

GREAT AMERICAN PAGAN.

Ingersoll Restates His Position on the Religious Questions of the Day.

"All Religions Are Simply Codes of Morals Plus Something Else."

"Freedom of Religion Means Destruction of Religion"—Morality Is a Sufficient Guide, He Thinks.

New York, Feb. 11.—Col. Robert G. Ingersoll, according to a reporter Saturday an interview in which he outlined his position in religious matters more definitely than he has heretofore done. It will be widely read that account, not only by those who are in accord with him, but by those who differ with him on every point, and by those who are to some extent neutral.

"What is your idea as to the difference between honest belief, as held by honest religious thinkers, and heterodoxy?" asked the reporter.

"Of course, I believe that there are thousands of men and women who honestly believe, not only in the improbable, not only in the absurd, but in the impossible. Heterodoxy, so called, occupies the half-way station between superstition and reason. A heretic is one who is still dominated by religion, but in the east of whose mind there is a dawn. He is one who has seen the morning star. He has not entire confidence in the day, and imagines in some way that even the light he sees was born of the night. In the mind of the heretic darkness and light are mingled. The ties of intellectual kindred bind him to the night, and yet he has enough of the spirit of adventure to look toward the east. Of course I admit that Christians and heretics are both honest. A real Christian must be honest and a real heretic must be the same. All men must be honest in what they think; but all men are not honest in what they say. In the invisible world of the mind, every man is honest. The judgment never was bribed. Speech may be false, but conviction is always honest. So that the difference between honest belief, as shared by honest religious thinkers and heretics, is a difference of intelligence. It is the difference between a ship lashed to the dock and one making a voyage. It is the difference between twilight and dawn—that is to say, between the coming of the night and the coming of the morning."

"Are women becoming freed from the bonds of sectarianism?" "Women are less calculating than men. As a rule they do not occupy the territory of compromise. They are natural idealists. The woman who is not dominated by superstition is apt to be absolutely free, and when a woman has broken the shackles of superstition she has no apprehension, no fears. She feels that she is on the open sea, and she cares neither for wind nor wave. An emancipated woman never can be re-enslaved. Her heart goes with her opinions, and goes first."

"Do you consider that the influence of religion is better than the influence of liberalism upon society; that is to say, is society less or more moral, is vice more or less conspicuous?" "Whenever a chain is broken an obligation takes its place. There is, and there can be, no responsibility without liberty. The freer a man is, the more responsible, the more accountable he feels. Consequently, the more liberty there is, the more morality there is. Believers in religion teach us that God will reward men for good actions, but men who are intellectually free know that the reward of a good action cannot be given by any nature but that of the natural result of the good action. The free man, guided by intelligence, knows that his reward is in the nature of things and not in the opinion even of the infinite. He is not a slave to a ritual or a creed. He is an intelligent man. His visions are ignorant. Real morality is the child of intelligence. The free and intelligent man knows that every action must be judged by its consequences. He knows that if he does good he gains good, but he knows that if he does evil he bears a burden, and he knows that these good and evil consequences are not determined by any invisible master, but that they live in and are produced by the action themselves."

"Can you see a tendency toward denominational consolidation through the development of liberal thought?" "All religions are free, and when all kinds of faith have immunity, the tendency is to destroy superstition. All religions had liberty in Rome. Each man had the right to worship his own god, and to fall from his religion without a penalty. These gods, being brought together, were found by actual experience to be equally useless. Freedom of religion is the destruction of religion. In Rome, after people were allowed to worship their own gods, all gods fell into disrepute. It will be so in America. Here is freedom of religion, and all devotees find that the gods of other devotees are just as good as theirs. They find that their prayers, like those of others, are answered precisely as their prayers are answered. The Protestant God is no better than the Catholic, and the Catholic is no better than the Mormon, and the Mormon is no better than the Jew for answering prayers. In other words, all prayers die in the air, which they uselessly agitate. There is undoubtedly a tendency among the protestant denominations to unite. In a few years, if all should unite, they would hardly have power enough to obstruct, for any considerable time, the march of the intellectual host destined to conquer the world. But let us all be good-natured—let us give to others all the rights that we claim for ourselves. The future, I believe, has both heads full of blessings for the human race."

