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ORATION

ON

VOLTAIRE

BY

COLONEL R. G. INGERSOLL.

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ON Saturday evening, October 8, Colonel R. G. Ingersoll delivered his new lecture on "Voltaire" before the Chicago Press Club, the audience numbering six thousand persons. The delivery of the lecture occupied two hours and a half, and from beginning to end the orator held the attention of the audience completely, and was most vociferously cheered throughout.

## Oration on Voltaire.

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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—The infidels of one age have often been the aureoled saints of the next. The destroyers of the old are the creators of the new. (Applause.)

As time sweeps on, the old passes away and the new in its turn becomes old. There is in the intellectual world, as in the physical, decay and growth, and ever by the grave of buried age stand youth and joy. (Applause.)

The history of intellectual progress is written in the lives of infidels. Political rights have been preserved by traitors; liberty of mind by heretics. (Applause.)

To attack the king was treason; to dispute the priest was blasphemy. For many centuries the sword and the cross were allies. Together they attacked the rights of man. They defended each other. The throne and the altar were twins—two vultures from the same egg. (Applause.)

James I. said, "No Bishop, no King." He might have added, No cross, no crown. The king owned the bodies of men; the priest the souls. One lived on taxes collected by force, the other on alms collected by fear. Both robbers—both beggars.

These robbers and these beggars controlled two worlds. The king made laws, the priest made creeds. Both obtained their authority from God; both were the agents of the infinite. With bowed backs the people carried the burdens of the one, and with Wonder's open mouth received the dogmas of the other. If the people aspired to be free, they were crushed by the king; and every priest was a Herod who slaughtered the children of the brain. (Applause)

The king ruled by force, the priest by fear, and each supported the other. The king said to the people, "God made you peasants, and he made me to be king; he made you to labor and me to enjoy; he made rags and hovels for you, robes and palaces for me. He made you to obey, and me to command. Such is the justice of God." And the priest said, "God made you ignorant and vile; he made me holy and wise. You are the sheep and I am the shepherd; your fleeces belong to me. If you do not obey me here, God will punish you now and torment you for ever in another world. Such is the mercy of God. You must not reason. Reason is a rebel. You must not contradict; contradiction is born of egotism. You must believe. 'He that hath ears to ear, let him hear.' Heaven is a question of ears." (Laughter and applause.)

Fortunately for us, there have been traitors and there have been heretics, blasphemers, thinkers, investigators, lovers of liberty, men of genius, who have given their lives to better the condition of their fellow-men.

It may be well enough here to ask the question, "What is greatness?" A great man adds to the sum of knowledge, extends the horizon of thought, releases souls from the Bastille of fear, crosses unknown and mysterious seas, gives new islands and new continents to the domain of thought, new constellations to the firmament of mind. A great man does not seek applause or place; he seeks for truth; he seeks the road to happiness, and what he ascertains he gives to others. (Applause.)

A great man throws pearls before swine, and the swine are sometimes changed to men. (Applause.) If the great men had always kept their pearls, vast multitudes would be barbarians now. (Applause.)

A great man is a torch in the darkness, a beacon in superstition's night, an inspiration and a prophecy. Greatness is

not the gift of majorities; it cannot be thrust upon any man; men cannot give it to another; they can give place and power, but not greatness. The place does not make the man nor the sceptre the king. Greatness is from within. (Applause.)

The great men are the heroes who have freed the bodies of men; they are the philosophers and thinkers who have given liberty to the soul; they are the poets who have transfigured the common, and filled the lives of many millions with love and song. (Great applause.) They are the artists who have covered the bare walls of weary life with triumphs of genius. They are the heroes who have slain the monsters of ignorance and fear, who have outgazed the Gorgon and driven the cruel gods from their thrones. They are the inventors, the discoverers, the great mechanics, the kings of the useful who have civilised this world. (Applause.)

At the head of this heroic army—foremost of all—stands Voltaire, whose memory we are honoring to-night. (Great applause.) Voltaire! A name that excites the admiration of men, the malignity of priests. Pronounce that name in the presence of a clergyman, and you will find that you have made a declaration of war. Pronounce that name, and from the face of the priest the mask of meekness will fall, and from the mouth of forgiveness will pour a Niagara of vituperation and calumny. And yet Voltaire was the greatest man of his century, and did more for the human race than any other of the sons of men.

VOLTAIRE COMES TO "THIS GREAT STAGE OF FOOLS."

On Sunday, Nov. 21, 1694, a babe was born—a babe exceedingly frail, whose breath hesitated about remaining. This babe became the greatest man of the eighteenth century. When Voltaire came to "this great stage of fools," his country had been Christianised—not civilised—for about fourteen hundred years. For a thousand years the religion of

peace and goodwill had been supreme. The laws had been given by Christian kings and sanctioned by "wise and holy men." (Laughter.)

Under the benign reign of universal love, every court had its chamber of torture, and every priest relied on the thumb-screw and rack. (Laughter and applause.) Such had been the success of the blessed gospel that every science was an outcast. To speak your honest thoughts, to teach your fellow men, to investigate for yourself, to seek the truth—these were all crimes; and the "Holy Mother Church" pursued the criminals with sword and flame. (Great applause.)

The believers in a God of love—an infinite father—punished hundreds of offences with torture and death. Suspected persons were tortured to make them confess. Convicted persons were tortured to make them give the names of their accomplices. Under the leadership of the Church, cruelty had become the only reforming power. In this blessed year 1694 all authors were at the mercy of king and priest. The most of them were cast into prisons, impoverished by fines and costs, exiled or executed. The little time that hangmen could snatch from professional duties was occupied in burning books. (Laughter and applause.) The courts of justice were traps in which the innocent were caught. The judges were almost as malicious and cruel as though they had been bishops or saints. There was no trial by jury, and the rules of evidence allowed the conviction of the supposed criminal by the proof of suspicion or hearsay. The witnesses, being liable to be tortured, generally told what the judges wished to hear. (Laughter.)

