

Torch of Reason

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In the Woods.

It is no disgrace to live in the woods. Many of the greatest benefactors of our race were born and reared in the timber. But it is a fact that an ignorant backwoodsman—one who has never seen a railroad, a telegraph, a telephone or a bicycle—one who is incapable of keeping in touch with the world by means of our great modern newspapers—one who never heard of the modern theories of light, of heat, of sound, and is totally ignorant of the application of electricity—in short, one who is entirely unscientific in thought, would be a poor teacher to choose for the people of today. And yet many full grown men and women who have received the advantages given to the world by our great modern teachers and practical appliers of science, are so blinded by their inherited prejudices and by modern priestly prattle that they select such a one for their teacher, their guide, their physician, their savior, their god, with a decided advantage in favor of the modern backwoodsman.

When one is fairly out of the woods of ignorant, reason-destroying orthodoxy, how childish seem the old songs and prayers of praise to such a crude, ignorant being as Jesus of Nazareth must have been, if he existed at all. Of course it was not his fault. We have no hard feelings toward one who was born and brought up in the back woods of time, but we have feelings of pity for those who, having been brought up in view of the school of

modern, scientific thought, still continue to follow one who believed in spirits, in miracles, in gods, in in ghosts, in prophecies and all the popular superstitions of a very superstitious time.

"What will you do with Jesus?" do you ask, dear Christian? Our answer will be to examine his character carefully and get all the good we can from the story of his life, but we must not accept and teach by example and precept those things that will "crucify afresh" the real savior of man. "What will you do with Science?" Shall we continue to advocate the foolish theories of the past when they are in exact opposition to the truth?

But, you say, you can not give up such a friend as Jesus. You want some one to go to in times of trouble—one on whom you can cast all your care and sorrow and feel the sweet peace that only comes to those who accept Christ as their all in all.

Well, so might say the heathen followers of any of the heathen gods. They have learned to be dependent on their gods as a child is dependent on its parent. But the time has come when men and women should no longer be children. We must learn to be independent, and then we shall have fewer troubles to cast on the gods. Science will teach us to control conditions instead of waiting the pleasure of a god, and to take whatever comes, after we have done our best, in a philosophical manner.

Here, then, are two opposing ideas offered us as the solution of the problem of individual and race salvation. The one is a savior in the form of a man. He lived nineteen hundred years ago. He was a Jew, and yet he is represented to us as being a god. He died, and yet he is said to live. Living in an age when the greatest of nature's truths were unknown, he did not know what girls and boys of this age know about the human body, about the stars, about the constituents of earth, air and water, about the cause of day and night and the seasons. He lived in the woods of ancient myth and mystery. The great western world not yet having been discovered, he could not teach about the great American continent. A modern ship never left its picture on the retina of his eye nor filled his mind with admiration for such a wonderful product of brain and hand. He was a leader of a few fishermen who paddled about in boats which would be despised by the workers of our great American industry. He became notorious, as others have before and since, by repeating, parrot-like, the sayings of Pagan philosophers, by eccentricities and by great pretensions. All this must be true if such a character existed and if the accounts of his life given, even by his friends, are true.

The other savior, and the one which we can conscientiously recommend to every child of Mother Nature, is not a one-man savior, but the combined wisdom of all men of all time. It is not a fossil, supposed to live in spirit way off with its parent fossil, and in some mysterious manner existing here on earth, but it is a living, growing savior—one that adapts itself to humanity and as fast as our strongest minds become capable of touching the hem of its garment, it heals them and through their efforts saves the world. It teaches self-reliance, not dependence; self-respect, not that we are filthy; self-control, not emotional drunkenness; fortitude, not the cowardly casting of our burdens upon the shoulders of innocence. This savior is one that appeals to every human being. It has no nationality. It has no color. It has no sex. Its heaven is here, and its doors are always open. Its books contain thoughts that elevate and inspire to noble action, and make friends instead of contentious interpreters of mysteries.

Which savior should we choose? The one whose doctrine lowers us to groveling suppliants for mercy—slaves in fear of the dungeon of torture, or the one that places the crown upon the brow of man? One degrades us and calls us fallen creatures who need a sacrifice of blood for our redemption; the other elevates us and says we have risen—are rising and redeeming ourselves from the curse of ignorance and superstition.

Principle vs. Policy.

In the work of building our Free-thought University we claim, and will have, the privilege of expressing freely our thoughts. While we do not wish to needlessly hurt the feelings of any or destroy their faith in anything that is true, yet we are not among that class of Freethinkers who are "willing to let everybody think as they choose if they will let us alone". We are not willing to let others think wrong, for that injures them and the whole world. We want people to believe, and to do, right. But what is right? Never mind, we will work for what seems right to us. Not by force, but by the use of the best reason we possess.

That the world is in a bad fix in some ways must be admitted by all; now we hold that the reason for this is that selfishness has caused men to be guided by policy rather than by principle and that people have become so confused that they cannot detect truth from error. The effect is very bad. People are exactly like children who have been lied to until they neither believe the truth nor try to tell it.

It is high time those who wish to make the world better, understand that the first step is to care

more for principle than for what some call success. We care nothing for the success(?) that comes through the sacrifice of one of our principles or the right of expressing our honest thought. There are those who really think they are Freethinkers who dare not say what they think for fear of not having success. What is success if it does not begin and end in freedom? Is slavery success?

Tell us we must not express our thoughts on this superstition or that vice! Would you place the galling irons on our limbs as they have been placed on the whole race for centuries? No, no; for this cause do we live, that we may free some, if only a few, from the shackles of policy, hypocrisy, superstition and crime; and how can we do anything at this work if our hands are tied?

Let us all be Freethinkers, and not slaves to our business or love of popularity, as the orthodox are to their creeds. Let science but prove that there are gods and spirits, and we will immediately accept. Let it show that the use of stimulants and narcotics is beneficial, and we will advocate their use. Let it prove that a thief is a benefit to society, and we will work to repeal all laws against stealing. Let it show that it is right for parents and teachers to lie to the children and for the preachers to lie to the people, and we will at once adopt the plan. But guided by our reason, we must search the great encyclopaedias of science, for in them we think we have more abundant life and they are they which testify to the truth; and then we must "hew to the line, let the chips fall where they may."

"Act Well Your Part."

For a people to educate only the intellectual faculties of the youth is a great blunder, the effects of which is being felt every day and every hour of our national life.

The Liberal University can boast but little as yet in regard to its industrial instruction, for it is not yet fairly on its feet; but its aim is as much the education of its students in the ability to work and the development of their moral natures as it is to train their intellectual faculties. The common methods of our common schools are altogether lacking in the most important branches of education. The old Bible-reading, which could not be called moral instruction, for it generally had just the opposite effect, is now prohibited by law and is largely extinct; and there is, therefore, no attempt to instruct the young in morals, unless it be an occasional hint of doing right woven into the class work.

This neglect is wrong. It is a grave error. Young people should be regularly taught lessons in proper conduct and right living. This