

Lincoln, the Freethinker  
by Joseph Lewis, 1924  
from Atheism And Other Addresses

Address delivered at banquet of the Freethinkers' Society of New York on the evening of February 12th, 1924, at Hotel Belleclaire, 77th Street at Broadway, New York City.

Abraham Lincoln was, in my judgment, in many respects, the grandest man ever President of the United States. Upon his monument these words should be written: "Here sleeps the only man in the history of the world, who, having been clothed with almost absolute power, never abused it, except upon the side of mercy".

-- Robert G. Ingersoll.

I remember once reading a statement in the public press that no person could be elected President of the United States unless that person were a believer in the Christian religion. At the time I saw this statement I took it as being true, because there came to my mind a story often told about Robert G. Ingersoll.

The story was something like this:

A number of prominent men and women came to pay a visit to the celebrated orator and during the course of conversation one of them remarked that the Colonel had a magnificent library which was no doubt extremely expensive. To this Ingersoll replied, that his library was exceedingly expensive and possibly the most expensive library of any individual in the world. The questioner looked a bit dubious at the reply and ventured that he thought he had seen libraries which cost a great deal more than the Colonel's. In reply to this, Ingersoll said that his library cost him the presidency of the United States.

But it is not true that a person must be a believer in the Christian religion as a qualification to hold that high and distinguished office. More than one President of this great country was a disbeliever in the Christian plan of salvation, and, peculiarly so, the very men who were not Christians have been acknowledged as the greatest in that long list of illustrious men who have received the highest gift within the power of this nation. Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln, all unbelievers, are the great triumvirate of the United States of America.

My effort, and it is a labor of love, is to show you tonight that Lincoln, that sad-eyed martyr of this Republic, was a Freethinker, "even as you and I." But in proving to you that Lincoln was a Freethinker, it becomes necessary to disprove the frequent assertion that he was a Christian. Under ordinary circumstances, it would not be necessary to prove a man was not something else in order to establish what he was. But in the case of Abraham Lincoln such a procedure is absolutely essential, because the Christian world, in a shameful disregard of the truth, claims an absolute monopoly of great men.

It is strange that very little effort is being made by the Christian world to prove the religious beliefs of Presidents other than those three who stand so preeminently as America's greatest statesmen; I think I can safely say that there are more volumes written to prove Lincoln a Christian than to prove the religious

conviction of any other statesman of this country. And, like a man that "doth protest too much," there is a reason for this. Perhaps they are believers in the motto that if you tell a lie often enough you will begin to believe it yourself, and so hardly a year passes that a book by some clergyman proclaiming Lincoln a Christian, is not issued from the press.

Last year, in response to a public announcement that a prominent senator was to deliver an address on Lincoln, I attended this gathering. Through an unfortunate circumstance the senator was unable to attend, and the minister in charge of the ceremonies announced that in the evening, at his church, he would deliver an address upon "Lincoln, the Christian." But in making this announcement he seemed to apologize for his liberty in calling Lincoln a Christian without the proper evidence to support his contention, and quoted Emerson, by saying: "What you are speaks louder than what you say." Under those conditions you can prove anything to be anything you want to prove it to be. But we will measure Lincoln for not only what he said, but also for what he did not say. We will follow the motto that although "actions speak louder than words," only hypocrites say what they do not believe.

In order to be a Christian it is necessary to believe the Bible to be a divinely inspired book. To be a Freethinker it is essential that you reject the Bible as a revelation from God. To determine, then, whether a person is a Christian or a Freethinker should indeed be very simple. A person may believe in God and yet reject the Bible as a divine book. Such a person cannot be a Christian believer, but may be a Freethinker.

A person may believe in the Bible, and according to his particular interpretation be any one of the following divisional sects of Christianity: Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Episcopalian, Congregationalist, Seventh Day Adventist, Holy Roller or Holy Jumper.

A Freethinker may be any one of the following: A Deist, a Rationalist, a Pantheist, a Materialist, an Agnostic, or an Atheist.

