

## NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

### AN EARNEST SOWING OF WILD OATS.

#### A CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

In taking temporary leave, last November, of my Atlantic readers, I told them that, at the age of twenty-seven, I engaged in a somewhat Quixotic enterprise, adding: "I saw what seemed to me grievous errors and abuses, and must needs intermeddle, hoping to set things right. Up to what point I succeeded, and how far, for lack of experience, I failed, or fell short of my views, some of those who have followed me thus far may wish to know."

It was in one sense, though not in the popular one, a "sowing of wild oats;" for many of the thoughts and schemes which in those days I deemed it a duty to scatter broadcast were crude and immature enough. Yet the records of such errors and efforts — if the errors be honest and the efforts well-meant — serve a useful purpose. It is so much easier to intend good than to do it! Young and rash reformers need to be reminded that age and sober thought must bring chastening influence, before we make the discovery how little we know, and how much we have still to learn.

It is forty-five years since Frances Wright and I established in the city of New York a weekly paper of eight large quarto pages, called *The Free Enquirer*. This paper was continued for four years;

<sup>1</sup> During the first year Frances Wright and I edited the paper, aided, chiefly in the business department, by Robert L. Jennings, whom I have already mentioned as one of the Nashoba trustees; then we severed connection with him. In the autumn of 1829 Miss Wright left for six months, returning in May, 1830; to remain, however, only two months, then crossing to Europe and not returning until after our paper was discontinued. From July, 1830, to July, 1831, I conducted the *Free Enquirer* entirely alone, aided only by occasional communications from Miss Wright; then I engaged the services of Amos Gilbert, a member of the society of Friends (Hicksite), one of the most painstaking, upright, and liberal men I ever knew, but a somewhat heavy writer, who remained until the paper closed, managing it as sole resident editor for the last five

months, throughout 1829, 1830, 1831, and 1832. It was conducted, during a portion of that time, with Miss Wright's editorial aid, and also with other assistance; but it was chiefly managed and edited by myself.<sup>1</sup>

Looking back through nearly half a century on these stirring times, I seem to be reviewing, not my own doings, but those of some enthusiastic young propagandist in whom I still take an interest, and whom I think I am able to see pretty much as he was in those early days of hope and anticipation; upright but hare-brained, with a much larger stock of boldness and force than of ballast and prudence, but withal neither mean nor arrogant nor selfish. I had failings and short-comings enough, very certainly, — among them lack of due meekness and of a wholesome sense of my own inexperience and ignorance and liability to error, — but the time never has been when I paltered with conscience, or withheld the expression of whatever I felt to be true or believed important to be said, from fear of man or dread of forfeiting popular favor. I have sometimes doubted since whether this zeal with insufficient knowledge resulted in much practical good; yet perhaps Herbert Spencer's view of cases like mine is the true one, when he says: —

"On the part of men eager to rectify

months, when I was in Europe; but I left him a dozen editorials, and sent him a regular weekly article throughout that time.

Orestes A. Brownson, well known since, especially in the Catholic world, then living at Auburn, New York (where he had been editing a Universalist paper), was agent and corresponding editor of our paper for six months (from November, 1829, to May, 1830), but he sent us only two or three articles. In one of these he thus defines his creed: "I am no longer to appear as the advocate of any sect nor of any religious faith. . . . Bidding adieu to the regions where the religionist must ramble, casting aside the speculations with which he must amuse himself, I wish to be simply an observer of nature for my creed, and a benefactor of my brethren for my religion." — *Free Enquirer*, vol. ii. p. 38.

wrongs and expel errors, there is still, as there ever has been, so absorbing a consciousness of the evils caused by old forms and old ideas, as to permit no consciousness of the benefits these old forms and old ideas have yielded. This partiality of view is, in a sense, necessary. There must be division of labor here as elsewhere: some who have the function of attacking, and who, that they may attack effectually, must feel strongly the viciousness of that which they attack; some who have the function of defending, and who, that they may be good defenders, must over-value the things they defend."<sup>1</sup>

Some of the leading opinions which I put forth in our paper were without foundation. I made assertions, for example, touching man's inability to obtain knowledge in spiritual matters which I now know to be erroneous. Yet perhaps the frank expression even of such errors was not without its use; it has taught me charity to those who make similar mistakes; and I have since taken pains to correct these false conceptions in as public a manner as I expressed them. Then again, there is wisdom in what a thoughtful clergyman of the Anglican church (holding to the Oxford Essayist school, however) has well said:—

"It is necessary that absurd and harmful ideas should be expressed, in order that they may be seen to be what they are, and that time and conflict may destroy them. Hidden, repressed, they exist as an inward disease: freely expressed, they are seen and burnt away. . . . Whether any new phase of national thought be good or evil, the very fact of its being new will be a good in the end; for it will disturb the waters and provoke conflict: if evil, it will throw the opposite idea, which is good, into sharper outline; and if good, it will make its converts and subvert some existing evil. The only unmixed evil is to silence it by intolerance."<sup>2</sup>

