

ESSAYS  
AND  
SPEECHES  
OF  
JEREMIAH S. BLACK.

*WITH A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.*

BY  
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## ANSWER TO INGERSOLL.

“Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing, more than any man in all Venice; his reasons are as two grains of wheat hid in two bushels of chaff; you shall seek all day ere you find them; and, when you have them, they are not worth the search.”—*Merchant of Venice*.

THE request to answer the foregoing paper comes to me, not in the form but with the effect of a challenge, which I can not decline without seeming to acknowledge that the religion of the civilized world is an absurd superstition, propagated by impostors, professed by hypocrites, and believed only by credulous dupes.

But why should I, an unlearned and unauthorized layman, be placed in such a predicament? The explanation is easy enough. This is no business of the priests. Their prescribed duty is to preach the word, in the full assurance that it will commend itself to all good and honest hearts by its own manifest veracity and the singular purity of its precepts. They can not afford to turn away from their proper work, and leave willing hearers uninstructed, while they wrangle in vain with a predetermined opponent. They were warned to expect slander, indignity, and insult, and these are among the evils which they must not resist.

It will be seen that I am assuming no clerical function. I am not out on the forlorn hope of converting Mr. Ingersoll. I am no preacher exhorting a sinner to leave the seat of the scornful and come up to the bench of the penitents. My duty is more analogous to that of the policeman, who would silence a rude disturber of the congregation by telling him that his clamor is false, and his conduct an offense against public decency.

Nor is the Church in any danger which calls for the special vigilance of its servants. Mr. Ingersoll thinks that the rock-founded faith of Christendom is giving way before his assaults; but he is grossly mistaken. The first sentence of his essay is a preposterous blunder. It is not true that “*a profound change* has taken place in

the world of *thought*," unless a more rapid spread of the gospel, and a more faithful observance of its moral principles, can be called so. Its truths are everywhere proclaimed with the power of sincere conviction, and accepted with devout reverence by uncounted multitudes of all classes. Solemn temples rise to its honor in the great cities; from every hill-top in the country you see the church-spire pointing toward heaven, and on Sunday all the paths that lead to it are crowded with worshipers. In nearly all families, parents teach their children that Christ is God, and his system of morality absolutely perfect. This belief lies so deep in the popular heart that, if every written record of it were destroyed to-day, the memory of millions could reproduce it to-morrow. Its earnestness is proved by its works. Wherever it goes it manifests itself in deeds of practical benevolence. It builds, not churches alone, but almshouses, hospitals, and asylums. It shelters the poor, feeds the hungry, visits the sick, consoles the afflicted, provides for the fatherless, comforts the heart of the widow, instructs the ignorant, reforms the vicious, and saves to the uttermost them that are ready to perish. To the common observer it does not look as if Christianity were making itself ready to be swallowed up by infidelity. Thus far, at least, the promise has been kept that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

There is, to be sure, a change in the party hostile to religion—not "a *profound* change," but a change entirely superficial—which consists, not in *thought*, but merely in modes of expression and methods of attack. The bad classes of society always hated the doctrine and discipline which reproached their wickedness and frightened them by threats of punishment in another world. Aforetime they showed their contempt of divine authority only by their actions; but now, under new leadership, their enmity against God breaks out into articulate blasphemy. They assemble themselves together; they hear with passionate admiration the bold harangue which ridicules and defies the Maker of the universe; fiercely they rage against the Highest, and loudly they laugh, alike at the justice that condemns, and the mercy that offers to pardon them. The orator who relieves them by assurances of impunity, and tells them that no supreme authority has made any law to control them, is applauded to the echo, and paid a high price for his congenial labor; he pockets their money, and flatters himself that he is a great power, profoundly moving "the world of thought."

There is another totally false notion expressed in the opening paragraph, namely, that "they who know most of nature believe the least about theology." The truth is exactly the other way. The more clearly one sees "the grand procession of causes and effects," the more awful his reverence becomes for the author of the "sublime and unbroken" law which links them together. Not self-conceit and rebellious pride, but unspeakable humility, and a deep sense of the meas-

ureless distance between the Creator and the creature, fills the mind of him who looks with a rational spirit upon the works of the All-wise One. The heart of Newton repeats the solemn confession of David: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou visitest him?" At the same time, the lamentable fact must be admitted that "a little learning is a dangerous thing" to some persons. The sciolist, with a mere smattering of physical knowledge, is apt to mistake himself for a philosopher, and, swelling with his own importance, he gives out, like Simon Magus, "that himself is some great one." His vanity becomes inflamed more and more, until he begins to think he knows all things. He takes every occasion to show his accomplishments by finding fault with the works of creation and Providence; and this is an exercise in which he can not long continue without learning to disbelieve in any being greater than himself. It was to such a person, and not to the unpretending simpleton, that Solomon applied his often-quoted aphorism, "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God." These are what Paul refers to as "vain babblings and the opposition of science, falsely so called"; but they are perfectly powerless to stop or turn aside the great current of human thought on the subject of Christian theology. That majestic stream, supplied from a thousand unfailing fountains, rolls on and will roll forever.

*Labitur et labetur in omne volubilis aevum.*

Mr. Ingersoll is not, as some have estimated him, the most formidable enemy that Christianity has encountered since the time of Julian the Apostate. But he stands at the head of living infidels, "by merit raised to that bad eminence." His mental organization has the peculiar defects which fit him for such a place. He is all imagination and no discretion. He rises sometimes into a region of wild poetry, where he can color everything to suit himself. His motto well expresses the character of his argumentation—"mountains are as unstable as clouds": a fancy is as good as a fact, and a high-sounding period is rather better than a logical demonstration. His inordinate self-confidence makes him at once ferocious and fearless. He was a practical politician before he "took the stump" against Christianity, and at all times he has proved his capacity to "split the ears of the groundlings," and make the unskillful laugh. The article before us is the least objectionable of all his productions. Its style is higher, and better suited to the weight of the theme. Here the violence of his fierce invective is moderated; his scurrility gives place to an attempt at sophistry less shocking if not more true; and his coarse jokes are either excluded altogether, or else veiled in the decent obscurity of general terms. Such a paper from such a man, at a time like the present, is not wholly unworthy of a grave contradiction.

