

Highland Messenger.

LIFE IS ONLY TO BE VALUED AS IT IS USEFULLY EMPLOYED.

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MISCELLANEOUS.

[From the Glasgow Christian Journal.]

THE INFLUENCE OF INFIDELITY ON INDIVIDUAL AND NATIONAL CHARACTER.

It is a remarkable fact, that skeptics have ever been distinguished for their zeal in the dissemination of their opinions, and that this zeal of theirs, has, in general, been proportioned to the erroneousness of their views. The refined infidelity of Hume and Bolingbroke was only studied and embraced by men who, like themselves, had a taste for metaphysical pursuits, and consequently it never exerted any marked influence on the masses of the population. Circumstances are now, however, greatly changed. Infidelity has of late years been divested of that mysticism in which her former friends enshrouded her. She has been exposed in all her grossness, to the view of common men, and multitudes who wish, forsooth, to vindicate their right of thinking for themselves, have not hesitated to embrace her. Once, skepticism seemed only to flourish in the closet of the man of letters—now, every willing must be an infidel, and the less intellect he has, the more virulent will his opposition be to the doctrines of the cross. Once, skepticism stooped not to the humbler classes of society; but now, her advocates are plying the poor man with their arguments, anxious that he also may be numbered among their victims. It is interesting as well as instructive, to note the zeal with which they are attempting to disseminate their views. They have their lecturers—men who are skilled in the art of making "the worse appear the better cause." They have their halls, where there may be nightly seen hundreds of our toil worn mechanics, who by rushing into skepticism, seem desirous of infusing a new element of misery, into their already aggravated lot. They have their publications; and these, like streams of molten lava, are even now circulating throughout our population, leaving behind them sure and fearful indications of their desolating progress. In short, as far as the world can see, nothing is wanting to secure the present success and the future triumph of their principles.

And even supposing that our modern skeptics were successful in their attempts to impose upon the community—even supposing that they were to prosper, in the war which they are at present waging against the common sense of mankind—would the brilliant results which they anticipate, be realized? Fortunately, we do not need to theorize, in order to come at a correct answer to this question. The world has already had experience of infidelity. To facts then, we would appeal.

What then has been the effects of skepticism on the character of individuals? Have its adherents been distinguished for their public and private virtues? Has it cherished and matured in them those graces which cling to man, fallen though he be, and which tell us so touchingly of that primal purity of which the Bible speaks? Has it banished from the human heart every trace of selfishness, and filled the bosom of its votaries with purposes of good to all mankind? Christianity has done all this, and it is on this account that she deserves the homage and regard of every being; it is on this account that we would pray and labor for her diffusion, until the whole world be brought within her hallowing influence. But infidelity has never yet produced such blessed fruits. Wherever it has appeared, it has blighted every holy principle. No virtue has ever flourished, when exposed to its unhallowing influence. Of its numerous votaries, there have been few whom even the world would call virtuous—few whose lives have not furnished a fearful commentary on the principles which they held.

We cannot but respect Rousseau. A man of great grasp of intellect, he no doubt was; and on this account few would pay him that homage, which our natures constrain us to yield to superior minds. Blunt though his moral perceptions were, he retained to the last a high admiration of virtue; and thus was he compelled to pronounce a eulogy upon the Saviour, whose claims and pretensions he affected to despise. He had also a hatred of tyranny in all its varied forms; such a hatred, that he was ready at all times to make common cause with the oppressed. Had he been a Christian, he might have approximated in character nearer than any man that ever lived, to "the disciple whom Jesus loved;" but he was an infidel. A deist by profession, he was an atheist in reality. He made his feelings the standard of his morals; and he scouted the idea that he was responsible for his conduct at any tribunal but that of man. Ay, and the practical tendency of these principles was strikingly illustrated in his life. There was no impurity which he did not practise, no meanness to which he did not stoop. Is this doubted? Then we point to

his own "confession," where each one may see for himself to what infamy infidelity may bring even a Rousseau.

