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Of Faith.

(Continued.)

Translated from Dr. E. Preuss's *Die Lehre von der Rechtfertigung*, Part III.

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But where is it written that Abraham believed Christ? Does not Scripture rather designate the promise of the Seed as the contents of his faith? True, but this Seed was Christ. This is the testimony of the same apostle who sets Abraham's faith before us as an example. Gal. 3, 6. But if Abraham became righteous through faith in the Seed, and if this Seed was Christ, then he became righteous through faith in Christ. Pray do not tell us that we illumine the mind of Abraham with the torch of Paul; that the patriarch understood the seed to be a child and nothing more. Nothing more? May it tickle the contemporaries to crowd their father Abraham under their footstool — he was greater than they. "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day," says Christ, "and he saw it and was glad." John 8, 56. It makes no difference whether one takes the "day of Christ" to be the day of His incarnation or the day of His appearing in the Plain of Mamre — it is certain that Abraham saw Christ, either with the eyes of his body in the door of his tent or by faith, when God promised him Seed, or both. See Him he did; this Christ testifies expressly, and so also the Jews understand Him: "Thou art not yet fifty years old and hast seen Abraham?" John 8, 57. How in the name of common sense can there have been a personal acquaintance between you? Very easily, answers Christ; for "I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." John 8, 58. Will you still say that we illumine the eyes of Abraham with the lamp of Paul? Methinks they do not need it. One should not picture the patriarchs to one's eyes as poor simpletons — with eyes turned to the ground, moved by earthly promises, without knowledge of Christ, and without hope of the life to come. Did they not have the Gospel of the "Seed of the woman" who was to bruise the head of the serpent? Gen. 3, 15. And they faithfully pondered it in their

The Horrors of Voltaire's Last Days.

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Several years ago, when the writer, in one of his Lenten addresses at the American Theater in St. Louis, ventured the statement that Voltaire died a horrible death, he was wrathfully assailed and branded a liar by an atheistic publication in the East. A friend, who sent him the clipping, begged that the matter be discussed in one of our periodicals and that the evidence for the opinion expressed be definitely presented. Other, more pressing work prevented the writer from complying with the request. Recently, however, when the Rev. Mr. Sunday, in one of his addresses at St. Louis, averred that the death of Voltaire was a most horrible one, he, too, was attacked by a writer in one of the daily papers published in St. Louis. Other periodicals took up the question, charging that the claim that Voltaire died in despair was a downright falsehood. The writer, therefore, feels that the evidence should no longer be withheld. Special thanks are due to Father Regnet, Librarian of St. Louis University, and to Mrs. Moody, Librarian-in-Chief of the Reference Department of the St. Louis Public Library; both assisted him faithfully in making the necessary sources accessible.

The controversy about the manner in which Voltaire died, will, no doubt, never be settled to the satisfaction of every person interested in this moot point. Not only avowed infidels, but also scholars without religious prejudices have emphatically declared that the death of Voltaire was altogether peaceful, and that it was accompanied by no other "horrors" than such as his excessive use of opium and stimulants, his "follies," which followed upon his last triumph at Paris, and his unpardonable overwork brought about.

This claim is well summarized in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, which says in part: "For about a fortnight he was alternately better and worse; but on May 30 the priests were once more sent for, to wit, his nephew, the Abbé Mignot, the Abbé Gaultier, and the *curé* of St. Sulpice. He was, however, in a state of half insensibility and petulantly motioned them away. *The legends set afloat about his dying in a state of terror and despair are certainly false.*"

François Marie Arouet de Voltaire was born on November 21, 1694, and died on May 30, 1778, at the age of eighty-four years.

We are now not interested in the unsavory life of this selfish, deceitful, and blasphemous writer; it is his death which claims our attention.

Those who declare that there is no shred of evidence upon which to hang the statement that this cowardly and unlovable person died in terror and despair are either ignorant of the his-

torical facts or are deliberately stating a falsehood. Father Kreiten, in his excellent work *Voltaire, ein Charakterbild*, a study that is both scholarly and fair, has thoroughly investigated the sources and given to the reading public a sketch of this philosopher's last days that is as plausible as it is reliable. He writes:—

“From this moment, that is to say, of the last twenty days of Voltaire's life, we have only very few really historical and coherent reports; and that is quite explainable. The only person attached to Voltaire for the sake of his bread and butter, Wagnière, had been pushed aside since April 29; he had stayed in far-away Ferney, the Swiss home of Voltaire. At the sick-bed his niece and the ‘brethren’ were watching, all of whom were deeply interested in having nothing unfavorable pass beyond the walls of the palace, if possible, beyond those of the sick-room. What Wagnière reported later on he learned from Morand, the *valet de chambre*. Let us try to draw a picture from the expressions and reports which were made public against their will.