#### ALMOST UNIVERSAL CORRUPTION.

When Voltaire was born, the Church ruled and owned France. It was a period of almost universal corruption. The priests were mostly libertines, the judges cruel and venal.

The royal palace was a house of prostitution. The nobles were heartless, arrogant, proud, and cruel to the last degree. The common people were treated as beasts. It took the Church a thousand years to bring about this happy condition of things. (Applause and laughter.)

The seeds of the Revolution were being scattered unconsciously by every noble and by every priest. They were germinating slowly in the hearts of the wretched; they were being watered by the tears of agony; blows began to bear interest. There was a faint longing for blood. Workmen, blackened by the sun, bowed by labor, deformed by want, looked at the white throats of scornful ladies and thought about cutting them. In those days, witnesses were cross-examined with instruments of torture; the Church was the arsenal of superstition; miracles, relics, angels and devils were as common as lies.

Voltaire was of the people. In the language of that day, he had no ancestors. His real name was François Marie Arouet. His mother was Marguerite d'Aumard. This mother died when he was seven years of age. He had an elder brother, Armand, who was a devotee, very religious, and exceedingly disagreeable. This elder brother used to present offerings to the Church, hoping to make amends for the unbelief of his brother. So far as we know, none of his ancestors were literary people. The Arouets had never written a line. The Abbé de Chaulieu was his godfather, and, although an abbé, was a Deist who cared nothing about his religion except in connection with his salary. (Laughter.) Voltaire's father wanted to make a lawyer of him, but he had no taste for law. At the age of ten he entered the College of Louis le Grand. This was a Jesuit school, and here he remained for seven years, leaving at seventeen, and never attending any other school. According to Voltaire,

he learned nothing at this school but a little Greek, a good deal of Latin, and a vast amount of nonsense.

#### TORTURE BEHIND THE CREED.

In this College of Louis le Grand they did not teach geography, history, mathematics, or any science. This was a Catholic institution, controlled by the Jesuits. In that day the religion was defended, was protected, or supported by the State. Behind the entire creed was the bayonet, the axe, the wheel, the faggot, and the torture-chamber. While Voltaire was attending the College of Louis le Grand, the soldiers of the king were hunting Protestants in the mountains of Cevennes for magistrates to hang on gibbets, to put to torture, to break on the wheel, or to burn at the stake.

There is but one use for law, but one excuse for government—the preservation of liberty, to give to each man his own; to secure to the farmer what he produces from the soil, to the mechanic what he invents and makes, to the artist what he creates, to the thinker the right to express his thoughts. Liberty is the breath of progress. In France the people were the sport of a king's caprice. Everywhere was the shadow of the Bastille. It fell upon the sunniest field, upon the happiest home. With the king walked the headsmen, and back of the throne was the torture-chamber. The Church appealed to the rack; faith relied on the faggot. Science was an outcast, and philosophy, so-called, was the pander of superstition. Nobles and priests were sacred; peasants were vermin. Idleness sat at the banquet, and industry gathered the crusts and crumbs. (Applause.)

At seventeen Voltaire determined to devote his life to literature. The father said, speaking of his two sons Armand and François: "I have a pair of fools for sons, one in verse, the other in prose." (Laughter and applause.) In 1713, Voltaire in a small way became a diplomat. He went to the

Hague attached to the French Minister. There he fell in love. The girl's mother objected. Voltaire sent his clothes to the young lady that she might visit him. Everything was discovered and he was dismissed. To this girl he wrote a letter, and in it you will find the key-note of Voltaire :

“Do not expose yourself to the fury of your mother. You know what she is capable of. You have experienced it too well. Dissemble; it is your only chance. Tell her that you have forgotten me, that you hate me. Then, after telling her, love me all the more.”

On account of this episode, Voltaire was formally disinherited by his father, who procured an order of arrest and gave his son the choice of going to prison or beyond the seas. Voltaire finally consented to become a lawyer, and says : “I have already been a week at work in the office of a solicitor, learning the trade of a pettifogger.” (Laughter.) About this time he competed for a prize, writing a poem on the king's generosity in building the new choir in the Cathedral of Notre Dame. He did not win it. After being with the solicitor but a little while, he learnt to hate the law. He began to write poetry and the outlines of tragedy. Great questions were then agitating the public mind—questions that throw a flood of light upon this epoch.

#### IN PRISON NOT KNOWING WHY.

Louis XIV. having died, the Regent took possession, and then the prisons were opened. The Regent called for a list of all persons then in the prisons sent there at the will of the king, and he found that, as to many prisoners, nobody knew any cause why they had been in prison. They had been forgotten. Many of the prisoners did not know themselves, and could not guess why they had been arrested. One Italian had been in the Bastille thirty-three years without ever knowing why. On his arrival in Paris thirty-three years before, he was

