

Torch of Reason

THE ONLY SECULAR PAPER PUBLISHED ON THE PACIFIC COAST.

Published Weekly by the Oregon State Secular Union.

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Entered at the postoffice at Silverton, Oregon, as second class mail matter.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES.

One Year, in advance.....\$1 00
Six Months, in advance..... 50
Three Months, in advance..... 25
In Clubs of 5 or more one year, in advance... 75
Money should be sent by registered letter or money order.
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THURSDAY, APRIL 29, E. M. 297

A Christian Nation?

The following, from a Washington letter, was evidently written by a Christian:

"Have you ever noticed that every time a prominent minister of the gospel publicly asserts that the United States is a Christian nation that somebody rushes into print with a denial that it is? I have also noticed that the somebody usually calls himself an agnostic. A case in point is the appearance of several communications in Washington newspapers questioning Bishop Newman's recent assertion that the United States supreme court unanimously decided in the case of the Church of the Holy Trinity vs. the United States, that this is a Christian nation. That opinion, which was prepared by Justice Brewer and handed down February 29, 1892, may be easily found and read by those who have doubts on the subject, in the Supreme Court Reports, but it is not needed to prove that this is a Christian nation. That is proven by the long line of Christian presidents and acts of congress. What I wish to especially call attention to is the agnostic who claims to know differently. Professor Huxley claimed to have invented the word agnostic, but it is also credited to a writer of the third century. The dictionaries define the word agnostic as 'one who disclaims all knowledge of God or of the ultimate nature of things.' I once heard an old man define an agnostic as 'an infidel who was afraid to say so,' and I think the agnostic of the present day is one who claims to know everything except the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, neither of which he wants to know; one who when cornered in an argument resorts to the cowardly 'I don't know,' and thus proves himself an unfit advisor for the public, and yet persists at every opportunity in foisting himself upon the public as an advisor and as an authority higher than ministers of the gospel upon such subjects as to whether this is a Christian nation. There are some things that are not in the doubtful class,

and the Christianity of the United States is one of them, notwithstanding assertions to the contrary by agnostics."

When people honestly believe that George Washington, the father of this country, was right when he said, "In no sense whatsoever is this government founded upon the Christian religion," they ought to rush into print and in every way defend the great principles of liberty that are continually being menaced by religious fanatics.

Justice Brewer may have been a Christian, and in its zeal the supreme court, like other courts, may have made a slight mistake; but this does not really make this a Christian nation any more than it would have made it a heathen nation if they had so declared it. If Romanists should get control and declare through the supreme court that this is a Roman Catholic nation, we wonder if the writer from Washington would "meekly wait and murmur not." We presume he would "rush into print."

The Constitution of this "land of the free" should be consulted in finding out whether this really is a Christian nation or not, and that immortal document in an amendment provides that "congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Now if our Christian friend will read Article III, Section 2, of the Constitution, he will discover that the supreme court of our country has no authority to declare in favor of any religion, and the case mentioned no more makes this a Christian nation than a similar decision of the justice of the peace would make this a Christian city.

As to the long line of Christian presidents, we must say that the line is somewhat broken when we count Unitarian presidents, which are considered unbelievers by most Christians, the Freethinker, Thomas Jefferson, and that Abraham Lincoln never made any profession and is said to have written a book in favor of infidelity; but even if they were all Christians it would no more make this a Christian nation than would the fact that President McKinley is a Methodist make this a Methodist nation.

Who dares dispute that men should have the privilege "of worshiping God according to the dictates of their own consciences," and if this is a government of this kind it is as much a Mohammedan nation as Christian for Mohammedans worship God.

Who are Christians? A good Methodist brother a short time since told me that Catholics are not Christians, and a Campbellite preacher told me that Methodists are not Christians but creedists, while Catholics claim that Protestants are not Christians. What is a Christian nation?

The writer of the above letter seems to have as vague an idea of an agnostic as all Christians have of their God. The agnostics with whom we are acquainted are not afraid to say what they think, and we feel sure that agnostics as a rule make no greater claim to knowledge than Christians do. We claim that an agnostic knows as much about the existence of a God and the immortality of a soul as the Christian, but that the Christian is deceived and thinks he knows what he does not or is a deceiver, while the agnostic is honest. Is it cowardly to say "I don't know," or is it cowardly to say I do know as the Christians do, when they do not?

By the letter one would suppose that the writer would advocate the idea of lying when he was cornered in an argument, and crawling out of it in that way is more cowardly by far than an honest "I don't know."

The "I know" Christian preachers who have foisted themselves upon our people for so many years will undoubtedly make a hard fight and try in every way to down our noble band of workers who are brave enough to be honest, but the old "dark days" are numbered and this will NEVER become a Christian nation!

Students.

The attention of the public is called to the fact that our Liberal University furnishes an excellent place in which to educate the young people and no matter what their religious or non-religious opinions, they will be well treated. The students, whether of Orthodox, of Spiritualist or of Freethought parents, will have the most careful attention and be free from any dogmatic or theoretic teachings whatever. This is not a private institution but one in which many are very much interested and it will have many advantages over other schools in the way of scientific apparatus, books, and Natural History specimens, etc. Remember that our school is not local in its nature but of national importance, and that our work will grow more and more effective as the many workers fall into line.

Regarding Spiritualists.

In an article on another page of this issue, written by our Spiritualist friend, C. S. Harnish, he shows that he is not posted in regard to the effect of allowing Spiritualists to lecture for our organization.

Spiritualism is as obnoxious to many of our best members as Catholicism is, and the work in the past has demonstrated beyond a doubt that it is better to keep our organizations separate. We have no more ideas in common than many other sects. A Seventh-Day Adventist is as much a Secularist

as a Spiritualist is, but the Adventists do not complain of our giving them a slap.

One of our mottoes is, "One world at a time," but if Spiritualists are allowed to speak for us they cannot refrain from teaching about another state of existence which is as silly to the majority of our members as is the future life story and other humbuggeries taught by the Christians. Can't our dear brother see that such lecturers would keep out the very people we want to join?

A Spiritualist may be an infidel, but he cannot be a Secularist for Secular means pertaining to things of this life, and Spiritualism teaches about things pertaining to another life.

Our friends should all take notice that the amendment which has given offense refers only to lecturers and was not meant for a slap as he expresses it, and far from doing us harm at this time, it will do us much good, for not many Spiritualists who understand the situation will be offended, and many who were holding aloof on account of our indefinite, undefined modus operandi will now step forward, and all will know what we are and what to depend on. We have many warm friends among the Spiritualists as well as among other sects and those who love our work for humanity will help us just as much as before.

As far as the arguments of our friend in favor of Spiritualism is concerned, of course we think they are very slim indeed and far from taking a stand with us in all reforms as far as we go, the Spiritualists are neglecting the greatest reform of all and that is the eradication of superstition from the minds of the people, for what can be a greater superstition than the doctrine of life after death?

We claim that it would have done us much harm to have left out the words "a future life" and that we could do it better now than we could after our school was built, for then the Spiritualists could justly complain.

Yes, we who believe in working for this world alone believe that it tends to lower the refined intellectual sensibilities of man to teach about spirits and spooks and a future life, and that the priests of Spiritualism are doing the same kind of harm as those of orthodoxy.

We cannot affiliate and will never prosper as long as we try. Let Spiritualists organize and work with all their might and if they wish to help us in our work for humanity all is well, but we should not injure ourselves by trying to teach about a future life and "one world at a time" on the same platform.

This juvenile attempt to narrow Secularism down to a certain groove of pet ideas is not as juvenile perhaps as some might suppose. Catholics, Adventists, Methodists