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## The Means of Grace.

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

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"Although the work of redemption was accomplished on the cross and forgiveness of sin acquired, yet it cannot come to us in any other way than through the Word. For what would we otherwise know about it that such a thing was accomplished or was to be given us if it were not presented by preaching, or the oral Word? . . . Or how can they apprehend and appropriate to themselves the forgiveness except they lay hold of, and believe, the Scriptures and the Gospel?" (Large Catechism. *Triglotta*, 759.) Therefore Paul calls the preached Word the means of salvation. 1 Cor. 15, 1. 2. But if it brings us salvation, it also brings us forgiveness; for salvation and forgiveness are the same thing. Yes, the Lord directly regards His Word as the bearer of His all-sufficient merits. For instead of saying: "Ye are clean through the obedience by which I made satisfaction to the Father," He says: "Ye are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you." John 15, 3.

But where there is forgiveness through the merits of Christ, there is life. Titus 3, 7; Rom. 6, 20. [*Note.* — "For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation." Small Catechism. *Triglotta*, 557.] Therefore the Lord also calls His Word the bearer of life. John 5, 24: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My Word and believeth on Him that sent Me hath everlasting life." And John 8, 51: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death." Yes, John 6, 63 He declares: "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." And John 12, 50: The Word of My Father "is life everlasting. Whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto Me, so I speak." [*Note.* — *Ἡ ἐντολὴ τοῦ πατρὸς ζωὴ αἰώνιος ἐστίν* does not mean: "He that keepeth the Law of the Father hath life everlasting," but according to

# The Horrors of Voltaire's Last Days.

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(Concluded.)

The June number of the THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY brought the account of Voltaire's death as given by Father Kreiten in his fine work *Voltaire, ein Charakterbild.*<sup>1)</sup> We have quoted his report mainly to show how carefully and painstakingly Father Kreiten deals with probabilities and facts and how conscientiously he weighs the evidence. Urged by his readers, the author, in addition, produces the evidence for his claims in a special appendix and furnishes substantial proof by the eye-witnesses: the Abbé Gaultier, whose report is corroborated by the Abbé of St. Sulpice; the attending physician Dr. Tronchin; Belle-et-Bonne, the Marquise de Villette; the servants of the Hotel of the Marquis de Villette, where Voltaire died. Let us now examine these reports.

1. The official report of the *Abbé Gaultier* to the Archbishop of Paris, with some letters by Voltaire and his "friends," appeared in P. Elie Harel's *Recueil des Particularités Curieuses de la Vie et de la Morte de Voltaire* (Paris, 1780). The report is very

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1) Zweite, vermehrte Auflage. Freiburg im Breisgau. Herdersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1885. Also: B. Herder Company, St. Louis, Mo.

conservative, dealing only with the main facts, and was evidently composed with much consideration for the relatives of Voltaire, especially his nephew, the priest Mignot. Father Kreiten says of him: "He does not tell the whole truth, perhaps because the pious priest would not see or believe it, or because that which he said was sufficient." Also, we must recall that Abbé Gaultier had withdrawn and did not witness the last frenzy of Voltaire; in his report he states that the last hours of Voltaire, as far as he witnessed them, were full of horror and despair. When on October 12, 1778, the well-known academician De la Lande asked Gaultier whether his official memorandum, for which authenticity was claimed, was really authentic, and especially the letters that accompanied it, he confirmed this and invited De la Lande to compare the original letters in his possession. The academician accepted the invitation and was convinced of the absolute truth of the memorandum. (Harel, German edition, p. 170f.)