Take we Voltaire as another example of the mischief which infidelity has wrought. When we think of the numerous and varied talents of the works which he has left behind him, and which have earned him so much fame, we are inclined to say, that "we could ill have spared that man;" but when we think what a degraded wretch he was after all, and how often his gigantic powers were prostrated to the basest purposes, we feel that "it had been better for the world if he had never been born!" He was as basely hypocritical, as he was grossly sensual. He could kneel before the passing pageants of the church of Rome, and with "upturned, reverent eye," he could adore the cross of Jesus, the symbol of man's redemption; and this even when he meditated putting the fearful watchword of his party into the mouths of a licentious populace. Had Voltaire been a common man he would have ended his days on the gallows or guillotine. But he was no common man; and accordingly, when he died, his country stood weeping at his grave, grateful for the lustre which his works have thrown around the name of France.

But why go on with this enumeration? Why follow infidelity in her desolating progress, and tell of the misery which she has brought on many noble spirits? We refer you to the lives of Hobbes, Shaftesbury, Tindal, and Bolingbroke, and we bid you think how different these men would have been, had their hearts been imbued with the principles of the Gospel. We point you to Tom Paine, infidelity's masterpiece, that man who shall be execrated as long as morality is prized; and we bid you think what a world of wretchedness this would be, if infidelity were triumphant, and if human reason, the infidel's god, were established on the throne of Deity!

It may here be asked, "do you maintain that infidelity is in all cases attended with such injurious consequences? Have there never been individuals decidedly skeptical in their views, whose conduct has been so exemplary, that it has won for them the esteem and confidence of the community?" That there have been such persons, we do not deny; but we hold that their immorality is not traceable to their skepticism. Had their principles been allowed free scope, had they been permitted to exert their full and uncontrolled influence on their hearts, they would, no doubt, have produced the same results; for we hold that the moral infidel is, to the full, as anomalous a character as the immoral Christian. In the present state of things, a man's comfort is inseparably connected with his character. When his reputation is lost, his ruin is secured. Thus it is, that multitudes who have long since lost their respect for Christianity, are deterred from entering on a career of open and of shameless profligacy. Were these wholesome restraints removed, were mankind to lose sight of the broad and palpable difference between virtue and vice, it is to be feared that many of your moral infidels would drop their disguise, and give evidence that skepticism has influenced them just as it has influenced other men.

The influence of infidelity upon national character has been equally marked. It is true that the cases in which the enemies of religion have been elevated to the seat of government, and in which they have been allowed to legislate in accordance with their own views and wishes, are exceedingly rare; but they are numerous enough to impress us with the truth, that skepticism is as ill adapted to the happiness of nations, as it is to promote the interest of individuals. The first case which we shall advance in proof of this, is that of Rome; and let it not be thought that we are dealing unfairly by infidelity, when we are thus bringing it into contrast with heathenism. Absurd and irrational though the religion of the Romans no doubt was, it assumed, as true, many principles of the very first importance to the preservation of social order. Thus, while the Roman mind was debased by the sensual rites which a designing priesthood had instituted and imposed, it was elevated by the conception of a superintending Providence, and by the still more sublime doctrines of a future state. And be it remembered, that unlike the religion of many professing Christians, the rites and ceremonies of Roman worship were not neglected and observed merely as convenience or caprice might dictate. They were entwined with the earliest and most cherished association of that people, and they entered into the commonest as well as the most important avocations of life. And let it also be kept in view, that theirs was not the religion of one part of the community merely. Its rites were celebrated by the poor, and by the rich, by the illiterate, and by the learned. The prince, surrounded by the emblems of his power, scorned not to humble himself before the King of kings. The philosopher, glorying in the triumphs of his genius, prostrated himself before the particular deity to whom his folly he ascribed his success. The warrior was stimulated in his career of conquest when he remembered that he was contending for his country's altars as well as for her homes, and when he returned from the field of carnage covered with the laurel wreath of victory, he forgot not to pay his vows to the God of battles. And let it not be thought that all these observances were vain. They cemented as by a bond of brass the

members of that great republic, and made the most discordant materials act in unison for the promotion of the common good. The testimony of Polybius (himself a skeptic) will show that the religion of ancient Rome was not, as has been alleged, without its uses.

