

WAS LINCOLN A CHRISTIAN?

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 was 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 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 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 has always denounced Voltaire as an Atheist, but this can be accounted for in two ways: First by the ignorance of the clergy, and Second, 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."

SCIENCE VS THEOLOGY.

(Continued from last issue.)

The argument for the existence of the human attribute of goodness in God is founded on the same imperfect reasoning as that we have just considered. Facts producing results such as a good man might produce, are cited as proofs of the goodness of God; while facts such as only the most cruel and wicked would or could be guilty of, are either passed over unnoticed, or put aside labelled "mysterious." A healthy and beautiful child is taken as proof of God's goodness; but nothing is said of infants born in a state of disease or deformity, destined to a short and miserable existence. What, again, is to be said of creatures so formed that life to them is possible only by the sickness, pain and death of other living creatures?

If facts similar to what human goodness would produce are proofs of God having the attribute of human goodness, it follows that facts similar to what human cruelty and wickedness would produce—and they are just as numerous—are equally proofs of God having the attributes of human cruelty and wickedness. But the truth is neither one nor the other is any proof at all that the nature of God is man-like.

It is said in the Hebrew Scriptures, "God made man in his own image." Turn the statement upside down, and it becomes true: "Man makes God in his own image." And whether the representation consists of the clay figure made by an African negro, or the mental image constructed by civilized man, it is equally a vain and foolish idol. The most ignorant savage and the Archbishop of Canterbury are equally unable to form any true conception of the nature of God. Let us suppose one of those small shell-fish in the slime at the bottom of the ocean trying to form a conception of the forms of existence on the surface of the earth. It knows and can know nothing of light or colour, of air or sound. Its experience has been confined to a few feet of mud two thousand fathoms below the surface, where there must be utter darkness and eternal silence. All the forms of existence known to

it have been creatures more or less like itself. Imagine such a creature trying to form and express a conception of the forms of existence of the plants and animals as known to us!—such an attempt must be in vain. Then suppose further this tiny creature trying to conceive the idea of God, the cause of all it knew, and to describe him as an invisible shell-fish, with a shell enormously large and tentacles infinitely long; in fact a magnified image of itself. The folly of this attempt to enter what was to the shell-fish the region of the unknowable would be very plain to us. But let us suppose still further that this little creature not only formed this conception of God but felt so confident of its virtues as a correct one that it assured the other little shell-fish that any of them that did not thus think of the deity would "without doubt perish everlastingly." The ludicrous presumption of the creature would amuse a child.—John Wilson.

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