2. The main evidence coming from *Dr. Tronchin* is a letter written by him to his friend in Geneva, Carl Bonnet, on June 20, 1778.<sup>2</sup> This letter is preserved at Geneva and has been frequently published. (Cp. Kreiten, p. 556.) Dr. Tronchin was an eminent physician and one of the most famous surgeons of his time. He was born at Geneva, in 1709, and died in 1781. He studied in Holland under the celebrated Boerhave. In 1756 he was called to Paris to inoculate the children of the Duke of Orleans, which was justly considered a most perilous undertaking, especially since the king had expressed his personal displeasure at the experiment. However, he had introduced the practise with great success in Holland and Switzerland and so ventured on the risk without fear. The children recovered; he was highly rewarded and honored and rose to the highest dignities of his profession.<sup>3</sup> Dr. Tronchin lived at Geneva when Voltaire moved to the near-by Ferney; and though he was an ardent Calvinist, not at all in sympathy with the corruption which ensued after Voltaire and his libertine friends exerted their baneful influence over the city, he consented to be the attending physician of the aged "patriarch." His wise counsels and his honest reproofs of the philosopher's profligate life did much to lengthen Voltaire's life. However, a quarrel soon occurred (the *guerre de Genève*), and dis-

2) Remember that Voltaire died May 30, 1778. — *M.*

3) The *Christian Observer*, Vol. 58, p. 672; also Kreiten's *Voltaire*, Appendix, p. 565.

gusted with the pollution at Ferney and the corruption at Geneva, Dr. Tronchin moved to Paris. The character of Dr. Tronchin is beyond reproach. Both as man and as physician he ranked among the leading men of his age. Truthful, honest, firm in his convictions, and without fear, his letter to Carl Bonnet carries a tremendous weight.

The letter of Dr. Tronchin is quoted in full in the *Christian Observer* (Vol. 58, p. 673) and in part, fortunately in the original, in Father Kreiten's book. We quote from the *Christian Observer*, adding the most important words of the French original. The letter reads:—

“He had imagined that I would not see him, and this thought tormented him. In haste he wrote me a letter, perfumed with incense, in which he swears eternal esteem and regard for me. I visited him. ‘You have been,’ said he to me, ‘my savior; be here my tutelar angel. I have but one breath of life left; I come to yield it up in your arms.’ He probably spoke the truth—they will kill him.<sup>4)</sup>

“If my principles, my dear friend, had required to be strengthened by any tie, the man whom I have seen become weak, agonize, and die before my eyes would have secured them by a Gordian knot; and on comparing the death of a good man, which is but the end of a fine day, with that of Voltaire, I should have seen the difference which exists between a fine day and a tempest; between the serenity of the soul of a wise man who ceases to live, and the dreadful torment of him to whom death is the king of terrors.<sup>5)</sup>

“I thank God that I did not need this spectacle, and yet *forte olim meminisse juvabit*. This man was then predestined to die in my hands. *I always told him the truth*, and unhappily for him, *I am the only person who never deceived him*. ‘Yes, my friend,’ he often said to me, ‘you alone gave me good advice; if I had followed it, I should not be in the dreadful state in which I am;

4) That is, Voltaire's “friends,” who did not have the courage to prevent Voltaire's excessive use of stimulants, his “follies,” and his overwork.

5) “*Si mes principes avaient eu besoin que j'en serrasse le noeud, l'homme que j'ai vu dépérir, agoniser, et mourir sous mes yeux, en aurait fait un noeud Gordien; et en comparant la mort d'un homme de bien, qui n'est que la fin d'un beau jour, à celle de Voltaire, j'aurais vu bien sensiblement la différence qu'il y a entre un beau jour et une tempête, entre la sérénité de l'âme d'un sage qui cesse de vivre et le TOURMENT AFFREUX de celui pour qui la mort est le roi des épouvantements. . . . Cet homme, donc, était prédestiné à mourir dans mes mains.*” (W. Kreiten, *Voltaire*, p. 566.)

I should have returned to Ferney. I should not have become intoxicated with the incense which turned my head. Yes, I have swallowed nothing but smoke; you can do me no more good. Send me the physician for madmen. What fatality brought me to Paris? You told me when I arrived that an oak of eighty years does not bear transplanting; and you spoke the truth. Why did I not believe you? And when I had given you my word that I would set out in the invalid carriage which you had promised me, why did I not go? Pity me; I am mad.

