

FREETHOUGHT WRITINGS:

THE INVESTIGATOR



Voltairine de Cleyre

For the Boston Investigator.

THE WOMAN'S NATIONAL LIBERAL UNION

MR. EDITOR:—Hereafter let it not be said that the women of American are behind their brothers in the work of freeing the country from superstition's shackles. The most radical organization in the United States, so far as the Church is concerned, was born in Washington D. C., the 24th of last month. And that organization is founded by women, officered by women, and will do its principal worth through women. It is the first and only national English-speaking body in these State of American which has the courage of its convictions, and openly declared its hostility to the Church and to all forms of supernaturalism.

Unlike the American Secular Union, it does not aim to be a political organization, but a moral movement, and although, as I have written, it is essentially a woman's movement, it aims to unite all, of both sexes, who wish to place themselves upon the roll of antagonists to priestcraft and godcraft. The history of the formation of the new Union, though not lengthy, is interesting. The two national women's suffrage societies founded originally by Freethinkers, have been growing more conservative, and since that notable politician, Miss Frances Willard, has assumed so prominent a position in the now united body of suffragists, the movement originally designed for woman's political emancipation has become sub-ordinated to the religious element.

Four months ago, Matilda Joslyn Gage, for twenty yeas the co-laborer of Mrs. Stanton, Miss Anthony, and other noted suffragists, having become convinced that no further progress was to be expected so long as churchocracy dominated the political association, resolved to call a convention of Freethinking women, who would openly declare themselves against the encroachments of both Catholicism and Protestantism. To her the principal credit of its success is to be ascribed, as the main portion of the hard work was done by her; not to omit the recognition due Mr. and Mrs. Aldrich of Alabama, who bore the burdens of expense, Mrs. Bones of Dakota, and our own beloved Miss Wixon, who, in the midst of many duties, and with the added weight of ill-health, found time to render much valuable assistance.

The morning of Monday, Feb. 24th, was cloudy and dismal enough. Truly, the new association was being baptized with "the wrath of God." At least the idea that all good Christian women would say so, played fancifully through your subscriber's head, as our train crept southward through the dark grey dawning. But this mid-winter rain seemed to fall softly, even warmly, so that the verdure of the half Southern city grew green beneath it, and in a fit of optimism I

concluded to let the poetry of color prophesy; yes, we too should grow green and strong beneath our baptism, and events have justified the promise.

The formal proceedings of the Convention were opened by the usual business routine—reading of letters, telegrams, appointment of committees, etc. Mrs. Gage, as President *pro tem* (and a fine-looking President she makes, with her piercing eyes, and crown of grand white hair,) dispatched all this in due order, and then calling Mrs. Aldrich to the chair, delivered the salutatory of the National Liberal Union. It was an exhaustive review of the causes which had mad the new association necessary, demonstrating anew the force of the reactionary law which compels resent on one hand equal to invasion on the other. This address brought forward such an array of facts, betrayed such extensive digging and delving in the most miscellaneous nooks and corners, that one could not but wonder how this indefatigable worker had found the necessary time for investigation.

Verily she had searched Jerusalem with candles, and brought an indictment against the oppressors of mind to-day, which might serve to around the most lethargic to the need of consolidated opposition. The afternoon session opened with somewhat larger attendance, the audience being entertained with Mrs. Westbrook's and Miss Wixon's view of the Church in relation to women. St. Paul received the usual ventilation, the one ne nearly always gets from Freethinkers, regarding his authoritarian attitude towards women, and poor old Adam the customary drubbing for his mental cowardice. With the contrariness which is my natural inheritance, I felt a good deal like defending their ancient dust against further attack; a person who was so mean, and little, and pusillanimous as Adam, after six thousand years ought to be relieved from any worse punishment than that of carrying his microscopical soul around him for the balance of duration. And as for St. Paul, if he could have heard Mrs. Westbrook's soft voice, and met Susan Wixon's marvelous smile, he would have been different from all the men I ever knew if he didn't let them talk to their heart's content, and enjoyed it, too.

The discussion of the Blair Bill by Mrs. White, which would undoubtedly have been of much interest, had to be omitted—Mrs. White a in California. I suppose that, as a Freethinker, Mrs. White would oppose the bill, though how she could possibly do so with any logic in view of the fact that she is a Nationalist, I am at a loss to understand. Nationalism, as presented by Edward Bellamy, is Senator Blairism, to a dot, so far as Blair goes; and since we are upon that topic permit me to digress from the legitimate order of reporting to tell you about the Blair Bill as Mr. Blair tells it.

A number of us who have interested ourselves in the World's Fair appropriation to the extent of wishing to see the loaves and fishes divided equally among the representatives of women as well as men, went over to the Capital to interview the "Honorable" servants of the American sovereigns about it. imagine, if you please, an elegant marble reception room, the like of which the majority of sovereigns never saw, sculpted and painted and furnished to match, and in one corner of it an assemblage of the "wives and daughters" of the sovereigns, anxious, painfully anxious, to see their illustrious servants. The first servant who came was Senator Blair. Now, I had made up my mind to "dislike him." I had firmly resolved that Mr. B was a small, weazened, dried-up representative of humanity, with a body just big enough to hold a "soul" of the Calvinian pattern. Instead, behold! a tall, broad-shouldered, blonde-haired man, with fine, open eyes, and as pleasant a voice as ever feel to the lot of a Christian—or Freethinker, either. When catechized relative to his educational bill, he stated that as it now reads it simply provides for public appropriations, the object of which is to secure and maintain free schools in those parts of each State where the people are too poor to establish such; it makes no provision for any species of religious instruction. He related that the circumstances of a trip in Virginia, where, he said, the people seemed to be more anxious for educational advantages for their children than they were interested upon any of the so-called political issues. (The "so-called" is mine.)

Although it occurred to me that the best way to help said Virginians would be to leave them rent-free and tax-free, to do away with their poverty that they might help themselves instead of making them benefit-members of a general charitable society, still it was pleasant to know that Mr. Blair had actually made personal investigations into the life of the people he is trying to help, and one likes him for it. When further questioned concerning the religious feature of his bill he stated that his idea was not to prejudice the children against any form of religion, but simply to give them a general knowledge of the religion of the country in which they were living; that such knowledge would be of more service to the children than that of Buddhism, just as the geography of his own country would be more serviceable than that of India.

Miss Wixon then inquired why such knowledge could not be acquired in the Sunday schools, to which Mr. Blair replied that there were thousands of children who never saw the inside of a church or Sunday school, and were growing up without knowing about God, or the devil, or heaven, or— "Who does?" interposed the intrepid sceptic. But Senator Blair "having ears heard not;" he proceeded with his argument. Of course we couldn't see it his way; nevertheless, I believe

we all left the Capitol with a much better opinion of the man than we had on entering it.

To return to the Convention. The evening exercises were opened by a recitation from your scribe—a poem, at that time, like the majority of my verses, nameless, but which is since denominated “The Gods and the People.” Following this was the address of Prof. Elliott Coues. Apart from the long, heavy, waving beard, and the rather too squarish forehead, Mr. Coues has the appearance of the Da Vinci Christ. He is an eloquent and forcible speaker, though in accordance with the theosophical idea of giving everything a harmonic name, he detracts somewhat from his force by politely calling *lies* “myths,” etc. While this may be a gain in harmony, it seems to me that there is no use in mixing sweetness with discord. I have always admire the splendid adaptation of inharmonic sound to inharmonic idea contained in these lines of Milton:—

“On a sudden open fly,
With impetuous recoil, and hard rebound
Th’ infernal doors, and on their hinges grate
Harsh thunder!”

To express the idea of hell in pretty language would have been un-Miltonic and unpoetic; and I know of nothing so hellish as theological lies. Dr. Coues’ address, however, was received with the approbation it merited, and, perhaps, after all, he is right.

The Rev. Olympia Brown followed with an address on “A Free Ballot and a Free Church.” The idea of either ballot or church having to do with freedom is really quite as paradoxical as “Christian science,” or red-hot ice; and the Rev. lady, through a fine orator and not a bad lawyer in making out her case, showed clearly that she neither understood the nature of the Church nor the ballot. In defence of the Church and its attitude towards women, she said that Oberlin College, founded by Orthodox Congregationalists, was the first institution in the country which admitted women on an equality with men. (“Give the devil his due.” But first is it true?)

The closing speech by Mrs. Eliza Burns, of New York, was the funny thing of the Convention. Mrs. Burns is a one-idea woman; she wishes to reform the world by “fonetik spelling.” The English language certainly needs the reform bad enough, but what that has to do with “Woman’s Right to Reason,” her advertised subject, the audience evidently failed to perceive. They ought to have been glad, however, that at last they beheld the miracle of woman perfectly satisfied with her calling. That should have been compensation for the apparent irrelevancy of her discourse.

