

Six Historic Americans

Thomas Jefferson

by John E. Remsburg

Had Jefferson's works been edited by some pious churchman who would have expunged or modified his radical sentiments; or had his works been suppressed after they were published, as some desired, the clergy might with less fear of exposure claim that their author was a Christian. But while his writings are accessible to the public, it adds nothing to their reputation for candor to make the claims respecting his belief which many of them do; for these writings clearly prove that he was not a Christian, but a Freethinker.

The "Memoirs, Correspondence and Miscellanies from the Papers of Thomas Jefferson," edited by Thomas Jefferson Randolph, a grandson of the distinguished statesman, was printed in four large volumes, and published in 1829. From these volumes, and other writings of Jefferson, I have culled some of the most radical thoughts to be found in the whole range of Infidel literature.

In a letter to his nephew and ward, Peter Carr, while at school, Jefferson offers the following advice, which though thoroughly sound, would be considered rather questionable advice for a Christian to give a schoolboy:

"Fix Reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion. Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one, he must more approve the homage of reason than of blindfolded fear. ...

Do not be frightened from this inquiry by any fear of its consequences. If it end in a belief that there is no God, you will find incitements to virtue in the comfort and pleasantness you feel in its exercise and in the love of others which it will procure for you" (Jefferson's Works, Vol. ii., p. 217).

The God of the Old Testament -- the God which Christians worship -- Jefferson pronounces "a being of terrific character -- cruel, vindictive, capricious, and unjust" (Works Vol. iv., p. 325).

In speaking of the Jewish priests, he denominates them "a bloodthirsty race, as cruel and remorseless as the being whom they represented as the family God of Abraham, of Isaac, and Jacob, and the local God of Israel" (Ibid.).

In a letter to John Adams, dated April 8, 1816, referring to the God of the Jews, he says:

"Their God would be deemed a very indifferent man with us" (Ibid., p. 373).

To his nephew he writes as follows regarding the Bible:

"Read the Bible as you would Livy or Tacitus. For example, in the book of Joshua we are told the sun stood still for several hours. Were we to read that fact in Livy or Tacitus we should class it with their showers of blood, speaking of their statues, beasts, etc. But it is said that the writer of that book was inspired. Examine, therefore, candidly, what evidence there is of his having been inspired. The pretension is entitled to your inquiry, because millions believe it. On the other hand, you are astronomer enough to know how contrary it is to the law of nature" (Works, Vol. ii., p. 217).

In this same letter, he thus refers to Jesus Christ:

"Keep in your eye the opposite pretensions: First, of those who say he was begotten by God, born of a virgin, suspended and reversed the laws of Nature at will, and ascended bodily into heaven; and second, of those who say he was a man of illegitimate birth, of a benevolent heart, enthusiastic mind, who set out without pretensions to divinity, ended in believing them, and was punished capitally for sedition by being gibbeted, according to the Roman law, which punished the first commission of that offence by whipping, and the second by exile or death in furea."

His own opinion respecting the above is expressed in a letter to John Adams, written a short time previous to his death:

"The day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the Supreme Being as his father, in the womb of a virgin will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter" (Works, Vol. iv, p. 365).

In the gospel history of Jesus, Jefferson discovers what he terms "a groundwork of vulgar ignorance, of things impossible, of superstitions, fanaticism, and fabrications" (Works, Vol. iv, p. 325).

He continues:

"If we could believe that he [Jesus] really countenanced the follies, the falsehoods, and the charlatanism which his biographers [Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,] father on him, and admit the misconstructions, interpolations, and theorizations of the fathers of the early, and the fanatics of the latter ages, the conclusion would be irresistible by every sound mind that he was an impostor" (Ibid..).

Jefferson, however, did not regard Jesus as an impostor. He says:

"Among the sayings and discourses imputed to him by his biographers, I find many passages of fine imagination, correct morality, and of the most lovely benevolence; and others, again, of so much ignorance, of so much absurdity, so much untruth and imposture, as to pronounce it impossible that such contradictions should have proceeded from the same being. I separate, therefore, the gold from the dross, restore to him the former, and leave the latter to the stupidity of some and the roguery of others of his disciples" (Ibid., 320).