It is not my intention to dispute with any particular branch of Christianity that may claim Lincoln as its follower, nor classify him in any one of the subdivisions by which a Freethinker may declare himself. It is my purpose to disprove that Lincoln was a Christian, and with the produced evidence, to show unequivocally, that he was an avowed Freethinker.

Evidence may be true or false. Proof of evidence is the only test of its reliability. The proof of a statement, without evidence, depends a great deal upon the person who makes it. What ministers say, particularly in religious controversies, requires corroboration.

For a great many years it was impossible to secure the "Life of Lincoln," as written by his intimate friend and law partner, William H. Herndon. And yet it was to Herndon, that Lincoln on becoming President, said that he wished his own name associated with that of Herndon's until death.

It seems that the religious world took exception to this "Life of Lincoln." It was found to contain too many truths that were not in harmony with the notions of a number of clergymen.

The story goes that every available copy of Herndon's "Life of Lincoln" was purchased by the clergy, some paying as high as one hundred dollars for a copy. They did not spend this money for the book because of its intrinsic value; they did not want its facts known to the public. For nearly twenty-five years this work on Lincoln was held at a premium, and I believe it was only last year, in response to an overwhelming demand, that the descendants of Herndon decided upon a republication of the volumes, and they are, fortunately, once more available to the general public.

Herndon's "Life of Lincoln" is conceded by all fair-minded persons to be the most accurate picture of the life of the sixteenth President of this country that has ever been written. Some maintain that Herndon was to Lincoln what Boswell was to Johnson. Men prominent in the higher walks of life, members of Congress, Senators, Judges, members of the President's cabinet, intimate friends and relatives and even his wife, testify that Lincoln was an unbeliever, an infidel, a Freethinker. Strangers, a few casual acquaintances and a number of clergymen, known and unknown, maintain that he was a Christian. And yet the two ministers most intimately acquainted with Lincoln -- Bishop Simpson and the Reverend P. D. Gurley -- do not support the contention of their more zealous, but less truthful fellow "divines."

The weight of the evidence is so preponderantly in favor of Lincoln's religious emancipation that it seems almost impossible that anyone could be so audacious as to assert that he believed in any dogma of any religious denomination. But we cannot prevent anyone from saying what he will, particularly in religious matters, where the emotion stronger than reason, sometimes prompts the religious fanatic even to murder a person in an endeavor to "save his soul." It may seem a paradox, and yet in religious matters the things most difficult of performance are the things most easily believed. And for Christianity not to possess Lincoln as an adherent is truly a tragedy for it. It is a thrust too painful to bear. It is no small wonder, then, that some clergymen have stooped to questionable means and methods in their endeavors to show Lincoln to have been a member of their faith. They did not seek the truth. They strained every fact to the breaking point in their endeavor to find some shred upon which they might base their claim. But, alas! unable to secure any truthful evidence, some, as proof of their contention, have said that Lincoln possessed the virtues of Patience, Tenderness and Charity.

As though these were exclusively "Christian" virtues!

For ages the virtues of Christianity were exemplified in the heartlessness that murdered a Hypatia, and the cruelty that accompanied the Crusades; that schemed and inflicted the punishment of an inquisition; that burned a Bruno and imprisoned a Galileo; that madly and joyously took part in a Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Eve, and that with due solemnity judicially tried, and convicted, sentenced and executed a rooster for laying eggs!

It requires but little effort on the part of the unscrupulous to find witnesses to testify falsely. I remember distinctly that when I first read the claim that Thomas Paine recanted I was simply overwhelmed. I was not only convinced that this brave and good man recanted before he died, but I felt certain, from the charges brought against him, that he had led a most profligate and dissolute life. No doubt the defamers of Paine believed in the motto, that if you throw enough mud a little of it will stick. I was stunned and bewildered. I was sore at heart to feel that so

great and unselfish a man, the author of the "Age of Reason" and the "Rights of Man," could have fallen to such miserable depths. But when I read Ingersoll's answer to the charges; when I saw how he disposed of each and every accusation; how he discredited the witnesses; how he exposed the character of the defamers and calumniators of Paine, I realized then that the reputation of any man with courage enough to speak the truth as he sees it may be besmirched if what he says is contrary to what the great mass of people are led to believe to be the truth.