arrested and sent to prison. He had grown old. He had survived his family and friends. When the rest were liberated, he asked to remain where he was, and lived there the rest of his life. The old prisoners were pardoned, but in a little while their places were taken by new ones. At this time Voltaire was not interested in the great world—knew very little of religion or of government. He was busy writing poetry, busy thinking of comedies and tragedies. He was full of life. All his fancies were winged like moths. He was charged with having written some cutting epigrams. He was exiled to Tulle, three hundred miles away. From this place he wrote in the true vein: "I am at a chateau, a place that would be the most agreeable in the world if I had not been exiled to it, and where there is nothing wanting to my perfect happiness except the liberty of leaving. It would be delicious to remain if I only were allowed to go." At last the exile was allowed to return. Again he was arrested; this time sent to the Bastille, where he remained for nearly a year. While in prison he changed his name from François Marie Arouet to Voltaire, and by that name he has since been known. Voltaire began to think, to doubt, to inquire. He studied the history of the Church and of the creed. He found that the religion of his time rested on the inspiration of the scriptures—the infallibility of the Church—the dreams of insane hermits—the absurdities of the fathers—the mistakes and falsehoods of saints—the hysteria of nuns—the cunning of priests and the stupidity of the people. He found that the Emperor Constantine, who lifted Christianity into power, murdered his wife Fausta and his eldest son Crispus the same year that he convened the Council of Nice to decide whether Christ was a man or the son of God. The Council decided in the year 325, that Christ was consubstantial with the Father. He found that the Church was indebted to a husband who assassinated his wife—a father who murdered

his son—for settling the vexed question of the divinity of the Savior. He found that Theodosius called a council at Constantinople in 381 by which it was decided that the Holy Ghost proceeded from the Father—that Theodosius, the younger, assembled a council at Ephesus in 431 that declared the Virgin Mary to be the mother of God—that the Emperor Marcian called another council at Chalcedon in 451 that decided that Christ had two wills—that Pognatius called another in 680, that declared that Christ had two natures to go with his two wills—and that in 1274, at the Council of Lyons, the important fact was found that the Holy Ghost “proceeded” not only from the Father, but also from the Son at the same time. (Laughter and applause.)

WHAT THE GREAT FRENCHMAN MOCKED.

So Voltaire has been called a mocker! What did he mock? He mocked kings that were unjust; kings who cared nothing for the sufferings of their subjects. He mocked the titled fools of his day. He mocked the corruption of courts; the meanness, the tyranny, and the brutality of judges. He mocked the absurd and cruel laws, the barbarous customs. He mocked popes and cardinals, bishops and priests, and all the hypocrites on the earth. He mocked historians who filled their books with lies, and philosophers who defended superstition. He mocked the haters of liberty, the persecutors of their fellow men. He mocked the arrogance, the cruelty, the impudence, and the unspeakable baseness of his time. (Applause.)

He has been blamed because he used the weapon of ridicule. Hypocrisy has always hated laughter, and always will. Absurdity detests humor and stupidity despises wit. Voltaire was the master of ridicule. He ridiculed the absurd, the impossible. He ridiculed the mythologies and the miracles, the stupid lives and lies of saints. He found pretence and

mendacity crowned by credulity. He found the ignorant many controlled by the cunning and cruel few. He found the historian, saturated with superstition, filling his volumes with the details of the impossible, and he found the scientists satisfied with "they say." (Laughter.) Voltaire had the instinct of the probable. He knew the law of average; the sea level; he had the idea of proportion, and so he ridiculed the mental monstrosities—the *non sequiturs*—of his day. Aristotle said women had more teeth than men. This was repeated again and again by the Catholic scientists of the eighteenth century. Voltaire counted the teeth. The rest were satisfied with "they say." (Laughter.)

THE APOSTLE OF COMMON SENSE.

We may, however, get an idea of the condition of France from the fact that Voltaire regarded England as the land of liberty. While he was in England he saw the body of Sir Isaac Newton deposited in Westminster Abbey. He read the works of this great man and afterwards gave to France the philosophy of this great Englishman. (Applause.) Voltaire was the apostle of common sense. He knew that there could have been no primitive or first language from which all human languages had been formed. He knew that every language had been influenced by the surroundings of the people. He knew that the language of snow and ice was not the language of palm and flower. (Applause.) He knew also that there had been no miracle in language. He knew it was impossible that the story of the Tower of Babel should be true. That everything in the whole world should be natural. He was the enemy of alchemy, not only in language but in science. One passage from him is enough to show his philosophy in this regard. He says: "To transmute iron into gold two things are necessary. First, the annihilation of iron; second, the creation of gold." Voltaire was a man of

humor, of good nature, of cheerfulness. He despised with all his heart the philosophy of Calvin, the creed of the sombre, of the severe, of the unnatural. He pitied those who needed the aid of religion to be honest, to be cheerful. He had the courage to enjoy the present and the philosophy to bear what the future might bring. And yet for more than a hundred and fifty years the Christian world has fought this man and has maligned his memory. In every Christian pulpit his name has been pronounced with scorn, and every pulpit has been an arsenal of slander. He is one man of whom no orthodox minister has ever told the truth. He has been denounced equally by Catholics and Protestants.

Priests and ministers, bishops and exhorters, presiding elders and popes have filled the world with slanders, with calumnies about Voltaire. I am amazed that ministers will not or cannot tell the truth about an enemy of the church. As a matter of fact, for more than one thousand years almost every pulpit has been a mint in which slanders were coined.

#### FILLED EUROPE WITH HIS THOUGHTS.

For many years this restless man filled Europe with the products of his brain. Essays, epigrams, epics, comedies, tragedies, histories, poems, novels, representing every phase and every faculty of the human mind. At the same time engrossed in business, full of speculation, making money like a millionaire, busy with the gossip of courts, and even with scandals of priests. At the same time alive to all the discoveries of science and the theories of philosophers, and in this babel never forgetting for a moment to assail the monster of superstition. Sleeping and waking he hated the Church. With the eyes of Argus he watched, and with the arms of Briareus he struck. For sixty years he waged continuous and unrelenting war, sometimes in the open field, sometimes striking from the hedges of opportunity, taking care during

all this time to remain independent of all men. He was in the highest sense successful. He lived like a prince, became one of the powers of Europe, and in him, for the first time, literature was crowned. (Applause.) Voltaire, in spite of his surroundings, in spite of almost universal tyranny and oppression, was a believer in God and in what he was pleased to call the religion of nature. He attacked the creed of his time because it was dishonorable to his God. He thought of the Deity as a father, as the fountain of justice, intelligence, and mercy, and the creed of the Catholic Church made him a monster of cruelty and stupidity. He attacked the Bible with all the weapons at his command. He assailed its geology, its astronomy, its idea of justice, its laws and customs, its absurd and useless miracles, its foolish wonders, its ignorance on all subjects, its insane prophecies, its cruel threats, and its extravagant promises. At the same time he praised the God of nature, the God who gives us rain and light, and food and flowers, and health and happiness—he who fills the world with youth and beauty. (Applause.)

