

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

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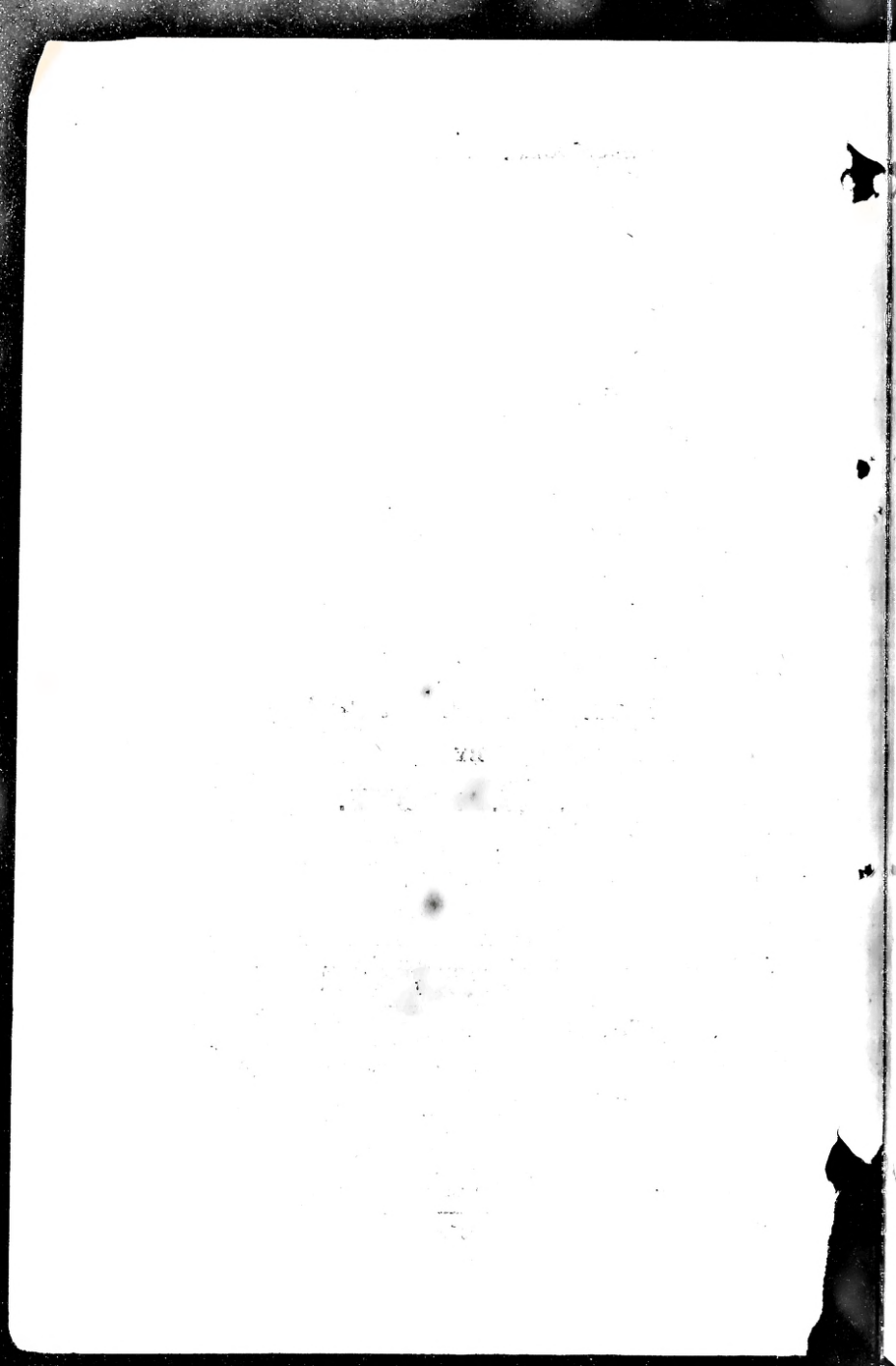
GUILTY
OR
NOT GUILTY?

AN OPEN LETTER
TO
The Rev. Dr. R. A. TORREY,
BY
G. W. FOOTE.

PRINTED FOR FREE DISTRIBUTION.

THE PIONEER PRESS, 2 NEWCASTLE STREET, LONDON, E.C.

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GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY?

AN OPEN LETTER

TO

DR. R. A. TORREY.