Tuesday's forenoon session had a small attendance of outsiders, which was rather to be expected in view of its being principally a business meeting. The Committees on Aims and Objects, Plan of Work, and Resolutions, brought in the results of their work. The same will soon be published in convenient form for distribution, and may be obtained of Mrs. Emily Coues, 1726 N Street, N. E., Washington, (D. C.) Owing to limited time these reports were not discussed as had been intended and announced; that such was the case is much to be regretted, as it has given opportunity for criticism that would otherwise have been avoided. For my own part I had no fault to find with either the first or last reports; but consider that the plan of work and organization which includes the election of officers, is rather too centralized. I speak of this because my name was put upon that committee, but the work was done before I arrived in the city. However, it lies within the power of future conventions to change this if they are not satisfied; and if they are satisfied I shall not complain. The general board of management consists of an Executive Council of nine, who chose a president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer from among their number. This directing board will appoint general assistants in each State, termed State managers. The present officials are, President, Matilda Joslyn Gage, Fayetteville, (N. Y. ;) Vice-President, Josephine C. Aldrich, (Ala. ;) Secretary, Emily Coues, Washington; Treasurer, Wm. E. Aldrich, Aldrich, (Ala. ;) Membership fees, \$1.00 a year, to be paid on or before July 1st of each year, but no one shall be deprived of membership on account of inability to pay his dues.

The address by Mrs. Bones on "Liberalism in So. Dakota" dealt somewhat with the legal features of the new State. She also read a lengthy paper from the pen of Lucinda Chandler of Illinois. Mrs. Bones, notwithstanding her name (obtained, I suppose by that ugly habit women have of perpetuating their husbands names, no matter how inappropriate they are,) suggests anything but Golgotha. She is as plump as Dicken's "Apple-cheeked Polly," and fresh as her own Western breezes.

The afternoon meeting was a really lively one. In place of the announced speech by your scribe, a discussion took place concerning the topic introduced by Mr. Aldrich, of raising a fund of \$500,000 to establish in the five principal cities of the United States, "public defenders," whose business it shall be to defend criminals, as it is that of public prosecutors to prosecute them. Now came the orators! Mrs. Foltz of California, in a blaze of eloquence, followed Mr. Aldrich, supporting the measure warmly; telling how in her experience innocent people had often been convicted and sentenced to long imprisonment, because, being moneyless, they were utterly at the mercy of a court, prejudging them guilty, and a prosecutor whose sole

aim was to prosecute—to make a case any way, and build a brilliant legal reputation regardless of truth. A gentleman in the audience negativized this view, and to his questions Mrs. Foltz sharply replied. Mrs. Belva Lockwood subsequently took the platform, and with the force of a natural speaker, hurled accusations against the criminal system, stronger even than those made by Mrs. Foltz. Well, the lawyers wrangled back and forth, their opinions being pretty evenly divided as to whether the criminal didn't have enough sympathy, or whether he had too much. So intense was the interest that even gentle, shrinking, little Mrs. Aldrich arose and earnestly told how she and her husband had followed case after case of unjust accusations, not taking the testimony of others but making personal investigations. Thought not a public speaker, her words were uttered with that direct, simply earnestness which makes a child the most effective of orators. Undoubtedly the major portion of the house, leaving the lawyers out of account, were in favor of Mr. Aldrich's plan; but somehow the thought would force itself on the unparticipating spectator, by what peculiar science is the incorruptibility of the "public defender" to be determined? Why may he not be bought? And why argue over the treatment of criminals, without investigating the cause of crime? And by what measurement can you decide what crime is? And if a wrong be done, can you rectify it by doing the wrong-doer another wrong?

The afternoon closed with a written address from Mrs. Lockwood, and a speech from Mrs. Charlotte Smith, the well-known labor agitator. Mrs. Smith is a Roman Catholic, and afterwards said to me that when she stated so on the platform, she expected to be hissed. No wonder, if she has judged of Liberalism by her church's treatment of her enemies; but I trust that now she knows us better. She is perhaps the best-informed woman in the United States in reference to the actual condition of our industrial women, and a talk with her is better than a book of facts, for her statistics are couple with the romance of experimental suffering. The closing session of the Convention introduced to a Washington audience one of the fairest, whitest, sweetest women that ever nursed a heartache of religious persecutions, or drank the bitterness of social condemnation because she was "an Infidel." Eliza Archard Conner is still young, though her short, waving hair is flashed with silver, and there are lines upon her face. Her movements are like music, and her voice has that pathetic cadence born of gentleness, and much endurance. Her audience was hers from the outset; they laughed with her, they looked sad with her, and when the music stopped, they begged the dainty player to strike the chords again. I think every one must have taken home with him that graceful, dignified acknowledgment, which negativized the request. To what she said, to catch the charm of it, would take three arts, the painter, the poet, the musician. I leave it with you, only saying that it

was an arraignment of the Church and Society, in its attitude towards woman, which every woman ought to read.

Mrs. Aldrich followed Mrs. Connor, speaking with her same earnest, child-like way, in protest against the wrongs inflicted by Orthodoxy upon the minds of children. From this we passed to a discussion of "The True Position of Woman in the Present Crisis," by your correspondent, and thence to the re-reading of Miss Wixon's poem: "When Womanhood Awakes," which, I hope, is to be printed.

I am unable to report Mrs. Gage's analysis of the "Scientific Basis of Morality," (which I much regret,) being taken ill a few moments after closing my address.

Altogether the Convention was a success, and I trust it may be the inauguration of a work sadly needed, and long neglected—that of killing the idea of authority-worship from the minds of women.

For the present, *au revoir*,

VOLTAIRINE DE CLEYRE.

For the Boston Investigator.

WASHINGTON SIGHTS AND SOUNDS.

MR. EDITOR:—When Charles Dickens visited us in 1842, he wrote that Washington was rather a city that was “going to be,” than an accomplished fact. Choosing between this opinion and that of a personal friend who declares it is the only city in the United States fit to live in, I should award the palm to Dickens.

Washington is still a largely “going to be” sort of place, a queer mixture of metropolitan airs and country village smells. I had heard so much of its magnificent distances that I was prepared to be tired at the first mention of sight-seeing; I imagined a walk from Fourteenth Street to the Capitol would be an all-day’s tramp, and the Washington Monument a sort of receding mirage that would beckon me through almost interminable space. For the benefit of similar sufferers allow me to say that it’s a piece of unwarrantable deceit. Though the grounds and streets of the Capitol are not “bright and glorious,” they are not “everlasting;” not near so distressingly stretched out as this Quaker City from which I write. It is wonderfully favored in scenic location, and if its people were not all either politicians or dependants of politicians, the one occupied in finding out the best way to blindfold the giant which creates them, the other sneering at them for their finding, Washingtonians might be poets and painters very naturally.

But I have heard before of the corruption of political life and now I know it. We used to say, out in Michigan, that to put any man selling wood would corrupt his morals, let him be never so saintly; he can’t stand the temptation to pile seven-eighths of a cord so as to fill the measure of a cord, and take money for ingenious holes. Alas! the politicians are selling the people holes at tremendous prices, and the various employes of the departments (about the only class of working people in Washington) seem to regard the sum total of officialdom as contained in the word “rotten.”

But lest I be supposed to be indulging in baseless invective of my own invention, come with me to that marble Capitol of which I spoke before, whose beautiful dome rises from the midst of the greenness and bloom which only the South affords in February. The great magnolias are in blossom, the catalpas are opening, and the growth of a blush burns soft and deep where the peach trees blow.

Inside the Hall of the People (I am not sarcastic,) with its wonderful rotunda, its checkered marble floors, its galleries like streets, you see upon the walls, and far up in the dome, beautiful paintings of beautiful women—always women! Liberty’s, Oh! so many of them, always women; angels, always women; muses, graces, Fates,

always women, and in the aisle and through the halls and in the corridors and reception rooms, men, men, men!

As we passed into the one pitiful waiting-room which in all the great Capitol is for the living representatives of the pictured guides and goddesses, we heard a *he*-creature remark to an acquaintance: "As so and so says, 'I believe my wife is my equal in *every respect*, except to be a servant to other people!' 'By G—d, that's me!"

Oh, how I wanted to let my tongue loose on that man! How I wanted to ask him whether he preferred his wife to be a servant for the United States at five thousand dollars a year and the difficult duties(?) of misguiding people's affairs, or working in a choking factory sixty hours a week for \$6.00, as a million of the served, who pay the five-thousand, do. I wanted to ask why it was quite proper that wives should work in every department of the public machine, serving the servants, but not at the Capitol? I wanted to ask him of what use any one was in the world if she did not serve some one; anyhow I suppose he would have assured me she was *his* servant—he had a monopoly on her services, bought and paid for them.

For my part I am glad women have never soiled themselves with the contemptible business of legislation. I hope by the time our equality is recognized, that vast pile will have been turned into an enjoyment hall, really "for the people," and there will be no more law-making; but as long as those people admit suffrage as a premise, I want them to use a little logic.