LISBON EARTHQUAKE CHANGES VOLTAIRE.

In 1755 came the earthquake of Lisbon. This frightful disaster became an immense interrogation. The optimist was compelled to ask, "What was my God doing? Why did the Universal Father crush to shapelessness thousands of his poor children, even at the moment when they were upon their knees returning thanks to him?" What could be done with this horror? If earthquake there must be, why did it not occur in some uninhabited desert, on some wide waste of sea? This frightful fact changed the theology of Voltaire. He became convinced that this is not the best possible of all worlds. He became convinced that evil is evil here now and for ever. (Applause.)

Who can establish the existence of an infinite being? It is beyond the conception—the reason—the imagination of

man—probably or possibly—where the zenith and nadir meet this God can be found. (Applause.)

Voltaire, attacked on every side, fought with every weapon that wit, logic, reason, scorn, contempt, laughter, pathos, and indignation could sharpen, form, devise, or use. He often apologised, and the apology was an insult. He often recanted, and the recantation was a thousand times worse than the thing recanted. He took it back by giving more. In the name of eulogy he flayed his victim. In his praise there was poison. He often advanced by retreating, and asserted by retraction. He did not intend to give priests the satisfaction of seeing him burn or suffer. Upon this very point of recanting he wrote :

“They say I must retract. Very willingly. I will declare that Pascal is always right. That if St. Luke and St. Mark contradict one another it is only another proof of the truth of religion to those who know how to understand such things ; and that another lovely proof of religion is that it is unintelligible. I will even avow that all priests are gentle and disinterested ; that Jesuits are honest people ; that monks are neither proud nor given to intrigue, and that their odor is agreeable ; that the Holy Inquisition is the triumph of humanity and tolerance. In a word, I will say all that may be desired of me, provided they leave me in repose, and will not prosecute a man who has done harm to none.”

He gave the best years of his wonderful life to succor the oppressed, to shield the defenceless, to reverse infamous decrees, to rescue the innocent, to reform the laws of France, to do way with torture, to soften the hearts of priests, to enlighten judges, to instruct kings, to civilise the people, and to banish from the heart of man the love and lust of war. (Applause.)

THE RELIGION OF HUMANITY.

Voltaire was not a saint. He was educated by the

Jesuits. He was never troubled about the salvation of his soul. All the theological disputes excited his laughter, the creeds his pity, and the conduct of bigots his contempt. He was much better than a saint. (Applause.) Most of the Christians in his day kept their religion not for everyday use but for disaster, as ships carry lifeboats to be used only in the stress of storm. (Applause.)

Voltaire believed in the religion of humanity—of good and generous deeds. For many centuries the Church had painted virtue so ugly, sour, and cold, that vice was regarded as beautiful. Voltaire taught the beauty of the useful, the hatefulness and hideousness of superstition. He was not the greatest of poets, or of dramatists, but he was the greatest man in his time, the greatest friend of freedom, and the deadliest foe of superstition. (Applause.) He wrote the best French plays—but they were not wonderful. He wrote verses polished and perfect in their way. He filled the air with painted moths—but not with Shakespeare eagles.

You may think that I have said too much; that I have placed this man too high. Let me tell you what Goethe, the great German, said of this man: "If you wish depth, genius, imagination, taste, reason, sensibility, philosophy, elevation, originality, nature, intellect, fancy, rectitude, facility, flexibility, precision, art, abundance, variety, fertility, warmth, magic, charm, grace, force, an eagle sweep of vision, vast understanding, instruction rich, tone excellent, urbanity, suavity, delicacy, correctness, purity, cleanliness, eloquence, harmony, brilliancy, rapidity, gaiety, pathos, sublimity, and universality, perfection indeed, behold Voltaire." (Applause.)

Even Carlyle, that old Scotch-terrier, with the growl of a grizzly bear, who attacked shams, as I have sometimes thought, because he hated rivals, was forced to admit that

Voltaire gave the death-stab to modern superstition. It was the hand of Voltaire that sowed the seeds of liberty in the heart and brain of Franklin, of Jefferson, and of Thomas Paine. (Applause.)

IN IGNORANT TOULOUSE.

Toulouse was a favored town. It was rich in relics. The people were as ignorant as wooden images—(laughter)—but they had in their possession the dried bones of seven apostles—the bones of many of the infants slain by Herod—part of a dress of the Virgin Mary, and lots of skulls and skeletons of the infallible idiots known as saints. (Laughter and applause.)

In this city the people celebrated every year with great joy two holy events: The expulsion of the Huguenots and the blessed massacre of St. Bartholomew. (Laughter.) The citizens of Toulouse had been educated and civilised by the Church. (Laughter.) A few Protestants, mild because they were in the minority, lived among these jackals and tigers. One of these Protestants was Jean Calas—a small dealer in dry goods. For forty years he had been in this business, and his character was without a stain. He was honest, kind and agreeable. He had a wife and six children—four sons and two daughters. One of his sons became a Catholic. The eldest son, Marc Antoine, disliked his father's business and studied law. He could not be allowed to practise unless he became a Catholic. He tried to get his license by concealing that he was a Protestant. He was discovered—grew morose. Finally he became discouraged and committed suicide by hanging himself in his father's store. The bigots of Toulouse started the story that his parents had killed him to prevent his becoming a Catholic. On this frightful charge the father, mother, one son, one servant, and one guest at their house were arrested. The dead son was considered a

martyr, the Church taking possession of the body. This happened in 1761. There was what was called a trial. There was no evidence, not the slightest, except hearsay. All the facts were in favor of the accused. The united strength of the defendants could not have done the deed.