I also realized then that the statement of a minister, especially in a bitter religious controversy, must be substantiated before being accepted as a verity. But "truth crushed to earth will rise again," and as it was with Paine, so it is with Lincoln.

Were the Civil War a failure, had the Union perished, the church would not be straining every muscle to claim Lincoln a believer in Christianity. Rather they would "shout from the house tops" the destruction brought upon this nation by the insane idealism of this arrogant infidel! All the horrors of that war would be vividly pictured before you. They would relate with glee, how in early manhood he had written a pamphlet against the Bible and Christianity, and how, seated among others discussing its points, it was snatched from his hands and thrown into the fire. How they would dwell upon this act of "Providence"; and with a sanctimoniousness becoming only to Christians, they would pray God to save them from another Lincoln. Slavery would still be the topic of the Christian pulpit and the "divine institution" would still be supported by the Biblical edict: "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling."

But the fact of the matter is that the manuscript that Lincoln wrote against the Bible and Christianity was taken from him and destroyed by a friend and fellow Freethinker, Samuel Hill, his employer, who feared the effects of such a book upon his public career. His friend knew the "liberality" of the religious-minded, and, fortunately for the Republic, his manuscript perished and the Nation was saved!

When Lincoln ran for Congress against the Reverend Peter Cartwright, charges were brought against him by clergymen that he was an infidel, and that he said that Christ was an illegitimate child. And not once did Lincoln deny the truth of these charges. When asked why he did not deny them, Lincoln said he did not do so for two reasons: First, he knew the charges to be true; and second, they could be easily proved.

Galileo became a heretic when he questioned the truth of Joshua's influence upon the sun. Were Charles Darwin a Christian, the "Origin of Species" would never have seen the light of day, and William Jennings Bryan would have been denied the great opportunity of making a monkey of himself. And if Abraham Lincoln were a Christian, the emancipation of the Negro slaves would never have entered his mind!

Slavery is just as much a fundamental part of Christianity as is the Virgin Birth. To contradict one is just as serious as to deny the other. Leviticus, Chapter 25, Verses 44 to 46, is just as much part of the Bible as are the Ten Commandments. If one is "inspired" so is the other, and I quote the former:

"Both thy bondmen and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen round about you; of them ye shall buy bondmen and bondmaids. Moreover of

the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, which they begat in your land; and they shall be your possession. And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen forever."

The following quotations from the New Testament require the same belief and acceptance from Christians as does the resurrection of Christ.

I quote Timothy, Chapter 1, Verse 6:

"Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their masters worthy of all honor."

And Titus, Chapter 2, Verse 9:

"Exhort servants to be obedient to their masters."

As proof that the emancipation of the Negro slaves was opposed by the Christian Church, I need but quote the testimony of the celebrated divines of that time.

The Reverend Alexander Campbell said: "There is not one verse in the Bible inhibiting slavery, but many regulating it. It is not then, we conclude, immoral."

The Reverend E.D. Simms, professor, Randolph-Macon College, wrote: "The extracts from Holy Writ unequivocally assert the right of property in slaves."

The Reverend R. Furman, D.D., Baptist, of South Carolina, said: "The right of holding slaves is clearly established in the Holy Scriptures, both by precept and example."

The Reverend Thomas Witherspoon, Presbyterian, of Alabama, said: "I draw my warrant from the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to hold the slave in bondage."

The Reverend Nathan Lord (what an authoritative name!), president of Dartmouth College, said: "Slavery was incorporated into the civil institutions of Moses; it was recognized accordingly by Christ and his apostles. They condemned all intermeddlers with it."