He makes certain charges which we answer by an explicit denial, and thus an issue is made, upon which, as a pleader would say, we "put ourselves upon the country." He avers that a certain "something called Christianity" is a false faith imposed on the world without evidence; that the facts it pretends to rest on are mere inventions; that its doctrines are pernicious; that its requirements are unreasonable; and that its sanctions are cruel. I deny all this, and assert, on the contrary, that its doctrines are divinely revealed; its fundamental facts incontestably proved; its morality perfectly free from all taint of error, and its influence most beneficent upon society in general, and upon all individuals who accept it and make it their rule of action.

How shall this be determined? Not by what we call divine revelation, for that would be begging the question; not by sentiment, taste, or temper, for these are as likely to be false as true; but by inductive reasoning from evidence, of which the value is to be measured according to those rules of logic which enlightened and just men everywhere have adopted to guide them in the search for truth. We can appeal only to that rational love of justice, and that detestation of falsehood, which fair-minded persons of good intelligence bring to the consideration of other important subjects when it becomes their duty to decide upon them. In short, I want a decision upon sound judicial principles.

Gibson, the great Chief-Justice of Pennsylvania, once said to certain skeptical friends of his: "Give Christianity a common-law trial; submit the evidence *pro* and *con* to an impartial jury under the direction of a competent court, and the verdict will assuredly be in its favor." This deliverance, coming from the most illustrious judge of his time, not at all given to expressions of sentimental piety, and quite incapable of speaking on any subject for mere effect, staggered the unbelief of those who heard it. I did not know him then, except by his great reputation for ability and integrity, but my thoughts were strongly influenced by his authority, and I learned to set a still higher value upon all his opinions when, in after-life, I was honored with his close and intimate friendship.

Let Christianity have a trial on Mr. Ingersoll's indictment, and give us a decision *secundum allegata et probata*. I will confine myself strictly to the record—that is to say, I will meet the accusations contained in this paper, and not those made elsewhere by him or others.

His first specification against Christianity is the belief of its disciples "that there is a personal God, the creator of the material universe." If God made the world it was a most stupendous miracle, and all miracles, according to Mr. Ingersoll's idea, are "the children of mendacity." To admit the one great miracle of creation would be

an admission that other miracles are at least probable, and that would ruin his whole case. But you can not catch the leviathan of atheism with a hook. The universe, he says, is natural—it came into being of its own accord; it made its own laws at the start, and afterward improved itself considerably by spontaneous evolution. It would be a mere waste of time and space to enumerate the proofs which show that the universe was created by a pre-existent and self-conscious Being, of power and wisdom to us inconceivable. Conviction of the fact (miraculous though it be) forces itself on every one whose mental faculties are healthy and tolerably well-balanced. The notion that all things owe their origin and their harmonious arrangement to the fortuitous concurrence of atoms is a kind of lunacy which very few men in these days are afflicted with. I hope I may safely assume it as certain that all, or nearly all, who read this page will have sense and reason enough to see for themselves that the plan of the universe could not have been designed without a Designer, or executed without a Maker.

But Mr. Ingersoll asserts that, at all events, this material world had not a good and beneficent creator; it is a bad, savage, cruel piece of work, with its pestilences, storms, earthquakes, and volcanoes; and man, with his liability to sickness, suffering, and death, is not a success, but, on the contrary, a failure. To defend the Creator of the world against an arraignment so foul as this would be almost as unbecoming as to make the accusation. We have neither jurisdiction nor capacity to rejudge the justice of God. Why man is made to fill his particular place in the scale of creation—a little lower than the angels, yet far above the brutes; not passionless and pure, like the former, nor mere machines, like the latter; able to stand, yet free to fall; knowing the right, and accountable for going wrong; gifted with reason, and impelled by self-love to exercise the faculty—these are questions on which we may have our speculative opinions, but knowledge is out of our reach. Meantime we do not discredit our mental independence by taking it for granted that the Supreme Being has done all things well. Our ignorance of the whole scheme makes us poor critics upon the small part that comes within our limited perceptions. Seeming defects in the structure of the world may be its most perfect ornament—all apparent harshness the tenderest of mercies—

“All discord, harmony not understood,  
All partial evil, universal good.”

But worse errors are imputed to God as moral ruler of the world than those charged against him as creator. He made man badly, but governed him worse; if the Jehovah of the Old Testament was not merely an imaginary being, then, according to Mr. Ingersoll, he was

a prejudiced, barbarous, criminal tyrant. We will see what ground he lays, if any, for these outrageous assertions.

Mainly, principally, first, and most important of all, is the unqualified assertion that the "moral code" which Jehovah gave to his people "is in many respects abhorrent to every good and tender man." Does Mr. Ingersoll know what he is talking about? The moral code of the Bible consists of certain immutable rules to govern the conduct of all men, at all times and all places, in their private and personal relations with one another. It is entirely separate and apart from the civil polity, the religious forms, the sanitary provisions, the police regulations, and the system of international law laid down for the special and exclusive observance of the Jewish people. This is a distinction which every intelligent man knows how to make. Has Mr. Ingersoll fallen into the egregious blunder of confounding these things? or, understanding the true sense of his words, is he rash and shameless enough to assert that the moral code of the Bible excites the abhorrence of good men? In fact and in truth, this moral code, which he reviles, instead of being abhorred, is entitled to, and has received, the profoundest respect of all honest and sensible persons. The second table of the Decalogue is a perfect compendium of those duties which every man owes to himself, his family, and his neighbor. In a few simple words, which he can commit to memory almost in a minute, it teaches him to purify his heart from covetousness; to live decently, to injure nobody in reputation, person, or property, and to give every one his own. By the poets, the prophets, and the sages of Israel, these great elements are expanded into a volume of minuter rules, so clear, so impressive, and yet so solemn and so lofty, that no pre-existing system of philosophy can compare with it for a moment. If this vain mortal is not blind with passion, he will see, upon reflection, that he has attacked the Old Testament precisely where it is the most impregnable.