I didn't wonder they were ashamed of the business, when we took seats in the gallery of the House, and watched how a law was made. Imagine an immense school-room, with a desk for each number, a waste-paper basket for each desk, a spittoon, writing materials, etc., and all this seen through a blue cloud which has curled gracefully upward from the illustrious Senators' mouths, and rests around the heads of "we, the people," who gaze down. But Oh, the members! Not sitting in their places like well-behaved school boys attending their lessons, but meandering about with (pardon) *cuds* in their mouths, attending to everyone else's affairs, and making noise enough to disgrace the gallery gods of a variety theatre. I have been there—and sat it out, the only woman in the crowd; I have been among the lowest "alums" of this or other cities; I have seen the much dreaded emigrant in all his glory, and I have yet to see as disorderly, and apparently, purposeless as assemblage, as the National House of Representatives.

In deprecating this to a friend in a somewhat apologetic tone of voice, I was amused by a little Spaniard's enthusiastic description of a device to keep these disorderly members in their seats. The plan was to put a large frame divided into sections, each section containing an indicator, upon the walls of the house, the sum of the sections to equal

the sum of the members; the indicator to be connected with an electric button at each desk. One push was to register "yeas," two, "nays," three, "don't vote." He had also perfected a mechanical plan for determining any tampering, and a scheme to lock the member in his seat while the vote is being registered. His reason for this was purely an economical one. He said:—"When I go dhere and see dhat man cry out, 'order, order, jhentlemen, and brings down his fist, my grazhus! every time he puts down himself dhat cost fifty dollar, my grazus!" So much for the Capitol.

One drizzling, misty day, I entertained myself at the National Museum. It's a fine assemblage of minerals, geologicals, bugs, birds, toads, bears, and (to quote Dickens again) "human bones various." There were lots of gods too, and one bright-eyed mulatto showed me the devil; like a little girl's ring, "he was solid brass." I sat down by a miniature fountain and reflected on the propriety of keeping God in the National Museum, though dear knows it would be sufficient reason for all the decent relics to arise and walk out. The monument! A vast needle of gray stone in the centre of what is "going to be" a beautiful roll of ground, a green gem setting for the silver of the Potomac, with blue Virginia hills behind. But to-day it is overhung by the sad veil of rain, (I used to call it God's tears when I was pious,) the way is muddy, the Potomac dismal, and the hills somber, and far away.

A party of us crowded in the elevator and went creeping up, up, seeing nothing through the grates of our moving prison save gray walls, sparkling now and then in the electric light, and black numbers which indicated every twenty feet of the ascent. Arrived at the top we each made a wild dive for the window, anxious to dash our eyes upon a scenery which is said to stretch away like a dim picture from that immense height. Lo! formless mist! Nothing but the gray veil we could not tear! I imagined how God must have felt in that immense void from which he "made" things. Only we had the advantage—we had some superb masonry to stand on—he was enthroned on that big shroud of nothing.

Finding there was no view my friend and I concluded to race the elevator down. As we had a nine minutes start, and "the walking is good," it was not a hard matter. We even found time to stop and admire the stone carvings on blocks presented by different societies in every part of the U. S. One poor old lady who is struggling hard with the world, told me her deceased husband put \$600 into the Columbus, (O.) presentation, saying with half complaining, but not bitter, lips: "I think he might better have left it to me."

I turned from the sad face to the great gray pile; I thought of the rotted bones sleeping in Mt. Vernon, beyond the somber hills; I wondered if the monument built of living gratitude were not better

than that mass of petrified heartache; and as my eyes fell from the aspect to the base, inwardly exclaimed with Anaxagoras, "What an amount of money turned into stone!" Pessimistic reflection no doubt; the proper thing is to admire and be patriotic and feel duly elated at having seen the highest monument in the world erected in my native country. But alas, I am a native of the world and I think more of the world's people now, than I care for glory or remembrance in the future. When I read of the obelisks, the pyramids, the temples of the ancients, I always think, to what end did those who quarried them with their lives, and cemented them with their sweat and sorrow, rear those vast tombs? To sepulchre the idle; to glorify gods of stone? And I fear our own cannot but impose the thinking in like manner.

Let no one who visits Washington omit the Corcoran Art Gallery. Out of its splendid array of sculpture and painting I have carried the remembrance of a painted sea, whose waves moved upon the canvas like living water, the foremost running in upon the beach in that long shell-like curve which writes great circles in the sand, and the farthest seen, curling its great blue crest to break, while in between floated ridges of sparkling white now and then upthrown like flying hair. One might cool one's self by that picture on a hot day; the very salt seems to be glistening in the air above it. In one of the side galleries there is the most wonderful moon-glimmer I have ever seen outside of a June night on Lake Huron. Through a gap where soft water winds beneath the night shadows of watching hills, the light breaks like a smile between parted lips. It shreds the unmoving leaves, throwing dark doubles downward, and then glints and rests on the long rippling foreground of water, so rarely, so clearly, that gazing you would exclaim, "the ripples move!"

I observe that Miss Leland in her book "Around the World," lays some severe strictures on 'the old masters' for putting on their paints roughly; but I suppose the masters, like these painters of sea and moonlight, worked for effects. Close to one they were very "dauby," but at the distance necessary to get the perspective they put to shale all the more painstaking works, who fine finishing only rendered them flat and indistinct. I observed the same thing in sculptures. The piece which fixed me longest was the head of the "Veiled Non," which, near at hand, looked shapeless, rough, and meaningless; but across the gallery the most beautiful features are revealed behind a veil, so filmy and delicate, one needed to touch it to believe it was of stone. In the centre of this gallery and facing the "Nun" is the reputed masterpiece—a cast of Powers' Greek Slave—it is lovely, but it has the fault of being *too* perfect, too finished, to arrest the eye at any distance.

I could have spent hours within those fascinating halls, but time, tide, and trains wait for no woman, so went away with a sigh and a

resolution to come again some other day. On my way to the depot I say the prettiest little spot in all Washington; a miniature grotto, in a quaint corner of the Capitol grounds, where a wee cascade sang to itself, and jealous rocks shadowed the wonderful greenness that bordered it.

On board the train I reflected: Well, I have seen Washington! It certainly is a novelty; it is different from all other places. It is ornamental if not useful; its papers are more honest than any I have ever met (probably because there are so many women reporters); its people are of many climes and nations; it has no fixed characteristics; its bump of continuity is small; but thank goodness it isn't pious!

Of course I didn't see a quarter of what was to be seen, but enough to justify the above conclusions which severally occupied my mind for different lengths of time until our "limited express," on hour late, landed me at Chestnut Street in the midst of a whirl of snow. It was cold snow, just as cold as flies up North; but not cold enough to chill the remembrance of the pleasant friendships made, and the warm heart-wishes for all the bright radicals I met at the Capitol. Let me close by extending them to all who read these lines.

VOLTAIRINE DE CLEYRE.

Philadelphia, Pa.

For the Boston Investigator.

CREMATION.

MR. EDITOR:—An article in the Truth Seeker from the pen of A. B. Bradford upon the subject of cremation suggested to me the propriety of describing a visit to the Cheltenham Hills cemetery made by a friend and myself some months ago. Much of the prejudice prevailing among even Freethinkers against this method of disposing of the dead is owing to ignorance of the process of cremation, and the surrounding of the last home of the silent.

One bitter winter evening, by a queer accident, the manager of the Cremation Society called upon my friend, with the idea that the corpse of some cremationist lay in the house awaiting services. No such sad event having occurred, we fell to chatting on the comparative merits and demerits of burial and incineration, and being all of one mind, it is needless to say that undertakers, coffins, graves, and the rest of the barbaric paraphernalia of burial were speedily consigned to the past, in company with the incantations, altar lights, priestly garments, and lying funeral orations which are a part of the tyranny and waste of Christianity. The upshot of it was that we were invited to attend an incineration the following day, and examine the machinery of this pagan—and sensible—custom,

I do not clearly remember just whose fault it was (and, therefore, shall put it on my friend, which is a convenient way of shelving responsibility). But we missed the train which is regularly met by the visitors' conveyance, and the result was a two mile tramp over the spongy country road, "up hill and down dale," in a frame of mind and body which led me to devote the whole earth, and particularly the Reading railroad, to that big crematory down below, which God's brightest angel is said to preside over. Why the Reading railroad? Well, because it is always behind time on every occasion, excepting when the passengers are, and then it beats the schedule.

But the days always have an ending, weariness has its own time of ceasing, bitterness and rancour are not immortal; and if the years are long enough for these to die in, I suppose I may soon forget the mud clogs, the hills, the lanes, the stumblings of that tedious walk, and learn to love the railroad as myself. At length out of the greenness, that even February could not kill, arose the small, neat dome of the Columbarium, and shortly after, we approach a flight of gray stone steps that led to the solemn house of ashes; for, do what you will, you cannot break the air of solemnity that always hangs around a place of memories.

The services we had expected to attend were over, but the manner of their holding is briefly explained. On passing through the vestibule

you find yourself in a softly-lighted hall, of beautiful architecture, whose walls from wainscot to ceiling are lined with small glass doors opening into niches wherein repose the urns which hold the ashes of the dead. The sort light comes through windows, stained to reject the harsher beams, and through them, and down from the dome, flows that quiet, somber shadow, that grayness-bearing hush upon its wings, which often broods in still places where a summer sun is dead. An echo rises from beneath you when your footfalls move upon the marble floor, as if some voice were calling gently, very gently, that its breath might not blow upon the dust in the niches. Opposite you, upon your entrance, is a small raised platform, from which any Faith or Unfaith may speak to those within the auditorium.