SIR,—

I write you this open letter as the most convenient and effective way of addressing you and others at the same time. The subject it deals with is a matter of public interest and importance. You have therefore no reason to complain of injustice or incivility. I desire to be just to you as well as to the truth—and to the truth as well as to you; and if I have occasion to express myself severely I shall keep well within the limits of allowable language.

To come to the point then. It is widely known that a pamphlet of mine, bearing the title of *Dr. Torrey and the Infidels*, was distributed outside the Albert Hall on the opening night of your Mission there, and continuously afterwards. You have yourself admitted that this pamphlet was distributed in tens of thousands. It was also reprinted in the *Clarion*, whose editor, Mr. Robert Blatchford, thought he was performing a public duty in promoting its circulation. I should add that it was printed for "free distribution," my friends having subscribed the means for that purpose. You will thus understand—or at least others will—that there was a principle involved in its publication and distribution.

In that pamphlet I endeavored, and I believe successfully, to vindicate the characters of Thomas Paine and Colonel Ingersoll against your slanderous aspersions. You had represented Paine as having taken away another man's wife and lived with her. I proved that this was an absolute falsehood. You had represented Ingersoll as having assisted in the dissemination of obscene literature in America. I also proved that this was an absolute falsehood.

You entered into conversation with some of those who gave their evenings to distribute my pamphlet outside the Albert Hall. This happened on several occasions. When they asked you why you did not substantiate or withdraw your charges against Paine and Ingersoll you gave various replies. You said that you had something better to do; you said that my pamphlet would do you no harm and you did not care; you also said that it was anonymous, and that anonymous attacks were beneath your notice. This last statement you repeated in letters that came under my own observation. I therefore thought it advisable to send you the following letter, which I registered for security, and with which I enclosed a copy of my pamphlet for the same reason:—

" 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street,
London, E.C.,
March 27, 1905.

DEAR SIR,—

I understand that you are professing ignorance as to who is the author of the pamphlet " Dr. Torrey and the Infidels," of which thousands of copies have been distributed outside the Albert Hall. Indeed, I have seen letters by you stating that this pamphlet is anonymous. I have therefore to draw your attention to the fact that every copy of the pamphlet contains an announcement at the end that it was written by the editor of the *Freethinker*. This is a perfectly sufficient identification of the author. The editor of the *Freethinker* is a well-known person, and his name appears in bold letters right under the title in every copy of every issue of that paper. However, in order to destroy that loophole of escape, I hereby inform you that I am the

editor of the *Freethinker*, that I am the author of the pamphlet "Dr. Torrey and the Infidels," and that I am determined to continue my public exposure of your infamous libels on Thomas Paine and Colonel Ingersoll until you have the manliness to retract them as openly as you made them.

Yours truly,

Dr. R. A. Torrey,
66 Sinclair-road, W.

G. W. FOOTE."

This letter elicited from you the following reply, in which—as I want it to be noted, even now—you do not challenge any specific allegation in my pamphlet:—

"66 Sinclair-road, London, W.,
March 28, 1905.

Mr. G. W. Foote,
2 Newcastle-street,
Farringdon-street, E.C.

DEAR SIR,—

Yours of March 27 received. You say, "I understand that you are professing ignorance as to who is the author of the pamphlet on 'Dr. Torrey and the Infidels.'" In reply would say, I am not professing any ignorance of the kind. I have referred to the pamphlet as "anonymous," and so it is. After the pamphlet was handed me I looked at the front to see if the name of the author was given, and it was not. Then I looked at the end, and the name was not given there. Thereupon I treated it with the same silent contempt that I do all anonymous pamphlets and letters. I had not noticed the little note at the bottom. I am not in the habit of reading advertisements at the end of anonymous pamphlets; but even since you have called my attention to this advertisement of your paper, this does not alter the essential fact at all. The name of the author is not given in this advertisement. I think you are aware that it is not the usual custom of authors of pamphlets and books to declare their authorship by advertisements, and then not to declare it by name. I suppose a great majority of those to whom the pamphlet was given at the Albert Hall neither know nor care who the editor of the *Freethinker* is. I take it for granted that you know the meaning of the word "anonymous," and the pamphlet is anonymous.

Now as to the other matter in your letter, permit me to say that as soon as you or any one else will show me anything that I have said in any of my books, in any of my lectures as correctly reported, or in any authentic letter regarding Mr. Thomas Paine or Col. Ingersoll that is not strictly true, I shall be more than glad to retract it. But I am not likely to retract anything that I have not said, or to retract anything that I have said that is true. I am not willing to be held responsible for incorrect reports in papers of what I have said, nor any mere hearsay reports which are always inaccurate, nor am I willing to be held responsible for deliberate falsifications of my statements.