Dismissing his groundless charge against the moral code, we come to his strictures on the civil government of the Jews, which he says was so bad and unjust that the Lawgiver by whom it was established must have been as savagely cruel as the Creator that made storms and pestilences; and the work of both was more worthy of a devil than a god. His language is recklessly bad, very defective in method, and altogether lacking in precision. But, apart from the ribaldry of it, which I do not feel myself bound to notice, I find four objections to the Jewish constitution—not more than four—which are definite enough to admit of an answer. These relate to the provisions of the Mosaic law on the subjects of—1. Blasphemy and idolatry; 2. War; 3. Slavery; 4. Polygamy. In these respects he pronounces the Jewish system not only unwise but criminally unjust.

Here let me call attention to the difficulty of reasoning about

justice with a man who has no acknowledged standard of right and wrong. What is justice? That which accords with law; and the supreme law is the will of God. But I am dealing with an adversary who does not admit that there is a God. Then for him there is no standard at all; one thing is as right as another; and all things are equally wrong. Without a sovereign ruler there is no law, and where there is no law there can be no transgression. It is the misfortune of the atheistic theory that it makes the moral world an anarchy; it refers all ethical questions to that confused tribunal where chaos sits as umpire and "by decision more embroils the fray." But through the whole of this cloudy paper there runs a vein of presumptuous egoism which says as plainly as words can speak it that the author holds *himself* to be the ultimate judge of all good and evil; what he approves is right, and what he dislikes is certainly wrong. Of course I concede nothing to a claim like that. I will not admit that the Jewish constitution is a thing to be condemned merely because he curses it. I appeal from his profane malediction to the conscience of men who have a rule to judge by. Such persons will readily see that his specific objections to the statesmanship which established the civil government of the Hebrew people are extremely shallow, and do not furnish the shade of an excuse for the indecency of his general abuse:

1. He regards the punishments inflicted for blasphemy and idolatry as being immoderately cruel. Considering them merely as religious offenses—as sins against God alone—I agree that civil law should notice them not at all. But sometimes they affect very injuriously certain social rights which it is the duty of the state to protect. Wantonly to shock the religious feelings of your neighbor is a grievous wrong. To utter blasphemy or obscenity in the presence of a Christian woman is hardly better than to strike her in the face. Still, neither policy nor justice requires them to be ranked among the highest crimes in a government constituted like ours. But things were wholly different under the Jewish theocracy, where God was the personal head of the state. There blasphemy was a breach of political allegiance; idolatry was an overt act of treason; to worship the gods of the hostile heathen was deserting to the public enemy, and giving him aid and comfort. These are crimes which every independent community has always punished with the utmost rigor. In our own very recent history they were repressed at the cost of more lives than Judea ever contained at any one time.

Mr. Ingersoll not only ignores these considerations, but he goes the length of calling God a religious persecutor and a tyrant because he does not encourage and reward the service and devotion paid by his enemies to the false gods of the pagan world. He professes to believe that all kinds of worship are equally meritorious, and should meet the same acceptance from the true God. It is almost incredible



that such drivel as this should be uttered by anybody. But Mr. Ingersoll not only expresses the thought plainly—he urges it with the most extravagant figures of his florid rhetoric. He quotes the first commandment, in which Jehovah claims for himself the exclusive worship of his people, and cites, in contrast, the promise put in the mouth of Brahma, that he will appropriate the worship of all gods to himself, and reward all worshipers alike. These passages being compared, he declares the first “a dungeon, where crawl the things begot of jealous slime”; the other, “great as the domed firmament, inlaid with suns.” Why is the living God, whom Christians believe to be the Lord of liberty and Father of lights, denounced as the keeper of a loathsome dungeon? Because he refuses to encourage and reward the worship of Mammon and Moloch, of Belial and Baal; of Bacchus, with its drunken orgies, and Venus, with its wanton obscenities; the bestial religion which degraded the soul of Egypt, and the “dark idolatries of alienated Judah,” polluted with the moral filth of all the nations round about. Let the reader decide whether this man, entertaining such sentiments and opinions, is fit to be a teacher, or at all likely to lead us in the way we should go.

2. Under the constitution which God provided for the Jews, they had, like every other nation, the war-making power. They could not have lived a day without it. The right to exist implied the right to repel, with all their strength, the opposing force which threatened their destruction. It is true, also, that in the exercise of this power they did not observe those rules of courtesy and humanity which have been adopted in modern times by civilized belligerents. Why? Because their enemies, being mere savages, did not understand, and would not practice, any rule whatever; and the Jews were bound *ex necessitate rei*—not merely justified by the *lex talionis*—to do as their enemies did. In your treatment of hostile barbarians you not only may lawfully, but must necessarily, adopt their mode of warfare. If they come to conquer you, they may be conquered by you; if they give no quarter, they are entitled to none; if the death of your whole population be their purpose, you may defeat it by exterminating theirs. This sufficiently answers the silly talk of atheists and semi-atheists about the warlike wickedness of the Jews.