Sitting there in the silence one might think how vast the revolution Time has witnessed since the days of the introduction of burial by the early Christians. How fair are all things now, when from the same footplace may be spoken the blessing (save the mark) of Calvinism, the touching invocation of Spiritualism, the grandeur of Agnosticism bowing to the Unknown, or the sublimity of Atheism teaching above the coffin Race-immortality; how fair all this compared with that bygone day when, in the name of God, faggots were built for living victims, and earth depopulated to fill hell for the sake of appeasing heaven.

What an object lesson in the harmonizing spirit of Liberty! What a hall of learning for those backward-looking souls, who, accepting the facts of Freethought, seeing the evil wrought by Gods, and knowing how naught but Liberty ever brought harmony, yet fear to trust the principle, and in the name of Society murder, as did the bigots of old; who, in the name of the god, Purity, imprison men, in the name of the god, Property, rob men, in the name of the god, Order, do every crime for which they condemn Calvin when he sacrificed his fellow-beings to his god, Jehovah. A study-room, this Columbarium, where you, who sing hymns to Liberty, yet spit upon and mock her, may do well to learn.

Before the platform surrounded by a brass railing is a square enclosure, the floor of which is a trap. Upon this trap the coffin rests, covered by a black cloth so disposed, that at the close of the service the corpse sinks down unseen to the room below. Here the undertaker removes the body to the preparing room, where it is covered with strips of cloth soaked in alum water to prevent the clothing from catching fire, and is then suspended upon a long iron lever. This is rolled forward, and the body lowered till it rests within the heated retort. The lever is then withdrawn, the door closed, and in ninety minutes the body is reduced to a few pounds of fine white ashes.

In ninety minutes there is done that which years of slow decay would also do. Within the shroud of rose-colored light the body

swiftly crumbles, and nothing remains to be a putrid sore beneath the skin of the earth, to mix its poison with the running streams that slake the thirst of the living, or to take up that ground the living need to use. No flame touches the body; the furnace fires are below, and only their hot breath passes up the flues that coil about the retort. The fire of coke is built nine hours before the incineration takes place, and the tremendous heat alone dissipates the oils and gases of the body, finally crumbling the bones.

The next day the ashes are removed and disposed as the friends desire. There are a number of urns within the Columbarium, others have been buried, others removed to their homes, and one, disposed as the writer would wish to be, her ashes sprinkled on the green lawn before the building, to mix with the grasses in the sunshine, to be blown by the straying wind as far as it might wander.

I do not know, but to those who sentiment clings to burial, and it never had anything *but* a sentimental foundation, let me say that to me cremation has not only all the logic, but all the poetry and beauty that can cling to the last service of life to death. Not to slow decomposition, not to the gnawing of worms, not to the black putrescence of underground decay, not to the darkness of the under earth, not to a selfish holding of the need of others, not to the base of a monument whose tall shaft mocks in its stoniness the loving hearts that bleed around it, not to the pomp of consecrated rot, but swiftly, brightly, in an aura of light, to go back to the winds, and the beams, and the life of the things which bless the race they have left.

Let me hope that these lines may set in motion the thoughts of some who have refused to think upon the subject, or who have deemed it not sufficiently important. It is important. It is important that we, by practical example, demonstrate our freedom from the fetich of the resurrection, upon which burial is based. It is important that we consider the health of the living, that we shall break as soon as possible the prejudice which prevails against cleanliness in favor of waste, disease, and filth. Civilization will never be worth the name as long as graveyards exist. They are a blot upon the century, and we should do what we can to remove the stain.

VOLTAIRINE DE CLEYRE.

P.S.—Greeley said, “the way to resume is to resume.” Since writing the preceding lines a number of us have resolved to materialize our sentiments, and the plan appears to me so good that I want to present it to my readers. The cost of cremation at Chelton Hills is \$35,00. As this is rather too large a sum for any person in poor circumstances, or even sometimes those moderately situated, to pay all at once, we have resolved to form a society of thirty-five members, each of whom is to pay one dollar admission into the hands of a secretary-treasurer. Upon a death in the association, each

member to pay an assessment of one dollar, and a new member to be admitted. In this way we shall secure the benefit of co-operation, pay only small amounts, and the probabilities are that no one member will ever pay the amount of a cremation certificate. Now let every one who "believes in cremation," but who does not feel able to take out a certificate now, yet fears to die and have the expense of death upon his friends, write to us and help us fill the required number. The secretary is Mr. Jas. B. Elliott, of Friendship Liberal League, who may be addressed at 3515 Wallace Street, this city, and who will gladly furnish information concerning the project. Let us see who is ready to act his belief.

V. DE CLEYRE.

Philadelphia, Pa., July 26, 1886.

For the Boston Investigator.

SUNDAY SCHOOLS AND SOCIAL INTERCOUSE AMONG LIBERALS

MR. EDITOR:—Among the many wants of the Free Thought movement is a much wider social intercourse than exists at present, a much more extensive acquaintance with the literature and plans for work of other similar organizations. This became singularly evident to me on the evening of the 12th of October last, when I lectured before the German Freethinking Society at Philadelphia. So far, the American and German movements have been “things apart.”—True, an attempt was made at Milwaukee to unite them after a fashion; but it failed, because there was no social union.

One of the saddest things in our own Free Thought societies is to see people come, Sunday after Sunday, possibly their names are known, though quite as frequently not, and sit the meeting out and then disappear in that vast forest called the city—no one knows where—and remain in the somber shadow of the unknown, sometimes drifting away forever, sometimes returning after long intervals with faces showing traces of suffering and disease; but no one knows anything about it.

In strong contrast with this cold, hard individualism-run-to-seed is the social life of the German elements. The German Freethinkers all know one another; when a stranger comes among them, they do not rest till they have shaken him by the hand and introduced him to their friends. In almost all the large cities they have their own buildings; have them divided into school rooms, audience halls, billiard-rooms, reading rooms, and generally comfortable rooms for chatting, eating lunch, sipping coffee, etc. Now, it is not because there is “more money” among the Germans than the Americans that they possess this advantage over us, but because their stronger social sympathies bind them together for a common object.

Is shall not soon forget my pleasant afternoon among the ladies of the “Woman’s Independent Congregation,” the following Sunday after my lecture; the bright-faced girls, the cheery women, the philosophic wise heads of the male sex, all bent on amusing and improving the time “in common.” We discussed some important things too, one of which was a plan for a Free Thought Sunday school in Philadelphia, which should combine the children of the English and German societies of radicals in that city. This school will represent the co-operative effort of the Woman’s National Liberal Union, the German Freigemeinde, and the American Secular Union.

The plan of the work is to take up the Scientific History of Creation, put it in contrast with the Biblical history, teach the

development of the earth, the development of man, the development of morals. The lessons are to be made short, simple, and as interesting as possible, always keeping in view the main point of the contrast in life founded upon faith and the life founded upon fact. Short articles out of the Free Thought papers and popular magazines bearing upon the point will occasionally be read. A competent teacher in the person of Miss Edith Fantini, with occasional visits and instruction from Miss Ida C. Craddock, will endeavor to fulfill that part of the work of the Sunday school.

As I am writing from far away off in Kansas, and have not heard yet from the East, I cannot say whether the plan is yet in operation. But at any rate it will be shortly, and it is desirable that all persons in Philadelphia who have an interest in keeping their children from pernicious influence of Church doctrines, should communicate with Mr. Edelman of 426 North Fifth Street, Philadelphia, who will be able to furnish information as to time, place of assembly, &c. I would advise such parents to visit the Sunday school, acquaint themselves with the teacher and pupils, send their children, and above all help to circulate the knowledge of the work among as many other children as possible.

Let there be no delay in this important matter. Let Liberals in other cities take up the work. Women! Remember it is to you that the children must look for their practical tuition in life! Ally yourself with the National Liberal Union; join forces with other organizations, and try to be at least no farther behind in planting the seeds of rationalism in the minds of the rising generation.

Yours,

VOLTAIRINE DE CLEYRE.

Enterprise, Kansas, Nov. 22, 1890.

THE GILDED EDGE OF HELL

MR. EDITOR:—The broad roll of the Delaware flashed back a white water-glisten at the full moon. Fifteen or twenty vessels spread their white wings to the slow breeze, or sent the black vomit from their whistling throats upward to the night sky. Splash, splash! fell the water from the sides of the “John A. Warner” as she cut the flowing current, that ran like long, waving hair, away from the white line in her wake. Upon her decks two thoughtful women gazed at the dark banks, lifted their eyes to the soft sky and occasionally spoke a few words of murmured admiration. Presently, upon the right, broke a long, shining road of electric lights, white, glittering, illuminating the night.

“Gloucester, how bright it is!” remarked the elder woman.

“The gilded edge of hell,” returned the other slowly, “a living hell!”

