

LUCY N. COLMAN

BRAVE PIONEER IN FREETHOUGHT AND EQUAL RIGHTS

Every member of the Old Guard of Freethought, men and women who have braved the slings and arrows of orthodox venom and hate that Liberty might continue, will remember the subject of this brief sketch. For years hers was a familiar face and figure at each of the Freethought conventions, no matter where held, or the distance that had to be traveled. Like a Queen she came, proud of her position and happy in her thought, contented in her association with kindred hearts and minds. Liberty was her one watch-word, whether of body or mind, and her only prayer was the spring of human love. She belonged to the old generation, the Old Guard, now with broken, shattered files, gathered into the great Unknown, gone from the land of the living to the land of the dead.

Lucy N. Colman was born in Massachusetts in 1817, and was, therefore, contemporary for a short time with some of the revolutionary patriots. Her parents were able to furnish her with as good an education as the country afforded at that period, and at a comparatively early age she became a school teacher in her native State. During her career as teacher, she labored to abolish corporal, or physical punishment in the schools, a practice then very much in vogue, and to a great extent she succeeded. Her feeling on this subject was natural and inborn. It was an emanation from her womanly instinct and love of childhood. The keynote to this beautiful and humane sentiment may be found in a few brief words she afterwards penned on the subject of Motherhood. She said, among other things:—

“I always like to write the word ‘Mother’ with a capital M. To me it is the most wonderful word in all the language; it means a joy that can never be equaled. I can never forget the ecstasy that came over me when I first looked in the face of my child, and knew that it was mine, but with the joy came the remembrance of the slave mother’s agony as she looked upon her child and knew its fate.”

In those beautiful words may be found the true sentiment, the moving theme of her whole life.

Mrs. Colman was married twice. At the age of eighteen years she was married to John M. Davis, of Dighton, Mass.; but six years later was made a widow through death. Two years following she was again married to Mr. Colman, and at the age of 28 became a mother. It was when the anti-slavery agitation began in New England, that Mrs. Colman, looking back at this epoch in her life, penned the burning words we have quoted as an argument against slavery. She became thoroughly devoted to the anti-slavery movement, and was intimately associated in this work with William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell

Phillips, Frederick Douglas, and others, and earned the reputation of being an ardent and enthusiastic abolitionist.

Death once more intervened to break up a happy domestic life, for her husband was killed on the New York Central Railroad, while traveling, and was buried from Corinthian Hall, at Rochester, New York, Andrew Jackson Davis officiating at the funeral. At this time Mrs. Colman had joined in with the Spiritualist movement, as a means of association, in that she had given up the church because of its complicity with slavery. Even the Unitarian and Universalist creeds had become too narrow, too orthodox, for her. Meeting with Amy Post, the latter announced her readiness to begin an anti-slavery campaign, and Mrs. Colman feeling that she must speak for the slave, threw herself into the movement. She labored in the East, and finally took up the campaign in Michigan. Here she found a home with Samuel D. Moore and wife, both of whom were well known figures and workers in the Liberal ranks at that time. From her own lips we learned that in her labors everywhere, the church was the bulwark of human slavery. When attacked by mobs, she found that ministers of the gospel were the leaders in it. Her life being thus filled with excitement and adventure, she gave some of its most interesting phases in a published work entitled “Reminiscences,” which was exceedingly interesting, and showing how great and bitter was the struggle for liberty in those perilous times.

In the course of time, by actual experience, aided by reading and study, Mrs. Colman became a radical Freethinker. She was a faithful and constant attendant at each and all Freethought conventions, whereat the writer of this sketch first met her and became acquainted with her. She became equally opposed to white slavery as to black slavery, and above all to mental slavery. She became interested in every living movement for progress, reform and human advancement. She became an ardent advocate of the rights of both men and women. She has mingled with the world, ever and always presenting a character as spotless and as stainless as the polar snows. She met and mingled with the greatest men and women of the Nation, and took part in each and every movement for reform.

Mrs. Colman has demonstrated what a woman can do when possessed of courage, determination, self-reliance, energy, ambition and devotion to the cause of truth and right. Her name still shines in the world of American Freethought, and because of its brilliancy, our eldest son came nearly having her name bestowed upon him. But for the sad death of Charles Bradlaugh, in England, in 1890, he would have been so named, but close ties and personal association with England’s greatest and bravest, impelled the change at the last moment.