But Mr. Ingersoll positively, and with the emphasis of supreme and all-sufficient authority, declares that “a war of conquest is simply murder.” He sustains this proposition by no argument founded in principle. He puts sentiment in place of law, and denounces aggressive fighting because it is offensive to his “tender and refined soul”: the atrocity of it is, therefore, proportioned to the sensibilities of his own heart. He proves war a desperately wicked thing by continually vaunting his own love for small children. Babes—sweet babes—the prattle of babes—are the subjects of his most pathetic

eloquence, and his idea of music is embodied in the commonplace expression of a Hindoo, that the lute is sweet only to those who have not heard the prattle of their own children. All this is very amiable in him, and the more so, perhaps, as these objects of his affection are the young ones of a race, in his opinion, miscreated by an evil-working chance. But his *philoprogenitiveness* proves nothing against Jew or Gentile, seeing that all have it in an equal degree, and those feel it most who make the least parade of it. Certainly it gives him no authority to malign the God who implanted it alike in the hearts of us all. But I admit that his benevolence becomes peculiar and ultra when it extends to beasts as well as babes. He is struck with horror by the sacrificial solemnities of the Jewish religion. "The killing of those animals was," he says, "a terrible system," a "shedding of innocent blood," "shocking to a refined and sensitive soul." There is such a depth of tenderness in this feeling, and such a splendor of refinement, that I give up without a struggle to the superiority of the man who merely professes it. A carnivorous American, full of beef and mutton, who mourns with indignant sorrow because bulls and goats were killed in Judea three thousand years ago, has reached the climax of sentimental goodness, and should be permitted to dictate on all questions of peace and war. Let Grotius, Vattel, and Puffendorf, as well as Moses and the prophets, hide their diminished heads.

But, to show how inefficacious, for all practical purposes, a mere sentiment is when substituted for a principle, it is only necessary to recollect that Mr. Ingersoll is himself a warrior who staid not behind the mighty men of his tribe when they gathered themselves together for a war of conquest. He took the lead of a regiment as eager as himself to spoil the Philistines, "and out he went a-coloneling." How many Amalekites, and Hittites, and Amorites he put to the edge of the sword, how many wives he widowed, or how many mothers he "unbabed," can not now be told. I do not even know how many droves of innocent oxen he condemned to the slaughter. But it is certain that his refined and tender soul took great pleasure in all the terrors with which the war was attended, and in all the hard oppressions which the conquered people were made to suffer afterward. I do not say that the war was either better or worse for his participation and approval. But if his own conduct (for which he professes neither penitence nor shame) was right, it was right on grounds which make it an inexcusable outrage to call the children of Israel savage criminals for carrying on wars of aggression to save the life of their government. These inconsistencies are the necessary consequence of having no rule of action, and no guide for the conscience. When a man throws away the golden metewand of the law which God has provided, and takes the elastic cord of feeling for his measure of righteousness, you can not tell from day to day what he will think or do.

3. But Jehovah permitted his chosen people to hold the captives they took in war or purchased from the heathen as servants for life. This was slavery, and Mr. Ingersoll declares that "in all civilized countries it is not only admitted, but it is passionately asserted, that slavery is, and always was, a hideous crime"; therefore he concludes that Jehovah was a criminal. This would be a *non sequitur*, even if the premises were true. But the premises are false; civilized countries have admitted no such thing. That slavery is a crime, under all circumstances and at all times, is a doctrine first started by the adherents of a political faction in this country less than forty years ago. They denounced God and Christ for not agreeing with them, in terms very similar to those used here by Mr. Ingersoll. But they did not constitute the civilized world; nor were they, if the truth must be told, a very respectable portion of it. Politically, they were successful; I need not say by what means, or with what effect upon the morals of the country. Doubtless Mr. Ingersoll gets a great advantage by invoking their passions and their interests to his aid, and he knows how to use it. I can only say that, whether American abolitionism was right or wrong under the circumstances in which we were placed, my faith and my reason both assure me that the infallible God proceeded upon good grounds when he authorized slavery in Judea. Subordination of inferiors to superiors is the groundwork of human society. All improvement of our race, in this world and the next, must come from obedience to some master better and wiser than ourselves. There can be no question that, when a Jew took a neighboring savage for his bond-servant, incorporated him into his family, tamed him, taught him to work, and gave him a knowledge of the true God, he conferred upon him a most beneficent boon.

4. Polygamy is another of his objections to the Mosaic constitution. Strange to say, it is not there. It is neither commanded nor prohibited; it is only discouraged. If Mr. Ingersoll were a statesman instead of a mere politician, he would see good and sufficient reasons for the forbearance to legislate directly upon the subject. It would be improper for me to set them forth here. He knows, probably, that the influence of the Christian Church alone, and without the aid of state enactments, has extirpated this bad feature of Asiatic manners wherever its doctrines were carried. As the Christian faith prevails in any community, in that proportion precisely marriage is consecrated to its true purpose, and all intercourse between the sexes refined and purified. Mr. Ingersoll got his own devotion to the principle of monogamy—his own respect for the highest type of female character—his own belief in the virtue of fidelity to one good wife—from the example and precept of his Christian parents. I speak confidently, because these are sentiments which do not grow in the heart of the natural man without being planted. Why, then, does he throw

polygamy into the face of the religion which abhors it? Because he is nothing if not political. The Mormons believe in polygamy, and the Mormons are unpopular. They are guilty of having not only many wives but much property, and, if a war could be hissed up against them, its fruits might be more "gaynefull pilladge than wee doe now conceyve of." It is a cunning manœuvre, this, of strengthening atheism by enlisting anti-Mormon rapacity against the God of the Christians. I can only protest against the use he would make of these and other political interests. It is not argument; it is mere stump oratory.

I think I have repelled all of Mr. Ingersoll's accusations against the Old Testament that are worth noticing, and I might stop here. But I will not close upon him without letting him see, at least, some part of the case on the other side.