After the silence that followed she resumed in a low voice: “It is the place where the drift from human wrecks floats and gathers. Now and then the flower from a broken stem swirls in a catches, and smiles there in the light for a little while. But it crushes and drops below very soon. I have been there—you know I have a passion for moving among the sad things, the bitter things of the earth. Somebody told me that since Philadelphia had been cleared of its dives, the corruption had broken out in a fresh place, and Gloucester was the moral ulcer of the City of Brotherly Love.

“There are rows on rows of shambling buildings where all manner of coarse amusements, coarse language, coarse accents, and coarse tastes strike the sensitive being like hard blows upon his body; the atmosphere is saturated with the fumes of nicotine, and beer seems to ooze from the pores of the rotting wood. The chairs are sticky, and beery rivulets run upon all the table where unsteady hands have tilted the tumblers. Here and there the wreck of a woman, gaudy with inharmonic colors, caked with paint to hide the scars of vileness, talks with some leer-eyed wretch whose every lineament betrays the animal rampant, the intellectual atrophied.

“But sometimes you will see, as I saw, a pure beautiful face, with a brow like the Madonna’s, chaste lips, a deep introspective light in a pair of lovely blue eyes, and her whole presence breathing the scorn of tolerance towards her surroundings. What is that face doing in that hideous crowd, which shrinks away from her high look, and, turning, sneers a horrid prophecy? Look, you moralists, you would-be charitables, you expounders of “faith and works,” you guides of “law and order,” whose blue-coated hirelings walk about, leering, as those

other wretches, at these shells of women. Look! What do you think of your works?"

"There, I am declaiming," exclaimed our narrator in a disgusted tone; "I forgot I was talking to you; I was thinking of that beautiful, scornful creature over there in that scum, with one knows not what of daily insult to bear, and there—these canting preachers, on the other side, telling how law and Gospel protect and rescue women. But that wasn't the worst. Up in one of those summer concert halls a little child, only eleven years old, with the genius of a Modjeska and the voice of an angel, was singing to that reef of wrecks, whose harsh gutturals came to one's ears like the din and clash of—can you imagine it, I wonder—the clash of the breakers tearing rock-pinioned ships in pieces! Yes, that is it. There is something in all their faces, something in all their tones that is not individual; it is the undertone of the social whirlpool in which they are engulfed, speaking in them, tearing them. Well, this little child; my friend brought her some flowers and asked her to come and talk with me.

"It was awful, the self-composure and indifference of that baby, the ease with which she told me the most transparent lies, and the contempt with which she spoke of that quiet life of home which had no charms for her because it was not exciting.

"Oh! the excitement! The bawdy costumes, the brassy instruments—I am sure their throats must have been green with verdigris—the abominable glare, the vulgar voices, the vulgar faces. Oh, the "excitement!" I couldn't bear it. I left that room that seemed to me to be full of grinning skulls just as that baby started in again with her divine voice, to sing something about a mother's love. A mother's love in such a place as that! but some mother loved and caressed every one of them I suppose. Ugh! that is that horrible brass music again. But the water softens it. I wonder if the harsh, bad notes go down with the current, and only the pure tones go far enough to reach us here? It is a pretty notion, isn't it, that there is some good even there, and the good reaches farther than the evil, in proportion! There, we are quite past them. Quite past! The bright edge of a black horror! See how white the moon shines."

* * * * *

Reader, *why*, do you suppose, did I write this young woman's recitative out for the Investigator? *The owner of the Gloucester dives is a Christian man*, who "renders unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's," and to God the things that are God's, *out of the earnings of shame and the corruption of children*.

Voltairine de Cleyre

Philadelphia, Pa.

For the Boston Investigator.

LETTER FROM VOLTAIRINE DE CLEYRE.

MR. EDITOR:—It is so long since I made my bow to the INVESTIGATOR that I feel somewhat as if an introduction were necessary in order that my friends may recognize me.

I went out to the land of reputed grasshoppers and hot winds something like a year ago, to a small retreat among the Kansas prairies called Enterprise, and there resigned myself to poetry in the shape of exquisite sunsets, thrice golden moons and brilliant stars, the vast solemnity of the great waving seas of grass, and the extremely prosaic business of getting a living as a piano teacher. Yes, it was poetry and prose mixed; sometimes, when the boys had their lessons, the poetry ran over and tinted the prose to something like rhythmic colors and tones, and quite frequently the prose diluted the poetry till neither one was “any good,” very much like a second pouring of tea, which is neither good water nor good tea. However, I have survived the unpleasant experience, and looking back over my year find that the good outweighed the bad, since I made many earnest friends, and is not one true friend worth more than the evil of a year?

Kansas with all her bigotry is none the less an enterprising state; which is to say, she is full of radical notions of all kinds—economic, social, political and religious. I had the pleasure of meeting a number of her brightest and most energetic freethinkers at Topeka and elsewhere. I do not know whether the INVESTIGATOR has received a report of the Ottawa convention of freethinkers. At any rate, it may not be amiss to say that a state organization was effected on September 7th, of which C. K. Levering of Burlington was elected president and Lillie D. White of Halsted, secretary. The association has no platform beyond that of opposition to the church on moral grounds, and leaves to its local societies entire jurisdiction over their own beliefs.

The convention at Ottawa was two-fold in its object: first, it was the annual reunion of the Lucifer Union, which was formed for the purpose of assisting Lucifer financially; and second, as an organization convention. Three days' meetings were held in Forest Park, and the attendance on Sunday was very large. The park, a beautiful place, by the way, is the annual meeting place of various societies, which endeavor to save souls according to the gospels of their several faiths. Mr. Semple, of Ottawa, determined to test the impartiality of the town officials, made application for its use for a freethought convention. After much heated discussion, refusals and persuasions he was finally given the permit, but not until they first

gave a promise that "all persons present shall be of good moral character."

Imagine, will you? Think of the ordinary christian local official stickling about moral character! In my opinion, if they are like any other officials I have ever known, they do not know what moral character is! However, the meetings passed off without disturbance, and it is to be hoped the remarks of Mrs. White, Mrs. Waisbrooker, Mr. Harman, Mr. Cook and Mrs. Semple liberalized them somewhat. Personally, I enjoyed the meetings very much, and the recollection of the pleasant sayings and doing kept me smiling during my long and tiresome ride to Chicago.

There again I found myself with friends, being welcomed at the house of that bright little woman whose name is known all over freethought America and whose recent writings in the Chicago Liberal and the Auditor have touched many a heart to tears. Mrs. Freeman is a sort of mother superior to the Chicago Secular Union, which held quite an interesting discussion, over the somewhat threadbare subject of a protective tariff. I say, threadbare, though properly no question is threadbare so long as such a vast mass of the people can be deceived concerning it. The union appears to be in a prosperous condition, and Mr. Geeting, who does the brunt of the work in the society, is much encourage with its present success.

The following evening a reception was tendered me by Dr. Juliet Severance at her elegant rooms on Warren Ave. Dr. Severance has not fully recovered her physical vigor, which was ravaged by two years' constant suffering as the result of a broken arm not properly attended. Nevertheless, she has not lost her grace, dignity and ease of manner as a hostess and a woman. Though comparatively a stranger to Chicagoans, having moved there recently from Milwaukee, she nevertheless made all feel at home, and a pleasurable evening was spent by "the crank;" some twenty of him were present, and we sung, played, recited and conversed just like other folks. Mrs. Severance vetoed "isms" at the start, which veto was supplemented by a remark by Mrs. Freeman that "the meeting was *not* a continuance of the secular union."

I have observed that such continuations are generally too frequent among us; that we are wont to sacrifice our social natures to a perpetual discussion of theories. This gathering, however, thanks to the good taste of all was entirely free from argument; an evening of pure entertainment, and if we may judge by the crowd which collected outside, our singers and reciters afforded pleasure to some others as well as our little group.

Shall I mention those present? They are too well known to need mention, and yet if someone reads these lines who shall some day wish to meet the members of that happy circle, let me name to him

bright-eyed, versatile Mrs. Holmes, Mrs. Ames, who looks at Nature through the medium of Herbert Spencer; to such an extent is my friend devoted to the great sociologist that she contemplates making a sort of Mecca-like pilgrimage to his home some day; she hopes to see him before he dies, and indeed, such persistent spreading of the Spencerian gospel deserves its reward. Geo. Schilling, the generous god-father of the Chicago cranks, casts his benevolent eyes upon the progressive fledglings under his charge, Messrs. Rossner, Trinkhaus and Lund. The editor of the Auditor and his energetic wife, Sarah V. Westrup, tried the various seats in the room, and found them good. M. A. Collins, who has twice been killed by the Chicago dailies, was present, as blithe as ever, "proving in himself," as Mr. Schilling puts it, "the truth of spiritualism and the physical resurrection."

We went home early, like good children; but the pleasant feelings remain with us yet; at least they do with men, and always will.

