

How a Minister of the Gospel Approached a Reader of The Torch of Reason.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TORCH AND ITS READERS:—

Do you know that it is wrong to read such a damnable paper as the Torch of Reason? I never knew it before, but I do now. About a year ago, while at Sioux Center, Iowa, a certain Rev. Mr. Bates, came to my store just about closing time, having with him a certain friend, Dr. Staad, who knew of my reading the Torch, and no doubt told the faithful servant of God that I was a Secularist and an ex-Catholic. So the first thing he said was:

"Dr., I understand you read the Torch of Reason; is that so?"

"Yes, sir," was my prompt reply. "Is there anything wrong in reading it?"

"Yes, sir, doctor," he answered. "It is an un-Godly, good-for-nothing paper; and to think that a man with the brightness of intelligence you have, will read such trash! Don't you know it will lead you to destruction. It believes in neither God, heaven nor hell, and you had better stop it."

I first got upon my inherited, irritating, Christian, impulsive temper, and was going to order him out of the store, but my self-educated common sense and reason came to my rescue just in time, and I spoke very kindly and in a low tone. I said:

"Mr. Bates, I do not think it wrong to read a good paper; a paper that believes as I do. I think it is really a good paper. While Secularism is traveling on a higher and better paved highway to reach its destiny, you keep everlastingly traveling in the old, misleading and worn-out pathway which leads its followers to destruction, and their final destiny will be a great disappointment. Rev. Bates, why do you come here and dictate to me, an older man than yourself? Do you know I am of age and we live in a free country, in this the most glorious land on earth? I do not come to you and say what you shall and shall not read. I do not ask you, why in the world, Mr. Bates, do you read and explain the Bible to your followers, and tell them lots of trash that you know nothing about? I simply let you alone because I don't believe your doctrines. Yet, I think you a nice gentleman and consider you my friend. Now, I think you should respect me and show me the same courtesy, as I believe in reading the style of reading from which I receive the greatest light and benefit, and that which teaches the greatest truth."

"Oh, doctor, doctor! You are lost and will surely go to hell. You had better come back into the church and be saved and go to heaven, for man, he says, that is not baptized and does not believe

can not enter the kingdom of heaven and become an angel and be saved."

"All right, Mr. Bates," I replied, "I do not believe in heaven and hell, and that the Bible is an inspired book, but a book written by men, and poorly written at that. However, if you will answer me a few questions, to show that you have proof, I will become a member of your Reform Dutch Church. Mr. Bates, you say no one unless he is a Christian and believes and is baptized can be saved. What becomes of the millions of 'heathens' who have never heard of Christianity and those who lived and died before the birth of Christ? The world stood thousands, perhaps millions, of years, then God all at once thought of sending a savior to redeem the world. Now, Mr. Bates, did that savior die for the living and the dead, and will all previous to his birth and all others out of the church be lost?"

"Yes, all outside the church since Christ's death are lost. As to those previous to Christ's death, I cannot tell, but presumably they are saved."

"Now Mr. Bates, how do you know that all who die out of the church are lost? What an unjust god, to create men and damn them forever without giving them a chance to be saved. I do not believe in such doctrine. For instance, Mr. Bates, suppose tonight your house is entered, you are overpowered, your infant daughter is torn from the mother's breast and carried to some distant land, where it grows up with no knowledge of your religion, dies and goes to hell, lost forever!"

He shuddered and said:

"Yes, it could not be saved."

"That settles it," I said. "I don't want anything to do with such an unjust god."

"Well, hold on," he says. "Doctor, I am wrong. My child will be saved, because my wife and myself are both Christians."

"Oh, that is it! If that is so, Christianity would soon be a thing of the past; for, if all children now living and children from Christian parents were to quit the church, or committed murder, adultery or sinned otherwise, and died outside of the church, they would be saved and would surely go to heaven, where, otherwise, had they lived in the church and violated the teachings of the church, they might have stood a good chance for the bad place."

"Doctor, doctor, you are just trying to aggravate me! I know you don't mean it."

"Mr. Bates, can you tell me where heaven or hell is located, and how far it is? What is the fare, or is it only one fare for all and any distance?"

"Doctor, we cannot answer those questions, but we must believe they

are somewhere, because the book says so."