The scope of our paper and the spirit

<sup>1</sup> Study of Sociology; concluding chapter.  
<sup>2</sup> Rev. Stopford A. Brooke, *Freedom in the Church of England*: London, 1871; pp. 5, 6.

in which we proposed to conduct it may be traced through a few brief extracts from its prospectus. After premising that we had not found, even in this land of freedom, "a single periodical devoted—without fear, without reserves, without pledge to men, parties, sects, or systems—to free, unbiased, and universal inquiry," we added:—

"We shall be governed in our choice of subjects by their importance, and guided in our estimation of their importance by the influence each shall appear to exert on the welfare of mankind. We will discuss all opinions with a reference to human practice, and all practice with a reference to human happiness. Religion, morality, human economy,—those master-principles which determine the color of our lives,—shall obtain a prominent place in our columns. . . . We exact from our correspondents what we promise for ourselves, courtesy and moderation. While there is no opinion so sacred that we shall approach its discussion with apprehension, there is none so extravagant that we shall treat its expression with contempt. . . . To the believer as to the heretic we say: 'He who will tolerate others shall himself be tolerated; exclusive pretension only shall be, with us, cause of exclusion.'"

Of ourselves we said: "We neither dread public censure, nor court public applause. We need not popular favor to put bread into our mouths, and we care not to put money into our pockets. We search truth alone and for itself. We think meanly of man's present condition, and nobly of his capabilities. Are we wrong? we want others to prove us so. Are we right? it shall be our endeavor to convince them of error. . . . We trust that many are wiser and we know that many are more gifted than ourselves; but we have yet to see—would that we could see!—those who are as earnest in the work and as fearless in its execution."

Somewhat boastful, certainly! Not at all what I should write to-day! But so it is, in this world. Experience and enthusiasm are much like the two buck-

ets of a well; as the one rises the other sinks, and they are found only for a moment together. While the heart is fresh and the spirits untiring, they lack prudence for a guide; and when at last prudence comes to our aid, she too often finds the heart cold and the spirits sluggish. Ah, if to the free and buoyant ardor of youth we could but unite the deliberate sagacity of age! In the life to come, perhaps—if, there, old and young are meaningless terms—some such dream may be realized.

As regards theology, which during the first two years was our chief topic, my views touching a First Cause were substantially identical with those recently put forth, in succinct and lucid terms, by Herbert Spencer. Our consciousness, he tells us, which is our sole guide to any knowledge of mind, does not enable us to conceive the character or attributes of an "originating mind." This, he says, is not materialism. It is not "an assertion that the world contains no mode of existence higher in nature than that which is present to us in consciousness." It is simply "a confession of incompetence to grasp in thought the cause of all things." It is a "belief that the ultimate power is no more representable in terms of human consciousness than human consciousness is representable in terms of a plant's functions."<sup>1</sup>

Such an avowal of inability to comprehend a first cause called forth, in those days, a storm of abuse quite beyond any with which Spencer and his co-believers are visited now. Press and pulpit assailed us as atheists. The mail brought us daily missives of wrath. Some of these I consigned to the wastebasket; a few I answered. One of the last—a fair sample of the rest—inclosed a tract which depicted the horrors of an unbeliever's death-bed, and an anonymous letter in which the writer said: "If you feel inclined to make any remarks in your infidel paper, you are at liberty to do so; but remember, there will be a day when you will regret that

<sup>1</sup> Herbert Spencer on Evolution, in Popular Science Monthly for July, 1872.

you ever turned a deaf ear to those warnings that are contained in that blessed book, the Bible." I inserted his letter, and, after stating that I had most earnestly sought religious truth, replied:—

If such a day indeed arrive, when I shall stand before the judgment-seat of a great immaterial Spirit, to answer for the deeds done in the body, then and there will I defend my honest skepticism. Then—when the secrets of all hearts shall be known; there—before that Being who will see and approve sincerity, will I say, as I say now, that for my heresies I am blameless. If my correspondent be there to accuse me, how shall he make out his case? Let us imagine the scene:—

*Accuser.*—During thy mortal life, thou didst turn a deaf ear to holy exhortations.

*Mortal.*—Nay, I heard them, but believed them not.

*Accuser.*—Thou hast not known on earth the great Judge before whom thou now standest in heaven.

*Mortal.*—True. There I knew him not, for he concealed his being from me. Here I know him, for he reveals to me his existence.

*Accuser.*—I warned thee of his existence.

*Mortal.*—But I did not believe the warning.

*Accuser.*—Dost thou confess thy sin?

*Mortal.*—I have no sin to confess in this; but I confess my human ignorance.

*Accuser.*—Thy ignorance was sinful.

*Mortal.*—To thee! hitherto unknown Spirit, I appeal. I knew thee not on earth, for thou hiddest thy existence from me. I thought not of thee, nor of this day of judgment; I thought only of the earth and of my fellow-mortals. The time which others employed in imagining thy attributes, I spent in seeking to improve the talents thou hadst given me, in striving to add to the happiness of the companions thou hadst placed around me, and in endeavors to improve the abode in which thou hadst caused me to dwell. I spoke of that which I knew.