“He was to set out two days after the follies of his coronation at the theater; but the next morning he received a deputation from the French Academy which entreated him to honor it with his presence before his departure. He attended in the afternoon and was made president of the society by acclamation. He accepted the office, which is for three months. He thus chained himself for three months, and of his promise given to me nothing remained. From this moment to his death his days were only a gust of madness. He was ashamed of it. When he saw me, he asked my pardon; he pressed my hands; he entreated me to have pity on him and not to abandon him, especially as he must use new efforts to make a suitable return for the honor which the Academy had done him and to induce it to labor at a new dictionary like the *della Crusca*. The compilation of this dictionary was his last dominant idea, his last passion. He had undertaken the letter *A* and had distributed the twenty-three other letters to twenty-three academicians, many of whom greatly irritated him by undertaking the task with an ill grace. ‘They are idle fellows,’ he said, ‘accustomed to stagnate in idleness; but I will make them advance.’ And it was to make them advance that, in the interval of the two sittings, he took, at his peril, so many drugs and committed so many follies, which hastened his death, and which threw him into a state of despair and dreadful madness. *I cannot recollect it without horror.*<sup>6)</sup> As soon as he saw that all that he had done to increase his strength had produced a contrary effect, death was ever before his eyes. From that moment rage took possession of his soul. Imagine to yourself the madness of Orestes. *Furiis agitatedus obiit.*”<sup>7)</sup>

6) Italics our own.

7) “*Je ne me le rappelle pas sans horreur. Dès qu’il vit que tout ce qu’il avait fait pour augmenter ses forces avait produit un effet tout contraire, la mort fut toujours devant ses yeux. Dès ce moment, la rage s’est emparée de son âme. Rappelez-vous les fureurs d’Oreste: Furiis agitatedus obiit.*” (W. Kreiten, *Voltaire*, p. 567.)

Besides the letter to Carl Bonnet we have as evidence Dr. Tronchin's report of Voltaire's death handed down in other publications; for as Tronchin testified in the letter, he also testified orally to his friends at Paris of the horrors of "the philosopher's" last days. Père Elie Harel, in his above-mentioned work, *Recueil des Particularités Curieuses*, etc., offers his account in a special note to the official letter of Abbé Gaultier. As Père Harel witnesses, Tronchin made this report to him personally. It runs as follows: "After the Rev. Father of St. Sulpice and the Rev. Abbé Gaultier had left Voltaire, Mr. Tronchin, his physician, visited him. He entered just as Voltaire was in a most dreadful state. He writhed, cast himself from one side of the bed to another, and cried full of madness, 'I am forsaken by God and men!' Then he reached into his stool, seized rapidly and full of frenzy a handful of feces and crammed them into his mouth. Dr. Tronchin, who narrated this frightful happening before celebrated men, could not restrain himself from saying, 'I would wish that all those who have been perverted by Voltaire's writings had been witnesses to his death. . . . It is not possible to retain one's composure at the sight of such horrible things. One can only say that Voltaire fulfilled the following prophecy of the prophet Ezekiel, of which so often he had made mockery, in himself, Ezek. 4, 12: "And thou shalt eat it as barley cakes, and thou shalt bake it with dung that cometh out of man, in their sight.'" So the old translation of 1785." (Kreiten, *Voltaire*, p. 567.)<sup>8</sup>)

Father Kreiten continues: "Let us note that Père Harel wrote and published this note two years after Voltaire's death; yet there was no *démenti*, neither from his "friends" nor from Tronchin, who at that time was still living at Paris. Only seven years later