Jefferson made a compilation of the more rational and humane teachings of Jesus, the "gold," as he termed it, which has since been published. Some superficial readers have supposed this to be an acknowledgment of Christ. Orthodox teachers, however, know better and ignore the book.

For the man Jesus, Jefferson, like Rousseau, Paine, Ingersoll, and other Freethinkers, had nothing but admiration; for the Christ Jesus of theology, nothing but contempt.

In regard to Jesus believing himself inspired he interposes the plea of mild insanity. He says:

"This belief carried no more personal imputation than the belief of Socrates that he was under the care and admonition of a guardian demon. And how many of our wisest men still believe in the reality of these inspirations while perfectly sane on all other subjects" (Works, Vol. iv, p. 327).

Several of the preceding quotations are from a lengthy communication to William Short. In the same communication he characterizes the Four Evangelists as "groveling authors" with "feeble minds." To the early disciples of Jesus he pays the following compliment:

"Of this band of dupes and impostors, Paul was the great Corypheus, and first corrupter of the doctrines of Jesus" (Ibid.).

The published writings of Jefferson, which, however, do not contain many of his most radical thoughts, would indicate that he regarded Jesus Christ as a historical character. In a contribution to Frazer's Magazine for March, 1865, Dr. Conway shows that he was sometimes disposed to entertain the mythical hypothesis. Mr. Conway says:

"Jefferson occupied his Sundays at Monticello in writing letters to Paine (they are unpublished, I believe, but I have seen them) in favor of the probabilities that Christ and his Twelve Apostles were only personifications of the sun and the twelve signs of the Zodiac."

This was the opinion held by Paine during the last years of his life.

For nearly sixteen hundred years the doctrine of the Trinity has been a leading tenet of the Christian faith. To doubt this dogma is the rankest heresy; for denying it thousands have lost their lives. In a letter to Col. Pickering, Jefferson speaks of "the incomprehensible jargon of the Trinitarian arithmetic, that three are one and one is three."

In a letter to James Smith, Jefferson says:

"The hocus-pocus phantasm of a God, like another Cerberus, with one body and three heads, had its birth and growth in the blood of thousands and thousands of martyrs" (Works, Vol. iv., p. 360).

Again, in the same communication, he says:

"The Athanasian paradox that one is three and three but one, is so incomprehensible to the human mind, that no candid man can say he has any idea of it, and how can he believe what presents no idea? He who thinks he does, only deceives himself He proves, also, that man, once surrendering his reason, has no remaining guard against absurdities the most monstrous, and like a ship without a rudder, is the sport of every wind. With such persons, gullibility, which they call faith, takes the helm of reason, and the mind becomes a wreck."

Not at an insignificant minority, not at an unimportant and unpopular sect, but at nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand Christians -- at virtually the entire Christian church -- was the above scathing criticism hurled. Even more bitter is the following from a letter to Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse:

"I should as soon undertake to bring the crazy skulls of Bedlam to sound understanding, as inculcate reason into that of an Athanasian" (Works, Vol. iv., p. 353).

In a letter to John Adams, written August 22, 1813, Jefferson says:

"It is too late in the day for men of sincerity to pretend they believe in the Platonic mysticism that three are one and one is three, and yet, that the one is not three, and the three are not one.... But this constitutes the craft, the power, and profits of the priests. Sweep away their gossamer fabrics of fictitious religion, and they would catch no more flies" (Ibid, p. 205).

Writing to John Adams a year later -- July 5, 1814 -- he again refers to this subject:

"The Christian priesthood, finding the doctrines of Christ leveled to every understanding, and too plain to need explanation, saw in the mysticisms of Plato materials with which they might build up an artificial system, which might, from its indistinctness, admit everlasting controversy, give employment for their order and introduce it to profit, power

and pre-eminence" (Ibid, p. 242).

Alluding to the eucharist, he styles the orthodox clergy "cannibal priests" (Ibid, p. 205).