I never spoke of thee, because I knew thee not. To thee I appeal from this my accuser.

*Judge.* — Thou hast well spoken. I placed thee on earth, not to dream of my being, but to improve thine own. I made thee a man that thou mightest give and receive happiness among thy fellows, not that thou shouldst imagine the ways and the wishes of gods. Even as thou condemnedst not the worm that crawled at thy feet, so neither do I condemn thy worldly ignorance of me.<sup>1</sup>

An illustration more forcible than well-judged; yet it will be conceded that it involves the assertion of a sacred privilege long and strangely denied to man — his right freely to express sincere convictions, especially in religious matters. That my creed was simply a confession of ignorance was due to the fact that, at that time, I had found no evidence which seemed to me trustworthy, of the spiritual or its phenomena.

My present opinions as to the evidence for a supreme intelligence, in some way personal, whose directing will is the equivalent of cosmical law, are at variance with Herbert Spencer's, and may be thus stated: I admit, to modern science, that force, aggregating atoms and acting on and through them, is the immediate cause of all the material objects that are presented to the senses. But if we go back of force, seeking its motive-power, can our consciousness supply no aid in the search? It informs us that, as regards that class of appearances which we call the handiwork of man, the originating cause is, in a certain sense, our human will. Beyond this we cannot go; for the materialist has utterly failed to prove that the will is the result of molecular changes in the brain. Whatever the cerebral mechanism may be, it is the spiritual principle within us which wills, and which, availing itself of that mechanism and acting in accordance with cosmical law, produces the thousand results of human skill and of human mind.

<sup>1</sup> *Free Enquirer*, vol. i. p. 326.

We speak familiarly, in these days, of motion, when it is arrested, being convertible into heat. May not will, when it is excited, be converted into force? or may not will be the original form of force? The spiritual part of man is the man — is, and will be, in another and a better phase of life than this; all else is only earthly induing. Is it not a reasonable belief that the entire phenomenal world, as manifest to sense, is but an outer investment — the epiphany of a deeper reality, and traceable to a spiritual force?

Certain it is that we reach, as ultimate, so far as our consciousness goes, human will-power; in other words, we detect what, within the range of its influence, may be termed originating mind. Within the petty range of its influence only, it is true, and subject, be it remembered, to forces which exist and operate independently of man. As to the myriads of phenomena that occur outside of human agency, or of similar limited influence, are we not justified, by strictest rule of analogy, in concluding that they, too, are due to will-force? And does not our consciousness thus enable us to conceive the overruling will-force of an originating mind, infinitely higher, wiser, more potent than ours?

I may here add that, in some of the recent developments of science, connected with the doctrine of evolution, and thought by many to be of atheistic tendency, I find, on the contrary, provided they are interpreted with enlightened limitations, proofs confirmatory of the views which I have here given touching a supreme intelligence controlling and directing the universe.

The great principle of natural selection, which in the main explains so strictly the mode of gradual progress in the vegetable and animal kingdoms, seems to me only partially applicable, as an element of advancement, to man. The origin of man's highest mental faculties cannot be logically traced to the preservation of useful variations. Some other principle intervenes. The degree of the human intellect, at any given time,

is not so much the result of past selection as the earnest of needs to be satisfied only in ages to come. The oldest human skulls yet found (some of them equal in size to the average of modern skulls and all quite disproportioned, in capacity of brain, to the requirements of their savage owners) were evidently constituted with prophetic reference to the distant future. So the human hands and voice, organs eminently delicate and sensitive, were, in the rudest ages, capable of being trained for elevated uses and refined enjoyment which for tens or hundreds of centuries were not to be attained.

But if, as from these and similar facts it appears, savage man's endowments (being of proleptic character and looking to far-off triumphs in intellectual and spiritual fields) have been due to some cause other than natural selection,<sup>1</sup> does not our human consciousness lead us to conceive that cause as a supreme being, forecasting the future, foreseeing what the needs of our race will be when generation after generation shall have passed away, and expressly preparing man for a high destiny to come — preparing him even in the dim beginnings of his existence on earth, when the instincts of the brute almost sufficed to provide for his rude wants and to satisfy his vague longings? I think we may rationally rest in such a belief.

The opinions which I held in those days touching a future state are condensed in this extract:<sup>2</sup> "From all assertions, affirmative or negative, re-

garding other worlds than this, I abstain. They exist, or they exist not, independently of our conceptions of them. Our belief cannot create, our unbelief cannot destroy them. Hereafter we shall enjoy, or we shall not enjoy them, whether we have anticipated such enjoyment, or whether we have had no such anticipation."