I do not enumerate in detail the positive proofs which support the authenticity of the Hebrew Bible, though they are at hand in great abundance, because the evidence in support of the new dispensation will establish the verity of the old—the two being so connected together that if one is true the other can not be false.

When Jesus of Nazareth announced himself to be Christ, the Son of God, in Judea, many thousand persons who heard his words and saw his works believed in his divinity without hesitation. Since the morning of the creation nothing has occurred so wonderful as the rapidity with which this religion spread itself abroad. Men who were in the noon of life when Jesus was put to death as a malefactor lived to see him worshiped as God by organized bodies of believers in every province of the Roman Empire. In a few more years it took complete possession of the general mind, supplanted all other religions, and wrought a radical change in human society. It did this in the face of obstacles which, according to every human calculation, were insurmountable. It was antagonized by all the evil propensities, the sensual wickedness, and the vulgar crimes of the multitude, as well as the polished vices of the luxurious classes; and was most violently opposed even by those sentiments and habits of thought which were esteemed virtuous, such as patriotism and military heroism. It encountered not only the ignorance and superstition, but the learning and philosophy, the poetry, eloquence, and art of the time. Barbarism and civilization were alike its deadly enemies. The priesthood of every established religion, and the authority of every government, were arrayed against it. All these, combined together and roused to ferocious hostility, were overcome, not by the enticing words of man's wisdom, but by the simple presentation of a pure and peaceful doctrine, preached by obscure strangers at the daily peril of their lives. Is it Mr. Ingersoll's idea that this happened by chance, like the creation of the world? If not, there are but two other ways to account

for it: either the evidence by which the apostles were able to prove the supernatural origin of the gospel was overwhelming and irresistible, or else its propagation was provided for and carried on by the direct aid of the Divine Being himself. Between these two, infidelity may make its own choice.

Just here another dilemma presents its horns to our adversary. If Christianity was a human fabrication, its authors must have been either good men or bad. It is a moral impossibility—a mere contradiction in terms—to say that good, honest, and true men practiced a gross and willful deception upon the world. It is equally incredible that any combination of knaves, however base, would fraudulently concoct a religious system to denounce themselves, and to invoke the curse of God upon their own conduct. Men that love lies, love not such lies as that. Is there any way out of this difficulty, except by confessing that Christianity is what it purports to be—a divine revelation?

The acceptance of Christianity by a large portion of the generation contemporary with its Founder and his apostles was, under the circumstances, an adjudication as solemn and authoritative as mortal intelligence could pronounce. The record of that judgment has come down to us, accompanied by the depositions of the principal witnesses. In the course of eighteen centuries many efforts have been made to open the judgment or set it aside on the ground that the evidence was insufficient to support it. But on every rehearing the wisdom and virtue of mankind have reaffirmed it. And now comes Mr. Ingersoll, to try the experiment of another bold, bitter, and fierce reargument. I will present some of the considerations which would compel me, if I were a judge or juror in the cause, to decide it just as it was decided originally:

1. There is no good reason to doubt that the statements of the evangelists, as we have them now, are genuine. The multiplication of copies was a sufficient guarantee against any material alteration of the text. Mr. Ingersoll speaks of interpolations made by the fathers of the Church. All he knows and all he has ever heard on that subject is that some of the innumerable transcripts contained errors which were discovered and corrected. That simply proves the present integrity of the documents.

2. I call these statements *depositions*, because they are entitled to that kind of credence which we give to declarations made under oath—but in a much higher degree, for they are more than sworn to. They were made in the immediate prospect of death. Perhaps this would not affect the conscience of an atheist—neither would an oath—but these people manifestly believed in a judgment after death, before a God of truth, whose displeasure they feared above all things.

3. The witnesses could not have been mistaken. The nature of

the facts precluded the possibility of any delusion about them. For every averment they had "the sensible and true avouch of their own eyes" and ears. Besides, they were plain-thinking, sober, unimagina-tive men, who, unlike Mr. Ingersoll, always, under all circumstances, and especially in the presence of eternity, recognized the difference between mountains and clouds. It is inconceivable how any fact could be proved by evidence more conclusive than the statement of such persons, publicly given and steadfastly persisted in through every kind of persecution, imprisonment, and torture, to the last agonies of a lingering death.

4. Apart from these terrible tests, the more ordinary claims to credibility are not wanting. They were men of unimpeachable character. The most virulent enemies of the cause they spoke and died for have never suggested a reason for doubting their personal honesty. But there is affirmative proof that they and their fellow-disciples were held by those who knew them in the highest estimation for truthfulness. Wherever they made their report it was not only believed, but believed with a faith so implicit that thousands were ready at once to seal it with their blood.

5. The tone and temper of their narrative impress us with a sentiment of profound respect. It is an artless, unimpassioned, simple story. No argument, no rhetoric, no epithets, no praises of friends, no denunciation of enemies, no attempts at concealment. How strongly these qualities commend the testimony of a witness to the confidence of judge and jury is well known to all who have any experience in such matters.

6. The statements made by the evangelists are alike upon every important point, but are different in form and expression, some of them including details which the others omit. These variations make it perfectly certain that there could have been no previous concert between the witnesses, and that each spoke independently of the others, according to his own conscience and from his own knowledge. In considering the testimony of several witnesses to the same transaction, their substantial agreement upon the main facts, with circumstantial differences in the detail, is always regarded as the great characteristic of truth and honesty. There is no rule of evidence more universally adopted than this—none better sustained by general experience, or more immovably fixed in the good sense of mankind. Mr. Ingersoll himself admits the rule and concedes its soundness. The logical consequence of that admission is, that we are bound to take this evidence as incontestably true. But mark the infatuated perversity with which he seeks to evade it. He says that when we claim that the witnesses were inspired, the rule does not apply, because the witnesses then speak what is known to him who inspired them, and all must speak exactly the same, even to the minutest detail. Mr.