The Reverend Taylor, principal of the Theological Department of Yale College (and he certainly ought to know), said: "I have no doubt that if Jesus Christ were on earth, he would, under certain circumstances, become a slaveholder." And I want to say here and now that I agree absolutely with the Reverend Gentleman.

And Lincoln himself said: "All the powers of the earth seem rapidly combining against the slave, Mammon is after him -- and the theology of the day is fast joining in the cry."

But the most striking illustration of history, showing the close connection between the Bible and slavery, is the fact that when the Revolutionists of France -- Freethinkers all -- rejected the Bible as a state book of authority, they also abolished slavery throughout the French possessions. And when the monarchist government came back into power, and the church regained control of the government, the Bible again became a state book of authority and the institution of slavery was

re-established.

To show the close connection between the belief in the Bible and the institution of slavery I need but mention the fact that when a bill was introduced in Parliament to abolish slavery in the British Empire, Lord Chancellor Thurlow characterized the move as "miserable and contemptible" and as being "contrary to the word of God."

And I repeat and re-emphasize, that it was utterly impossible for Abraham Lincoln to be a believer in the Bible, and be the author of the Emancipation Proclamation.

A Christian believes the Bible to be the infallible word of God. He believes that all the knowledge necessary to his well-being, happiness and immortality is contained therein. To question its precepts is heresy to him. It is because of this belief that Christianity has to its credit the Dark Ages. To doubt, to investigate, to improve, to advance, is a principle contrary to the doctrines of religion. "Prove all things, hold fast to that which is true," means to the religious-minded only what the Bible says is true. "Whatever is, is best," is the brake upon the wheel of progress. "God's will" is the stereotyped answer to all that is. If Lincoln were a Christian he would have accepted the Negro's plight in life as in accordance with the "divine plan" as enunciated in the "Holy Bible."

It was because Lincoln was not bound by any creed, not hampered by any religious belief, that he felt that the mark of the vicious lash upon the tender skin was not and could not be right by divine sanction, and for that reason he waged the most just war in humanity's heroic struggle for freedom. "In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free," is the statement that no believer in the Bible could utter.

Even those clergymen who claim that Lincoln accepted Christianity in the latter years of his life, admit that in early manhood he was an infidel. His first law partner, John T. Stewart, said: "Lincoln was an avowed and open infidel, and sometimes bordered on Atheism. He went farther against Christian beliefs, doctrines and principles than any other man I ever heard."

The impression, now being created in the minds of our school children, that Lincoln's only sources of knowledge were the Bible and Pilgrim's Progress is, in view of the facts, a deliberate and malicious falsehood. Lincoln was a reader and lover of Voltaire, Volney and Paine, and was not satisfied with being enlightened himself, but informed others of what he had found out. He thought it miserly to keep that knowledge to himself and was zealous in his heresy. He argued and talked for that which he had discovered to be true. It is said that he never tired of reading Paine; and I ask, who does tire of reading him? Who can read the "Age of Reason" without being convinced by its logic?

Oh, what a valuable, what a priceless copy of the "Age of Reason" it was that fell into the hands of Abraham Lincoln! The germ of Lincoln the Emancipator was planted when he read these liberty-loving books. And friends, as a gentle reminder, if you have a son whom you would like to see develop into another Lincoln, you cannot better equip him than by giving him the same mental food upon which Abraham Lincoln thrived.

Lincoln's belief in "God" or "Providence" prompted him to say: "Friends, I agree with you in Providence, but I believe in the Providence of the most men, the

largest purse and the longest cannon."

The use of the word "God" has a thousand interpretations and does not reveal the religious belief of the person using that word. The manner in which Lincoln used the word "God" in his immortal papers should be sufficient proof that he had no faith in the generally accepted sense of that word. I think the following incident as related by Herndon should settle for all time the significance of the use of the word "God" by Lincoln. "No man had a stronger or firmer faith in Providence than Lincoln, but the continued use by him late in life of the word 'God' must not be interpreted to mean that he believed in a personal God. In 1854 he asked me to erase the word 'God' from a speech I had written and read to him for criticism, because my language indicated a personal God, whereas, he insisted, no such personality existed."