"Among all the useful institutions," says he, "that demonstrate the superior excellence of the Roman government, the most considerable, perhaps, is the opinion which people are taught to hold concerning the gods; and that which other men regard as an object of disgrace, appears in my judgment to be the very thing by which the republic is chiefly sustained. I mean superstition, which is impressed with all its terrors, and influences the private actions of the citizens, and the public administration to a degree that can scarcely be exceeded. The ancients therefore, acted not absurdly, nor without good reason, when they inculcated the notions concerning the gods, and the belief of infernal punishments; but much rather are those of the present day to be charged with rashness and absurdity, in endeavoring to extirpate these opinions, for, not to mention other effects which flow from such an institution, if among the Greeks, for example, a single talent only be entrusted to those who had the management of the public money, though they give ten written securities, with as many seals, and twice as many witnesses, they are unable to discharge the trust reposed in them with integrity. But the Romans on the other hand, who in the course of their magistracies, and in embassies, disburse the greatest sums, are prevailed on, by the single obligation of an oath, to perform their duty with inviolable honesty. And as in other states, a man is rarely to be found whose hands are pure from public robbery, so among the Romans it is less rare to discover one not tainted with this crime."—*Hampton's Polybius*, vol. iii. book vi.

Such was Rome in her best and most prosperous days. Some were the principles which gave strength and stability to her power. Had she retained them, she would long have continued the empress of the world. Had she embraced Christianity in their stead, she would have become a blessing to the nations; and the tribes whom she had goaded on to madness by her tyranny, would gladly have acknowledged her supremacy. But a less glorious destiny awaited her. Skepticism, which man already brought ruin and effeminacy upon Greece, soon began to spread itself among the Romans. The change effected by its influence was not at once perceptible. Indeed, even after infidelity and atheism had been almost universally embraced, the republic seemed for a time to be more firmly based than ever. But the splendor which then invested it, was like the glory of the setting sun, which shines forth in all its brilliancy for a moment, and then is lost in darkness. And could it well be otherwise? Could the state prosper when the ties which had so long bound its citizens together were forever broken? Accordingly, the name of Rome was soon slighted and despised by the nations whom she had formerly enslaved; and those tribes who, to avoid her vengeance, had once succumbed to her authority, rolled in like a flood upon the land which had oppressed them, and stayed not their destructive course, until they had swept from its bosom every vestige of Rome's former greatness.

The only instance in modern times in which the avowed enemies of revelation have possessed the supreme power and government of a country, is that of France during the greater part of the revolution. Long before that event the people had begun to be weary of that system of ecclesiastical domination to which they had so long succumbed, and, accordingly, when individuals whose talents secured for them the attention and respect of their fellow citizens declared against the abuses of the Romish church, and denounced religion as the cause of all human woes, they met with a large amount of public sympathy. The infidel party, at all times interested in the progress of their views, rejoiced that they had at least gained the favor of the populace. They looked forward to still more decisive triumphs, and fondly anticipated the dawning of the day, when superstition would be de-throned, and when to reason would be committed the management of affairs. Little did they imagine, that when they were thus striking at the root of all religion, they were overturning the bulwarks of social order; that when they were teaching their countrymen to dishonor the law of God, they were also instructing them to violate and dishonor the law of man. When revolution brought desolation on their country, they saw they had gone too far. But they could not crush the evil principles which they had called into existence. Like Frankenstein, they could only look with impotent and unavailing terror on the wild and destructive workings of the monster, which, in an evil hour they had created. The case must have been extreme which could have extorted from Mercier (himself an infidel) the confession—"We have in proscribing superstition, destroyed all religious sentiment; but this is not the way to regenerate the world."

We shall not attempt to sketch the horrors of the French revolution. Once the theatre of the useful and ornamental arts, it seemed to have become, under the influence of atheism, the chosen abode of every evil principle. All the religions in the world were declared to be the daughters of

ignorance and error. By a decree of the National Convention, the existence of the Deity and the doctrine of the soul's immortality, were formally disavowed; and in order that the world might have the benefit of their folly, this was ordered to be translated into every language under heaven. Public worship was of course discontinued. The churches were converted into "temples of reason" and women of profligate character, who, by the acclamations of the populace, had been constituted tutelary goddesses, received that homage which can only with propriety be paid to Deity. And infidelity had also its sacrifices of blood. Within the short period of ten years, no less than three millions of human victims were offered at its shrine.—"France," says an eloquent writer, "during that period, was a theatre of crime, which had excited in the mind of every spectator amazement and horror. The miseries of that single nation have changed all the histories of the preceding sufferings of mankind into idle tales, and have been enhanced and multiplied without a precedent, without a number, and without a name. The kingdom appeared to be changed into one great prison; the inhabitants converted into felons; and the common doom of mankind commuted for the violence of the sword, the bayonet, and the guillotine. To contemplate men it seemed for a season, as if the knell of the whole nation was tolled, and the world summoned to its execution and its funeral."