DOOMED TO DEATH UPON THE WHEEL.

Jean Calas was doomed to torture and to death upon the wheel. This was on March 9, 1762, and the sentence was to be carried out the next day. On the morning of the 10th the father was to be taken to the torture-room. The executioner and his assistants were sworn on the cross to administer the torture according to the judgment of the court. They bound him by the wrists to an iron ring in the stone wall four feet from the ground, and his feet to another ring in the floor. Then they shortened the ropes and chains until every joint in his arms and legs were dislocated. Then he was questioned. He declared that he was innocent. Then the ropes were again shortened until life fluttered in the torn body; but he remained firm. This was called the *question ordinaire*. (Laughter.) Again the magistrates exhorted the victim to confess, and again he refused, saying there was nothing to confess. Then came the *question extraordinaire*. (Laughter.) Into the mouth of the victim was placed a horn holding three pints of water. In this way thirty pints of water were forced into the body of the sufferer. The pain was beyond description, and yet Jean Calas remained firm. He was then carried to the scaffold in a tumbril. He was bound to a wooden cross that lay on the scaffold. The executioner then took a bar of iron, broke each arm and leg in two places, striking eleven blows in all. He was then left to die if he could. He lived for two hours, declaring his innocence to the last. He was slow to die, and so the executioner strangled him. Then his poor lacerated, bleeding and broken body was chained to a

stake and burned. All this was a spectacle—a festival for the savages of Toulouse. What would they have done if their hearts had not been softened by the glad tidings of great joy, peace on earth, goodwill to men? (Laughter and applause.)

But this was not all. The property of the family was confiscated; the son was released on condition that he became a Catholic; the servant if she would enter a convent. The two daughters were consigned to a convent, and the heart-broken widow was allowed to wander where she would.

Voltaire heard of this case. In a moment his soul was on fire. He took one of the sons under his roof. He wrote a history of the case; he corresponded with Kings and Queens, with chancellors and lawyers. If money was needed he advanced it. For years he filled Europe with the echoes and the groans of Jean Calas. He succeeded. The horrible judgment was annulled, the poor victim declared innocent and thousands of dollars raised to support the mother and family. (Applause.) This was the work of Voltaire.

Sirven, a Protestant, lived in Languedoc with his wife and three daughters. The housekeeper of the Bishop wanted to make one of the daughters a Catholic. The law allowed the Bishop to take the child of Protestants from its parents for the sake of its soul. This little girl was so taken and placed in a convent. She ran away and came back to her parents. Her poor little body was covered with marks of the convent whip. "Suffer little children to come unto me." (Laughter and applause.) The child was out of her mind. Suddenly she disappeared, and a few days after her little body was found in a well, three miles from home. The cry was raised that her folks had murdered her to keep her from becoming a Catholic. This happened only a little way from the Christian city of Toulouse while Jean Calas was in prison. The Sirvens knew that a trial would end in conviction. They fled. In their absence they were convicted, their property

confiscated, the parents sentenced to die by the hangman, the daughters to be under the gallows during the execution of their mother, and then to be exiled. The family fled in the midst of winter; the married daughter gave birth to a child in the snows of the Alps; the mother died, and at last the father, reaching Switzerland, found himself without means of support. They went to Voltaire; he espoused their cause; he took care of them, gave them the means to live, and labored to annul the sentence that had been pronounced against them for nine long and weary years. He appealed to kings for money, to Catherine II. of Russia, and to hundreds of others. He was successful. He said of this case: The Sirvens were tried and condemned in two hours in January, 1762; and now in January, 1772, after ten years of effort, they have been restored to their rights. (Applause.)

This was the work of Voltaire. Why should the worshippers of God hate the lovers of men? (Applause.)

#### THE ESPENASSE CASE.

Espenasse was a Protestant of good estate. In 1740 he received into his house a Protestant clergyman, to whom he gave supper and lodging. In a country where priests repeated the parable of the "Good Samaritan" this was a crime. (Laughter.) For this crime Espenasse was tried, convicted, and sentenced to the galleys for life. When he had been imprisoned for twenty-three years his case came to the knowledge of Voltaire, and he was, through the efforts of Voltaire, released and restored to his family. (Applause.)

This was the work of Voltaire. There is not time to tell of the case of General Lally, of the English General Byng, of the niece of Corneille, of the Jesuit Adam, of the writers, dramatists, actors, widows, and orphans for whose benefit he gave his influence, his money, and his time.

But I will tell another case. In 1765, at the town of Abbe-

ville, an old wooden cross on a bridge had been mutilated—whittled with a knife—a terrible crime. (Laughter.) Sticks, when crossing each other, were far more sacred than flesh and blood. Two young men were suspected—the Chevalier de la Barre and d'Etallonde. D'Etallonde fled to Prussia and enlisted as a common soldier.

La Barre remained and stood his trial. He was convicted without the slightest evidence, and he and D'Etallonde were both sentenced: First, to endure the torture, ordinary and extraordinary; second, to have their tongues torn out by the roots with pincers of iron; third, to have their right hands cut off at the door of the church; and fourth, to be bound to stakes by chains of iron and burned to death by a slow fire. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." (Laughter.) Remembering this, the judges mitigated the sentence by providing that their heads should be cut off before their bodies were given to the flames. (Laughter.) The case was appealed to Paris; heard by a court composed of twenty-five judges learned in law, and the judgment was confirmed. The sentence was carried out the 1st day of July, 1776.