Ingersoll's notion of an inspired witness is that he is no witness at all, but an irresponsible medium who unconsciously and involuntarily raps out or writes down whatever he is prompted to say. But this is a false assumption, not countenanced or even suggested by anything contained in the Scriptures. The apostles and evangelists are expressly declared to be witnesses, in the proper sense of the word, called and sent to testify the truth according to their knowledge. If they had all told the same story in the same way, without variation, and accounted for its uniformity by declaring that they were inspired, and had spoken without knowing whether their words were true or false, where would have been their claim to credibility? But they testified what they knew; and here comes an infidel critic impugning their testimony because the impress of truth is stamped upon its face.

7. It does not appear that the statements of the evangelists were ever denied by any person who pretended to know the facts. Many there were in that age and afterward who resisted the belief that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and only Saviour of man; but his wonderful works, the miraculous purity of his life, the unapproachable loftiness of his doctrines, his trial and condemnation by a judge who pronounced him innocent, his patient suffering, his death on the cross, and resurrection from the grave—of these not the faintest contradiction was attempted, if we except the false and feeble story which the elders and chief priests bribed the guard at the tomb to put in circulation.

8. What we call the fundamental truths of Christianity consist of great public events which are sufficiently established by history without special proof. The value of mere historical evidence increases according to the importance of the facts in question, their general notoriety, and the magnitude of their visible consequences. Cornwallis surrendered to Washington at Yorktown, and changed the destiny of Europe and America. Nobody would think of calling a witness or even citing an official report to prove it. Julius Cæsar was assassinated. We do not need to prove that fact like an ordinary murder. He was master of the world, and his death was followed by a war with the conspirators, the battle at Philippi, the quarrel of the victorious triumvirs, Actium, and the permanent establishment of imperial government under Augustus. The life and character, the death and resurrection, of Jesus are just as visibly connected with events which even an infidel must admit to be of equal importance. The Church rose and armed herself in righteousness for conflict with the powers of darkness; innumerable multitudes of the best and wisest rallied to her standard and died in her cause; her enemies employed the coarse and vulgar machinery of human government against her, and her professors were brutally murdered in large numbers; her triumph was complete; the gods of Greece and Rome crumbled on their

altars; the world was revolutionized and human society was transformed. The course of these events, and a thousand others, which reach down to the present hour, received its first propulsion from the transcendent fact of Christ's crucifixion. Moreover, we find the memorial monuments of the original truth planted all along the way. The sacraments of baptism and the supper constantly point us back to the author and finisher of our faith. The mere historical evidence is for these reasons much stronger than what we have for other occurrences which are regarded as undeniable. When to this is added the cumulative evidence given directly and positively by eye-witnesses of irreproachable character, and wholly uncontradicted, the proof becomes so strong that the disbelief we hear of seems like a kind of insanity :

" It is the very error of the moon,  
Which comes more near the earth than she was wont,  
And makes men mad! "

From the facts established by this evidence, it follows irresistibly that the gospel has come to us from God. That silences all reasoning about the wisdom and justice of its doctrines, since it is impossible even to imagine that wrong can be done or commanded by that Sovereign Being whose will alone is the ultimate standard of all justice.

But Mr. Ingersoll is still dissatisfied. He raises objections as false, fleeting, and baseless as clouds, and insists that they are as stable as the mountains, whose everlasting foundations are laid by the hand of the Almighty. I will compress his propositions into plain words printed in *italics*, and, taking a look at his misty creations, let them roll away and vanish into air, one after another.

*Christianity offers eternal salvation as the reward of belief alone.* This is a misrepresentation simple and naked. No such doctrine is propounded in the Scriptures, or in the creed of any Christian church. On the contrary, it is distinctly taught that faith avails nothing without repentance, reformation, and newness of life.

*The mere failure to believe it is punished in hell.* I have never known any Christian man or woman to assert this. It is universally agreed that children too young to understand it do not need to believe it. And this exemption extends to adults who have never seen the evidence, or, from weakness of intellect, are incapable of weighing it. Lunatics and idiots are not in the least danger, and, for aught I know, this category may, by a stretch of God's mercy, include minds constitutionally sound, but with faculties so perverted by education, habit, or passion that they are incapable of reasoning. I sincerely hope that, upon this or some other principle, Mr. Ingersoll may escape the hell he talks about so much. But there is no direct promise to save him in spite of himself. The plan of redemption contains no express cove-



nant to pardon one who rejects it with scorn and hatred. Our hope for him rests upon the infinite compassion of that gracious Being who prayed on the cross for the insulting enemies who nailed him there.

*The mystery of the second birth is incomprehensible.* Christ established a new kingdom *in* the world, but not *of* it. Subjects were admitted to the privileges and protection of its government by a process equivalent to naturalization. To be born again, or regenerated, is to be naturalized. The words all mean the same thing. Does Mr. Ingersoll want to disgrace his own intellect by pretending that he can not see this simple analogy?

*The doctrine of the atonement is absurd, unjust, and immoral.* The plan of salvation, or any plan for the rescue of sinners from the legal operation of divine justice, could have been framed only in the councils of the Omniscient. Necessarily its heights and depths are not easily fathomed by finite intelligence. But the greatest, ablest, wisest, and most virtuous men that ever lived have given it their profoundest consideration, and found it to be not only authorized by revelation, but theoretically conformed to their best and highest conceptions of infinite goodness. Nevertheless, here is a rash and superficial man, without training or habits of reflection, who, upon a mere glance, declares that it "must be abandoned," because it *seems to him* "absurd, unjust, and immoral." I would not abridge his freedom of thought or speech, and the *argumentum ad verecundiam* would be lost upon him. Otherwise I might suggest that, when he finds all authority, human and divine, against him, he had better speak in a tone less arrogant.

