

# Saladin: In Memoriam

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THE *Agnostic Journal* has lost its Editor; the world has lost one of its most strenuous fighters for freedom. Saladin was one of those Titans who strike off the world's fetters while she sleeps.

Saladin's creed was one that underlies every religion in the world; the supreme reality underlying all forms drew him to itself, but so many barriers interposed that his soul was bruised in the attempted passage, and he drew back to devote his life to demolishing one of the greatest of those barriers.

Saladin slashed and hewed at the grossly-materialised symbols that form the idols of the unthinking; the popular and absurd gods knew no mercy from him; he was not of a nature to easily brook compromise; he had but to perceive a lie to attack it with all his force. If this passion for truth be the predominant element in a man's character, he will—granted the possession of intellect—be pre-eminently a man and a leader of men.

In Saladin that intellect was assuredly not lacking, and the result is that we who mourn him mourn at once a personal friend of marvellous magnetism and charm, and a man who devoted his life to an heroic effort to liberate the world's mind. Saladin, in a word, brought a magnificent brain garnished with high culture, and a faithful and magnanimous nature, as an offering upon the twin altars of Truth and Freedom. And the sacrifice was not in vain.

Before Saladin's influence can be accurately gauged, it will, of course, need the perspective that is always and infallibly lent by Time. But even now, when his weary body has been just cast off and laid within the breast of the kindly mother-earth that bore him, it may be said with absolute certainty that that influence will be felt throughout the coming centuries. In that day when intellectual freedom shall be part of man's birthright, Saladin will come into his own, within the hearts of men.

So strong and idiosyncratic a personality as the dead Chief's could, in the nature of things, have no peer, and for this reason he leaves no successor—"His soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart." Little men leaves places that may easily be filled, and it is a proof of Saladin's greatness, that—as was said of the

hero of the Scandinavian legend—no hand can wield his gigantic battle-axe. Truly was Saladin of the royal stock, and his successor is not yet known.

In happier times, Saladin would have been a revered and happy member of some more positive school of thought than that with which he identified himself, and whose acknowledged Chief he was. Such a man as he, born in our superstition-cursed day, could but be a leader out of the paths of falsity, and a light-bearer through the mists of folly. This work was necessary, but I, for one, cannot help regretting that he, who possessed a mind at once reverent and critical, a heart both fiery and tender, a wide and thorough academic knowledge, and, above all, the artist's love of perfection of form, should not have been devoted to some more constructive system than that to which his life was given.

For me, as it must be for all who knew the Chief personally, and, in a lesser degree, for those who knew him only through his writings, a light has gone out of life; and there is sadness in my heart when I recollect that I shall never again hold that firm hand in my own, shall never again, in the flesh, see the brave, kind eyes flash their indignation or their humour; shall never again hear that sympathetic voice speak with the passion of enthusiasm on life and literature.

It is not for me, an outsider, to speak of the dead man's domestic life. But I want to mention the unselfishness and ever-gentle devotion of his wife, who must indeed have suffered often and greatly during the closing years of her husband's life; she never complained, and I know that this thought must be her greatest solace until she joins Saladin in that country whereof he is now an inhabitant. The Chief—as I love to call him—knew many sorrows; they saddened him infinitely, they embittered him not at all, and I feel, in saying this, that I am paying the greatest tribute to the heart of Saladin that could be paid.

I think the name of Saladin will never die from the hearts of us who knew him, and I think, further, that I may say that those who come after us will worthily bear in their hearts a spark that will leap into a flame at the mention of the Chief's name.

I cannot say "The Chief is dead; long live the Chief!" as could be said of a mere hereditary ruler. Saladin was too great for that. No "appointment" can ever adequately replace him we have lost. We have to take them as they come; they can never be made.

No one, I think, will accuse me of egotism if I mention here what I, personally, owe to Saladin. He was my only discriminative critic at a time when I was absolutely unknown, and, along with his appreciation, he gave me the

hospitality of the columns of his paper. What this means to a writer of verse I need not say. I will say but this: that I should never have been able to give him an adequate return for his encouragement, even had he outlived me.

For the rest, I feel that I have been voicing the sentiments of the contributors to, and readers of, the *Agnostic Journal*, and I wish to conclude this incomplete and inadequate notice with the name of the great man who forms the subject of it—Saladin, William Stewart Ross.