Herndon goes farther and says: "If Lincoln were asked whether he believed in God, he would have said: 'I do not know that a God exists.'"

Lincoln's two most important documents, the Emancipation Proclamation and the Gettysburg Address, were originally written with the idea of God completely left out. It is an historical fact and noteworthy to us that the Emancipation Proclamation was written and printed by Lincoln before he consulted the members of his cabinet. When he called them into conference he handed each a copy, and asked them for any suggestions. One member, the Honorable Salmon P. Chase, after reading it, stated:

"Mr. Lincoln, this paper is of the utmost importance -- greater than any state paper ever made by this government. A paper of so much importance, and involving the liberties of so many people, ought, I think, to make some reference to the Deity. I do not observe anything of the kind in it."

"No, I overlooked it," replied Lincoln. "Won't you make a draft of what you think ought to be inserted?"

And the following words as suggested by the Honorable Salmon P. Chase were inserted in the proclamation:

"I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God."

No doubt a similar circumstance was responsible for the words "under God" being put into the Gettysburg Address as the original draft of this immortal speech makes no mention of these words.

We must not lose sight of the fact that Lincoln was the most misunderstood and hated man of his day. There were conspirators in every branch of the Government, and, it has been intimated, even in his own cabinet. We must not judge him for what he permitted others to do in order to accomplish his glorious undertaking, and if the churches of his day were ready to strike him down on the slightest provocation, the oversentimental references to "God" in his messages can be readily understood as of little importance.

When chided about his Thanksgiving messages as being contrary to his known convictions on the subject, Lincoln said to Judge James N. Nelson: "Oh! this is

some of Seward's nonsense and it pleases the fools!" Lincoln knew the power of the church's hostility, and was a compromiser in the sense that he believed in "doing a little harm for a great good," particularly so when the end meant the liberation of thousands of human beings from the bondage of slavery. To the church, it is more important to crush the infidel than to add a step of progress to civilization and for that reason, while president, Lincoln was reticent in public upon the question of religion. By this act of discretion he carried the nation safely through the most trying period of its history.

It is very curious indeed, that if Lincoln were a Christian, as some say, nowhere in any of his writings does there appear a single mention of Jesus Christ. In his public addresses, official documents and his private correspondence, never once did he express a belief in any doctrine that would even remotely claim him as a Christian. On the contrary, his personal conversations were such as unhesitatingly to classify him an avowed Freethinker. And yet some have the impudence to say that on the presentation of a \$500 Bible, which some misguided Negroes of Baltimore gave him as a token of gratitude, he is quoted as saying:

"In regard to the great book I have only this to say, that it is the best gift which God has given to Man. All the good from the Saviour of the world is communicated to us through this book. But for this book we could not know right from wrong. All those things desirable to man are contained in it."

This statement is a lie, the enormity of which I am unable to express. To say that Lincoln said this is too ridiculous for notice, and yet when uttered by a clergyman it is taken to be true. It is utterly impossible that Lincoln, who openly doubted the truth of the Bible and questioned the legitimacy of the birth of Christ, should utter such a puerile statement, especially to a group of people representing a race that had been so mercilessly subjected to a condition of servitude because of the Bible's precepts. Out of courtesy, Lincoln may have thanked the little group of well-meaning Negroes for their gift, yet thinking in his heart what fools they were to take \$500 of their hard-earned money and waste it upon the very instrument that was the greatest obstacle in their struggle for emancipation.

More likely, sad-hearted Lincoln felt, if he did not actually say: "What fools you are; here I am striving with all the energy I possess, with the resources of a great nation, sacrificing thousands of lives, the very flower of the Republic, to liberate you from the chains of slavery, and here you are presenting me with a Bible, a book that has held the minds of men in mental slavery for over a thousand years and has caused more mischief and heartache, and agony and hatred and bloodshed than any other instrument in the world. Go; you are now physically free: strive for mental emancipation."