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8) "Nachdem der Herr Pfarrer von St. Sulpice und der Herr Abbé Gaultier den Voltaire verlassen hatten, besuchte ihn Herr Tronchin, sein Leibarzt. Dieser kam eben dazu, als Voltaire in der entsetzlichsten Lage war. Er waelzte sich, warf sich hin und her und schrie mit voller Wut: 'Ich bin von Gott und Menschen verlassen!' Alsdann langte er in seinen Leibstuhl, ergriff schnell und rasend eine Handvoll Unflat und frass ihn hinein. Der Doktor Tronchin, welcher diese schauervolle Begebenheit vor angesehenen Personen erzuehlt hat, konnte sich nicht enthalten, ihnen zu sagen: 'Ich wollte wohl wuenschen, dass alle diejenigen, welche durch Voltaires Schriften sind verfuehrt worden, Zeugen von seinem Tode gewesen waeren. . . . Es ist nicht moeglich, bei einem solchen Schreckensbild in seiner Fassung zu bleiben. Man kann nur sagen, dass Voltaire die folgende Weissagung des Propheten Hesekiel, ueber welche er so vielmal gespottet hatte, an sich selbst erfuehlt habe, Hesek. 4, 12: "Gerstenkuchen sollst du essen, die du vor ihren Augen mit Menschenmist backen sollst.'" So die alte Uebersetzung von 1785."

Wagnière raised doubts concerning the strong expressions of Tronchin."

One of Dr. Tronchin's oral accounts was published also in the *Gazette de Cologne* of July 7, 1778, which quotes Tronchin as having said: "He reached out his arms and, putting his hands into his chamber-pot and seizing that which was in it, ate of it."<sup>9</sup>)

Father Kreiten remarks: "It may seem strange that they should have recourse to a newspaper from Cologne to establish a fact which happened at Paris. Why not quote a Paris paper? Because the French Government had strictly forbidden to speak of Voltaire in French periodicals; they were allowed to say neither anything good nor anything bad. Indeed, even his name should not be mentioned in the columns of the periodicals. The actors were forbidden to enact his plays, and teachers, to assign verses from the 'patriarch's' poems for memory work. So we are informed unanimously by the memoirs of the day, by the correspondence of Grimm, d'Alembert, and Laharpe; by the *Journal du Bourgeois de Paris* of June 2; by the *Correspondance Secrète* of June 6; by the *Nouvelles de Bachaumont* of June 11. We must therefore not be surprised that no one knew the day of his death. Not until June 8 could the *Gazette de France*, the official government journal, register his death, and then only without mentioning the place where he had died. In consequence, most of the news of his death could spread only through oral reports, and since among the actual eye-witnesses of the last scene only Tronchin did not belong to the 'brethren' or was not dominated by them, it is not surprising that most of the accounts refer to Tronchin's oral statements" (p. 569).

Dr. Tronchin's oral reports were guardedly published also in the *Bourgeois de Paris* of June, 1778, which speaks of Voltaire's "*l'espèce de rage et de désespoir.*" Yet in spite of these and other publications they were never branded as lies by the "friends" of Voltaire, nor were they ever retracted or modified by Dr. Tronchin, who continued to live at Paris and was in close touch with everything that concerned his former patient. To this day Dr. Tronchin's account stands un rebutted and unrefuted; nor have any "friends" of Voltaire dared to calumniate his character or question his veracity on account of the reports spread about the "master's" death. The blunt old Calvinist continued in good grace even with the enemies of the Roman Catholic Church, the Vol-

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9) "*Il se tordait les bras, et portant les mains dans son pot de chambre et saisant ce qui y était, il l'a mangé.*"

tairian atheists, deists, and agnostics of the time. Was he so highly honored because he alone told the truth?

3. The third eye-witness of Voltaire's death was *Mademoiselle Belle-et-Bonne*, or the Marquise de Villette, as she was called after her marriage to the Marquis de Villette, in whose palace, the Hotel de Villette, the old rake died. In 1820 she returned to the Catholic Church and then made frequent confessions concerning Voltaire's death to Deperry, who published them, in 1835, in his famous work *Biographie des Hommes Célèbres du Département de l'Ain*." In this work he quotes Belle-et-Bonne as follows:—