I am back in my own Michigan again; it is two years since I saw her in her dress of green, beautiful in the September sunlight. The papers have put me in nearly every place in the Union where I didn't belong. I have been dubbed a Pittburger and a Chicagoan when I had not been in either place for a year. I never thought it worth contradiction, deeming the world my home; but some way, down in a corner of men, there is a peculiar affection for the lights and shadows, the green hills and the yellow, dusty road, even the anthills and the ugly, red barns of my own Michigan. Let who can, explain it; I am no believer in patriotism.

VOLTAIRINE DE CLEYRE.

Saint John's, Mich.

For the Boston Investigator.

VOLTAIRINE DE CLEYRE AT GREENSBURG.

MR. EDITOR:—In the little city of Greensburg, some thirty miles east of Pittsburgh, there are a few brave, strong souls who are making war on God and his adjutants with a zeal which only those who have a principle at heart can do. About a month ago your subscriber, being invited to deliver a lecture under the auspices of their union, found herself shaking hands with the ungodly trinity of officers one April night, after a long day's ride though the perpetual wonder of the Alleghany mountains.

Very sad, gray-brown, sorrowful mountains they had seemed to me all day, for just before leaving Philadelphia I had learned that my dear friend, teacher and comrade, Dyer D. Lum, was lying dead in New York; and wherever I looked the memory of the pleasant gray eyes, now closed forever, and the kind voice, hushed beneath the finger of death, haunted me, and colored all with somber shadows.

But as much as it is possible for the living to do for the mourner my welcoming friends did for me to make my sorrow less.

Five years ago, one June day, I had entered Greensburg before, and found all the work resting upon the shoulders of two men, Harrison Null and John S. Byers.

Now, however, there are some newer faces, enthusiastic and devoted—ready to do anything possible for the advance of liberalism. Among these are Mr. Sol Marks, a business man who isn't afraid to be a freethinker for fear of "hurting his business," Mr. J. P. Leasure, Mr. Weibel, Mr. Adamson, Mr. MacIntyre and a number of radical women, among whom I particular remember Mrs. Marks, Mrs. Beatty and Mrs. Byers.

Unfortunately, however, the work, as in all organizations, is left principally to a few, and these few naturally have a tendency to get discouraged when the others become indifferent.

I wish I knew some genuine remedy for the "innocuous desuetude" so often evinced by many of our liberals. I wish I knew something that would fire them with the grandeur of our liberty ideal, and make them willing to work for it. Unfortunately, I don't. But in the midst of this doleful reflection it is not displeasing to remember that the majority of the earnest religionists are in all probability cogitating over the same problem, for I observe that people will be indifferent in church, as out of it.

My lecture was delivered as Zeannette, about four miles from Greensburg, in the Opera House there. There was a very good audience, and a very attentive one; and although the report of the Zeannette Star declared that they had no use for freethinkers in

general, and the Greensburg Liberal Union and myself in particular, I have been invited to speak there again, whenever convenient, with the assurance of a full house.

Quite unwittingly I ran against the Sunday law, and in consequence might have been arrested had not the people been about as astonished at my action as I was at the law. Living in Philadelphia, where literature is constantly sold on Sundays, I quite forgot the blue laws, and offered some books and leaflets for sale. (I think I should have done precisely the same if I had *not* forgotten). However, there were plenty of people to buy, and although a policeman, constable and magistrate were present, our transactions were no interrupted. Not being able to understand in what way I had injured those people who did *not* buy, or wanted to buy, I saw no reason for the outburst of sanctimony in the next day's Star, which declared that my "audacity" should have been punished.

During the week we had several talks at the cosy little hall of the Liberal Union in Greensburg, and many pleasant memories do I bring away with me of the bright faces and earnest voices I met there.

On Sunday, April 16th, I returned to my old field, Pittsburgh, among the ranks of whose workers there still clings to me a more homelike feeling than in any others. The old faces, the old places, how dear they are! To be sure, many things have changed; some have done the long way of all flesh; some have married; and here and there new faces fill in the old frames. But the old "war-horses" are there yet, and they haven't stopped the fight, and they don't intend to.

Condemned to torture both myself and my audience with a hoarse voice, the lecture was hardly the most desirable thing to listen to. But it was a means of calling out the every-interesting, ever-amusing Mr. Thresher, who takes particular delight in making his own professed religion ludicrous.

After the meeting a new organization, a "Topolobampo Club," organized for the purpose of studying the principles of A. K. Owen's "Integral Co-operation," was formed. Whether Mr. Owen's plan be a correct one or no, it is a good sign that people are beginning to dream that they may find a way out of their troubles by mutual self-help rather than by the dictum of priests and politicians.

V. de Cleyre.

For the Boston Investigator.

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT—THE APOSTLE OF WOMAN'S
FREEDOM.

AN ADDRESS

Delivered at the International Congress of Freethinkers at Chicago.

BY VOLTAIRINE DE CLEYRE.

“Quietly does the clear light, shining day after day, refute the ignorant surmise, or malicious tale, which has thrown dirt on a pure character.”—[MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT'S “Vindication of the Rights of Woman,” p. 143, Humboldt Library Edition.

To touch with the commanding fire of the resurrection the crumbling bones of one who rots these hundred years; to call from our her grave in Bournmouth churchyard the form stricken from the passion and fervor of being in the midst of its struggle and its aspiration; to put back the pink and white of life upon the wreck and ruin of death; to lift the lids of the long sleep, letting out again the tender, slumb'rous brown light from those eyes that had attained the divinity of sorrow, the pathos of pity; to make you see her, feel Her, know her, that supreme woman, speaking with her undying voice away over the ocean of the years, to you, to me, to all—that woman who threw her splendid genius against the barbed barriers to freedom, who took their frightful pints of steel into her generous breast, that felt so deeply, burned so indignantly, loved so much; to make her live before you in all the beauty of that wonderful face, that wistful, pathetic, childlike face, that face that might have moved God to tears, if there were a God to weep; to have you know how that great heart, dust, dust, impalpable dust, years before any of us were, yet beats and pulses onward forever in the outgoing, wide-enfolding circle of the children of liberty; to make the live words leap again from the long neglected pages till you feel Mary Wollstonecraft's presence here, asking, nay, not asking but compelling, the recognition of love and reverence, the tribute of grateful memory so long denied!—this is my task, the task that I have set myself; I, her humble lover, who if many tears and heart throbs could call her from the dead—would have summoned her here in my stead to-night.

I am unworthy; I know it. I know “I am a late come scribe, measuring with little wit that lofty love” which shines, an unquenchable fire, through every line the great apostle wrote.

Yet wherever the heart of freedom beats faster at the sound of a beloved name, it is because many grateful, humble ones, many whose

hearts loved better than their lips could speak, have paid their tributes there, knowing the gift was little, but—their best. What freethinker's bosom does not glow to-day at the name of Thomas Paine? And has not that glow been kept alive in obscure corners of the world, in little out-of-the-way coffee-houses and humble halls, and modest parlor gatherings, where those who were too poor in purse and power of thought and speech to do justice to the occasion, yet urged on by reverence and devotion and gratitude and indignation, poured out their thankfulness to the neglected hero?

The time will come when she, too, now so neglected and forgotten, she—this historian, this reformer, this thinker of daring thoughts, this doer of brave deeds,—will have her name graven on every altar-stone whereon the tabernacle of liberty rests.

And since love of a principle, incarnate in a man, begets love for those kindred spirits whom that man chose in friendship, let those who do not know it, learn—let those who love and reverence Thomas Paine remember—that *Mary Wollstonecraft was Paine's friend*. She knew him in England when they were fellow-strugglers for the rights of free press, then fighting its way against courts, fines, imprisonment and exile; she knew him in France in the bitter days of the revolution, when the terrible tocsin was ringing the judgment of the people upon kings; and later, when the leaders of the people, gone mad with hate and suspicion, had doomed Paine to the guillotine. She, an Englishwoman, stayed there in the teeth of the storm, running the risk of the same fate, after the expulsion of the English had been ordered. Like Paine, she cried out against the shedding of blood in the days when to declare mercy to others meant danger to self. And while they were burning Paine in effigy all over England as the author of the "Rights of Man," the same persons were proposing to do Mary Wollstonecraft the same honor as the author of the "Rights of Women." In the great painting of Paine by Jarvis, among the fourteen names that decorate "the wreath of freedom haloing the figure, as these two: Margaret Bonneville and Mary Wollstonecraft; all the rest are men. These were the women who faced the east in that world-convulsing morning. Margaret Bonneville because catholic and reactionist; Mary Wollstonecraft died true to the faith of liberty.

Paine answered Edmund Burke's strictures on the French revolution with the "Rights of Man." Before Paine's book appeared Mary Wollstonecraft had also answered with the "Rights of Man." It is a long neglected work, although forgotten now; but if you unbury the treasure you will find there thoughts as keen and clear, and words that blind and bit as clean and sharp as anything Paine wrote, and more than that, words as applicable to-day as in the day when they were written. Listen! and marvel that it is no modern socialist that

speaks, but the voice of a woman calling out of a grave dug one hundred years ago.

“The demon of property has ever been at hand to encroach upon the sacred rights of men.... Security of property! Behold the definition of English liberty.... It is only the property of the rich that is secure. When was the castle of the poor sacred? ... Property in England is much more secure than liberty.”