Mistaking that of which I knew nothing for the unknowable, I was, in common with my co-editors, what is now called a Secularist, and having adopted from Pope and Southwood Smith<sup>3</sup> the maxim that "Whatever is, is right," I sought to persuade myself that our horizon was wisely bounded by the world we live in; and that our earthly duties are better performed because of such a restriction. I have since had occasion to express my conviction that evidence, manifest to the senses, which assures man of a life to come, is one of the most cogent among civilizing influences; and that the human race will never attain that wisdom and virtue of which its nature is capable, until the masses shall have reached, not a vague belief, but a living, ever-present assurance, that character and conduct in this world determine our state of being in the next.

But at that time, in the absence of such evidence, I not only rejected, as I hope all men will, some day, reject the doctrine of *plenary* inspiration, but I lacked faith also in any inspiration other than that of genius; quite ignoring what Swedenborg calls influx from the spiritual world. My present views on that subject are given in a recent work:—

<sup>1</sup> It would be out of place here to follow up in detail the argument that primeval man, supplied with attributes beyond his early needs, could not have obtained these merely by the persistent survival of those individuals of his race who were the fittest to protect and support themselves in ages of barbarism. For full details on this subject, I refer the reader to a recent work by a distinguished English scientist, Alfred Wallace; the first who put forth, in outline, the principle of natural selection, and one who has made special study of that subject. In his *Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection* (London, 1870) there is a chapter on *The Limits of Natural Selection as applied to Man* (pp. 232-271), which merits careful perusal. On that subject his deductions are, in the main, similar to mine. From the class of phenomena which he describes, his inference is (p. 359), "that a superior intelligence has guided the

development of man in a definite direction and for a special purpose, just as man guides the development of many animal and vegetable forms." He does not regard the human will as "but one link in the chain of events," and concludes: "If we have traced one force, however minute, to an origin in our own *will*, while we have no knowledge of any other primary cause of force, it does not seem an improbable conclusion that all force may be will-force; and thus that the whole universe is not merely dependent on, but actually is, the will of higher intelligences, or of one supreme intelligence" (p. 368).

<sup>2</sup> From a manuscript lecture now before me, which I delivered, on various occasions, in the years 1831 and 1832.

<sup>3</sup> In his *Divine Government*, a volume in which the author advocates earnestly, and (so far as I remember) logically, the principle of optimism.

"Inspiration is a mental or physical phenomenon, strictly law-governed; occasional, but not exceptional or exclusive; sometimes of a spiritual and ultra-mundane character, but never miraculous; often imparting to us invaluable knowledge, but never infallible teachings; one of the most precious of all God's gifts to man, but in no case involving a direct message from him—a message to be accepted, unquestioned by reason or conscience, as divine truth unmixed with human error. . . . Inspiration, in phase more or less pure, is the source of all religions that have held persistent sway over any considerable portion of mankind. And just in proportion to the relative purity of that source, welling up in each system of faith respectively, is the larger or smaller admixture of the Good and the True which, modern candor is learning to admit, is to be found in certain measure even in the rudest creed."<sup>1</sup>

But while in those days neither Frances Wright nor I regarded Christ as an Inspired Teacher, both of us expressed in strong terms our respect for his exalted character. She wrote thus: "The real history of Jesus, if known, will probably be found to be that of every reformer whose views and virtues are ahead of his generation. By his ignorant friends his superior natural powers were mistaken for inspiration, and by his ignorant enemies for witchcraft. . . . Jesus appears to have been far too wise and too gentle to have conceived the scheme now attached to his name."<sup>2</sup>

This called forth, from a correspondent, one or two articles in opposition, speaking of Jesus as possibly a myth; at all events as "a miracle-monger, a magician," and as "wanting in filial affection and respect," etc. To these I replied after this wise: "I think of Jesus as one of the wise and good . . . who pleaded the poor man's cause and was called the friend of publicans and sinners; who spoke against hypocritical forms and idle ceremonies, and was de-

nounced as a Sabbath-breaker setting at naught the law; who exposed the selfishness of the rich and the powerful, and thus incurred their hatred; who attacked the priesthood of the day and by their machinations lost his life. This is a picture too strictly verified by all history to be refused credit, merely because its outlines are awkwardly filled up. There is, mixed with the mystery which beclouds Jesus' biography, too much of gentle, tolerant, high-minded principle to warrant the supposition that it was all the biographers' invention. Ignorant men do not invent tolerant democratic principles, nor imagine unpretending deeds of mercy, nor paint gentle reformers. . . . And if, speaking in parables, Jesus kept back much that might more distinctly have marked the character of his heresy, let us recollect that he spoke with his life in his hand, and that it is hard to blame him for having ventured so little, who suffered death, probably, for having ventured so much."<sup>3</sup>

Expressions of sentiment so plain as these did not save us, however, from bitter abuse; for instance by a certain Dr. Gibbons, a Quaker preacher with orthodox proclivities, who, quoting against us in an abusive pamphlet the words employed by our anti-christian correspondent, accused us of treating with indignity Christ and his teachings; and also of holding that "what is vice in one country is virtue in another." To him I replied:—

"No, Dr. Gibbons. You yourself know that we never expressed any such doctrine. Virtue is virtue in itself, independently of time, of name, and of country; honesty, for instance, and candor. You know, too, that the quotations touching Jesus given by you were not from our pens. Not one word of them was approved by us. You *know* that; and, knowing it, you suppress our words, *impute to us our very opponents' arguments as our own*, and thereupon (with a degree of assurance which to be credited must be seen) you found your

<sup>1</sup> The Debatable Land between this World and the Next: New York, 1872; pp. 242, 243.