Sincerely yours,
R. A. TORREY."

To this letter of yours I returned the following answer:—

"2 Newcastle-street, E.C.,
April 4, 1905.

DEAR SIR,—

Yours of March 28, apparently posted later, reached me safely, and I should have given it an earlier reply if I had not seen by the newspapers that several important personages, including the Queen and yourself, were taking a holiday on the Continent.

You use a great many words to say very little. I infer rather than perceive from your letter that, in your opinion, a drama by the author of *Hamlet*, a poem by the author of *Paradise Lost*, or a novel by the author of *David Copperfield*, would be anonymous. Etymologically you may be right, but when such hair-splitting involves a pretence of ignorance, and an evasion of responsibility, it is more worthy of a prisoner in the dock than of a public teacher of religion and morality. However, I will take care that this hole of escape shall be closed up. Further impressions of my pamphlet shall state, not only that it is written by the editor of the *Freethinker*, but that the name of the editor is G. W. Foote.

You say that the majority of your auditors who saw my pamphlet did not know who was the editor of the *Freethinker*. Do you really believe this?

The last part of your letter is the unworthiest of all. You must know what you have said about Paine and

Ingersoll, and if you were a straightforward person you would either admit what you did say or deny what you did not say. Instead of doing this, you stand absolutely on the defensive, like a person indicted for a criminal offence.

You want to know what you have said about Paine or Ingersoll that is "not strictly true." I have told you in my pamphlet. I shall not waste time in telling you again. My object now is to place the pamphlet in as many hands as possible.

When you come to your senses, which will probably be when your own people are tired of your perpetual evasions; when you lead the procession to your own penitent form, and confess your "sin" and resolve to make atonement; I shall rejoice to know that the revivalist is revived, and that the soul of the soul-saver has found its "Resurrection."

Yours truly,

Dr. R. A. Torrey,
66 Sinclair-road, W.

G. W. FOOTE."

You know perfectly well, sir, why I did not put my name on the title-page of the pamphlet. Had I done so I should have defeated my object. When you told your friends inside the Albert Hall, with a meaning smile, that they "knew what to do" with "those pamphlets," you only indicated what I had foreseen. I wished to put the pamphlet into the hands of your auditors, and I wished it to be read. For that reason I kept my name off the front. But I also wished its authorship to be known. For that reason I had the announcement made at the end that it was written by the Editor of the *Freethinker*. It was honest information for those who had read the pamphlet through, and for those who had not it was unnecessary.

My pamphlet has been distributed in tens of thousands all over Great Britain as well as at your Mission meetings, and I have not heard of anyone being in doubt as to its authorship. You yourself were not in doubt. You cleverly avoided saying that you were. But even if your ignorance had been so phenomenal you could easily have enquired of your

English friends, and you would soon have ascertained my identity. The *Freethinker* is a paper that everybody affects not to know, and that everybody knows. Men who have suffered a long imprisonment for their principles are not so numerous in England that any one of them can easily be forgotten. It may be different in America. I do not know. But I have not heard that *you* ever suffered for *your* convictions, and I do not suppose I shall live to see your name in any genuine list of martyrs.

So much for the "anonymous" character of my pamphlet, and the technical excuse you pleaded for not answering it. That excuse was utterly unworthy of a public teacher, one who sets himself up to save other people's souls, and incidentally to elevate their morals. This is not simply my opinion. It is the opinion of many of your Christian friends. I happen to know that some of them have expostulated with you on your embarrassing silence. You begin to feel that you are in a tighter corner than you thought. You have too much pride to admit a mistake, and not enough honesty to admit a more serious offence. Your only possible line of escape, therefore, is to suggest—for you are too astute to *assert*—that you never uttered those slanders against Paine and Ingersoll. And this is the line you are taking.

Now I have proved that what I alleged you said about Paine and Ingersoll was flagrantly false. I will now prove that you said it. And the fact that this task is forced upon me will enable candid men, even of your own party, to understand the kind of person you are.