"Nothing is more true, said Madame de Villette, among other numerous particulars, than that which Mr. Tronchin relates about the last moments of Voltaire. He made terrible outcries, he writhed, he stretched out his hands, he lacerated himself with his nails. A few minutes before giving up his soul, he asked for the Abbé Gaultier. Many times, Madame de Villette said, she desired to send some one for a minister of Jesus Christ, but the friends of Voltaire who were present opposed themselves, fearing that the presence of a priest, receiving the last breath of their patriarch, would not foster the work of philosophy and would not encourage the adepts, whom such a conduct of their leader would have condemned. When the fatal moment arrived, a new attack of despair seized the dying man. He cried out that he felt an invisible hand dragging him before the tribunal of God. He called upon Jesus Christ with plaintive pleadings, whom he had fought during his whole life. He cursed his companions in impiety and invoked and blasphemed Heaven again and again. Finally, in order to quench a burning thirst which choked him, he put his mouth to the night-chamber. He roared out a last cry and died in the midst of filth and blood which rolled out of his mouth and his nostrils." (*Biographie des Hommes Célèbres du Département de l'Ain*, p. 163.)

4. Of the *servants* who later testified to the horrors of Voltaire, the report of the chef of Hotel Villette is the clearest. We have already quoted his confession made to the Abbé of St. Sulpice: "*Si le diable pouvait mourir, il ne mourrait pas autrement.*" (Cp. *Histoire de M. Vuarin par l'Abbé Martin*, tom. I, p. 372.)

The report of Dr. Tronchin was also perpetuated in Barruel's *Mémoires sur le Jacobinisme* (tom. I, p. 266) and in *Helviennes*, published in 1784. We shall quote his account as it is transcribed in the *Christian Observer* of November, 1842, pp. 668. 669. We read:—



"It was during Voltaire's last visit to Paris, when his triumph was complete and he had even feared that he should die with glory, amidst the acclamations of an infatuated theater, that he was struck by the hand of Providence and fated to make a very different termination of his career.

"In the midst of his triumphs a violent hemorrhage raised apprehensions for his life. D'Alembert, Diderot, and Marmontel hastened to support his resolution in his last moments, but were only witnesses to their mutual ignominy as well as to his own.

"Here let not the historian fear exaggeration. Rage, remorse, reproach, and blasphemy, all accompany and characterize the long agony of the dying atheist. His death, the most terrible ever recorded to have stricken the impious man, will not be denied by his companions in impiety. Their silence, however much they may wish to deny it, is the least of those corroborative proofs which might be adduced. Not one of the sophists has ever dared to mention any sign given, of resolution or tranquillity, by the premier chief during the space of three months which elapsed from the time he was crowned in the theater until his decease. Such a silence expresses how great their humiliation was in his death!

"It was in his return from the theater and in the midst of the toils he was resuming in order to acquire fresh applause, when Voltaire was warned that the long career of his impiety was drawing to an end.

"In spite of all the sophists flocking around him in the first days of his illness, he gave signs of wishing to return to God, whom he had so often blasphemed. He called for the priest who ministered to Him whom he had sworn to crush under the appellation of 'the Wretch.' His danger increasing, he wrote the following note to Abbé Gaultier: 'You had promised, sir, to come and hear me. I entreat you would take the trouble of calling as soon as possible.' Signed: '*Voltaire*. Paris, the 26th February, 1778.'

"A few days after this he wrote the following declaration, in the presence of the same Abbé Gaultier, Abbé Mignot, and the Marquis de Villeveille, copied from the minutes deposited with Mr. Momet, notary, at Paris:—<sup>10)</sup>

"I, the undersigned, declare that for these four days past, having been afflicted with a vomiting of blood, at the age of eighty-four, and not having been able to drag myself to the church, the Rev. Rector of St. Sulpice having been pleased to add to his good

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10) This point is not mentioned by Kreiten, but is confirmed by others.

works that of sending to me Abbé Gaultier, a priest, I confessed to him, and if it please God to dispose of me, I die in the Holy Catholic Church in which I was born, hoping that the divine mercy will deign to pardon all my faults. If ever I have scandalized the Church, I ask pardon of God and of the Church. Second of March, 1778.' Signed: '*Voltaire*. In presence of Abbé Mignot, my nephew, and the Marquis de Villevieille, my friend.'<sup>11)</sup>

"After the two witnesses had signed this declaration, Voltaire added these words, copied from the same minutes: 'The Abbé Gaultier, my confessor, having apprised me that it was said among a certain set of people I should protest against everything I did at my death, I declare that I never made such a speech and that it is an old jest, attributed long since to many of the learned, more enlightened than I am.'