Oh, how we feel that in America to-day, when loaves of bread are so much more sacred than hungry mouths! so much more sacred than the rights of those mouths to speak and declare their needs than the police club and arrest those who proclaim the holiness of sentient, suffering flesh, as against the holiness of glass and stone and gold; and workingmen and workingwomen walk between double rows of uniforms and bludgeons to proclaim the definition of American liberty!

How truly might Mary Wollstonecraft write again: “The rich man may thank his God he is not as other men are! When shall retribution be made to the miserable who cry day and night for help?” One hundred years have rolled away; and still the procession of the miserable comes pouring down, hungrier, thinner, dirtier than ever, and the cry goes up louder and louder, day and night, day and night, the whole long century, and no help comes! And the “*rights of men*” repose on obscure shelves in magnificent libraries, unknown of men, because the right to read has been made void by the necessity for work. Free libraries! Generous gifts of the “custodians of wealth”—that open at eight and close at five, while the factories open at seven and close at six. And do not forget these libraries are pious—they remember to keep “holy the Sabbath day.” O, satire on the rights of men! Men who are now, as she writes they were then, “oppressed by the influence of their own money”—their money which buys them cathedrals and priests, government-halls and governors, libraries and librarians, and neither knowledge nor hope! Their money, which plunges them into the frightful pessimism of starvation, gazing at abundance with bars between!

How little the spirit of the classes has change since our heroine penned these words: “If the poor are in distress the rich will make some benevolent exertions to assist them; they will confer obligations but not do justice!” And then the bright fire of her indignation leaps out at those who would have the recipients of such assuming charity, meek, and mild, and patient, and oh, so very, very humble, dropping these words of comfort to the proud soul who spurns such ostentatious insolence: “The aversion which men feel to receive a right as a favor ought rather to be extolled as a vestige of native dignity than stigmatized as the odious offspring of ingratitude.” There flamed forth the human being, asserting the supremacy of the individual over

this stupendous travesty on justice which arrogates privileges to a few, that they may exercise the virtue of degrading the manhood of the rest. There shone out a clear, white streak of light, a sudden illumination of the soul upon the immense obscurity of human life, darting to the uttermost depths of the cave of misery the splendid truth that the “rights of men” are equal; and that these rights are not mere metaphysics, declarations on paper, political catchwords, but based upon the daily needs of human existence. The rights of man to Mary Wollstonecraft mean the right to eat, the right to be clothed, the right to be sheltered; and none of these as a charitable dole, and not of the poorest and meanest, but of the best, as rightfully belonging to those who produced them. The rights of men means to expropriate the expropriators! The right to take back that which has been stolen, without thanks to the thief! This is one of her questions: “Why does the brown waste meet the traveller’s eye when men want work?... Why might not the industrious peasant be permitted to *steal* a farm from the heath?” A century has passed. And still the brown waste meets the traveller’s eye, still men want work. And I echo her question, and repeat: “Why shall they not steal back the source of wealth which has been stolen from them?”

Edmund Burke, the great master of rhetoric, the fallen idol of the liberals, the cloaked pensioner of the English government, had arraigned the French revolution with more of eloquence than logic, as he found to his cost when Paine’s reply was selling by the thousand. He had exhausted himself in tears concerning the atrocities committed in that furious revolt, as if they had been born without a *raison d’être*. But Mary Wollstonecraft, true child of the people, faithful to the ideals of the people even when they themselves were unfaithful, came with her rebuking hand and, pointing to the sixty thousand monastics, the sixty thousand nobles, the two hundred thousand priests, the leech grown of fifteen hundred years upon the patient peasants of France, and pointing to the misery and squalor of these, exclaimed: “Your tears are reserved for the downfall of queens!... What were the outrages of a day compared to such continual miseries?” “Man preys on man, and your mourn for the idle tapestry that decorated a Gothic pile, and the dronish bell that summoned a fat priest to prayer.... You mourn for the empty pageant of a name while slavery flaps her wing!”

The world, the honest world, the christian world, the good religious, crucifying world; the world which takes hearsay for evidence and prejudice for judgment, the world which starves and freezes, and outcasts and hangs and damns people, for conscience sake, has amused itself these many years by repeating the false charge of atheism against Thomas Paine; when the very book they so ignorantly condemn was written, as its author says, “to stem the tide

of atheism.” “The Age of Reason,” to quote Conway’s beautiful expression, “is the insurrection of the human heart against deified inhumanity;” it is humanity, or humaneness rather, raised to the divine pinnacle. The same charge by the same prejudice-hugging world has been made against this woman, also a fervent deist, because she, too, refused, as a slander upon God, the infamous doctrine of eternal torture, and that procrastinating christianity which bids man be Lazarus here in order to escape being Dives hereafter. In one of those darting sentences of hers, which strikes fire from the flint of the centuries, she asks: “Is the human heart satisfied with turning the poor over to another world to receive the blessings this could afford?” And again: “Why is our imagination to be appalled with terrific perspections of hell beyond the grave? Hell stalks abroad. The lash sounds on the slave’s naked sides, and the sick wretch who can no longer earn the sour bread of unremitting toil steals to the ditch to bid a long good-night; or, neglected in some ostentatious hospital, breathes his last amid the laugh of mercenary attendants. Such misery demands more than tears.”

So the brave spirit cried against the cursed inhumanity of the christian scheme of heaven and hell, though all the while her whole being was aglow with love for that ideal of God existing in her own fervent nature. To her, God was the supreme source and end of all life, a source which gave forth nothing but good, an end so pure and great as to receive back the foulest returning and remain unsullied, even as the ocean receives back the slime and mud of its children—the rivers—yet remains forever blue. This faith worked outward in her life, giving her the warmest and sincerest convictions of duty, and the strength to follow them. She was, in the highest and best sense of the word, a religious woman. So sure was she of the unfailling goodness of God that she spent no time in idle and impertinent prayers urging him to remember his duties. She attended to *her* part, believing that omnipotence knows its own business. Though at one time an attendant of an orthodox church, during the last decade of her life, from 1787 to 1797; that is, during the decade of her highest development, she never attended. And Godwin, her devoted lover and biographer, tells us that during her last illness “not one word of a religious cast fell from her lips.”

She had *lived* her faith, she didn’t need to *talk* about it. And her death, though one of intense suffering; so far as her mental attitude was concerned, was peaceful and beautiful. She went out into the darkness without a question as to the hereafter, conscious of rectitude, soul serene. If one believed as she, one might say those child eyes had looked straight through death at God, and were satisfied.

So much claim has she upon the love of humanity in general, and freethinkers in particular! But her fame as a reformer rests upon another work—the rights of women.

As Paine was the first English writer of note who contended for the rights, not only of white men, but of negro slaves, so Mary Wollstonecraft was the first English write of note who contended for the rights of the slaves of slaves—women. Against both the old and the new schools, against both Dr. Gregory and Jean Jacques Rousseau, she announced the repudiation of St. Paulism. She claimed for woman the destiny of an individual—self-supporting, self-governing, responsible. She demanded that an end be put to the abominable worship of sensuality as the be-all and end-all of woman's existence. She went through the sham of female education with a ruthless dissecting knife. She asked for an equal standard of morals, of intellectual ideals, of physical culture. She denied that it was virtue for a woman to look pale and sickly and weak in order to flatter the vanity of some man's "power of protection." She denied that there was any reason why women should hide their abilities in order not to appear as a competitor with man mentally. She claimed for woman and man alike the full freedom to develop their powers to the utmost, without let or hindrance from each other. She showed how "cunning is ever the product of force;" how if the powers of mind and body be diverted from struggle towards free and noble ideals, they will twist and distort, and undercreep and mine the repressing forces, until society is cancered through, and ready to break into leprous sores. She showed that where classes of men (giving in example soldiers and courtiers) have been forced into an idle and frivolous existence, such as the majority of women led, and still do lead, they have become weak, cunning, intriguing, despicable. That, therefore, those faults charged, and charged justly, upon woman, are not hers because of her sex, but because of her social and industrial environment; that given men in the same conditions, the same results upon character will be produced. Hence wherever there is an idle class, a slave class, a class whose "grand business in life is coquetry," a class perpetually appealing to the lowest and most sensual elements in its master's character, nothing but evil to the whole race can be expected.

Thanks to the patient, patient years, some of the things for which she contended are not accomplished; and if in reading over her "Rights of Women" we are sometimes annoyed at her insistent repetitions of what seem to us obvious truths, right there let us check ourselves to thank her that she has done her work so well that we stand upon the steps her brave hands hewed in the rock, cutting above her head—that our feet are placed where he hands were, and our eyes see higher up. Remember that true gratitude to the great past does not consist in doing the specific acts of the past, but in

preserving the progressive spirit of the past. She who truly loves Mary Wollstonecraft is she who tries to live as far in advance of her day as Mary Wollstonecraft was in advance of hers. Remember that, when you read by the reflex light of a hundred years the "Vindication of the Rights of Women."