<sup>2</sup> Free Enquirer, vol. i. p. 199.

<sup>3</sup> Free Enquirer, vol. i. p. 256, and vol. ii. p. 190.

assertions that we have 'railed against Jesus Christ,' and 'reviled the author of Christianity.'

"In no country, Dr. Gibbons, will this pass for virtue. In no country will it be approved by any one whose approval is worth having. No end can justify such means; no cause sanction such weapons."<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Gibbons made no answer. This is but a specimen of a hundred similar attacks, to which I replied after the same fashion; gradually fighting my way, I think, to considerable respect. At all events, after the first two years, we were treated with much more consideration than at the outset, by the press and by the pulpit of the more liberal sects, Unitarian and Universalist, and more especially by the Hicksite Quakers.

Some of the New York dailies were bitter enough, refusing even our paid advertisements; others, hitting us from time to time, did it good-naturedly: among these last, M. M. Noah, then conducting the *Inquirer*. Major Noah (as he was usually called) was a man of infinite humor, and I used to enjoy his jokes even when made at my expense. He said of my father, commencing operations in Indiana: "Robert Owen, the Scotch philanthropist, has been putting his property at New Harmony into common stock; he ought to be put into the stocks himself for his folly." When some country editor came out against him thus: "We can't endure Noah for two reasons: first, we hate his politics; secondly, he spells *Enquirer* with an I" — the major replied: "Any man who would put out his neighbor's *ii's* (eyes) ought to forfeit all *ee's* (ease) for the rest of his life."

We had other heresies which brought us reproach, aside from those of a theological character. We advocated the abolition of imprisonment for debt and of capital punishment; equality for women, social, pecuniary, and political; equality of civil rights for all persons without distinction of color, and the

right of every man to testify in a court of justice without inquiry made as to his religious creed. Above all, we urged the importance of a national system of education, free from sectarian teachings, with industrial schools where the children of the poor might be taught farming or a trade, and obtain, without charge, support as well as education.

This last brought upon us the imputation of favoring communism and holding agrarian views; quite unjustly, however, for I had taken pains to say: "We propose no equalization but that which an equal system of national education will gradually effect." As to the province of the general government as distinct from that of the States, I had then, like most foreigners, no very exact idea of the distinction.

Financially our enterprise was so far a success that it ultimately paid all expenses, including those of our household, with a trifle over. This was due to very strict economy, for we had but a thousand paying subscribers, at three dollars a year: in those early days, however, deemed a fair subscription list. We leased, at four hundred and forty dollars a year, from Richard Riker, then recorder of the city, a commodious mansion and grounds on the banks of the East River, some half mile southeast of Yorkville. There we lived and there our paper was handsomely printed by three lads who had been trained in the New Harmony printing-office. They boarded with us, and we paid them a dollar a week each.<sup>2</sup> We bought a small church in Broome Street, near the Bowery, for seven thousand dollars, and converted it into what we (somewhat ambitiously) called "The Hall of Science;" adding business offices in front. In this hall we had lectures and debates every Sunday, and sometimes on week-days; admission, ten cents. It paid interest and expenses, leaving the offices free of rent. We carried on also a small business in liberal books; our sales reaching two thousand dollars a year.

and we paid them for extra work, when they did any.

<sup>1</sup> Free Enquirer, vol. ii. pp. 134, 135.

<sup>2</sup> They got out the paper in five days of the week,

We lived in the most frugal manner, giving up tea and coffee, and using little animal food; were supplied with milk from a couple of good cows, and vegetables from our garden. We kept two horses and a light city carriage; had two female servants, and a stout boy who attended to the stable and garden. I have now before me a minute account which I kept of our expenses.<sup>1</sup> Including paper (upwards of five hundred a year), printing, expenses of house, stable, and office, rent, etc., our total expenditure was but three thousand one hundred a year when Miss Wright and her sister were with us, and after they went, twenty-seven hundred dollars only. I was my own proof-reader, rode on horseback to and from the city (ten miles) daily, and my only assistant in the office was an excellent young man of fifteen, Augustus Matsell, to whom we paid two dollars a week. I was occupied fully twelve hours a day; and, having a vigorous constitution, my health was unimpaired.

Though it was a somewhat hard and self-denying life, my recollections would prompt me to say that I was bright and cheerful through it all, but for a letter of mine which recently came to my hands, written to a European friend in the autumn of 1830, in which, alluding to the death of my sister Anne, I wrote:—

“It is customary to lament the dead; I lament the survivors. If, indeed, the world were what it ought to be, we might sorrow for those who go; for from how much of enjoyment would they be cut off! But as it is, one must be very favorably and independently situated, to render it certain that death is a loss and not a gain. I myself am thus situated, so that these reflections have no special application in my own case. From nature or education, or both, I derived a lightness of heart which few circumstances can depress.”