"Mr. Bates, can you tell me the size, weight and form of an angel you talk so much about? Have angels bodies; if so, what do they eat and drink?"

"Again, doctor, I cannot answer, but we read of the angels, and therefore we must believe it."

"Yes, Mr. Bates, you Christians must believe it, or Christianity would fall to pieces. I do not believe it, for I think Christianity is a myth, and everlastingly illustrates the good and bad, heaven and hell, to its dupes. The more money a member of any church gives, the better Christian is he, and especially so in the Catholic church."

"Well," he says, "doctor, I must go home. I know you don't mean what you say. Good night."

"Hold on, Mr. Bates; don't go away mad," for he showed signs of anger, because he was unable to answer my questions.

"I hope we part friends," said I.

"Oh, yes, I am not mad."

"Well, Mr. Bates, we will both continue to read what we think is right, and if I find anything in the Torch that I don't like, I simply pass it by, and if anything good, I will try and be benefitted by it."

Thus ended the controversy.

DR. L. S. STOLL,
Ex-Catholic.

P. S.—I have not as yet become a member of Mr. Bates' or any other church, but will when my questions are answered. Mr. Bates called on me the next day, and looked over my library, half of which are Freethought and Liberal books. He complimented me on my fine selection. I told him he was welcome to any of them, so he took an old Catholic Gospel Hymn Book that had been in the library for perhaps 20 years. As I value such books hardly the space they occupy, I thought: "I hope it will please you."

Mr. Bates has been friendly to me ever since, but never mentions the Torch of Reason to me. Let the Torch shine for the welfare of mankind and the world.

Hurrah for the University and Mr. Wakeman and family!

DR. STOLL.

It is stated that the Roman Catholic priests in Belgium have succeeded in having a law passed which compels parents to give their children no names other than those in the calendar of saints. We are not informed what privileges are enjoyed by Belgian mule-drivers in the selection of names for their beasts, but trust that here, also, due respect is shown for the calendar. The intellectual powers of Balaam's ass were apparently on a par with those of most of the prophets, and there is no good reason evident why the descendants of that sacred animal should not enjoy all the rights due them according to the doctrine of asinine succession.—[Boston Investigator.

For the Torch of Reason.

Is God Silent?

BY D. PRIESTLEY.

There is an ancient story told of a man who was a candidate for orders in the Church of England. According to rules, he was to be examined by a certain bishop; but, unfortunately, the bishop stuttered, and so he sent his vicar to conduct the examination. The first question which the vicar propounded to the candidate was, "Why did Baalam's ass speak?" The reply was, "I suppose it was because his master had an impediment in his speech."

There seems to be a similar reason why priests and preachers talk for God and explain his method and purposes in governing the world. Even in asking the question if God is silent, it is taken for granted that God is dumb, and that we must find out his meaning by means of signs something like the deaf and dumb alphabet. The explanations are never scientific but always theological. Here is one of these explanations as commented upon by the Review of Reviews:

"It is a grewsome piece of reading which Mr. Richard Heath presents to us under the startling heading, 'Is God Silent?' He takes strong exception to Dr. Robert Anderson, assistant commissioner of police, in his 'Silence of God,' that 'God never speaks to his people now.' Mr. Heath insists that the voice of the Almighty is heard in the history of individuals and nations still, especially enforcing the two fundamental truths, 'Hereditary guilt and vicarious suffering.' He illustrates his contention by reference to the retribution which overtook the French nobility in the hundred years war for their infamous oppression of the peasantry, and which visited the Anglo-French nobility in England in the Wars of the Roses for their brutal betrayal of the common people. Not content with expounding the vengeance of offended Heaven in these national judgments, Mr. Heath essays to trace the same retributive treatment in the miserable doom which overtook family after family of the offending nobility. The law by which the Supreme Judge assigns this award is: 'Thou shalt love,' and stern are the penalties for disobedience. Altogether it is a grewsome chapter in the philosophy of history."

The thought never occurs to the theological mind that God does, or should do, anything to help the oppressed and suffering. He always lets them drain the bitter cup to the very dregs. Their redress is referred to some other world, and is to be post-mortem. If God only gets back on some one else and thus adds to human misery he is