

Torch of Reason

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The Nature of Life.

Herbert Spencer, in his work, Synthetic Philosophy, says that LIFE is the definite combination of heterogeneous changes, both simultaneous and successive, in correspondence with external co-existences and sequences. Life, then, is not a thing, but the certain changes that the matter of which a living being is composed undergoes. There are changes in matter which we do not call life, but Mr. Spencer clearly shows the difference between these simple changes and the wonderful, simultaneous and successive changes we call life. Wonderful, wonderful are the truths he has revealed to the world. Wonderful? Yes, and no. After learning a few of the great laws governing matter and its changes, it seems wonderful in one sense, but that kind of wonder that fills our minds when totally ignorant of these laws is gone; and we learn that the more we learn the more we have of that kind of wonder which is akin to love and sympathy. We are thus brought into sympathy with all of Mother Nature's works; despise the violation of her laws; take pleasure in learning and teaching the truth; live longer and happily become a blessing to our fellow men, "and departing, leave behind us foot prints on the sands of time." But that kind of wonder which is born of ignorance causes men and women to worry; jump at conclusions; hate life; become superstitious; look beyond nature for a remedy for derangements caused by violations of her laws; waste splendid energies; become a curse to

the world by being blind leaders of the blind, and departing leave a record that a forlorn and shipwrecked brother seeing may LOSE heart again and become one of those unhappy creatures that, like a prowling beast, only knows self and self-gratification, with the addition of enough intellect to make more misery than a beast is capable of making and do a lasting harm because of his influence over the young and those who are on a balance between success and failure.

In the struggle of the human family toward the light, there has perhaps been no doctrine more detrimental than that life is a thing—a thing that can exist separate from the body—a spirit; and there has never been a greater step forward than will be taken when this erroneous idea and the many false theories built thereon takes its place among the old rubbish left from the erection of the temple of civilization, and not used further in its structure.

The beating of the heart, the action of the liver or of the brain—none of these CHANGES which all together we call life, is possible separate from their organs, and the changes of each organ are dependent on the changes of each of the other organs. "The acts that make up the digestion are mutually dependent. Those composing a train of reasoning are in close connection. And generally, it is to be remarked of vital changes, that each is made possible by all, and all are affected by each. Respiration, circulation, absorption, secretion, in their many subdivisions are brought up together. Muscular contraction involves chemical change, change of temperature, and change of excretions. Active thought influences the operations of the stomach, of the heart, of the kidneys."

The action of the heart is more complicated and less understood, perhaps, than some other less complex organ, and the action of the brain, with its rapid and wonderful changes, may be still more complex and less understood. Yet the action of the brain, or the resultant of that action, which we call mind, is no more to be supposed to exist separate from its organ than is the beating of the heart, the secretion of the bile, or the emptying of the colon.

The changes which we call life are not perfectly understood, yet much has been learned since the heathen Jews of two thousand years ago, in common with many other heathen people who were totally ignorant of the laws governing these changes, formulated their ideas of religious philosophy; and the most cruel, because the most injurious, thing in our present civilization is the clinging to these old notions. The teachers—the leaders of civilized men—the educated ones—those who have such an advan-

tage over the masses, still teach, or allow the youth to be taught these absurdities and to be led away from true principles which have been dug out of the mines of truth by true philosophers and the great benefits always following their mastery, by stories of the prophets, priests and preachers who could only guess at the causes of things. These old religious enthusiasts, because of their ignorance, when knowledge was demanded of them, were led into gross deceptions whose evil taint still hinders the highest form, the most wonderful and most omnipotent change of all—human thought.

Time.

Time is the only wealth we have, but we are using this precious "stuff" to the very best of our ability. We teach all day; look over examination papers; read proof; write editorials, etc., etc. We have not time to do more, and our colleagues are just as busy doing similar work. If we only had more time we could do better, but the only way we can accomplish greater results is to get you to give the cause a little more of your time. Can't you drop a few shining minutes, or their equivalent, into the great Freethought contribution box this week?

The Holy Show.

A few days ago there appeared upon the streets of Silverton a family of Italians. They had with them a monkey, three black bears and a cinnamon bear. The animals (the bears and the monkey) danced and performed tricks at the command of their harsh, cruel masters. It made us feel very sad when we saw one of the young bears flogged because he failed to suit his ugly trainer and when we thought of the cold, cruel, ignorant life of the little children; but this wandering band of ignorant bimana and quadrumana set into action a train of thought that may serve our readers as mental food, and thus these wanderers may do more good than the fact of merely existing.

Bears—monkeys—men. The bears dance when the tambourine is played and when the trainer sings his peculiar, indescribable chant, but the monkeys can do more; they can dance and perform tricks that the clumsy bodies and brains of the bears will not permit them to do. The men can do still more. They can dance, perform tricks and TEACH their tricks to bears and monkeys.

Now there seems to be three classes of men who follow the gospel show which are here fairly represented. There are those who, like the bears, can be and are whipped into performing simple things like dancing when the preacher's or

priest's voice is heard or when the inspiring music of the Salvation Army begins to play; then there is the more intelligent class who, like the monkey, can perform other tricks, such as acting as deacons, talking in a very affecting manner in prayermeeting, etc. The trainers are the priests, and of course know enough of the philosophy of life to make the bears and monkeys dance or they wouldn't dance.

Exacting, cruel and tyrannical, the priests have in the past taught the bears and monkeys of the human race to dance very well, and large crowds of the children of Freethought enjoy looking on and some even drop money into the hat to help carry on the show. But the weather is growing cold; the bears and monkeys are dying off, and the Dago trainers must move to the warmer climate of heathen lands or change their occupation. They can not all become missionaries, and we suggest that the best informed seek some honest employment and join the earnest band of educators who are breaking down the barriers between the world as it is and the world as it is to be.

The Real Cause.

The cause of Freethought is no cause at all if it only stands for the idea of everyone thinking just as he chooses. We believe that everyone should have this privilege. We THOROUGHLY believe in it, but there is no danger of anyone thinking otherwise, and those who are only making a big shout about liberty are working for "what there is in it," and some of them are fooling those who think they are pretty smart. The cause of Freethought, as we conceive it, is the idea of getting people to think RIGHT and do the right which comes from Freethinking. We hold that a Christian thinks just as he chooses, but if he wasn't tied by orthodox chains and wasn't afraid to think in any other way he would become a Freethinker. What we want is to educate, so that people will find the real truth—not just continue to think as they choose in their present ignorant state. Real Freethought has more enemies than just the orthodox religion. Everything that ties up our thoughts, whether it be spirit, god, devil, or anything which robs us of the power to think.

It certainly looks silly for Freethinkers to spend all their energy in trying to get people to think as they choose when they do so already, or to shout very much about liberty or the nine demands of Liberalism, unless they put forth every effort to educate the young so they will know how to use liberty when they get it. The Freethought cause is unbiased education; nothing short of it and success will come when Freethinkers find this out.

Dear Freethinker, are you an orthodox Freethinker or are you converted to educational, progressive, moral Secularism?