Jefferson's hatred of Calvinism was intense. He never ceased to denounce the "blasphemous absurdity of the five points of Calvin." Three years before his death he writes John Adams:

"His [Calvin's] religion was demonism. If ever man worshiped a false God, he did. The being described in his five points is ... a demon of malignant spirit. It would be more pardonable to believe in no God at all, than to blaspheme him by the atrocious attributes of Calvin" (Works, Vol. iv., p. 363).

"It is hard to say observes Bancroft, "which surpassed the other in boiling hatred of Calvinism, Jefferson or John Adams."

To Dr. Cooper, November 2, 1822, Jefferson writes:

"I had no idea, however, that in Pennsylvania, the cradle of toleration and freedom of religion, it [fanaticism] could have arisen to the height you describe. This must be owing to the growth of Presbyterianism. The blasphemy of the five points of Calvin, and the impossibility of defending them, render their advocates impatient of reasoning, irritable, and prone to denunciation" (Works, Vol. iv, p. 358).

In the same letter, after mentioning the fact that in Virginia where he resides, the Christians being divided into different sects, including the Presbyterian, are more tolerant, he continues:

"It is not so in the districts where Presbyterianism prevails undividedly. Their ambition and tyranny would tolerate no rival if they had power. Systematical in grasping at an ascendancy over all other sects, they aim, like the Jesuits, at engrossing the education of the country, are hostile to every institution they do not direct, and jealous at seeing others begin to attend at all to that object."

In the following significant passage we have Jefferson's opinion of the Christian religion as a whole:

"I have recently been examining all the known superstitions of the world, and do not find in our particular superstition [Christianity] one redeeming feature. They are all alike, founded upon fables and mythologies" (Letter to Dr. Woods).

Could a more emphatic declaration of disbelief in Christianity be framed than this?

In his "Notes on Virginia," the following caustic allusion to Christianity occurs:

"Millions of innocent men, women, and children, since the introduction of Christianity, have been burnt, tortured, fined, and imprisoned; yet we have not advanced one inch toward uniformity. What has been the effect of coercion? To make one-half the world fools and the other half hypocrites."

In his letter to Dr. Cooper, prayer meetings and revivals receive this cruel thrust from his pen:

"In our Richmond there is much fanaticism, but chiefly among the women. They have their night meetings and praying parties, where, attended by their priests, and sometimes by a henpecked husband, they pour forth the effusions of their love to Jesus in terms as amatory and carnal as their modesty would permit to a merely earthly lover" (Works, Vol. iv., p. 358).

A short time before his death, Jefferson, in a letter to John Adams, after commending the morals of Jesus, wrote as follows concerning his philosophical belief:

"It is not to be understood that I am with him [Jesus] in all his doctrines. I am a Materialist."

In support of his Materialistic creed, he argues as follows:

"On the basis of sensation we may erect the fabric of all the certainties we can have or need. I can conceive thought to be an action of matter or magnetism of loadstone. When he who denies to the Creator the power of endowing matter with the mode of motion called thinking shall show how he could endow the sun with the mode of action called attraction, which reins the planets in their orbits, or how an absence of matter can have a will, and by that will put matter into motion, then the Materialist may be lawfully required to explain the process by which matter exercises the faculty of thinking. When once we quit the basis of sensation, all is in the wind. To talk of immaterial existences, is to talk of nothings. To say that the human soul, angels, God, are immaterial, is to say they are nothings, or that there is no God, no angels, no soul. I cannot reason otherwise. But I believe that I am supported in my creed of Materialism by the Lockes, the Tracys, and the Stewarts."

Noting the absence of the idea of immortality in the Bible and particularly in the books ascribed to Moses, he writes:

"Moses had either not believed in a future state of existence, or had not thought it essential to be explicitly taught to the people." (Works, Vol. iv., p. 326.)

Jefferson's wife preceded him to the grave by nearly forty- four years. If ever woman was adored by man this woman was

adored by her husband. The blow stunned him; and for weeks he lay prostrated with grief. Referring to the sad event, Wm. O.