Regarding this supposed speech to the group of Colored People, permit me to quote Herndon concerning it:

"I am aware of the fraud committed on Mr. Lincoln in reporting some insane remarks supposed to have been made by him, in 1864, on the presentation of a Bible to him by the colored people of Baltimore. No sane man ever uttered such folly and no sane man will believe it. In that speech Mr. Lincoln is made to say: 'but for this book we could not know right from wrong.' Does any human being believe that Lincoln ever uttered this? What did the whole race of Man do to know right from wrong during the countless years that passed before the book was written? How did

the struggling race of Mankind build up its grand civilization in the world before this book was given to Mankind? What do the millions of people now living, who never heard of this book, do to know how to distinguish right from wrong? Was Lincoln a fool, an ass, a hypocrite, or a combination of them all? Or is this speech -- this supposed, this fraudulent speech -- a lie?"

Herndon's characterization of this supposed speech of Lincoln to the Negroes of Baltimore as a lie is the only term that can properly be applied to it. It only goes to prove to what lengths people will go in their desperation to prove a false contention.

But one lie begets another and the great task before us is to disprove them and halt their circulation. I believe it was Mark Twain -- another Freethinker, by the way -- who said that a lie could get into circulation and around the world before truth had time to put on its shoes. While Lincoln was alive no one presumed to call him a Christian. His enemies took particular delight in referring to him as an infidel. And now that he is dead, we take it upon ourselves to defend his infidelity, if you please. And when I hear the word "infidel" used as anathema, I feel like answering, with all the sauciness of a child: "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me."

Abraham Lincoln is no less Abraham Lincoln because he was a Freethinker. In fact, many of the world's greatest geniuses and benefactors have been Freethinkers. And it seems to me a very difficult thing sometimes to determine whether a person is a genius because he is a Freethinker or a Freethinker because he is a genius.

For years there has been circulated by the religious forces a picture of Lincoln with his son Tad standing beside him. Both are looking at a large book which Mr. Lincoln has in his lap. This picture is generally captioned: "Lincoln Reading the Bible to His Son." On close examination the book is discovered to be a picture album. And in a recent issue of a magazine in which this picture appeared, Ida M. Tarbell is the authority for the statement, that when this picture of Lincoln was taken he issued this injunction: "Now don't let anybody entitle this picture, 'The President Reading the Bible to His Son.'" How well have the religious forces carried out his wishes!

The following explanation from the Boston Globe has an interesting bearing upon this point.

"The pretty little story about the picture of President Lincoln and his son Tad, reading the Bible, is now corrected for the one hundredth time. The 'Bible' was Photographer Brady's picture album which the President was examining with his son while some ladies stood by. The artist begged the President to remain quiet and the picture was taken. The truth is better than fiction, even if the rectal conflicts with a pleasing theory."

If the religious forces will go so far as to declare that a picture album is a Bible, what kind of other evidence would you expect them to present in order to prove their claim.

How can anyone say that Lincoln believed in the Bible when he so aptly characterized the religious forces of both the North and the South, by saying: "Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes his aid

against the other." The opinion of the church element toward Lincoln and the reason for its opposition can best be told by Lincoln himself. In 1843 Lincoln desired a nomination for Congress and did all in his power to secure it. The opposition toward him was growing stronger and stronger and in a letter to some of his constituents he wrote as follows:

"The strangest combination of church influence was against me. Baker, (his opponent) was a Campbellite, and therefore got all that church. My wife has some relations in the Presbyterian church and some with the Episcopalian churches, and therefore whenever it would tell, I was set down as either ONE OR THE OTHER, while it was everywhere contended that NO CHRISTIAN ought to vote for me because I BELONGED TO NO CHURCH and was suspected as being a deist."