“After his excessive use of opium, Voltaire was usually deprived of his sound mind, and often for twenty-four hours he was delirious. (Laharpe, *Correspondance Littér.*, t. II, p. 240.) Now and then he recognized his friend d'Alembert, pressed his hand, and tried to make himself understood by monosyllables. The friend found this spectacle so heartrending that he could not bear witnessing it. (*To Frederick II*, July 1, 1778.) During the few hours when Voltaire was in possession of his sound mind, he cursed the impotence of the physicians, murmured at, and lamented over, his suffering, and bitterly complained that he could no longer enjoy his glory. (Grimm, *Correspondance Littér.*, t. X, p. 220f.) Wagnière adds that in such moments Voltaire abused his niece, whom he declared to be the cause of his death; for this reason he had practically banished her from his room during the last days. Racle, the engineer, once succeeded in gaining admittance to Voltaire's room and found the wretch just as he tremblingly came out of the bath. *The niece had dismissed the nurse whom the physician had engaged and had placed in the service of her uncle one of her own servants, whom she had commanded not to permit anything to happen without her knowledge and against her interests.* Of all this Voltaire took notice. He called for Wagnière. They told him that they had sent for him. When the secretary did not arrive, Voltaire himself wrote him a letter in the presence of Tronchin. The letter was retained (by the niece), just as the memorandum which he wrote to his notary public. Mademoiselle

Denis expressly said to Mademoiselle de St. Julien: 'My uncle is crazy, and therefore you must not carry out his commands.' When Mademoiselle de St. Julien entered Voltaire's room without the notary public, he cried out, 'O great God, so also you are betraying me!' or, as others report, 'I am forsaken by God and men!'

"Finally, on May 25, Mademoiselle Denis realized that her uncle was hopelessly doomed to a speedy death and that she could now, without incurring any danger, satisfy his longing for Wagnière. She therefore wrote to him: 'Come; for although the weakness of the patient alarms the physician, yet all attacks have ceased, and I hope you will find your master in a better condition.' The rest of the letter deals only with business transactions and with money and ends with the worthy conclusion: 'Bring along as many business papers as you can, for they are essential.' Certainly they were — for the niece!

"On the same day Wagnière received another letter from Voltaire's nephew, d'Hornoy, in which the condition of the patient was fully described and the truth accurately stated, and Wagnière was urged to come at once, since little hope was being held out that he would find the master alive.

". . . Indeed, there was no hope at all. The two physicians, Lorry and Tronchin, considered it necessary to tell the patient what his circle of acquaintances had known for a long time. Induced by a letter from d'Alembert, Tronchin set about to inform the patient of his true condition. The physician, a Protestant, was a professing Christian and, as compared with his patient, even religious. He therefore regarded the condition of the patient's soul quite differently from the sick man himself. 'Voltaire,' he wrote to his brother, 'is very sick. If he dies in a cheerful mood, I shall be much deceived.¹⁾ Before his friends he will not dissimulate, but will indulge his inclinations, no matter how whimsical or cowardly he may feel, especially as he fears to leave the certain for the uncertain. The heaven of the future life is, in truth, not as clear to him as that of Hyères or Montauban, particularly for an old man of eighty years, who is a born coward and very much an enemy of it. I believe his approaching end makes him feel very sad, and I wager that he will not make sport of it. The end will be to Voltaire a deuced moment (*fichu moment*); if he keeps up his courage to the last, we shall have a trivial death.' (Cp. Gaberel, *Voltaire et les Gênois*, p. 166.)

1) Voltaire had often said, "I will die laughing if I can."

"So Tronchin went to Voltaire, and after the manner of physicians he announced to him the death sentence in covert words. Voltaire caught the meaning at once. 'Get me out of it; save me!' he petitioned the doctor. 'It is impossible,' replied Tronchin; 'impossible; you *must* die!'