Stoddard, the Presidential biographer, says:

"He was utterly absorbed in sorrow, and took no note of what was going on around him. His dream of life had been shattered, and it seemed as if life itself had lost its claim upon him, for no faith or hope of his reached onward and inward to any other." (Lives of the Presidents, Vol. ii, p. 270.)

In the following brave and truthful words we have Jefferson's estimate of priestcraft:

"In every country and in every age the priest has been hostile to liberty; he is always in alliance with the despot, abetting his abuses in return for protection to his own."

Alluding to his beloved child, the University of Virginia, he writes:

"The serious enemies are the priests of the different religious sects to whose spells on the human mind its improvement is ominous" (Works, Vol. iv., p. 322).

"We have most unwisely committed to the hierophants of our particular superstition the direction of public opinion -- that lord of the universe. We have given them stated and privileged days to collect and catechise us, opportunities of delivering their oracles to the people in mass, and of molding their minds as wax in the hollow of their hands." (Ibid.).

His uncomplimentary allusions to the Christian clergy, to the Christian Sabbath, and to Christianity itself as "our particular superstition," are as unorthodox as anything to be found in Paine.

To John Adams he writes as following regarding disestablishment in New England:

"I join you, therefore, in sincere congratulations that this den of the priesthood is at length broken up, and that a Protestant Popedom is no longer to disgrace the American history and character." (Works, Vol. iv., p. 301).

Jefferson's hatred of priestcraft was life-long; for while the above was written but a few years prior to his death, the following from a letter to Mr. Whyte, was written nearly half a century before:

"If anybody thinks that kings, nobles and priests, are good conservators of the public happiness, send him here [Paris]. It is the best school in the universe to cure him of that folly. He will see here with his own eyes that these descriptions of men are an abandoned confederacy against the happiness of the mass of the people."

While he detested the entire clergy, regarding them as a worthless class, living like parasites upon the labors of others, his denunciation of the Presbyterian priesthood was particularly severe, as evinced by the following:

"The Presbyterian clergy are the loudest, the most intolerant of all sects; the most tyrannical and ambitious, ready at the word of the law-giver, if such a word could now be obtained, to put their torch to the pile, and to rekindle in this virgin hemisphere the flame in which their oracle, Calvin, consumed the poor Servetus, because he could not subscribe to the proposition of Calvin, that magistrates have a right to exterminate all heretics to the Calvinistic creed! They pant to re-establish by law that holy inquisition which they can now only infuse into public opinion" (Works, Vol. iv., p. 322).

He charges the early church in this country with uniform cruelty -- in Virginia as well as New England. He says:

"If no capital execution [of Quakers) took place here it was not owing to the moderation of the church." (Notes on Virginia, p. 262.)

His noble fight against the church and in behalf of religious freedom for Virginia, in which he acknowledged the valiant support of Madison, entitles him to the everlasting gratitude of every lover of liberty. From his argument in favor of the disestablishment of religion, to be found in his "Notes on Virginia," (pp. 234-237,) the following extracts are taken:

"By our own act of Assembly of 1705, c. 30, if a person brought up in the Christian religion denies the being of God, or the Trinity, or asserts there are more gods than one, or denies the Christian religion to be true, or the Scriptures to be of divine authority, he is punishable on the first offense by incapacity to hold any office or employment, ecclesiastical, civil, or military; on the second, by disability to sue, to take any gift or legacy, to be guardian, executor, or administrator, and by three years' imprisonment without bail. A father's right to the custody of his own children being founded in law on his right of guardianship, this being taken away, they may of course be severed from him, and put by the authority of the court, into more orthodox hands. This is a summary view of that religious slavery under which a people have been willing to remain, who have lavished their lives and fortunes for the establishment of civil freedom."

"The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no God. Constraint may make him worse by making him a hypocrite, but it will never make him a truer man."

"Reason and persuasion are the only practicable instruments. To make way for these free inquiry must be indulged; how can we wish others to indulge it while we refuse it ourselves? But every state, says an inquisitor, has established

some religion. No two, say I, have established the same. Is this a proof of the infallibility of establishments?"

"It is error alone which needs the support of government. Truth can stand by itself."