WITH EVERY WEAPON OF GENIUS.

Voltaire had fought with every weapon that genius could devise or use. He was the greatest of all caricaturists, and he used this wonderful gift without mercy. For pure crystallised wit he had no equal. The art of flattery was carried by him to the height of an exact science. He knew and practised every subterfuge. He fought the army of hypocrisy and pretence, the army of faith and falsehood. Voltaire was annoyed by the meaner and baser spirits of his time, by the cringers and crawlers, by the fawners and pretenders, by those who wished to gain the favor of the priests, the patronage of nobles. Sometimes he allowed himself to be annoyed by these scorpions; sometimes he attacked them.

And but for these attacks, long ago they would have been forgotten. In the amber of his genius Voltaire preserved these insects, these tarantulas, these scorpions. (Applause.)

It is fashionable to say that he was not profound. This is because he was not stupid. In the presence of absurdity he laughed, and was called irreverent. He thought God would not damn even a priest forever. (Laughter.) This was regarded as blasphemy. He endeavored to prevent Christians from murdering each other, and did what he could to civilise the disciples of Christ. (Laughter.) Had he founded a sect, obtained control of some country, and burned a few heretics at slow fires, he would have won the admiration, respect, and love of the Christian world. Had he only pretended to believe all the fables of antiquity, had he mumbled Latin prayers, counted beads, crossed himself, devoured now and then the flesh of God, and carried faggots to the feet of Philosophy in the name of Christ, he might have been in heaven this moment enjoying a sight of the damned. (Laughter and applause.)

If he had only adopted the creed of his time—if he had asserted that a God of infinite power and mercy had created millions and billions of human beings to suffer eternal pain, and all for the sake of his glorious justice—(laughter)—that he had given his power of attorney to a cunning and cruel Italian Pope, authorising him to save the soul of his mistress and send honest wives to hell—if he had given to the nostrils of this God the odor of burning flesh—the incense of the faggot—if he had filled his ears with the shrieks of the tortured—the music of the rack, he would now be known as St. Voltaire. (Laughter and applause.)

ALL RELIGIONS PRACTISE PERSECUTION.

Instead of doing these things he wilfully closed his eyes to the light of the gospel, examined the Bible for himself,

advocated intellectual liberty, struck from the brain the fetters of an arrogant faith, assisted the weak, cried out against the torture of man, appealed to reason, endeavored to establish universal toleration, succored the indigent, and defended the oppressed. (Applause.) He demonstrated that the origin of all religions is the same, the same mysteries—the same miracles—the same imposture—the same temples and ceremonies—the same kind of founders, apostles and dupes—the same promises and threats—the same pretence of goodness and forgiveness and the practice of the same persecution and murder. He proved that religion made enemies—philosophy, friends—and that above the rights of gods were the rights of man. (Applause.) These were his crimes. (Laughter.) Such a man God would not suffer to die in peace. If allowed to meet death with a smile, others might follow his example, until none would be left to light the holy fires of the *auto da fe*. (Laughter.) It would not do for so great, so successful an enemy of the Church to die without leaving some shriek of fear, some shudder of remorse, some ghastly prayer of shattered horror, uttered by lips covered with blood and foam. For many centuries the theologians have taught that an unbeliever—an infidel—one who spoke or wrote against their creed, could not meet death with composure; that in his last moment God would fill his conscience with the serpents of remorse. For a thousand years the clergy have manufactured the facts to fit this theory—this infamous conception of the duty of man and the justice of God. (Applause.) The theologians have insisted that crimes against men were, and are, as nothing compared with crimes against God. That, while kings and priests did nothing worse than to make their fellows wretched, that so long as they only butchered and burnt the innocent and helpless, God would maintain the strictest neutrality—(laughter)—but when some honest man, some great and tender soul, expressed

a doubt as to the truth of the scriptures, or prayed to the wrong God, or to the right one by the wrong name, then the real God leaped like a wounded tiger upon his victim, and from his quiver-flesh tore his wretched soul. (Applause.)

#### CRUELITIES IN THE WORLD.

There is no recorded instance where the uplifted hand of murder has been paralysed—no truthful account in all the literature of the world of the innocent child being shielded by God. Thousands of crimes are committed every day—men are at this moment lying in wait for their human prey—wives are whipped and crushed, driven to insanity and death—little children begging for mercy, lifting imploring, tear-filled eyes to the brutal faces of fathers and mothers—sweet girls are deceived, lured and outraged, but God has no time to prevent these things—no time to defend the good and protect the pure. He is too busy numbering hairs and watching sparrows. (Laughter.) He listens for blasphemy; looks for persons who laugh at priests; examines baptismal registers; watches professors in college who begin to doubt the geology of Moses and the astronomy of Joshua. (Laughter and applause.) He does not particularly object to stealing if you don't swear. (Laughter.)

A great many persons have fallen dead in the act of taking God's name in vain, but millions of men, women and children have been stolen from their homes and used as beasts of burden, but no one engaged in this infamy has ever been touched by the wrathful hand of God. All kinds of criminals, except infidels, meet death with reasonable serenity. As a rule, there is nothing in the death of a pirate to cast any discredit on his profession. (Laughter.) The murderer upon the scaffold, with a priest on either side, smilingly exhorts the multitude to meet him in heaven. The man who has succeeded in making his home a hell meets death without a

quiver, provided he has never expressed any doubt as to the divinity of Christ or the eternal "procession" of the Holy Ghost. (Laughter and applause.)

KILLED FOR SPEAKING THE TRUTH.