These are cheerless views of human

<sup>1</sup> Some of the items sound strangely to-day: Flour five dollars a barrel, horse feed two dollars a week each, butter sixteen cents a pound, and so on.

<sup>2</sup> John Stuart Mill, in his *Autobiography*, says

life: quite different from any which I take now in old age. Can a skeptic, with vision restricted to this world and regarding our existence here as a finality, not as a novitiate, ever obtain assurance (except perhaps during the heyday of a prosperous youth) that life, with its lights so often overshadowed, is a gift worth having at all?<sup>2</sup>

I think that Frances Wright, less light-hearted than I, took a still gloomier view of the world as it is. Our deepest feelings are wont to crop out in genuine poetry; and Miss Wright, though it is not generally known, was a poet. I have read many of her fugitive pieces in manuscript, but she was never willing to have them issued in a volume. Some of these possessed, I think, considerable merit; as witness the following lines:—

#### TO GENIUS.

##### I.

Yes! it is quenched, the spark of heavenly fire  
Which Genius kindled in my infant mind:  
Fled is my fancy, damped the fond desire  
Of fame immortal—all my dreams resigned.  
All, all are gone! Yet turn I ne'er behind,  
Like pilgrim wending from his native land?  
Shall I in other paths such beauties find  
As spring beneath Imagination's hand,  
As bloom on wild Enthusiasm's visionary strand?

##### II.

Celestial Genius! dangerous gift of Heaven!  
How many a heart and mind hast thou o'er  
thrown!  
Broken the first, the last to frenzy driven,  
Or jarred of both for aye the even tone!  
Once, once I thought such fate would be my own,  
And only looked to find an early grave;  
To die as I had lived, my powers unknown;  
Content, so reason might her empire save,  
Unseen to sink beneath oblivion's rayless wave.

##### III.

But oh! with all thy pains thou hast a charm  
That nought may match within this vale below;  
E'en for the pangs thou giv'st thou hast a balm,  
And renderest sweet the bitterness of woe:  
Thy breath ethereal, thy kindling glow,  
Thy visions bright, thy raptures wild and high,  
He that has felt, oh, would he e'er forego?  
No! in thy glistening tear, thy bursting sigh,  
Though fraught with woe, there is a thrill of ec-  
stasy.

of his father, James Mill, who was a skeptic in religion but a man of the strictest moral principle: “He thought human life a poor thing at best, after the freshness of youth and of unsatisfied curiosity had gone by.”—*Amer. Ed.* p. 48.

## IV.

And art thou flown, thou high, celestial Power?  
 Forever flown? Ah! turn thee yet again!  
 Ah! yet be with me in the lonely hour!  
 Yet stoop to guide my wildered fancy's reign!  
 Turn thee once more, and wake thy ancient  
 strain!  
 No joys that earth can yield I love like thine;  
 Nay, more than earth's best joys I love thy pain.  
 And could I say I would thy smile resign?  
 No; while this bosom beats, oh still, great gift, be  
 mine!

These verses indicate the writer's ambitious aspirations, her self-estimate, and the restless and desponding moods to which, though not habitually sad, she was subject. In middle life, however, Frances Wright's ambition took the form of zealous endeavor to aid her suffering fellow-creatures. When the experiment at Nashoba proved a failure, and it became evident that the slaves there, instead of working out their freedom, were bringing the institution, year by year, into debt, she still resolved that the hopes with which she had inspired them should not be disappointed. She left New York for her Tennessee plantation in the autumn of 1829, and was absent six months, engaged in carrying out her final intentions regarding them.

I have in my possession the manifest of the brig — appropriately enough it was the John Quincy Adams, of Boston — in which the little colony was conveyed to Hayti. It shows that by that act, thirteen adults and eighteen children, — thirty-one souls in all, — liberated from slavery, were transported to a land of freedom. I have also the letter of the President of Hayti (Boyer), dated June 15, 1829, in which, after eulogizing Miss Wright's philanthropic intentions, he offers, to all persons of African blood whom she may bring to the island, an assured asylum; adding that they will be placed, as "cultivators," on land belonging to kind and trustworthy persons, where they will find homes, and receive what the law in such cases guarantees to all Haytien citizens, half the proceeds of their

<sup>1</sup> "Comme cultivateurs, ils seront placés sur les habitations, dont les propriétaires, connus sous des rapports de sagesse et de justice, leur prodigueront tous les soins que nécessiteront leur situation, et

labor ;<sup>1</sup> all which he faithfully carried out.

Miss Wright herself accompanied these people and saw them satisfactorily settled. The experiment thus brought to a close cost her some sixteen thousand dollars; more than half her property.