There are still existing on the statute books of many states laws but little less intolerant than those which Jefferson and his friends removed from the statute books of Virginia. To those who Contend that these laws are not dangerous because no longer enforced, I commend these words of Jefferson:

"I doubt whether the people of this country would suffer an execution for heresy, or a three months' imprisonment for not comprehending the mysteries of the Trinity. But is the spirit of the people infallible -- a permanent reliance? Is it government? Is this the kind of protection we receive in return for the rights we give up? Besides, the spirit of the times may alter -- will alter. Our rulers will become corrupt, our people careless. A single zealot may become persecutor, and better men become his victims." (Notes on Virginia, p. 269.)

Jefferson's Presidential administration was probably the most purely secular this country has ever had. During his eight years' incumbency of the office not a single religious proclamation was issued. Referring to his action in this matter, he says:

"I know it will give great offense to the clergy, but the advocate of religious freedom is to expect neither peace nor forgiveness from them."

In answer to a communication from the Rev. Mr. Miller relative to this subject, he writes as follows:

"I consider the Government of the United States as interdicted by the Constitution from meddling with religious institutions, their doctrines, discipline, or exercises. But it is only proposed that I should recommend, not prescribe a day of fasting and praying. That is, I should indirectly assume to the United States an authority over religious exercises, which the Constitution has directly precluded them from. ... Every one must act according to the dictates of his own reason and mine tells me that civil powers alone have been given to the President of the United States, and no authority to direct the religious exercises of his constituents."

A favorite claim with the church is that we are indebted to the Bible and Christianity for our moral and civil law, and especially that the teachings of the Bible and Christianity are a part of the common law. This claim is universally urged by Christians and generally conceded by jurists. In a letter to Major John Cartwright, Jefferson exposes the fraudulent character of the claim. Of such importance is the question, and so thorough is the refutation, that I give it entire:

"I was glad to find in your book a formal contradiction at length of the judiciary usurpation of legislative powers; for such the judges have usurped in their repeated decisions, that Christianity is a part of the common law. The proof of the contrary which you have adduced is incontrovertible; to wit, that the common law existed while the Anglo-Saxons were yet Pagans, at a time when they had never yet heard the name of Christ pronounced, or knew that such a character had ever existed. But it may amuse you to show when and by what means they stole the law in upon us. In a case of *quare impedit* in the Year Book 34 H. 6, folio 38, (anno 1458,) a question was made, how far the ecclesiastical law was to be respected in a common law court. And Prisot, Chief Justice, gives his opinion in these words: 'A tiel leis qu'ils de seint eglise ont en ancien scripture covient a nous a donner credence,' etc. See S.C. Fitzh. Abr. Qu. imp. 89. Bro.; Abr. Qu. imp. 12.

Finch, in his first book, c. 3 is the first afterwards who quotes this case, and mistakes it thus: 'To such laws of the church as have warrant in Holy Scripture our law giveth credence;' and cites Prisot, mistranslating 'ancien scripture' into 'Holy Scripture.' Whereas Prisot palpably says 'To such laws as those of holy church have in ancient writing it is proper for us to give credence;' to wit, to their ancient written laws. This was in 1613, a century and a half after the dictum of Prisot. Wingate, in 1658, erects this false translation into a maxim of common law, copying the words of Finch, but citing Prisot. Wing, Max. 3. And Sheppard, title 'Religion,' in 1675, copies the same mistranslation, quoting the Y.B. Finch and Wingate. Hale expresses it in these words: 'Christianity is parcel of the laws of England.' 1 Ventr. 293. 3 Keb. 607. But he quotes no authority. By these echoings and reechoings from one to another it had become so established in 1728 that, in case the King vs. Woolston, 2 Stra. 834, the court would not suffer it to be debated, whether to write against Christianity was punishable in the temporal courts at common law. Wood, therefore, 409, ventures still to vary the phrase, and say that all blasphemy and profaneness are offenses by the common law, and cites 2 Stra. Then Blackstone, in 1763, 4.59, repeats the words of Hale, that 'Christianity is part of laws of England,' citing Ventr. and Strange. And finally, Lord Mansfield, with a little qualification in Evans's case, in 1767, says that 'the essential principles of revealed religion are part of the common law.' Thus engulfing Bible, Testament, and all, into the common law, without citing any authority. And thus we find this chain of authorities hanging link by link, one upon another, and all ultimately on one and the same book, and that a mistranslation of the words 'ancien scripture' used by Prisot.

