

# Freethought

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FREETHOUGHT is a stage between Agnosticism and Gnosticism.

Obviously, Agnosticism is not the highest possible ideal, for it is a confession of ignorance. It may be argued, however, that this confession of ignorance applies exclusively to what is inherently unknowable, but the fact that a thing is *now* unknowable is no guarantee that it must forever remain so.

But Agnosticism is one of the most useful of systems, for by its very name, it implies intellectual honesty, and this quality is probably the most important of all qualities in the search for truth.

The value of Agnosticism in the evolutionary scheme—if scheme there be—seems to me to be this:—That it makes the seeker after knowledge very cautious before accepting as true any theory relating to the Cosmos or its workings.

"To thine own Church be true," says the theologian; "To thine own self be true," says the Freethinker, and the only way of reconciling these *dicta* is by being a member of a Church that knows no dogma. Such a Church has, of course, no objective existence, and it is well that this should be so, for every organisation contains within it the seeds of decay. But such a Church exists subjectively, and the members of it are these who regard no exclusive *-ism* as being necessary to "salvation," mental, moral, physical, or "supernatural,"—but the mere fact of being a member of the human race. It is simply egotism, and very amusing egotism, to describe a man as "converted" when you have merely made him think as you think. Real conversion can only be effected by awakening the Man in an individual, and inducing him to think for himself. Whether he agrees with you or not is a matter of relatively small importance, for, as soon as his intellect has been awakened, a man will soon find a path for himself.

"Save his own soul's light overhead,  
None leads him, and none ever led."

I think that this is the gist of all the real "Inner Teaching"; like all great principles it is infinitely simple, and has results infinitely complex. It is this very simplicity that has baffled the disciples of every great teacher. The truth was

so simple and obvious that they overlooked it, and, perhaps, so obvious was it to the teacher, that he neglected to express it to them directly. To this neglect must be attributed the curse of Sectarianism. In the very nature of things, every sect, and every religion—for what is a religion but a sect on a larger scale?—must believe itself to possess more of truth than do its rival sects, and this feeling of superiority militates more against brotherhood than do all other causes combined.

Truth is one, but has an infinite number of aspects. What but bigotry can we look for from him who views Truth from one point of view only? And when we remember that that point of view is probably very erroneous, owing to its lack of perspective, what wonder is there at the enormous number of unnecessary tragedies brought about by the conflict of the votaries of rival sects or religions.

By perfect freedom for the individual, we attain upon the freedom for the race, for he who is truly free will never encroach upon the freedom of others. He will have no need. To persecute is invariably a sign and confession of weakness. Strength smiles tolerantly at opposition; it is Weakness that becomes enraged upon having its authority questioned.

Real brotherhood is not obtainable by dogmatism, which is, as I have attempted to show, the most prolific cause of disunion. But diversity of thought—*free* thought—is no bar to brotherhood. And diversity of thought is inevitable, for no two thinking minds can view things in precisely the same light.

Complete unity of thought is to be found only among those who do not think for themselves, but receive their ideas ready-made; and it is these people—the children of Dogma—who are always ready to persecute those who differ from them, for, never having thought themselves, they cannot conceive of the use or necessity of thought in others.