninety-nine people out of a hundred accept the creed to which they were born, exemplifies their mental attitude toward things at large. Nearly all of them pursue mechanically the routine to which they have been accustomed, and are not only blind to its defects, but will

not recognize them as defects when they are pointed out.—The Principles of Ethics.

Clergy and flock alike act in the spirit of self-interested corporation. They feel that if children are not trained to accept Christian doctrines before they can reason for themselves, the chances are ten to one that they will not join any church in later life. The dissenting clergy therefore insist that the main Christian doctrines shall be taught in the schools, leaving the churches to compete among themselves for the adherence of the taught, when they have left school.—John M. Robertson.

The central proposition of the whole "Discourse" (Rene Descartes) are these. There is a path that leads to truth so surely, that any one who will follow it must needs reach the goal, whether his capacity be great or small. And there is one guiding rule by which a man may always find this path and keep himself from straying when he has found it. This golden rule is—Give unqualified assent to no propositions but those the truth of which is so clear and distinct that they cannot be doubted. The enunciation of this great first commandment of science consecrated Doubt. It removed doubt from the seat of penance among the grievous sins to which it had long been condemned, and enthroned it in that high place among the primary duties, which is assigned to it by the scientific conscience of these latter days.—T. H. Huxley.

QUESTION BOX.

Do Catholics and Methodists love each other?

Could all good men and women join together and work for the advancement of righteousness? Why don't they?

Do all who pray for daily bread get it?

Does an unbeliever get his daily bread?

Could cyclones, floods, poverty and disease exist if there was an all wise and good intelligence governing the universe?

Do good men pray for the salvation of the world? Is it a good prayer? Why isn't it answered?

Should parents be thanked for not killing their children? Should a god be thanked for permitting us to live?

Why is the word "god" said to be of the masculine gender?

Is it wicked to ask such questions? Why?