Now and then a man of genius, of sense, of intellectual honesty, has appeared. Such men have denounced the superstitions of their day. They have pitied the multitude To see priests devour the substance of the people—priests who made begging one of the learned professions—filled them with loathing and contempt. These men were honest enough to tell their thoughts, brave enough to speak the truth. Then they were denounced, tried, tortured, killed by rack or flame. But some escaped the fury of the fiends who loved their enemies and died naturally in their beds. It would not do for the Church to admit that they died peacefully. That would never do. That would show that religion was not essential at the last moment. Superstition gets its power from the terror of death. It would not do to have the common people understand that a man could deny the Bible, refuse to kiss the cross, contend that humanity was greater than Christ, and then die as sweetly as Torquemada did after pouring molten lead into the ears of an honest man—(laughter)—or as calmly as Calvin after he had burned Servetus, or as peacefully as King David after advising, with his last breath, one son to assassinate another. (Laughter and applause.)

The Church has taken great pains to show that the last moments of all infidels (that Christians did not succeed in burning)—(laughter)—were infinitely wretched and despairing. It was alleged that words could not paint the horrors that were endured by a dying infidel. Every good Christian was expected to, and generally did, believe these accounts. (Laughter.) They have been told and retold in every pulpit

of the world. Protestant ministers have repeated the lies invented by Catholic priests, and Catholic, by a kind of theological comity, have sworn to the lies told by the Protestants. (Laughter and applause.) Upon this point they have always stood together, and will as long as the same falsehood can be used by both. Upon the death-bed subject the clergy grow eloquent. When describing the shudderings and shrieks of the dying unbeliever their eyes glitter with delight. It is a festival. (Laughter.) They are no longer men; they become hyenas; they dig open graves; they devour the dead. (Laughter.) It is a banquet. Unsatisfied still, they paint the terrors of hell. They gaze at the souls of the infidels writhing in the coils of the worm that never dies. They see them in flames—in oceans of fire—in abysses of despair. They shout with joy; they applaud.

“LET ME DIE IN PEACE.”

It is an *auto da fe*, presided over by God. But let us come back to Voltaire—to the dying philosopher. He was an old man of 84. He had been surrounded with the comforts, the luxuries of life. He was a man of great wealth, the richest writer that the world had known. Among the literary men of the earth he stood first. He was an intellectual monarch—one who had built his own throne and woven the purple of his own power. He was a man of genius. The Catholic God had allowed him the appearance of success. (Laughter.) His last years were filled with the intoxication of flattery—of almost worship. He stood at the summit of his age. The priests became anxious. (Laughter.) They began to fear that God would forget, in a multiplicity of business, to make a terrible example of Voltaire. (Laughter and applause.) Towards the last of May, 1778, it was whispered in Paris that Voltaire was dying. Upon the fences of expectation gathered the unclean birds of superstition, impatiently waiting for

their prey. Two days before his death, his nephew went to seek the curé of St. Sulpice and the Abbé Gautier, and brought them to his uncle's sick chamber, who being informed that they were there, said: "Ah, well, give them my compliments and my thanks." The abbé spoke some words to him, exhorting him to patience. The curé of St. Sulpice then came forward, having announced himself, and asked of Voltaire, elevating his voice, if he acknowledged the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Laughter.) The sick man pushed one of his hands against the curé's coif, shoving him back, and cried, turning abruptly to the other side, "Let me die in peace." The curé seemingly considered his person soiled and his coif dishonored by the touch of a philosopher. He made the nurse give him a little brushing and went out with the Abbé Gautier. He expired, says Wagniere, on May 30, 1778, at about a quarter past eleven at night, with the most perfect tranquillity. A few moments before his last breath he took the hand of Morand, his valet de chambre, who was watching by him, pressed it, and said: "Adieu, my dear Morand, I am gone." These were his last words. Like a peaceful river, with green and shaded banks, he flowed without a murmur into the waveless sea, where life is rest. (Applause.)

"SHAMELESS LIES" ABOUT HIS DEATH.

From this death, so simple and serene, so kind, so philosophic and tender, so natural and peaceful; from these words so utterly destitute of cant or dramatic touch, all the frightful pictures, all the despairing utterances have been drawn and made. From these materials, and from these alone, or rather, in spite of these facts, have been constructed by priests and clergymen and their dupes, all the shameless lies about the death of that great and wonderful man. A man, compared with whom all of his calumniators, dead and living, were, and are, but dust and

vermin. (Applause.) Let us be honest. Did all the priests of Rome increase the mental wealth of man as much as Bruno? Did all the priests of France do as great a work for the civilisation of the world as Voltaire or Diderot? Did all the ministers of Scotland add as much to the sum of human knowledge as David Hume? Have all the clergymen, monks, friars, ministers, priests, bishops, cardinals, and popes, from the day of Pentecost to the last election, done as much for human liberty as Thomas Paine? (Applause.) What would the world be if infidels had never been? The infidels have been the brave and thoughtful men; the flower of the world; the pioneers and heralds of the blessed day of liberty and love; the generous spirits of an unworthy past; the seers and prophets of our race; the great chivalric souls, proud victors on the battle-fields of thought, the creditors of all the years to be. (Applause.)