"Was this declaration a fresh instance of his former hypocrisy? For he had the mean hypocrisy, even in the midst of his efforts against Christianity, to receive the Sacrament regularly and to do other acts of religion, merely to be able to deny his infidelity if accused of it.

"Unfortunately, after the explanations we have seen him give of his exterior acts of religion, might there not be room for doubt? Be that as it may, there is a public homage paid to that religion in which he declared he meant to die, notwithstanding his having perpetually conspired against it during his life. This declaration is also signed by the same friend and adept, the Marquis de Villevieille, to whom, eleven years before, Voltaire was wont to write, '*Conceal your march from the enemy in your endeavors to crush the Wretch!*'

"Voltaire had permitted this declaration to be carried to the Rector of St. Sulpice and to the Archbishop of Paris to know whether it would be sufficient. When Abbé Gaultier returned with the answer, it was impossible for him to gain admittance to the patient. The conspirators had strained every nerve to hinder the chief from consummating his recantation; and every avenue was

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11) Perhaps Richard Aldington is right when under the title "The Last Days of Voltaire" he writes in the *Nation and the Athenaeum*, Vol. 36, No. 12, December 20, 1924: "He signed a recantation indeed. The reason for Voltaire's temporizing with the Church was not dread of hell-fire [not at that time.—*M.*], but a legitimate desire to protect his remains from the indignity of being cast into the public sewer, the usual fate of those who differed from the Church." [*Sic!*] Richard Aldington is no doubt right in claiming that his recantation was not sincere. But, then, what a lie and what a blasphemy it was!

shut to the priest whom Voltaire had sent for. The demons haunted every access; rage succeeds fury, and fury to rage again, during the remainder of his life.

"Then it was that d'Alembert, Diderot, and about twenty others of the conspirators who had beset his apartment never approached him but to witness their own ignominy. For often he would curse them and exclaim, 'Begone! I could have done without you all; but you could not exist without me. And what a wretched glory have you procured me!'

"Then would succeed the horrid remembrance of his conspiracy. They could hear him, the prey of anguish and dread, alternately supplicating or blaspheming that God against whom he had conspired; and in plaintive accents he would cry out, 'O Christ! O Jesus Christ!' Then he would complain that he was abandoned by God and man. The hand which had traced in ancient writ the sentence of an impious and reviling king seemed to trace before his eyes, 'Crush, then, do crush the Wretch!'

"In vain he turned his head away; the time was coming apace when he was to appear before the tribunal of Him whom he had blasphemed. His physicians, particularly Mr. Tronchin, called in to administer relief, thunderstruck, retired, declaring that the death of the impious man was terrible indeed. The pride of these conspirators would willingly have suppressed these declarations, but it was in vain. The Mareschal de Richelieu flies from the bedside, declaring it to be a sight too terrible to be sustained; and Mr. Tronchin, that the furies could give but a faint idea of those of Voltaire." —

"There is no shred of evidence on which to hang the claim that Voltaire died in terror," this statement made by "friends" of Voltaire is absolutely false. The report of Dr. Tronchin is indeed very credible. His veracity is beyond reproach; his character was unblamable; his knowledge of the last scene was based upon what his eyes saw and his ears heard. There is no ulterior motive that could have prompted a lie in his confidential letter to Carl Bonnet; it was a missive sent by a friend to a friend, who, like him, was interested in Voltaire. Why, then, deny the truth of Dr. Tronchin's statement? *There is no shred of evidence to prove that he was a liar.*

To quote the *Christian Observer* once more: "*The last days of Voltaire exhibit a terrible proof that infidelity affords no downy pillow for the slumbers of a dying man.*"

And there the matter rests.