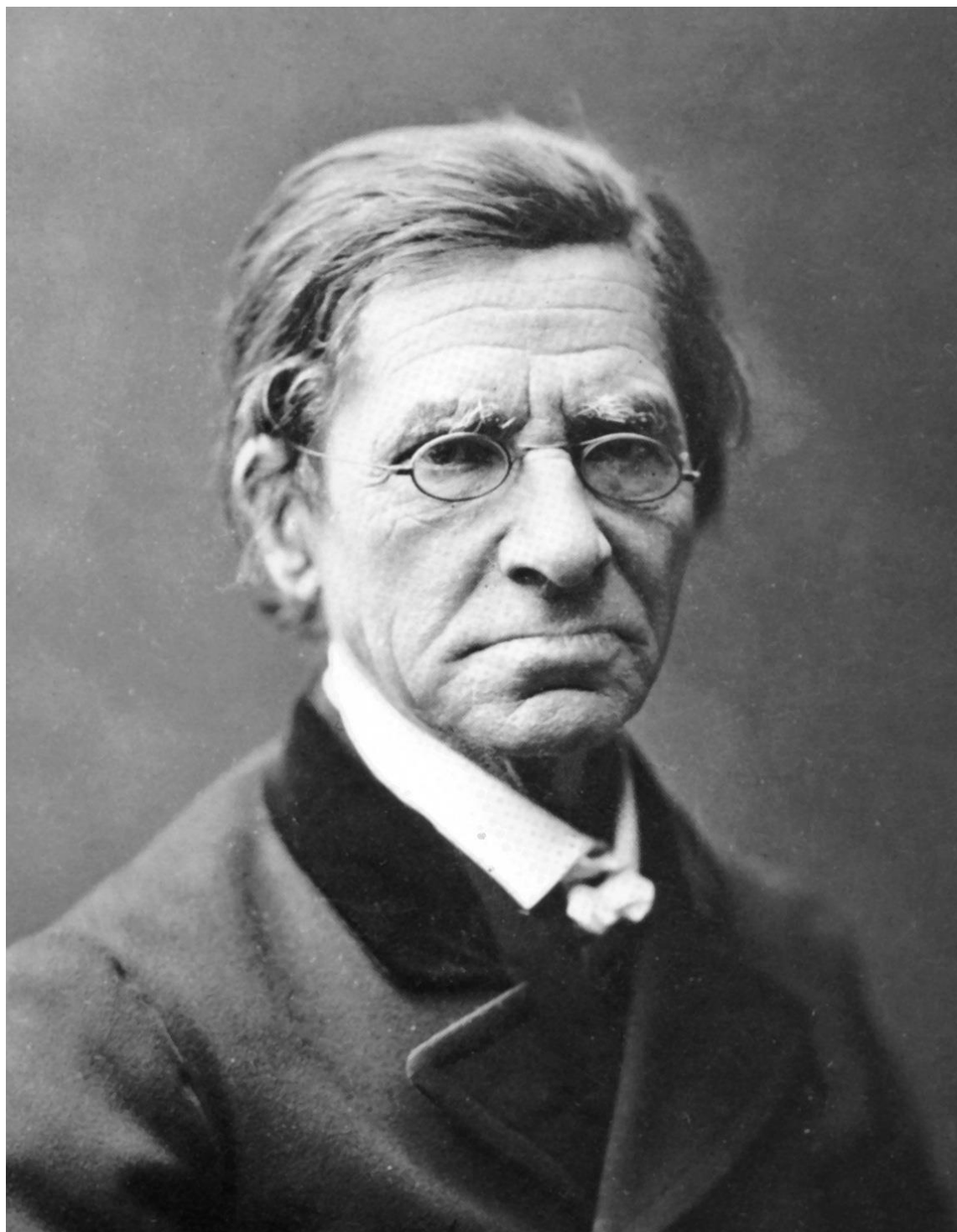


Maximilien Paul Émile Littré
Born Atheist, buried Christian



Vive la libre pensée! Vive la liberté!