And now most reverently do I approach her last, her best, her greatest claim upon the gratitude of humanity. There be teachers that I have known teach, and preachers that I have known preach, and reformers that I have known, and the world has known, to be loud of mouth and pen! But the doers, the souls that become one with their thoughts that *are* their teachings, these are very few. And Mary Wollstonecraft was on of there rare few. Hers were no sterile songs flung out to die upon the air; they were the music of herself; she was an Idea, she was *liberty!*

Mary Wollstonecraft did not preach justice to the poor, and then live upon their toil; she toiled herself. She did not behold misery from afar off, and make fine phrases about it. She drank the cup, bitter with fennel, with the rest, and knew whereof she spoke. She did not preach the abrogation of classes and then practice servility to the powerful or arrogance to the humble. She maintained the dignity of the individual in her own person, compelling the haughty family of Lord Kingsborough to treat her, their governess, as an individual, not as a servant. She taught self-respect to the ignorant by setting them the example. She did not condemn the frivolities of so-called polite society and then acquire the last smirk and flutter; she did not proclaim a high standard of virtue and live a low one; she did not prate of independence for woman and then coquet to capture a husband; she did not declare for responsibility and then shrink from it when it came; she uttered no word that she did not stand by and live by unto the uttermost, no matter how great the price she paid society for it; and sometimes it was a very dear price!

She was poor, she suffered privations, she lived cheaply, in poor lodgings; she was sometimes in sore straits for work, and knew not where to turn. She did her own work, ladies; she washed her own dishes, and mended and turned her old dresses. Her clothes were not always pleasing to those who have nothing better to do than study fashion plates. When I read that, I remembered that Paine once said concerning a similar criticism: "Let those dress who need it."

The money she earned by her pen went towards establishing her brothers and sisters in independent positions. She even adopted a friendless, young girl in London, a stranger to her, and out of her own poverty helped her to live. She resented as an insult an offer of marriage to a man whom she did not love—the usual cheap road of relief to struggling women—declaring marriage, which is only made holy by love, to be pure and simple prostitution without it, no matter

how sanctioned by priest or magistrate. She never reckoned the cost to self, or the size of her opponent, when a wrong was being done. Once, on her passage from Spain to England, she alone, on woman, compelled a brutal captain of the vessel to take on board some castaways whom he had refused to rescue, and who, but for her, would have died the horrible death of starvation at sea! Her dear dream of life was independence, not the shell of it, but real independence, where she would not be only industrially self-supporting, but free to announce and live her beliefs, refusing to accept any position which demanded their suppression.

And when the great trial of life came, the trial which sends every soul through the fire—the trial of love—her acts proclaimed the sincerity of her conviction, that what is commonly called marriage—a service, a ceremony trumpeting abroad the sacred secrets of the heart—is of all the vulgarities the worst! Time proved her to have been mistaken, not in her own feelings, not in her principles of action, but in her estimate of Capt. Imlay. How many women that have had both the word of a husband and the certificate of a priest have also found themselves mistaken?

Millicent Garret Fawcett, in her introduction to the last edition of the "Rights of Woman," apologetically alludes to this relationship as "an error" caused by the philosophical reaction of which Mary Wollstonecraft was part. I say Millicent Fawcett does poor and cowardly service to that great woman; she needs no apology, least of all for that. It was a brave living of beliefs which cannot be condemned because certain individuals holding them prove unworthy; of principles whose correctness have never been refuted.

Calumny was very busy with her after that. Tongues that lick vinegar spit gall. But she kept her grief for herself, and her dignity before all the world, ever refusing to be ashamed that she was an unmarried mother!

Long afterward, when she was dead, the letters, the letters to Imlay, the passionate, broken letters, were given to the world—and the world beheld the drops of blood falling from Mary Wollstonecraft's heart. Sacred drops, drops that should purify whoever touches them. A Christian slanderer named Jeafferson, a man who has made it his business to vilify the great freethinkers, pressed his foul fingers on those sacred wounds. Had he been a man the touch would have killed him! He was not a man; and anyone who can read those letters and not feel that he is in the presence of something holy, pure, devoted, ineffably tender, is less than a human being.

There came a rift of sunshine after that, the sunshine of an honest love; and in that golden, summer afternoon she died. Too soon, too soon for us. Too soon for the motherless little babe, that afterward

became the wife of the poet Shelley; too soon for the melancholy child, Imlay's child, who, left alone, committed suicide; too soon for the unfinished work, left so broken and incomplete. But not too soon for us to say: "Behold the apostle of our freedom! Behold here who lived and died for woman's progress!" Let justice be done! Let April 27, 1759, become a day of annual commemoration in every city, in every town, where the throbbing desire for liberty her heartbeats set in motion a century ago, pulses and thrills. Let us make a Mary Wollstonecraft day! Let it not be said that freethinkers keep warm the memory of a great man alone. Let April 27th be as celebrated as is January 29th. Let us retwine the names of Paine and Wollstonecraft wreathed by Jarvis a century ago. Let the women determine to keep this day, and I am sure the men will be with them.

How many will help to make this woman's day memorable, this congress memorable, as the birthday of recognition for Mary Wollstonecraft? I appeal to you, women and men! How many will help to let in "the clear light" upon the pure and noble character of this woman, whose dust lies there beyond the water, but whose immortal life beats full and strong in every heart that cries for liberty; full and strong the mother pulses, the first incitations, the centurine out-rippings? Who, each year, will pluck a white flower from the garden of his heart to lay upon her tomb?

For the Boston Investigator.

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT.

MR. EDITOR:—Yourself and readers will be interested to learn that the plan of establishing a “female saint’s day” among freethinkers, by commemorating the birth of Mary Wollstonecraft, proposed by myself at the international congress of freethinkers, last October, has taken practical form in this city. The Ladies’ Liberal League, of Philadelphia, (which is not, by the way, an auxiliary of the Friendship Liberal League, as state by Mr. Charlesworth in a communication last fall, and I correct the error in the interest of both societies, the former being a much more radical group than the latter), has done itself the honor of being the first society to take up the work of doing justice to that great woman, who was the initiator of the women’s rights movement among the English-speaking people.

On the 24th of April, that being the day nearest to the anniversary of Mary Wollstonecraft’s birthday, (the 27th) in our regular lecture course, your correspondent delivered an address upon her life and work. The hall was crowded with an audience of thoughtful people from all ranks of life, to every one of which some precious sentence has been left by the fiery genius who died just where woman hood “was touching noon, and while the shadows still were falling to the west.”

A fine crayon drawing of that face which Raphael might have worshipped, by Mr. Henry La Rosee, a rising young artist of this city, was displayed upon the platform; and a hundred curious eyes were fastened on that wistful, tender mouth, those great pathetic eyes, which seemed looking from beyond the caverns of death—pleading for a little kindness. This picture has been purchased by the society and will hereafter adorn the walls of its meeting place.

In the course of the address I reviewed the history of her life as teacher, translator and author; dwelt on those sentences in the “Rights of Men,” the “Rights of Woman” and the “French Revolution” which illustrated her love for sincerity, her detestation of tyranny, her fears for the future of man under commercialism, her burning indignation at injustice of whatsoever kind, her hatred of the fripperies of life which degrade the noble ideal of human duties, her contempt for priests and those solemnities of religion which darken humanity’s sunshine, her noble appeal for a stronger, and individualized, womanhood, her large ideas of the benefits of kindness adhered to in the treatment of the criminal classes, her defence of criminals in general as social victims rather than social demons, her magnificent conceptions of Nature as imagined in her Letters from Norway and Sweden. To all these the audience paid the

greatest attention, frequently marking with applause those sentiments which found the nearest echoes in their hearts. The facts of her personal experience were also given as evidence that the sentiments she uttered could be lived by and died by; and that though the dust of a century lies upon her coffin and that of her great husband, William Godwin, (whose work "Political Justice" is, as was said by a member on the occasion, a work beside which Paine's "Rights of Man" is a schoolboy's production), still out of the grave their principles speak and grow forever in the growing mind of man. At the conclusion of the address numerous short speeches were made by Dr. R. B. Westbrook, Messrs. George Brown, Ralph Raleigh, J. C. Hannon, Mrs. Skinner, Miss Hansen, Miss McLeod and others.

I must also give credit where it is due, and say that much of the success of the evening was due to the untiring efforts of Mr. James B. Elliott, who is perhaps more than myself the originator of this movement. Mr. Elliott has also been for some time engaged in rooting out the history of liberalism in Philadelphia, and when his researches are completed will offer readers of the INVESTIGATOR some interesting details of the lives and deaths of freethinkers and freethinking societies in this city. He has not found, however, that recognition was given by any of them to Mary Wollstonecraft. Our society is the first. Let me hope that others will follow the example of the Ladies' League. Let individuals inform themselves concerning her works; buy the "Rights of Woman;" it is in paper, sold for sixty cents by the Humboldt Publishing Co., New York. Write to me for any information on the subject desired; I will be glad to furnish it. Let us have a freethinking woman's commemoration day as well as a man's; let us remember Paine's friend, Mary Wollstonecraft.

Yours for liberty,

VOLTAIRINE DE CLEYRE.