*He does not comprehend how justice and mercy can be blended together in the plan of redemption, and therefore it can not be true.* A thing is not necessarily false because he does not understand it: he can not annihilate a principle or a fact by ignoring it. There are many truths in heaven and earth which no man can see through; for instance, the union of man's soul with his body is not only an unknowable but an unimaginable mystery. Is it therefore false that a connection does exist between matter and spirit?

*How, he asks, can the sufferings of an innocent person satisfy justice for the sins of the guilty?* This raises a metaphysical question, which it is not necessary or possible for me to discuss here. As matter of fact, Christ died that sinners might be reconciled to God, and in that sense he died for them—that is, to furnish them with the means of averting divine justice which their crimes had provoked.

*What, he again asks, would we think of a man who allowed another to die for a crime which he himself had committed?* I answer that a man who, by any contrivance, causes his own offense to be visited upon the head of an innocent person is unspeakably depraved.

But are Christians guilty of this baseness because they accept the blessings of an institution which their great benefactor died to establish? Loyalty to the King who has erected a most beneficent government for us at the cost of his life—fidelity to the Master who bought us with his blood—is not the fraudulent substitution of an innocent person in place of a criminal.

*The doctrine of non-resistance, forgiveness of injuries, reconciliation with enemies, as taught in the New Testament, is the child of weakness, degrading, and unjust.* This is the whole substance of a long, rambling diatribe, as incoherent as a sick man's dream. Christianity does not forbid the necessary defense of civil society, or the proper vindication of personal rights. But to cherish animosity, to thirst for mere revenge, to hoard up wrongs, real or fancied, and lie in wait for the chance of paying them back; to be impatient, unforgiving, malicious, and cruel to all who have crossed us—these diabolical propensities are checked and curbed by the authority and spirit of the Christian religion, and the application of it has converted men from low savages into refined and civilized beings.

*The punishment of sinners in eternal hell is excessive.* The future of the soul is a subject on which we have very dark views. In our present state the mind takes in no idea except what is conveyed to it through the bodily senses. All our conceptions of the spiritual world are derived from some analogy to material things, and this analogy must necessarily be very remote, because the nature of the subjects compared is so diverse that a close similarity can not be even supposed. No revelation has lifted the veil between time and eternity; but in shadowy figures we are warned that a very marked distinction will be made between the good and the bad in the next world. Speculative opinions concerning the punishment of the wicked, its nature and duration, vary with the temper and the imaginations of men. Doubtless we are many of us in error: but how can Mr. Ingersoll enlighten us? Acknowledging no standard of right and wrong in this world, he can have no theory of rewards and punishments in the next. The deeds done in the body, whether good or evil, are all morally alike in his eyes, and, if there be in heaven a congregation of the just, he sees no reason why the worst rogue should not be a member of it. It is supposed, however, that man has a soul as well as a body, and that both are subject to certain laws, which can not be violated without incurring the proper penalty—or consequence, if he likes that word better.

*If Christ was God, he knew that his followers would persecute and murder men for their opinions; yet he did not forbid it.* There is but one way to deal with this accusation, and that is to contradict it flatly. Nothing can be conceived more striking than the prohibition, not only of persecution, but of all the passions which lead or incite to

it. No follower of Christ indulges in malice even to his enemy without violating the plainest rule of his faith. He can not love God and hate his brother : if he says he can, St. John pronounces him a liar. The broadest benevolence, universal philanthropy, inexhaustible charity, are inculcated in every line of the New Testament. It is plain that Mr. Ingersoll never read a chapter of it ; otherwise he would not have ventured upon this palpable falsification of its doctrines. Who told him that the devilish spirit of persecution was authorized, or encouraged, or not forbidden, by the gospel ? The person, whoever it was, who imposed upon his trusting ignorance should be given up to the just reprobation of his fellow-citizens.

*Christians in modern times carry on wars of detraction and slander against one another.* The discussions of theological subjects by men who believe in the fundamental doctrines of Christ are singularly free from harshness and abuse. Of course I can not speak with absolute certainty, but I believe most confidently that there is not in all the religious polemics of this century as much slanderous invective as can be found in any ten lines of Mr. Ingersoll's writings. Of course I do not include political preachers among my models of charity and forbearance. They are a mendacious set, but Christianity is no more responsible for their misconduct than it is for the treachery of Judas Iscariot or the wrongs done to Paul by Alexander the coppersmith.

*But, says he, Christians have been guilty of wanton and wicked persecution.* It is true that some persons, professing Christianity, have violated the fundamental principles of their faith by inflicting violent injuries and bloody wrongs upon their fellow-men. But the perpetrators of these outrages were in fact not Christians ; they were either hypocrites from the beginning or else base apostates—infidels or something worse—hireling wolves, whose gospel was their maw. Not one of them ever pretended to find a warrant for his conduct in any precept of Christ or any doctrine of his Church. All the wrongs of this nature which history records have been the work of politicians, aided often by priests and ministers who were willing to deny their Lord and desert to the enemy, for the sake of their temporal interests. Take the cases most commonly cited and see if this be not a true account of them. The *auto-da-fé* of Spain and Portugal, the burnings at Smithfield, and the whipping of women in Massachusetts, were the outcome of a cruel, false, and anti-Christian policy. Coligny and his adherents were killed by an order of Charles IX, at the instance of the Guises, who headed a hostile faction, and merely for reasons of state. Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes, and banished the Waldenses under pain of confiscation and death ; but this was done on the declared ground that the victims were not safe subjects. The brutal atrocities of Cromwell and the outrages of the Orange lodges against the Irish Catholics were not persecutions by

religious people, but movements as purely political as those of the Know-Nothings, Plug-Uglies, and Blood-Tubs of this country. If the gospel should be blamed for these acts in opposition to its principles, why not also charge it with the cruelties of Nero, or the present persecution of the Jesuits by the infidel republic of France ?