To begin with I beg to observe that, so far from the libels on Paine and Ingersoll being *unlike* you, as I hear you are suggesting, they bear all the marks of your parentage. Specific libels are really no worse than general libels—although they may prove more dangerous. You denied, during your Dublin mission, as reported in the *Irish Times*, that an "infidel" could "remain an honest one." You declared

that "infidelity and whisky went together," and that the "stronghold of infidelity" was "the public-house, the racecourse, the gambling-hell, and the brothel." This is general slander, it is true; but a general slander is a slander by presumption against everyone in the category who is not expressly exempted. You may reply, as I am told you do reply, that you will not be responsible for "unauthorised" reports of your addresses in the newspapers. This is a very convenient policy when you are challenged. But it is easy to checkmate you in this instance; for in your article in the *Daily Chronicle*, on the eve of your London mission, you wrote that "Infidelity and immorality are Siamese twins. They always exist and always grow and always fatten together." This covers by implication everything in the *Irish Times* report of your speech—and as much more of the same kind as your own charitable imagination could possibly invent. I must point out, also, that I quoted in my pamphlet a passage from your *Hard Problems of Scripture* in which you stated that "The unclean classes, both men and women, were devoted admirers of Colonel Ingersoll" and that they "did frequent his lectures." This could only mean that Ingersoll's audiences were largely composed of drunkards, prostitutes, and whoremongers. And it passes my comprehension how you could say this, and then expect anyone to believe that the slanders I confuted as to Paine and Ingersoll are so *unlike* you. They are *perfectly* like you; they smell and taste of their natural source. And the source is unique. You alone, I believe, amongst men of any considerable position in the Christian world, are capable of treating the public to such delicacies.

So much for the presumption, and now for the precise evidence of your guilt.

I lay no stress upon the fact that your reflections on the characters of Paine and Ingersoll were reported to me by several correspondents in different places. Your cue is to dispute everything at a venture, and to take the chance of what can be

proved, and you are prepared to deny everything that would not be considered strict evidence in a court of law. I shall therefore go at once to a particular speech of yours at Liverpool in the latter part of 1903, and to a correspondence which gathered round it.

Mr. W. Cain, of Liverpool, wrote me the following letter, which I published in the *Freethinker* of October 11, 1903 (and here let me say, to prevent misconceptions, that my paper is dated for Sunday, but is printed on Wednesday, and is on sale all over the country on Thursday) :—

“SIR,—Dr. Torrey, in his course of evangelistic entertainments in this city, included two addresses to business men, on the causes and cure of “infidelity.”

I attended at the City Hall, Eberle-street, on Tuesday and Wednesday last to hear the Yankee savior's views on this subject, and learned that almost all cases of ‘infidelity’ ought to be attributed to one at least of the following five causes, viz., misrepresentation (either of biblical teaching and interpretation, or of true Christianity by the inconsistent conduct of professed Christians), ignorance of the Bible, conceit, sin, resistance to the spirit of God.

On Tuesday evening I wrote to Dr. Torrey a letter, in which I gave the names of several men whose life records I thought would justify us in seeking elsewhere than in the above list for an explanation of their ‘infidelity.’ The names were—John Morley, Charles Bradlaugh, Professor Haeckel, Charles Darwin, Professor Huxley, Colonel Ingersoll, and Thomas Paine.

On Wednesday Dr. Torrey read out my letter, and replying to it, made reference first to Haeckel, whose writings, he said, indicated the Professor's complete ignorance of the Bible. Then of Darwin, he stated that this great man had declared that at one time he resisted the spirit of God lest it should interfere with his scientific labors. Huxley, we were told, was not remarkable for his candor, as anyone reading his works would discover. Ingersoll also, was found guilty of complete ignorance of the Bible, whilst Thomas Paine, according to the wonderful Doctor, ‘ran away to Paris with another man's wife, and eventually died in America, leaving her deprived of all hope.’

It is significant that the names of Bradlaugh and Morley were passed over without any remark, perhaps because their reputations are too popularly known in England to be tampered with.

Proceeding with his lecture Dr. Torrey made a further statement regarding Ingersoll, who, he said, had been charged with assisting in the dissemination of obscene literature in America, and having instituted an action for libel, wished the case to be tried in private. On his request being refused, said Dr. Torrey, Ingersoll withdrew the case.

It would be a great pleasure and advantage to myself, and doubtless to others, to read any remarks you may make upon these utterances, throughout the whole of which no instance was quoted, nor reference to any authority given. Simply bald statement and nothing else. Of the story of Ingersoll and the libel case, will you state the true facts of the case, if such there was?

Perhaps you will devote at least a good substantial 'acid drop' to this matter.

WILLIAM CAIN."