#### VOLTAIRE'S SECRET BURIAL.

In those days the philosophers—that is to say, the thinkers—were not buried in holy ground. It was feared that their principles might contaminate the ashes of the just. (Laughter.) And it was also feared that on the morning of the Resurrection they might, in a moment of confusion, slip into heaven. (Laughter.) Some were burned and their ashes scattered, and the bodies of some were thrown naked to beasts, and others were buried in unholy earth. Voltaire knew the history of Adrienne De Couvreur, a beautiful actress denied burial. After all, we do feel an interest in what is to become of our bodies. There is a modesty that belongs to death. Upon this subject Voltaire was very sensitive, and it was that he might be buried that he went through the farce of confession, of absolution, and of the last sacrament. The priests knew that he was not in earnest, and Voltaire knew that they would not allow him to be buried in any of the cemeteries of Paris. His death was kept

a secret. The Abbé Mignot made arrangements for the burial at Romilli-on-the-Seine, more than one hundred miles from Paris. Sunday evening, on the last day of May, 1778, the body of Voltaire, clad in a dressing-gown, clothed to resemble an invalid, posed to simulate life, was placed in a carriage; at its side was a servant, whose business it was to keep it in position. To this carriage were attached six horses, so that people might think a great lord was going to his estates. Another carriage followed, in which were a grand-nephew and two cousins of Voltaire. All night they travelled, and on the following day arrived at the court-yard of the abbey. The necessary papers were shown, the mass was performed in the presence of the body, and Voltaire found burial. A few moments afterwards the Prior, who "for charity had given a little earth," received from his bishop a menacing letter forbidding the burial of Voltaire. It was too late. He could not then be removed, and he was allowed to remain in peace until 1791.

#### LABOR AND THOUGHT BECAME FRIENDS.

Voltaire was dead. The foundations of State and throne had been sapped. The people were becoming acquainted with the real kings and with the actual priests. Unknown men born in misery and want, men whose fathers and mothers had been pavement for the rich, were rising towards the light and their shadowy faces were emerging from darkness. Labor and thought became friends. That is, the gutter and the attic fraternised. The monsters of the night and the angels of dawn—the first thinking of revenge and the others dreaming of equality, liberty and fraternity. (Applause.) For 400 years the Bastille had been the outward symbol of oppression. Within its walls the noblest had perished. It was a perpetual threat. It was the last and often the first argument of king and priest. Its

dungeons, damp and rayless, its massive towers, its secret cells, its instruments of torture, denied the existence of God. In 1789, on the 14th of July, the people, the multitude, frenzied by suffering, stormed and captured the Bastille. (Applause.) The battle-cry was "Vive le Voltaire." (Applause.)

In 1791 permission was given to place in the Pantheon the ashes of Voltaire. He had been buried 110 miles from Paris. Buried by stealth, he was to be removed by a nation. A funeral procession of a hundred miles; every village with its flags and arches in his honor; all the people anxious to honor the philosopher of France—the savior of Calas—the destroyer of superstition! On reaching Paris the great procession moved along the Rue St. Antoine. Here it paused, and for one night upon the ruins of the Bastille rested the body of Voltaire—rested in triumph, in glory—rested on fallen wall and broken arch, on crumbling stone still damp with tears, on rusting chain, and bar, and useless bolt—above the dungeons dark and deep, where light had faded from the lives of men and hope had died in breaking hearts. (Applause.) The conqueror resting upon the conquered. Throned upon the Bastille, the fallen fortress of night, the body of Voltaire, from whose brain had issued the dawn. (Applause.)

For a moment his ashes must have felt the Promethean fire, and the old smile must have illumined once more the face of the dead. (Applause.)

While the vast multitude were trembling with love and awe, a priest was heard to cry: "God shall be avenged!"

VOLTAIRE'S GRAVE VIOLATED.

The grave of Voltaire was violated. The cry of the priest "God shall be avenged!" had borne its fruit. Priests, skulking in the shadows, with faces sinister as night—ghouls—in the name of the Gospel, desecrated the grave. They carried away

the body of Voltaire. The tomb was empty. God was avenged! The tomb is empty, but the world is filled with Voltaire's fame. Man has conquered!

What cardinal, what bishop, what priest raised his voice for the rights of men? What ecclesiastic, what nobleman, took the side of the oppressed—of the peasant? Who denounced the frightful criminal code—the torture of suspected persons? What priest pleaded for the liberty of the citizen? What bishop pitied the victims of the rack? Is there the grave of a priest in France on which a lover of liberty would now drop a flower or a tear? Is there a tomb holding the ashes of a saint from which emerges one ray of light? (Applause.) If there be another life, a day of judgment, no God can afford to torture in another world a man who abolished torture in this. (Applause.) If God be the keeper of an eternal penitentiary—(laughter)—he should not imprison there those who broke the chains of slavery here. (Applause.) He cannot afford to make eternal convicts of Franklin, of Jefferson, of Paine, of Voltaire. (Applause.)

PERFECT EQUIPMENT FOR HIS WORK.

Voltaire was perfectly equipped for his work. A perfect master of the French language, knowing all its moods, tenses, and declinations—in fact and in feeling playing upon it as skilfully as Paganini on his violin, finding expression for every thought and fancy, writing on the most serious subjects with the gaiety of a harlequin, plucking jests from the mouth of death, graceful as the waving of willows, dealing in double meanings that covered the asp with flowers and flattery, master of satire and compliment, mingling them often in the same line, always interested himself, therefore interesting others, handling thoughts, questions, subjects as a juggler does balls, keeping them in the air with perfect ease, dressing old words in new meanings,

charming, grotesque, pathetic, mingling mirth with tears, wit and wisdom, and sometimes wickedness, logic and laughter. (Applause.) With a woman's instinct, knowing the sensitive nerves—just where to touch—hating arrogance of place, the stupidity of the solemn, snatching masks from priest and king, knowing the springs of action and ambition's ends, perfectly familiar with the great world, the intimate of kings and their favorites, sympathising with the oppressed and imprisoned, with the unfortunate and poor, hating tyranny, despising superstition, and loving liberty with all his heart. Such was Voltaire writing "Œdipus" at seventeen, "Irene" at eighty-three, and crowding between these two tragedies the accomplishment of a thousand lives (Long-continued applause.)

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