Finch quotes Prisot; Wingate does the same. Sheppard quotes Prisot, Finch, and Wingate. Hale cites nobody. The court in Woolston's case cites Hale. Wood cites Woolston's case. Blackstone quotes Woolston's case and Hale. And Lord Mansfield, like Hale, ventures on his own authority. Here I might defy the best read lawyer to produce another scrip of authority for this judiciary forgery; and I might go on further to show how some of they Anglo-Saxon priests interpolated into the texts of Alfred's laws 20th, 21st, 22d, and 23d chapters of Exodus, and the 15th of the Acts of the Apostles, from the 23d to the 29th verse. But this would lead my pen and your patience too far. What a conspiracy this between church and state! Sing Tantarara, rogues all, rogues all!" (Works, Vol. iv., pp. 397, 398).

It is claimed by Christian apologists that the grossest intolerance prevailed in Pagan Rome, that Christians were punished for their opinions merely, that religious freedom was denied. The student of Roman history knows this to be untrue. Religious intolerance in the Roman Empire was virtually unknown. The so-called "Christian persecutions" are mostly Christian myths, and the Christian martyrs of the early church were mostly Christian criminals. To this Christian claim Jefferson pertinently replies:

"Had not the Roman Government permitted free enquiry Christianity could never have been introduced" (Notes on Virginia, p. 265).

The Fourth of July, 1826, was the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of American Independence. The people of Washington had decided to celebrate the memorable occasion in a fitting manner, and Mr. Weightman was deputed to invite the illustrious author of the Declaration to attend. On the 24th of June Jefferson wrote a letter declining, on account of his infirmities, to be present. In this letter a new Declaration of Independence is proclaimed. Bravely he writes:

"All eyes are opened or opening to the rights of man. The general spread of the light of science has already laid open to every view the palpable truth, that the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few bootied and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God."

Those were the last words Jefferson penned. Ten days later -- on the day that he had contributed so much to make immortal -- the Sage of Monticello breathed his last. On the same day, too, died John Adams. Politically at variance these men differed but little in theology. Writing to Jefferson on the 5th of May, 1817, Adams, giving expression to the matured conviction of eighty-two eventful years, declares.

"This would be the best of all possible worlds if there were no religion in it."

To this radical declaration Jefferson replied:

"If by religion, we are to understand sectarian dogmas, in which no two of them agree, then your exclamation on that hypothesis is just, 'that this would be the best of worlds if there were no religion in it' " (Works, Vol. iv., p. 301).

Referring to another letter he received from Adams, he says:

"Its crowd of skepticism kept me from sleep" (Ibid, p. 331).

Writing to Adams in 1817, Jefferson says:

"The result of your fifty or sixty years of religious reading in the four words: 'Be just and good,' is that in which all our enquiries must end; as the riddles of all the priesthood end in four more: 'Ubi panis ibi Deus.' What all agree in is probably right; what no two agree in most probably wrong" (Ibid, p. 300).

These anti-Christian views of Jefferson were for the most part written after he had retired to private life; but that the public had always been apprised of his unbelief, there can be no doubt. When he ran for President, the more bigoted orthodox journals opposed his election upon these grounds. At his inauguration, some of these journals appeared in mourning, while flags were displayed at half-mast, in token of grief because an Infidel had been elevated to the Presidency. It is true that Washington and Adams, both disbelievers in Evangelical Christianity, had filled the office before him; but they were reticent in regard to the subject, openly expressing no opinions that would offend the church.

That Jefferson's Deistic opinions were well known before he retired from public life is shown by a letter which Paine wrote to Jefferson after his reelection. Paine says:

"When I was in Connecticut the summer before last, I fell in company with some Baptists among whom were three ministers. The conversation turned on the election for President, and one of them who appeared to be a leading man said, 'They cry out against Mr. Jefferson because they say he is a Deist. Well, a Deist may be a good man, and if he think it right, it is right to him. For my own part,' said he, 'I had rather vote for a Deist than for a blue-skin Presbyterian.'"