To this letter from Mr. Cain I appended an editorial note, advising him to write you another letter and ask you for *particulars*. Mr. Cain took my advice, and received the following letter from you, which I published in the *Freethinker* of November 1, with a long criticism from my own pen:—

" Mather's Hotel, Dundee,
October 14, 1903.

Mr. Wm. Cain,
Liverpool.

DEAR SIR:—

Your note of October 8 at hand, and also the clipping sent me from another source containing your letter to the 'Free Thinker.' You have quoted me very inaccurately in this letter, in regard to what I said about Ingersoll, about Payne, and about Darwin. I presume this misquotation was unintentional, but it allows a loophole for one to deny the statement. However, the main facts stand. Does the editor of 'The Free Thinker' deny that Thomas Payne took another man's wife with him to France and lived with her? If this commonly believed outrageous action of Thomas

Payne's is not correct history, it should be known and I certainly for one should be glad to know it, for I believe in giving any man his due. I did not suppose that infidels denied the conduct of Thomas Payne. In regard to the statement about Robert Ingersoll, the alleged libellous statements about him were made by Dr. A. C. Dixon at that time of Brooklyn, now of Boston. Dr. Dixon did not show any disposition to take back his statements when Col. Ingersoll brought action against him for libel; on the contrary, he prepared to defend his statements in court then, had secured considerable evidence to do it, and Col. Ingersoll requested that the trial might be in private, but to this Dr. Dixon would not assent and the action was withdrawn. I am surprised that the editor of the "Truth Seeker" did not know this, as it is a matter of common knowledge in America. I am writing to America by this mail for more details concerning the matter.

I am somewhat surprised at the difference of tone toward me that you take in your letter to me and in the public letter that you sent to the editor of the "Free Thinker."

Sincerely yours,

R. A. TORREY."

In the *Freethinker* of December 6, 1903, there was an editorial paragraph referring to another letter you had written to Mr. Cain, in which you said that you had "received the facts" from America, but that you would not use them "damaging as they were to Colonel Ingersoll" because you had "no desire to blacken his reputation, even though it could be justly done." You added that you were "concerned with principles, not with men." Which led me to ask why you advanced grave charges against leading Freethinkers, and only made "insolent faces and cowardly retreats" when "asked for proof."

Now I ask, in the name of common sense, if it can be imagined that all that correspondence and comment, printed in a public journal eighteen months ago, was *invented*? Is human cleverness equal to such an amazing feat? How could Mr. Cain know that you were staying at Mather's Hotel in Dundee? How could he forge letters bearing the marks

of your composition in every sentence? How could they be printed in my paper, which is watched with cat-like vigilance by its enemies, without provoking a prompt denial?

I cannot produce the original of your letter to Mr. Cain dated October 14, 1903. It was type-written and it went up into the composing room as copy. But I still have the original of your last letter to Mr. Cain, which was not printed in the *Freethinker*, but only referred to; and this letter proves the correspondence and establishes its character. I have also the originals of a correspondence you had with Mr. James, of Liverpool, at the very same time; and in your part of it you refer to your correspondence with Mr. Cain, and repeat in almost identical words your slander against Thomas Paine.

Your last letter to Mr. Cain ran as follows:—

“ Grand Hotel, Aytoun-street,
Manchester,

Mr. Wm. Cain, November 19, 1903.
Wavertree, Liverpool.

DEAR SIR,—

Yours of November 15th received. In reply would say I have not seen the article in the ‘Free Thinker’ I am not a regular reader of the ‘Free Thinker.’ I have a better use for my time. Quite likely I should not have replied to it if I had seen it, for it is absolutely impossible to keep up with all the attacks that are made upon a public man. If I should do this, I could do nothing else, for everywhere I go these attacks are made. I have a large and important correspondence for people who are sincere seekers after truth. I try to answer their letters as far as possible but in order to do that, it puts me at the expense of hiring someone to do this work. If one answers a letter of this kind, it leads to endless discussion. Your own correspondence is a case in point. You wrote me apparently an innocent letter, which I thought I ought to answer. It was you who drove me into making those personal statements. I seek to avoid them, and you see what a correspondence it has involved at a tremendous cost of time.

I have received the facts about the Ingersoll case and have them in my possession, but as damaging as they

are to Col. Ingersoll I have no time to spend in endless discussion over them. I have no desire to blacken his reputation, even though it could be justly done. I am concerned with principles not with men. It was your letter that forced the personal statement.