Such are the evils which infidelity has brought upon individuals and nations. It is painful to reflect that multitudes in our own country are at the present moment exposing themselves by their skepticism to similar evils, and it is yet more painful to reflect that the abettors of deistical opinions are permitted to disseminate the poison of their principles, unchecked and unresisted by the Christian part of the community. We believe that our country can never be brought into the condition of revolutionary France; but the very fact that skepticism is now introducing wretchedness into many a family, should rouse us to vigorous action the slumbering energies of the Christian church. And were believers sufficiently alive to their duty, they could with ease banish infidelity from our land. All that is requisite to guard the poor man from the attempts of the designing gainsayer, is to tell him what the Bible really is, and to tell him what the Bible really is in contrast with the pruriency of skepticism. Were infidelity thus exposed to the light of knowledge and of truth, it would speedily wither, and it would ultimately die.

[From the Casket.]

STORMING OF STONY POINT.

The night had already settled down gloomy and forbidding, on the evening of the 15th July, 1779, when the advancing column of a little army, whose uniform betokened it to be American, emerged from a thick wood on the shore of the Hudson, and in an instant the whole dim and shadowy prospect, disclosed to them along the bank of the river, opened to the sight. Far away lay Verplanck's Point, now buried in a mass of shadow, while on the other side of the river, dark, gloomy, and frowning, rose up the craggy heights of Stony Point. Washed on three sides by the Hudson, and protected on the other, except along a narrow road, by a morass, the Fort was deemed one of the most impregnable upon the river, and its capture regarded as almost impossible. Yet to achieve that gallant purpose, this little army was now upon its march.

A turn in the road soon hid them from the river, and after a short march of some minutes duration, they arrived within a mile and a half of the enemy's lines, and halting at the command of their officer, formed into columns for the attack. Beginning again their march, they soon reached the marshy ground at the base of the hill.

"Halt!" said the low voice of the general, from the front, "we are nigh enough now—HALT!"

The order passed in a whisper down the line, and the column paused on the edge of the morass. It was a moment of suspense and peril. Every man felt that in a few minutes the fate of their hazardous enterprise would be determined, and that they would either be cold in death, or the American flag waving in triumph over the dark promontory ahead, now scarcely discernable through the thick gloom of midnight. Yet not a lip quivered, nor a cheek blanched in that crisis. About twenty paces in front of the column, had halted the forlorn hope of one hundred and fifty men, with unloaded pieces and bayonets fixed, while farther on a smaller group of shadowy forms could be seen through the obscurity, accounted with axes to cut through the abatis. Each man had a piece of white paper in his hat to distinguish him from the foe in the approaching melee. The pause, however, afforded, was but momentary. The general had already reconnoitred the approaches to the still silent promontory, and waving his sword on high he gave the order. In another instant the dark, massive column was moving steadily to the attack.

It was a thrilling moment, during which that devoted band crossed rapidly over the marsh. As yet the enemy had not discovered them. Even the hearts of the oldest veterans trembled with the eagerness of the moment of suspense. Already had the foremost of the pioneers reached the abatis, and the quick, rapid

blows of their axes rung upon the night, when suddenly a shout of alarm broke from the fort, the gun of a sentry flashed through the gloom, and in an instant all was uproar and confusion within the astonished fortifications. Not a moment was to be lost.

"Advance! advance!" shouted Wayne, as he pressed rapidly on towards the abatis, followed in death-like silence by his indomitable troops.

"To arms!" came borne on the night breeze from the fort—"to arms—to arms!" and then followed the quick roll of the drum.