Jefferson's library contained the leading Freethought works of his day. They gave evidence of having been carefully studied and the marginal annotations from his pen showed that the most radical sentiments were endorsed by him.

He wrote letters to Volney, and placed the bust of Voltaire in his library. He manifested the strongest attachment for Paine, which continued till the latter's death. When Paine signified his intention of returning from France to America, Jefferson furnished

a national ship to convey him home. After his return he became the honored guest of the President, both at Washington and Monticello.

Alluding to Paine's visit to Washington, the editor of the "Diary and Letters of Gouverneur Morris" Says that "Jefferson received him warmly, dined him at the White House, and could be seen walking arm in arm with him on the street any fine afternoon." This was eight years after Paine published his "Age of Reason," and when in the eyes of Christians he had become infamous.

President Jefferson continued to correspond with Paine on theological subjects up to Paine's last illness, which occurred about the time he retired from the Presidency.

To Paine and the great English Deist, Bolingbroke, Jefferson paid the following tribute:

"You ask my opinion of Lord Bolingbroke and Thomas Paine. They were alike in making bitter enemies of the priests and Pharisees of their day. Both were honest men; both advocates for human liberty" (Letter to Francis Eppes).

To the English heretic, Dr. Priestley, he extended the following welcome:

"It is with heartfelt satisfaction that in the first moments of my public action, I can hail you with welcome to our land, tender to you the homage of its respect and esteem, and cover you under the protection of those laws which were made for the good and the wise like you."

When Jefferson's works were first published, the New York Observer, then the leading Christian journal of this country, gave them the following notice:

"Mr. Jefferson, it is well known, was never suspected of being very friendly to orthodox religion, but these volumes prove not only that he was a disbeliever, but a scoffer of the very lowest class."

What is remarkable, the Observer has never claimed that Jefferson recanted; while it has claimed that Paine did. According to this authority Jefferson was more confirmed in his disbelief than Paine.

The clergy circulated a story to the effect that Jefferson admitted his indebtedness to the church by declaring that it was to a preacher, Dr. Small, of William and Mary College, that he owed the destinies of his life. Being in doubt as to whether the Dr. Small referred to was really a preacher or not, Mr. Wm. Edmonds, of Texas, in 1887, addressed a letter to Governor Fitzhugh Lee, of Virginia, on the subject. Gov. Lee instructed his private secretary, Mr. J.E. Waller, to send the following reply':

"The Governor directs me to say, in reply to your letter of inquiry of August 26th, that, from the best information he can get, he is satisfied that Dr. Small was either an M.D., or scientist, which would entitle him to the degree of Doctor. Mr. Jefferson was a Freethinker and, as there is no record of Dr. Small ever having a church in Virginia, the natural conclusion is that this Dr. Small was of the same belief. John Randolph claims to have imbibed some of his skeptical ideas from a Dr. Small."

The Rev. Thornton Stringfellow, D.D., a prominent Christian divine of Jefferson's own state, in his "Scriptural View of Slavery," a work showing that the Bible sanctions slavery, says:

"My correspondent thinks with Mr. Jefferson, that Jehovah has no attributes that will harmonize with slavery; and that all men are born free and equal. Now, I say let him throw away his Bible as Mr. Jefferson did his and then they will be fit companions. But never disgrace the Bible by making Mr. Jefferson its expounder, nor Mr. Jefferson by deriving his sentiments from it. Mr. Jefferson did not bow to the authority of the Bible, and on this subject I do not bow to him."

John S.C. Abbot, the panegyrist of Napoleon Bonaparte, in his "Lives of the Presidents" (p. 142), referring to one of Jefferson's most distinguished efforts in behalf of religious liberty, says:

"He devoted much attention to the establishment of the University at Charlottesville. Having no religious faith which he was willing to avow, he was not willing that any religious faith whatever should be taught in the University as a part of its course of instruction. This establishment, in a Christian land, of an institution for the education of youth, where the relation existing between man and his Maker was entirely ignored, raised a general cry of disapproval throughout the whole country. It left a stigma upon the reputation of Mr. Jefferson, in the minds of Christian people, which can never be effaced."