Sincerely yours,

R. A. TORREY."

This letter has your personality written all over it. You talk of being *attacked* when you are brought to book for *your own* attacks on others; you doubt Mr. Cain's being an "innocent letter" because he had not warned you that he was a Freethinker; and you speak of being "forced" into personalities. You were evidently feeling uneasy. But the main point is that you admit having made "those personal statements." And what were they but the libels on Paine and Ingersoll? Libels, by the way, which you did not originate; for they had done duty in the gutter-walks of "Christian Evidence" long before you picked them out for your own campaign.

I come now to your letters to Mr. James. Much in them has no reference to this controversy. I therefore give only pertinent extracts. In your letter dated October 14, 1903, from Mather's Hotel, Dundee, you write:—

"Yours of October 8th received. Please let me thank you for the clipping from the 'Free Thinker' that you have sent me. It has been useful to me. Does the Editor of the 'Free Thinker' mean to deny that Thomas Payne went with another man's wife to France and lived with her? Mr. Cain's quotations of what I said were not accurate, but if this part of the statement about Thomas Payne is not true, I should like to know it. I supposed that this was admitted as a fact of commonly known history."

In your next letter to Mr. James, dated October 20, 1903, also from Mather's Hotel, Dundee, you say something of still greater importance, while again referring to your correspondence with Mr. Cain:—

In regard to Thomas Paine's name being misspelled, I am not responsible for the spelling in my letters. A

person that has oftentimes a hundred letters a day cannot reply to them with his own hand, but has to dictate replies.

I do not think yet that his character has been cleared. If it can be cleared, I certainly for one, should be glad, for I like to see any man have justice done him. You ask why I refer to this moral obloquy anyway. Simply because a direct question was asked me by Mr. Cain, which I could not honorably dodge in answering. I dislike these personalities, but the question was asked and I had to answer it, which I did from the facts of history as commonly believed in spite of admirers and special pleaders to blot the course of recorded history. I think a man's character has a good deal of bearing upon his judgment of the Bible. Tom Paine attacks the Bible on account of its immoralities. If he is indulging in immoralities, which he says are justified by the Bible, he certainly is playing the part of a hypocrite and his judgment is not of much account. You ask, 'Why should you persist in attributing wickedness to your antagonists?' For the simple reason, in practical experience by the confessions of countless men, I have found that immorality lay at the basis of their infidelity and that when they give up their immorality, they get that clear vision of truth that enabled them to see there is a God and that the Bible is His Word."

Here you defend the wisdom of the very "personalities" you "dislike." You explain *why* you attacked the character of Thomas Paine. We have thus the fact and the justification—both from your own hand.

Your letters to Mr. James, which can all be produced, refer to your correspondence with Mr. Cain. They also contain the very libel on Thomas Paine which you uttered in your first letter to Mr. Cain, after having uttered it at a public meeting in Liverpool. Your guilt with respect to Thomas Paine is thus demonstrated.

Your second letter to Mr. Cain, which can also be produced, clearly shows that you had been attacking the character of Colonel Ingersoll; and your statement that you had "received the facts about the Ingersoll case" proves the authenticity of the first

letter in which you said that you were "writing to America by this mail for more details concerning the matter." Thus your guilt with respect to Ingersoll is also demonstrated.

Your letters to Mr. Cain and to Mr. James further show that you were quite aware of what was appearing in the *Freethinker*. And when you said, in the second of the above letters to Mr. James, that you did "not think yet that his [Paine's] character had been cleared" you were obviously referring to my vindication of Paine in the *Freethinker*, to which Mr. James had drawn your attention.

These patent facts and inevitable conclusions, together with your present equivocal attempts at repudiation, make you look odious as a libeller and contemptible as a coward. I say this with sorrow as well as disgust, for I do not like to think ill of a fellow being, I have no delight in any man's humiliation, and I would rather hear of your repentance even at this late hour than see you continue in your evil courses. You probably entered upon them as sinners usually do, little by little, a step at a time. You found that stories about "wicked infidels" tickled the palate of your orthodox audiences, and you went on from bad to worse, until ease and impunity made you reckless. You did not count on a day of reckoning. You overlooked the possibility of being challenged. You forgot, in defiling the graves of dead Freethinkers, that a living one might stride in and arrest you. I have done that. If I have nothing else I have love for the heroes you calumniated. And you who libelled them are but as a grain of sand which the wind lifts to the top of a pyramid.

Yours, etc.,

2 Newcastle-street,
London, E. C.,
May 29, 1905.

G. W. FOOTE.