On another occasion he is quoted as having made this laconic, and all too significant statement: "The Bible is not my book nor Christianity my profession."

The Honorable David Davis, a judge of the Circuit Court of Illinois, at the time that Lincoln was a practicing attorney, and who was Lincoln's intimate friend and adviser, and who later became a Supreme Court Judge of the state of Illinois -- a United States Senator -- a Vice-President of the United States and finally a member of that august body, the Supreme Court of the United States, has something to say regarding Lincoln's beliefs. The intimacy between Lincoln and Judge Davis was such a bond of friendship that upon Lincoln's death Judge Davis was chosen by common consent to be administrator of his estate. Few men of this country have been held in higher esteem by their contemporaries than was Judge Davis. Surely his years of association, his friendship and his intimacy with Lincoln qualify him to testify to Lincoln's religious convictions. Judge Davis says: "Lincoln had no faith in the Christian sense of the term -- he had faith in law, principles, causes and effects."

Recently there appeared in this city a magnificent production of a play by John Drinkwater, entitled, "Lincoln." In that play Lincoln's life was beautifully portrayed, with the exception of one particularly great blunder, a blunder that adds little credit to the playwright. In this play Lincoln is shown in a humiliating position, and despite a letter from me correcting this falsity, the scene remained unchanged. In this play Lincoln is made to fall upon his knees in prayer. I emphatically state that no evidence exists that the grown Abraham Lincoln ever prostrated himself in prayer. The scene is a lie and belongs in the same category as that of Washington praying at Valley Forge. We need no better proof of the falsity of this scene regarding Lincoln than Lincoln himself when he said "What is to be will be, and no prayers of ours can arrest the decree."

In every great crisis there are always religious fanatics who have spoken directly to God, and who are directed by God to deliver certain messages. The Civil War was no exception, and Lincoln was not free from such annoyers. It is said that Lincoln, more than any other President, was constantly pestered by clergymen with advice from "divine sources." He controlled his temper only because of his sympathy for the mentally deranged. To indicate his attitude toward such people I will quote his words of contempt for them:

"I am approached with the most opposite opinions and advice, and by religious men who are certain they represent the Divine Will. I hope it will not be irreverent in me to say, that if it is probable that God would reveal His will to others, on a point so connected with my duty, it might be supposed He would reveal

it directly to me."

On another occasion when a woman came to see Lincoln, claiming that God sent her to deliver His message of advice to him, he caustically replied to her as only a Freethinker would:

"I have nether the time nor disposition to enter into a discussion with the Friend, and will end this occasion by suggesting to her the question, whether, if it be true that the Lord has appointed me to do the work she has indicated, is it not probable that he would have communicated knowledge of the fact to me as well as to her?"

It is sometimes very difficult to determine properly whether these "very religious people" are not fit subjects for the lunatic asylum, and I wonder if this thought was in Lincoln's mind when he said: "When an individual in a church, or out of it, becomes dangerous to the public interest he must be checked."

Lincoln's real opinion of the clergy may be gathered from one of his anecdotes which, it is said, he delighted to repeat:

"Once in Springfield, I was off on a short journey, and reached the depot a little ahead of time. Leaning against the fence just outside the depot was a little darky boy, whom I knew, named Dick, busily digging with his toe in a mud puddle. I came up I said: 'Dick, what are you about?' Said he, 'Making a church.' Said I, 'What do you mean?' 'Why, yes,' said Dick, pointing with his toe, 'don't you see, there is the shape of it, there's the steps and the front, here's the pews, where the folks set and there's the pulpit.' 'Yes, I see,' said I, 'but why don't you make a minister?' 'Laws,' answered Dick, with a grin, 'I hadn't got MUD enough for dat.'"

