

Atheists Who Lost Their “Faith”

by James L. Sloan

Some of the world’s most brilliant and able literary men have been quite critical and outspoken in their condemnation of the notion of God and eternal life. Unfortunately, their testimonies have usually been heard in their young, brash, productive years when they were very full of themselves and when the day of their death seemed far removed. It might profit us to have the opportunity to learn from them in their declining days as they looked back and evaluated their lives from a high peak and broad perspective.

SAMUEL LANGHORNE CLEMENS, better known by his pen name, Mark Twain (1835-1910). “A myriad of men are born; they labor and sweat and struggle for bread; they squabble and scold and fight; they scramble for little mean advantages over each other. Age creeps upon them and infirmities follow; shame and humiliations bring down their prides and their vanities. Those they love are taken from them, and the joy of life is turned to aching grief. The burden of pain, care, and misery grows heavier year by year. At length ambition is dead, pride is dead, vanity is dead; longing for release is in their place. It comes at last — the only unpoisoned gift earth ever had for them — and they vanish from a world where they were of no consequence; where they achieved nothing, where they were a mistake and a failure and a foolishness; where they left no sign that they have existed — a world that will lament them a day and forget them forever” (*Autobiography*, Vol. II, p. 37).

BERTRAND RUSSELL (1872-1970). “Why should you suppose I think it foolish to wish to see the people one is fond of? What else is there to make life tolerable? We stand on the shore of an ocean, crying to the night and the emptiness; sometimes a voice answers out of the darkness. But it is a voice of one drowning; and in a moment the silence returns.” (*Autobiography* p. 287).

ROBERT G. INGERSOLL (1833-1899). “Death is a narrow vale between the cold and barren peaks of two eternities. We cry aloud and the only answer is the wailing echo of our cry” (oration given at the grave of his brother).

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW (1856-1950). “The science to which I pinned my faith is bankrupt Its counsels which should have established the millennium have led directly to the suicide of Europe. I believed them once . . . In their name I helped to destroy the faith of millions of worshippers in the temples of a thousand creeds. And now they look at me and witness the great tragedy of an atheist who has lost his faith” (*Too True To Be Good* [a play]).

W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM (1874-1965). “When I look back on my life . . . it seems to be strangely lacking in reality ... it may be that my heart, having found rest nowhere, had some deep ancestral craving for God and immortality which my reason would have no truck with” (*The Chicago Daily News*, January 26, 1964).

These have been testimonies of atheists as they faced the bleak abyss of death and looked back on a life so lauded by others but now so strangely meaningless to themselves. Let us share just one more personal testimony. It was written by a man of immense intellect, great ambition (though not selfish), and genuine literary achievement. He was also a man who underwent great personal sufferings and gross miscarriages of justice. He said in his old age: “*For I am already on the point of being sacrificed; the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing*” (2 Tim. 4:6-8). **This is the testimony of a believer!**

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