"May 30 approached. Exactly two months had passed since the solemn coronation of Voltaire in the theater. Abbé Gaultier heard that he had grown worse, and although he had been stubbornly refused admittance so often, he nevertheless, at this dangerous moment, asked Voltaire by letter to be admitted to his death-bed. Dying, Voltaire was no longer able to read the request, but merely heard what the 'brethren' desired. Immediately Abbé Mignot [the nephew and friend of Voltaire. M.] hurried to Abbé Gaultier — it was six o'clock in the evening — and begged him in the name of the patient to come at once. The dying man had not given this command; he had not even been able to take notice of the note of Gaultier; but the purpose was to make people believe that Voltaire had intended to fulfil his 'obligations.' [Abbé Mignot was determined upon securing a decent burial for his uncle. M.] 'Your letter,' Mignot said to Gaultier, 'has made a deep impression on my uncle; he desires to confess, but only to you.' Gaultier declared himself willing to come at once and took with him a detailed form of recantation, which had been prepared beforehand by the church authorities. This he now showed to Mignot. 'Surely,' Mignot replied, 'the form is good; my uncle will subscribe to it; for this I vouch.' Gaultier now demanded that the Abbé of St. Sulpice be called as witness, and immediately he proceeded to Hôtel Villette. Here Gaultier read the form also to the Marquis [the owner of the Hôtel Villette], and he, too, was of the opinion that no objection could be raised against it. Both were scoundrels [Mignot, the nephew, as well as the Marquis; note how unsparingly Father Kreiten censures the priests of the Catholic Church! M.], since they well knew that Voltaire was no longer able to subscribe to anything and that the form should be merely a certificate to eternal life. All this was done only to show that the dying man and his circle of friends were ready to the last to do the bidding of the Church and that only the 'regrettable impossibility,' that is, the coma of the dying man, had prevented this. Certainly, they had waited long enough to be altogether sure that this 'impossibility' would occur.

"As soon as the Abbé of St. Sulpice had arrived, the two priests were led into the death-chamber. At first the Abbé of

St. Sulpice spoke, but he was not recognized by the dying man. Then Gaultier addressed him, and since he felt a slight pressure of Voltaire's hand, he had hopes; but soon he was disappointed by the strange words: 'Monsieur Abbé Gaultier, I pray you to pay my compliments to Monsieur Abbé Gaultier.' The delirium was evident. The priests perceived that at present they could not do anything and withdrew with the request that they be called as soon as the patient would regain consciousness.²⁾

"After some time the sick man, for a few moments, regained consciousness. 'I am forsaken by God and man,' he cried in bitter despair. And turning to the bystanders, 'Away, away from me! It is your fault that I am in this wretched condition. Away! I could do without you all, but you needed me! Oh, this is an excellent honor that you procured for me!' At other times he rolled about in his bed, moved by terror and pain; now he groaned, and now he blasphemed the name of God with his mouth. With horror his friends heard him say with a half-choked voice, 'Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ!' When Richelieu heard this most holy name pronounced with blasphemy and wrath, he left the room and said, 'Surely that is too much; no one can stand such a thing.'

"The horrible spectacle continued. The dying man was writhing like a worm on which one has stepped and lacerated himself with his finger-nails. He called for Abbé Gaultier; but his 'friends' remained merciless. So the last moment drew near.

2) So Gaultier relates in his official report. The "friends" have expanded this story. Their version reads: When the sick man was told of the presence of the two priests, he said, "Assure them of my esteem." When they presented the Abbé of St. Sulpice, he kissed his hand and said, "I honor my *curé*." Then they led Gaultier, his confessor, to him. Voltaire said, "Pay my compliments to him and assure him of my gratitude." The confessor now asked him, "Do you acknowledge the deity of Christ?" The sick man, with his open hand and his outstretched arm, thrust him aside. Seizing his head and turning to the other side, he exclaimed with a clear and loud voice, "Let me die in peace." The confessor repeated the question; but now Voltaire, collecting his strength, clenched his fist and pushed him back, crying, "In the name of God, do not talk to me about that man!" Then the priest of St. Sulpice said to the father confessor, "You see, he is not in his right mind." Both then withdrew. In his letter to Frederick II d'Alembert, who was not present at this scene, claims that Voltaire was fully conscious and knew what he did. After the priests had left the room, Voltaire cried with a loud voice, "I am a dead man!" Ten minutes before his death he seized the hand of his servant and said, "Adieu, my dear Morand, I am dying." These were his last words. Another source adds that he also remarked, "Take care of Mama" (Mademoiselle Denis). (Cp. also the statements of the biographers Duvernet and Condorcet; also the *Journal des Débats*, 30 Janvier, 1869; finally, the *Memories of Wag-nière*, t. I, p. 161.)

A new attack of despair announced it. 'I feel a hand which seizes me and drags me to the judgment-seat of God.' Then with a vacant stare he gazed at the space at the bedside. 'The devil is there! He wants to grab me! I see him! I see hell! Oh, hide me from it!' At last, in his extreme despair, and tormented by a feverish thirst, he seized the chamber-pot, placed it at his lips, and emptied it. Then, with a fierce cry, he sank back. Blood and slops came forth from his mouth and nose. *Voltaire was dead.*³⁾

"In the year 1758 Voltaire had written to d'Alembert: 'In twenty years the good Lord will have a vacation.'⁴⁾ And twenty years later, on May 30, 1778, in the evening, at eleven o'clock, Voltaire died."

(To be concluded.)