M. Piquepal d'Arusmont, of whom I have already spoken as a teacher at New Harmony, escorted Miss Wright to Hayti; and when she returned, I learned that they were engaged to be married. Soon after, she left for France accompanied by her younger sister: and there, next year, two misfortunes happened to her: the one her marriage, the other her sister's death. That lady, inferior in talent to Frances, but unassuming, amiable, and temperate in her views, exercised a most salutary influence over her. The sisters, early left orphans and without near relatives, had spent their lives together and were devoted to each other. When I heard of the death of the younger, Mrs. Hemans's touching lines rushed to my mind: —

"Ye were but two; and, when thy spirit passed,  
 Woe to the one — the last!"

In that sister Miss Wright lost her good angel. In her husband (gifted with a certain enthusiasm which had its attraction) she found, from the first, an unwise, hasty, fanciful counselor, and ultimately a suspicious and headstrong man. His influence was of injurious effect, alike on her character and on her happiness; and certain claims made by him on her property finally brought about a separation. Whether there ever was a legal divorce I do not know. I saw but little of Madame d'Arusmont after her marriage, and lost sight of her altogether in the latter years of her life.

The "Fanny Wright" of Free Enquirer days — her self-sacrificing philanthropy overlooked, or reproached as rank abolitionism — attained notoriety not only in virtue of her theological

leur accorderont, suivant la loi qui garantit et protège tous les citoyens, la moitié du produit de leur travaux."

heresy, verging nearer to materialism than mine, but also because of her expressed opinion that, in a wiser and purer future, men and women would need no laws to restrict and make constant their affections. I shared this opinion, as a theory; but I think she was not sufficiently careful explicitly to declare, as I did: "I have never recommended, and am not prepared to defend, any sudden abolition of the marriage law in the present depraved state of society. That great and immediate benefit would result from giving to married women independent rights of property, I am convinced; and I think such a change in the old Gothic antiquated statutes regarding *baron and feme* will soon be made in this country."<sup>1</sup>

We were both strongly opposed to indissoluble marriage; favoring divorce for cruel treatment and for hopeless unsuitability;<sup>2</sup> and adducing, in proof that this merciful provision was of virtuous tendency, the domestic morals of Catholic France and Spain and Italy, where marriage was a sacrament binding for life, which no secular law could reach. My present opinions remain the same as those expressed, in detail, on that subject in a correspondence with Horace Greeley (comprised in five letters each), originally published in March and April of 1860, in *The New York Daily Tribune*; afterwards in a pamphlet which had a very wide circulation. Greeley undoubtedly persisted in holding to his opinion then expressed, that marriage was no marriage if it could be severed by divorce; for, several years afterwards, he called on me, in his hurried way, one morning before early breakfast, earnestly asking me if I could not possibly supply him with a copy of that

<sup>1</sup> *Free Enquirer*, vol. ii. p. 200.

<sup>2</sup> Here is a specimen of the arguments by which then fortified my position:—

"The household sovereign little thinks, when he issues capricious commands, exacts grievous service, or employs tyrannical language, that George Washington's example will justify domestic disobedience. Yet are not all women 'endowed with unalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness'? Are not governments (matrimonial and national) 'instituted among men to secure these rights'? Do not marriages as well as governments 'derive their just powers from the con-

pamphlet, to be reprinted in the appendix to his *Recollections of a Busy Life*. I told him I had no copy remaining, but should do my very best to get one for him. I did so, and it appeared as he proposed; as much, I am quite sure, to my satisfaction as to his.

An additional cause of the harsh feeling toward Miss Wright which was felt, especially by the orthodox public, was the somewhat bitter manner in which she was wont to speak of what, like my father, she used to call the "priesthood." Her public lectures, of which she gave many throughout the country, East and West, usually attracted large crowds, thousands sometimes going away unable to find even standing-room. In one of these, she spoke of the clergy as "a class of men whom no one, not absolutely bent on self-martyrdom, would wish to have for enemies; but whom no honest man ever had — ever could have — for friends."

So sweeping a censure would place me, with all my heresies, in the category of the dishonest; seeing that I have found, throughout my life, nearly as fair a proportion of friends in the clerical profession as in any other calling.

I myself lectured, not only statedly at our hall on Sundays, but also in many of the principal towns and cities of the northern and northwestern States. I met, during my travels, with many amusing incidents, one of which occurs to me.

The stage-coach was then the usual mode of transit even on the chief routes; and familiar conversation with chance companions was more common there than it is now in rail-cars. On one occasion I sat next to an old lady of grave

sent' of the contracting parties? Whenever any marriage (be it of a king to his subjects or a husband to his wife) 'becomes destructive of these ends,' is it not right that it should be dissolved? Has not 'all experience shown' that women (and subjects) 'are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed?' And is not the abolition of these forms often right, desirable, a virtuous wish? Is not divorce, is not revolution, a virtuous act, when kings and husbands play the despot?" — *Free Enquirer*, vol. iv. p. 141.

and anxious aspect. She expressed great interest in the state of my soul. Then she asked me: "Are you going to our great city of Boston?"