The noted divine, Dr. Wilson, in his celebrated sermon on "The Religion of the Presidents," has this to say of Jefferson:

"Whatever difference of opinion there may have been as to his religious faith at the time [of his election to the Presidency], it is now rendered certain that he was a Deist. That fact after his 'Notes on Virginia' ought never to have been doubted by any reasonable man. That work itself contains sufficient evidence of the fact, and I believe the influence of his example and name has done more for the extension of Infidelity than that of any other man. Since his death, and the publication of Randolph, [Jefferson's Works,] there remains not the shadow of doubt of his Infidel

principles. If any man thinks there is, let him look at the book itself. I do not recommend the purchase of it to any man, for it is one of the most wicked and dangerous books extant."

The Rev. Dr. D.J. Burrell, of New York, recently said:

"No man could be elected President of the United States to-day who is an avowed opponent of Christianity. Thomas Jefferson would not be an available candidate to-day for either party."

The "International Cyclopedia edited by Daniel Coit Gilman, LL. D., President of Johns Hopkins University, says:

"In religion it is probable that he [Jefferson] was not far from what was then known and execrated as a Freethinker."

The "New American Cyclopedia," in its edition of 1860, makes the following frank and truthful statement of Jefferson's belief:

"Discarding faith as unphilosophical, he became an Infidel."

This statement was offensive to some, and the edition of 1874 substituted the following which means the same thing:

"He carried the rule of subjecting everything to the test of abstract reason into matters of religion, venerating the moral character of Christ, but refusing belief in his divine mission."

Bancroft, referring to Jefferson, says:

"He was not only a hater of priestcraft and superstition and bigotry and intolerance, he was thought to be indifferent to religion" (History of United States, Vol. v., p. 323).

Benson J. Lossing, in his "Lives of the Signers of the Declaration of American Independence," sums up the religious and moral character of Jefferson in the following brief words:

"In religion he was a Freethinker; in morals pure and unspotted" (p. 183).

Morse, in his "Life of Jefferson," which forms a part of the "American Statesman" series, says:

"To my mind it is very clear that Jefferson never believed that Christ was other than a human moralist" (p. 341).

Tucker, in his biography of Jefferson, says:

"It is very certain that he did not believe at all in the divine origin of Christianity, and of course not in the inspiration of the Scriptures; even of the New Testament."

Theodore Dwight, in "The Character of Jefferson, (p. 364) given expression to the following sensible conclusion:

"It cannot be necessary to adopt any train of reasoning to show that a man who disbelieves the inspiration and divine authority of the Scriptures -- who not only denies the divinity of the Savior, but reduces him to the grade of an uneducated, ignorant and erring man -- who calls the God of Abraham (the Jehovah of the Bible), a cruel and remorseless being, cannot be a Christian."

In an article on Jefferson's religious belief, the Chicago Tribune says:

"A question has been raised as to Thomas Jefferson's religious views. There need be no question, for he has settled that himself. He was an Infidel, or, as he chose to term it, a Materialist. By his own account he was as heterodox as Col. Ingersoll, and in some respects even more so."

Surely, Christians, your cause must be growing desperate, when, to sustain it, you must needs claim for its support so bitter an enemy as Thomas Jefferson -- a man who affirmed that he was a Materialist; a man who recognized in your religion only "our particular superstition," a superstition without "one redeeming feature;" a man who divided the Christian world into two classes -- hypocrites and fools; a man who asserted that your Bible is a book abounding with "vulgar ignorance;" a man who termed your Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, a "hocus-pocus phantasm;" a man who denounced your God as "cruel, vindictive, and unjust;" a man who intimated that your Savior was "a man of illegitimate birth;" a man who declared his disciples, including your oracle, Paul, to be a "band of dupes and impostors," and who characterized your modern priesthood as "cannibal priests" and an "abandoned confederacy" against public happiness.

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