

The Centre Democrat.

BELLEFONTE, PA.

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BLACK vs. INGERSOLL.

An Able Defense of Christianity.

Judge Black Meets the Great Infidel Lecturer in Debate in the Pages of the "North American Review" and Gives Him a Taste of His Quality.

Hon. Jeremiah S. Black and Col. Robert G. Ingersoll have contributed articles to the August number of the *North American Review* in which the former defends the cause of Christianity and the latter attacks and opposes it. Colonel Ingersoll's arguments are the same as those with which the public has been made familiar in his lectures. Judge Black in masterly rhetoric and with a fund of illustration that is remarkable, defends the Jewish theocracy and then proceeds to demonstrate the truth of the Christian religion. We regret that we have room for only a small portion of this able paper and as we are obliged to select a part we prefer to give that which relates more particularly to the Christian dispensation. Judge Black reasons as follows:

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 abroad. Men who were in the noon of life when Jesus was put to death as a malefactor lived to see Him worshipped 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. It is 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.

First. 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.

Second. 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.

Third. The witnesses could not have been mistaken. The nature of the facts precluded the possibility of any delusion about them. For every avowed testimony they had "the sensible and true avouch of their own eyes" and ears. Besides, they were plain-thinking, sober, unimaginative 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 proven 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.

Fourth. 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.

Fifth. 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 denunciations 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.

Sixth. The statement 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 characteristic of truth and honesty. There is no rule of evidence generally adopted that a statement sustained by general agreement is more immovably fixed than a statement 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.

Seventh. 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.

Eighth. 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 Caesar 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 the 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 irrefragable character, and wholly uncontradicted, the proof becomes so strong that the disbelief we hear of seems like a kind of insanity.

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 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 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 covenant 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 on earth, 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 cannot 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 Omnipotent. 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 verendum* 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 cannot be true. A thing is not necessarily false because he does not understand it; he cannot annihilate a principle or 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, 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 man 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 unpeppably depraved. But are Christians guilty of this business 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, degradation, 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 cannot 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 in 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 cannot 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 cannot 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 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 cannot 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 copper-smith.

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 fe* of Spain and Portugal, the burning of Smithfield, and the whipping of women in Massachusetts, were the outcome of a cruel, false, and antichristian 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 of 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-Uglys, 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 cannot 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 miracle 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 cannot even show that they are *a priori* improbable. God would be likely to reveal His will to the rational creature 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 centre 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 savior for the sick, no refuge for the unfortunate. In all pagandom there was not a hospital, 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, sawn 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 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 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 if his doctrine misconstrued, let him not lay his fault at the door of the Church, or cast his censure on the clergy.

"Adsum que feci, in me convertite ferrum."
J. S. BLACK.

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