"Yes."

"Great cities," she added, "offer great temptations; and there are many heretics in Boston. Are your religious opinions made up?"

Unwilling to offend, I replied, in general terms, that I was a searcher after truth.

"What church do you propose to attend?"

"I shall probably visit more than one."

"But you have a preference, I suppose?"

Thus pressed to the wall, I confessed that I hoped to hear Dr. Channing.

"Dr. Channing!" she repeated, "Dr. Channing! I fear—I greatly fear, young sir, that you are one of the *moral* sort of men!"

"I hope so, madam," I answered quietly. "I should be sorry to believe that I was not."

Some of the passengers smiled, but my reply evidently horrified the good dame. She lifted up her eyes to heaven; and, probably regarding the case as hopeless, relapsed into silence.

My lectures were well attended, commonly listened to with deep attention; in the case of a few audiences, interrupted by applause. On one occasion only did I meet with anything like violent opposition. It was at Cincinnati, where the authorities had granted me the use of the court house. I lectured there twice. During the first lecture, a member of an orthodox church rose, indignantly denied some statement I had made, and called on the audience to put me down. The audience resented the interruption by loud cries of "Out with him!" and I had to interfere, to prevent his expulsion. Next day the court house could not contain half the crowd that assembled, for opposition was expected. I took the precaution to obtain two moderators, Mr. Gazlay and Mr. Dorfeuille, proprietor of a large museum containing an elaborate

collection of natural curiosities and scientific specimens. But I was suffered to close what I had to say without interruption, except that, while I was speaking, a stone, thrown from without, crashed through the casement of a window near by, and fell pretty close to where I stood.

Next morning I visited the museum; and Mr. Dorfeuille showed me, among his geological specimens, one a little larger than a man's fist, which a friend of his had picked up in the court house the evening before, and which now bore the quaint and pithy label:—

#### THIS ARGUMENT

*was introduced through a window of the Cincinnati court house, in an attempt to put down Robert Dale Owen, while delivering there an address on Religion, March 6, 1832.*

In addition to lecturing and the editorship of the *Free Enquirer*, I contrived, within the four years during which that paper appeared, to do a good deal of extra work.

I wrote and published a duodecimo volume of seventy or eighty pages, entitled: *Moral Physiology*; or, *A Brief and Plain Treatise on the Population Question*. In this little work I took ground against the theory of Malthus that the checks of vice and misery are necessary to prevent the world from being overpeopled. It had a circulation, in this country and in England, of fifty or sixty thousand copies.

I also engaged in a debate touching *The Existence of God* and the *Authenticity of the Bible*, with the Rev. Origen Bacheleer. This extended to ten papers each; which were published, first in the *Free Enquirer*, and afterwards in two volumes, which had a fair circulation.

But the heaviest work I undertook was in connection with an evening paper, called *The New York Daily Sentinel*, commenced in February, 1830, by a few enterprising journeymen printers, in the interest of what was called the "*Working Men's Party*." They were

disappointed in an editor whom they had engaged; and, at their request, I agreed to supply his place for a few weeks, till they could find another. The few weeks stretched into months; and finally to more than a year, during which time I wrote for them, on the average, upwards of a column of editorial matter daily. This I did partly because, after a time, I got interested in editorial skirmishing, and partly to help the young fellows in their undertaking; not charging them, nor receiving from them, a dollar for my pains. I concealed my name, always leaving my articles with a friend, Mr. Samuel Humphreys; and many were the speculations as to "who the devil it was that was running the *Workies'* paper." I wrote as one of the industrial classes; and certainly had a good right so to do,

considering my regular twelve hours' daily labor.

It was during the years 1828 and 1829 that I made the acquaintance of that young English lady of whom I have spoken, in one of my works on Spiritualism,<sup>1</sup> under the name of Violet. Her early death was a great grief to me. But I have received a communication (as to which the attendant circumstances forbid me to doubt that it was truly from her) to the effect that she has been able to aid and guide me from her home in the other world, more effectually than if she had remained to cheer and help me in this.

The readers of *The Atlantic* will be better able to judge the cogency of evidence that forces on me belief in such phenomena, when they shall have read my next chapter.

*Robert Dale Owen.*

<sup>1</sup> In *The Debatable Land between this World and the Next*: New York and London, 1873; book

iv. chap. iii., entitled, *A Beautiful Spirit manifesting Herself.*

## DREAMS.

WHAT do we call them? Idle, airy things  
Broken by stir or sigh,  
Or else sweet slumber's golden, gauzy wings  
That into heaven can fly.

What may we call them? Miracles of might.  
For such they are to us  
When the grave bursts and yields us for a night  
Some risen Lazarus.

And if no trace or memory of death  
Cling to the throbbing form,  
And in a dream we feel the very breath  
Coming so fast and warm, —

Then all is real; we know life's waking thrill  
While precious things are told,  
Ay, such a dream is even stranger still  
Than miracles of old.

*Charlotte F. Bates.*