In an instant the enemy were at their posts, and as the gallant continentals still maintained their silent but steady march, a fire, such as only desperation could produce, burst from every embrasure of the fort. The incessant rattle of the musketry, the roar of the artillery, the crashing of the grape shot, and the lurid light flung over the scene by the explosion of the shells, and the streams of fire pouring from the fort, formed a picture which no pen can describe. Yet, amid it all, the daring assailants steadily advanced, though not a trigger had been pulled in their ranks. Faithful to the commands of their general, though trembling in every limb with eagerness, they kept up their silent march, amid the fiery tempest, as if impelled by some godlike power. On—on—on they pressed.

The whirring of fire from the fort ceased not; yet still they dashed along, charging at the point of the bayonet, over abatis and bulwark, until the enemy, borne back by their impetuous onset, quailed before them. The works were forced. Then, and not till then was the death-like silence broken. A sound rung out from the victorious troops over all the thunder of the battle. It was the watchword of success. It was heard by the head of the column behind; it passed down their line, was caught up by the rear, and a wild shout, making the very welkin tremble, rung out as they dashed on to the attack.

The contest was short, but terrific. Over bulwark, battery, and prostrate foes, the gallant continentals, headed by Wayne, pressed on, and driving all before them, met the column of their little army, with an enthusiastic cheer, in the very centre of the enemy's works. In another moment the starry flag of America waved triumphantly over the battlements.

But though the contest had been so bloody, not a man of the enemy fell after resistance ceased. The prisoners were disarmed, a guard placed over them, and sentries posted on all the commanding positions around the works. The morning gun announced to the British fleet in the river that STONY POINT WAS WON.

RAPIDITY OF TIME. Swiftly glide our years—they follow each other like the waves of the ocean. Memory calls up the persons we once knew, the scenes in which we once were actors—they appear before the mind like the phantoms of a night vision. Behold the boy, rejoicing in the gaiety of his soul; the wheels of time cannot move too rapidly for him—the light of hope dances in his eye, the smiles of expectation play upon his lip—he looks forward to long years of joy to come—his spirit burns within him when he hears of great men and mighty deeds—he wants to be a man—he longs to mount the hill of ambition, to tread the path of honor, to hear the shout of applause. Look at him again—he is now in the meridian of life—care has stamped its wrinkles upon his brow—disappointment has dimmed the lustre of his eye; sorrow has thrown its gloom upon his countenance—he looks back upon the waking dreams of his youth, and sighs for their reality—each revolving year seems to diminish, something from his little stock of happiness, and he discovers that the season of youth, when the pulse of anticipation beats high is the only season of enjoyment. Who is he of the aged looks? His form is bent and totters—his footsteps move more rapidly towards the tomb—he looks back upon the past—his days appear to have been very few, and he confesses they were evil—the magnificence of the great is to him vanity—the hilarity of youth, folly—he considers how soon the gloom of death must overshadow the one—and disappointment the other—the world presents little to attract, and nothing to delight him—still, he would lengthen out his days—though of "beauty's bloom," of "fancy's flash," of "music's breath," he is forced to exclaim, "I have no pleasure in them." A few years of infirmity, anxiety and pain, must consign him to idleness or the grave—yet this was the generous, the high-souled boy, who beheld his ascending path of life strewn without a thorn. Such is human life, but such cannot be the ultimate destinies of man.

EXTRAORDINARY DISCOVERY OF AN ANCIENT PRINTING PRESS IN INDIA.—When Warren Hastings was Governor General of India, he observed that in the district of Benares, a little below the surface of the earth, to be found a stratum of a kind of fibrous wooden substance, of various thickness, in horizontal layers. Major Roebuck, informed of this, went out to a spot where an excavation had been made, displaying this singular phenomenon. In digging somewhat deeper for the purpose of further research, they laid open a vault, which on examination proved to be of some size, and to their astonishment, they found a kind of printing press, set up in the vault, and on it moveable types, placed as if ready for printing. Every inquiry was set on foot to ascertain the probable period at which such an instrument could have been placed there, for it was evidently of modern origin, and from all the Major could collect it appeared probable that the place had remained in the state in which it was found for at least one thousand years. We believe the worthy Major on his return to England, presented one of the learned associations with a memoir containing many curious speculations on the subject. Paper we know to have been manufactured in the East many centuries before we had any knowledge of it; and we have many reasons to think that the Chinese have been acquainted with the mode of printing they now employ many centuries before Fauste invented it in Europe. It certainly does no credit to the inventive genius of the Romans, to know that they approached so near as to engrave in a style not to be equalled in the present age, on gems and stones, and of course the taking of impressions from them, that they should still have remained ignorant of the art which has bestowed so many blessings on mankind.