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The nefarious influence of the year 1881 is still asserting itself.¹ The assassination of the President of the United States, General Garfield, follows the murder of the Emperor of Russia. The death of Rubinstein, the great pianist, but preceded that of Henry Vieuxtemps, the Belgian, the greatest violoncellist and composer of our century. And now comes that of Littré, one of the most brilliant scientific lights of France, and it is to him that we will now devote a few lines. But who next?

Maximilien Paul Émile Littré, the Academician, and Senator, the great French Lexicographer, born in the first year of our century, has just died in his eighty-first year. The eminent philologist (he knew Sanskrit, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin to perfection) was a professed atheist all his life, and a warm friend of August Comte, as well as a prominent promoter of his doctrines of which he gives an excellent synopsis in his great work, *La Philosophie Positive*, and upon which he expounded, while defending them in a series of pamphlets. For years, owing to the intrigues of the Archbishop Dupanloup, the “fiery Bishop of Orleans,” and notwithstanding the eminent scientific achievements of the infidel savant, the doors of the Academy of Sciences were shut to him. The forty “Immortals” fearing to admit such a rank atheist lest the aristocratic Faubourg St.-Germain, and the Fish Market, in the face of their respective representatives of the fair sex — those ladies from the two opposite ends of the social ladder, having now remained the chief if not the only pillars of the Roman Catholic clergy in Republican France — should stone them. In 1871, however, M. Dupanloup notwithstanding, the “Immortals” feeling themselves suffused with blushes for their cowardice, unanimously elected M. Littré to the Academical chair. We may add *en passant*, that they were rewarded for it by a fearful scandal created by the Archbishop, who cursed and anathematized his colleagues there and then and — withdrew, breaking forever with the Academy. To the last moment of his *conscious* life, the late Positivist remained true to his principles of negation. And now — he died . . . as the clerical papers triumphantly assert — a Christian!

According to the unanimous testimony of the Paris press, as soon as the octogenarian atheist had fallen *in articulo mortis*, and the agony had begun, the ever vigilant Jesuit Fathers, who had secured to their cause his wife and daughter, proclaimed the news that the atheist had just before that repented; and, without losing time, administered to him the rites of baptism and the *viaticum*.² According to the *Gaulois* the friends and supporters of the dead philosopher were enraged beyond description at such proceedings, and the burial ceremony culminated in a public scandal. The clericals had endeavoured to make the *entourage* of the funeral as solemn and as theatrical as it was possible for them. Since early morning a priest was seen pros-

¹ [See “The Number of Beast is the Number of Man,” in our Confusing Words Series.]

² [Roman Catholic term for Eucharist administered to the sick or to a person who is dying, with or without anointing.]

trated before the coffin which was surrounded by a whole army of the clergy who tried to crowd off from the church every infidel they could. They had no trouble to succeed, as none of Littré's associates in atheism would enter it during the service, and M. Renan, the free-thinking author of the *Vie de Jésus*, Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, and a host of others stood outside. In the cemetery, when Mr. Viruboff, the intimate friend and literary partner of the defunct, desired to make a speech by his tomb, the clericals interrupted him with cries — "Respect to the bereaved family." In answer, the Positivists, who numbered about two-thirds of the crowd — 3,000 men strong — shouted "Vive la libre pensée! Vive la liberté!" (Long live Free Thought! Hurrah, for Liberty!), and regardless of the protest, Mr. Viruboff pronounced his speech excusing the defunct before the Positivists on the grounds given above. The *République Française* vociferates against the clergy and tells its readers that it is they "of the long coats" who shouted "Down with the Republicans!" receiving in reply:

"Down with the Jesuits! The church has committed a ravishment upon a dying man. . . . It is guilty of kidnapping!"

The presence of the President of the Republic of France served but to throw oil upon the fire. As a matter of course, the clergy who have before now tried their hand at claiming as their prize Thomas Paine and even Voltaire, will now sing victory more than ever. Thus the memory of an honest and a great man, who remained true to his convictions for over three score and ten [years] — will descend to posterity as that of a MORAL COWARD!



Charles Darwin and Émile Littré depicted as performing monkeys at a circus, breaking through gullibility, superstitions, errors, and ignorance. Caricatured by André Gill (La Lune Rousse, 18 Août 1878)