*Christianity is opposed to freedom of thought.* The kingdom of Christ is based upon certain principles, to which it requires the assent of every one who would enter therein. If you are unwilling to own His authority and conform your moral conduct to His laws, you can not expect that He will admit you to the privileges of His government. But naturalization is not forced upon you if you prefer to be an alien. The gospel makes the strongest and tenderest appeal to the heart, reason, and conscience of man—entreats him to take thought for his own highest interest, and by all its moral influence provokes him to good works ; but he is not constrained by any kind of duress to leave the service or relinquish the wages of sin. Is there anything that savors of tyranny in this ? A man of ordinary judgment will say, no. But Mr. Ingersoll thinks it as oppressive as the refusal of Jehovah to reward the worship of demons.

*The gospel of Christ does not satisfy the hunger of the heart.* That depends upon what kind of a heart it is. If it hungers after righteousness, it will surely be filled. It is probable, also, that if it hungers for the filthy food of a godless philosophy it will get what its appetite demands. That was an expressive phrase which Carlyle used when he called modern infidelity “the gospel of dirt.” Those who are greedy to swallow it will doubtless be supplied satisfactorily.

*Accounts of miracles are always false.* Are miracles impossible ? No one will say so who opens his eyes to the miracles of creation with which we are surrounded on every hand. You can not even show that they are *a priori* improbable. God would be likely to reveal his will to the rational creatures who were required to obey it ; he would authenticate in some way the right of prophets and apostles to speak in his name ; supernatural power was the broad seal which he affixed to their commission. From this it follows that the improbability of a miracle is no greater than the original improbability of a revelation, and that is not improbable at all. Therefore, if the miracles of the New Testament are proved by sufficient evidence, we believe them as we believe any other established fact. They become deniable only when it is shown that the great miracle of making the world was never performed. Accordingly, Mr. Ingersoll abolishes creation first, and thus clears the way to his dogmatic conclusion that *all* miracles are “the children of mendacity.”

*Christianity is pernicious in its moral effect, darkens the mind, narrows the soul, arrests the progress of human society, and hinders civilization.* Mr. Ingersoll, as a zealous apostle of “the gospel of

dirt," must be expected to throw a good deal of mud. But this is too much : it injures himself instead of defiling the object of his assault. When I answer that all we have of virtue, justice, intellectual liberty, moral elevation, refinement, benevolence, and true wisdom came to us from that source which he reviles as the fountain of evil, I am not merely putting one assertion against the other ; for I have the advantage, which he has not, of speaking what every tolerably well-informed man knows to be true. Reflect what kind of a world this was when the disciples of Christ undertook to reform it, and compare it with the condition in which their teachings have put it. In its mighty metropolis, the center of its intellectual and political power, the best men were addicted to vices so debasing that I could not even allude to them without soiling the paper I write upon. All manner of unprincipled wickedness was practiced in the private life of the whole population without concealment or shame, and the magistrates were thoroughly and universally corrupt. Benevolence in any shape was altogether unknown. The helpless and the weak got neither justice nor mercy. There was no relief for the poor, no succor for the sick, no refuge for the unfortunate. In all pagandom there was not a hospital, asylum, almshouse, or organized charity of any sort. The indifference to human life was literally frightful. The order of a successful leader to assassinate his opponents was always obeyed by his followers with the utmost alacrity and pleasure. It was a special amusement of the populace to witness the shows at which men were compelled to kill one another, to be torn in pieces by wild beasts, or otherwise "butchered, to make a Roman holiday." In every province paganism enacted the same cold-blooded cruelties ; oppression and robbery ruled supreme ; murder went rampaging and red over all the earth. The Church came, and her light penetrated this moral darkness like a new sun. She covered the globe with institutions of mercy, and thousands upon thousands of her disciples devoted themselves exclusively to works of charity at the sacrifice of every earthly interest. Her earliest adherents were killed without remorse—beheaded, crucified, sawed asunder, thrown to the beasts, or, covered with pitch, piled up in great heaps and slowly burned to death. But her faith was made perfect through suffering, and the law of love rose in triumph from the ashes of her martyrs. This religion has come down to us through the ages, attended all the way by righteousness, justice, temperance, mercy, transparent truthfulness, exulting hope, and white-winged charity. Never was its influence for good more plainly perceptible than now. It has not converted, purified, and reformed all men, for its first principle is the freedom of the human will, and there are those who choose to reject it. But to the mass of mankind, directly and indirectly, it has brought uncounted benefits and blessings. Abolish it—take away the restraints which it

imposes on evil passions—silence the admonitions of its preachers—let all Christians cease their labors of charity—blot out from history the records of its heroic benevolence—repeal the laws it has enacted and the institutions it has built up—let its moral principles be abandoned and all its miracles of light be extinguished—what would we come to? I need not answer this question: the experiment has been partially tried. The French nation formally renounced Christianity, denied the existence of the Supreme Being, and so satisfied the hunger of the infidel heart for a time. What followed? Universal depravity, garments rolled in blood, fantastic crimes unimagined before, which startled the earth with their sublime atrocity. The American people have, and ought to have, no special desire to follow that terrible example of guilt and misery.

It is impossible to discuss this subject within the limits of a review. No doubt the effort to be short has made me obscure. If Mr. Ingersoll thinks himself wronged, or his doctrines misconstrued, let him not lay my fault at the door of the Church, or cast his censure on the clergy.

*“Adsum qui feci, in me convertite ferrum.”*

J. S. BLACK.

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