During the course of my address I mentioned the fact that during the latter years of his life Lincoln did not engage in prayer. I want to correct that statement. I want to retract it. For I do find that he did indulge in this form of religious exercise. While at the White House some one came to pay him a visit. A terrific storm was raging. It was raining and thundering with fearful intensity. His visitor found himself unable to leave. Lincoln reflected for a moment and with solemn reverence said: "O Lord, if it's all the same to you, give us a little more light and a little less noise." On another occasion Lincoln prayed to God with deep and reverent devotion, that He put stockings on the chicken's feet in winter.

More significant than anything that might be said by others on the subject of Lincoln's religious belief is the attitude of Lincoln himself toward religion. The mere fact that he did not become a member of any church is alone sufficient to silence forever any charge that he was a Christian believer.

Lincoln weighted down with the pains and burdens of the bloody struggle of the Civil War and with Death constantly staring him in the face, uttered the most important and striking testimony to his lifelong disbelief. It is irrefutable! In answer to a letter from Judge J. A. Wakefield, an old friend, inquiring and hoping that he had changed the infidel opinions and convictions of his early manhood, Lincoln wrote -- and it is significant that this letter was written after the death of his son Willie: --

"My earlier views of the unsoundness of the Christian scheme of salvation and the human origin of the scriptures, have become clearer and stronger with advancing years and I see no reason for thinking I shall ever change them."

He emphatically denied the existence of Hell and with equal fervency said that if there were a God all would be saved or none. Lincoln certainly was not as godly as Jehovah, but his humanity was a thousand times greater. He delighted in repeating this homely, yet philosophic epitaph.

"Here lies poor Johnny Kongapod,  
Have mercy on him, gracious God,  
As he would do if he were God  
And you were Johnny Kongapod."

Other evidence, equally striking and abundant can be adduced further to disprove the clergy's claim; but enough, I think, has been presented to settle beyond the peradventure of a doubt that Lincoln was not a Christian believer. And yet of the utmost significance is the fact that Mrs. Lincoln was a member and regular attendant of the Christian church and that Lincoln rarely attended the services with her. And like a thunderbolt to the heart of the Christian world, Mrs. Lincoln herself testifies that her illustrious husband and one of America's greatest presidents was a disbeliever in the Christian religion. Mrs. Lincoln says: "He never joined a church. He was not a technical Christian. He had no hope or faith in the usual acceptation of those words."

No effort of mine is needed to establish Lincoln's place in the glittering galaxy of the world's great immortals and humanitarians and if there is a resting place for those who have passed on, he is happily in company with Voltaire, Paine and Ingersoll. In lauding Lincoln as a Christian example, the church makes its own weapon and stabs itself with the very instrument it would use against us.

Abraham Lincoln belonged to no sect; he professed no creed; he was truly an American! We honor him as one of the foremost statesmen of this country.

We honor him as the Preserver of our Republic.

We honor him as the Great Emancipator, and we honor ourselves when we honor him as a fellow Freethinker.

Graphic Rule

Appendix

Since the publication of "Lincoln the Freethinker" there has been a widespread controversy regarding the authenticity of the famous Bixby letter which Lincoln was supposed to have written to Mrs. Lydie Bixby, of Boston, offering his condolence on the loss of her five sons in the Civil War, and in which he refers to "our Heavenly Father."

The true facts now brought to light concerning this letter are: that five sons of Mrs. Bixby were not killed in the Civil War, but only two sons; that almost every circumstance connected with the writing of this letter is now a matter of much speculation and doubt; that the men responsible for making the alleged facts public

have been proved to be of questionable veracity, and that the original letter (if Lincoln ever wrote such a letter, which I doubt very much) is not in existence!

"Facsimiles are abundant and though they vary slightly," as stated by Dr. William E. Barton, in defense of the genuineness of this letter, is to me conclusive evidence that the "Bixby Letter" is but another pious fraud perpetrated upon our martyred President. For how would it be possible for facsimiles that "vary slightly" to be made from an original letter if it were not in existence? Furthermore, if such a letter ever existed, how could facsimiles that "vary slightly" be made from it, if they were facsimiles?