POLITICS OF THE DAY.

A Letter from the President of the United States.

WASHINGTON, JULY 4, 1840.

Gentlemen: I have had the honor to receive the invitation which you have been pleased to give me in behalf of the democratic citizens of the counties of Fayette, Woodford, and Scott, to be present as a guest at a public meeting and entertainment to be held by them at the White Sulphur Springs, in Scott county, Kentucky, on the 11th instant.

Truly grateful for this mark of their respect and kindness, I can but regret that my public duties will not permit me to express my gratefulness face to face.

That I have been so fortunate as to secure "the entire approbation of the democracy of Kentucky," that they look upon me as "true to the Constitution of the United States," "the representative and advocate of their principles in the Executive Department of our Government," cannot but afford me peculiar satisfaction, coming, as it does, from a highly respectable portion of the ancient and time-honored patriots of that noble State, and from the sons of those who, in their day, were the pillars of the republic. History, gentlemen, must be false to her duty when she ceases to inform mankind that it was by Kentucky that the first effectual blow was struck at the dangerous principles introduced into the administration of our Government soon after the adoption of the Constitution—principles which had already led to acts of fearful usurpation, and threatened speedily to destroy as well the rights of the States as the liberties of the People. It was Kentucky resolutions, backed by those of her patriotic parent State, which changed the current of public opinion, and brought back the administration of the Government to the principles of the Revolution. For forty years the democracy of the Union have looked upon those resolutions as the creed of their political faith; political degeneracy has been marked by departure from that standard, and, like the original language of the Bible in matters of religion, they are the text book of every reformer.

Nothing could more effectually prove the purity of the principles then announced than the progress they have since made in the minds of men. While even the names proposed then has come to be considered a term of reproach, if not of ignominy and insult, the principles of the Kentucky resolutions, in profession, if not in fact, now enter into the creed of every political sect, and the once derided name borne by their apostles and advocates, is considered an essential passport to popularity and success. Nay, more, the People, almost with one voice, have recently recognised and consecrated the principles of those resolutions, by an act as impressive and emphatic as it is possible for a nation to perform. Since your letter has been laying before me waiting for a reply, it has become my agreeable duty to confirm the fiat of the nation settling forever the unconstitutionality of the sedition laws of 1798, by approving an act for the relief of the heirs of Matthew Lyon, refunding to them a fine collected of their ancestor under the law in question. Party prejudice, judicial authority, dread of the precedent, respect for that which has assumed the form of law for forty years, have successfully resisted this act of justice; but at length all are swept away by the irresistible current of public opinion, and the sedition act has been irresistibly decided to be unconstitutional by a tribunal higher than the courts of justice—the sovereign People of the United States. The patriots of Kentucky and Virginia, the men who, in that day, amidst obloquy and insult, voted for or sustained the Kentucky and Virginia resolutions of 1799, cannot but rejoice with joy unspeakable in witnessing the final triumph of the pure principles to which they then announced their allegiance. They and their descendants have a right to glory in seeing those principles recognised, even at this late day, by the acclamations of a nation, and one of the tyrannical acts against which they protested virtually expunged from the records of the country.

While to aged patriots it is a subject of congratulation and joy, it teaches the young that efforts at reform in the Government of their country ought never to be considered hopeless as long as there is anything to improve, and that, if the fathers do not enjoy the fruits of their exertions in the cause of democratic principles, they are certain to fall in blessings upon the children.

I am most happy to inform you, gentlemen, that I have this day signed the bill for the establishment of an Independent Treasury, a measure of which you speak in decided commendation. By this measure, the management of an important branch of our national concerns, after a departure of nearly half a century, will be brought back to the letter, as well as to the obvious spirit and intention of the Constitution. The system now superseded was, in fact, one of those early measures devised by the friends and advocates of privileged orders, for the purpose of perverting the Government from its pure principles and legitimate objects, vesting all power in the hands of the few, and enabling them to profit at the expense of the many. I need not inform you, gentlemen, that the effect of depositing the public money in banks, was to lend it to those institutions, generally without interest, to be used as a part of their capital, and