Col. Ingersoll also replied in detail to the various questions which attacked his Christianism. His reply filled several columns of the Evening Telegram, the paper for which it was written. Discussing Dr. De Costa's attack, Col. Ingersoll says: "The Rev. Dr. De Costa, drawing a distinction between Christianity and 'churchmanship,' claiming, of course, to be governed himself by Christianity, calls me, in an exceedingly argumentative way, a 'tiger,' and then to clinch the argument, suggests that after all 'I may be an underdog tiger's skin.' Fearing that a loose-hoof might still be left, he asserts that 'some go so far as to assert that he (meaning me) holds a brief for Satan, and is doing the best he can for his client.' He makes the familiar assertion that 'by its fruits we may know Christianity.' Now, if by Christianity he means kindness, candor, the spirit of investigation, observation, reason—in other words, if he calls them 'Christianity'—then there can be no dispute. But is this true? Every religion teaches a code of morals plus something else, and it is this 'something else' that determines what each religion is. Buddhism is a code of morals plus a belief in the transmigration of souls, in the illumination of Buddha, in certain prayers, ceremonies, genuflections and superstitions. So Christianity is a code of morals plus that the God of the Old Testament is the creator of the universe, that the Christ of the New Testament is the same God, and by his death an atonement was made for all who should believe in him in a certain way, plus certain ceremonies and superstitions. No one objects to the morality of Christianity. The industrious people of the world, those who have anything, are, as a rule, opposed to any religion that very large majority of those objects to being murdered. And so we have laws against larceny and murder. A large majority of people believe in what they believe, or what they understand to be, justice—at least between others. There is no difference of opinion among civilized people to speak of as to what is or is not moral. I cannot truthfully be said that the man who attacks Buddhism attacks all morality. He does not attack goodness, justice, mercy or anything that tends in his judgment to the welfare of mankind. But he attacks Buddhism. He does not attack what is called Christianity, because he does not attack kindness, charity or any virtue. He attacks something that has been added to the virtues. He does not attack the flower, but what he believes to be its parasite. If people, who they speak of Christianity, include the virtues common to all religions, they should not give Christianity credit for all the good that has been done. There were millions of virtuous men and women, saintly of heroic and self-sacrificing souls, before Christianity was known."

"It does not seem possible to me that lofty kindness, justice or charity ever around any one who possessed and practiced these virtues to persecute his fellow-men on account of a difference of belief. If Christianity has persecuted, some reason must exist outside of the virtue that it has inculcated. Of this reason—the right to be inebriated in that something else, which has been added to the ordinary virtues, then Christianity can properly be held accountable for the persecution. Of course, back of Christianity is the nature of man and, primarily, it may be responsible. Is there anything in Christianity that will account for such persecutions for the inquisition? It certainly was taught by the church that belief was necessary to salvation, and it was taught at the same time that the fate of man was eternal punishment, that the sinner of man was that of depravity, and that there was but one way by which he could be saved, and that was through belief, through faith. As long as this was honestly believed Christians would not allow heretics or infidels to preach a doctrine to their wives, to their children or to themselves, which, in their judgment, would result in the damnation of souls. The law gives a father the right to kill one who is about to do a great bodily harm to his son. Now, if a father has the right to take the life of a man simply because he is attacking one of his sons, how much more would he have the right to take the life of one who would labor to assassinate the son of his son? Christians reasoned in this way. In addition to this they felt that God would hold the community responsible if the community allowed a blasphemy to attack the true religion. Therefore they killed the free-thinker, or rather free-talker, in self-defense. At the bottom of religious persecution is the doctrine of self-defense: that is to say, the defense of the soul. If the founder of Christianity had plainly said: 'It is not necessary to believe in order to be saved; it is only necessary to do, and he who really lives his fellow men, who is kind, honest, just and charitable, is to be forever blessed' if he had only said that there would probably have been but little persecution. If he had added, 'You must not persecute in any name. The religion I teach is the religion of love, not the religion of force and hatred. You must not imprison your fellow men. You must not stretch their bones, racks or crush their bones in iron boots. You must not flay them alive. You must not cut off their ears, noses, noses, noses, noses, noses. You must treat all with absolute kindness. If you can not convert your neighbor by example, persuasion, argument, that is the end. You must never resort to force; and whether he believes as you do or not, treat him always with kindness,' his followers would not have murdered their fellows in his name. If Christ was in fact God, he knew the persecutions that would be carried on in his name, and he knew the millions that would suffer death through torture. And yet he died without uttering a word to prevent what he must have known, if he were God, would happen. All that Christianity has added to morality is worthless and useless. Not only so, it has been brutal. Take Christianity from morality and the useful is left, but take morality from Christianity and the useless remains. Now, falling back on the old assertion, 'By its fruits we may know Christianity.' Then I think we are justified in saying that as Christianity consists of a mixture of morality and something else, and as morality has never been persecuted, a human being, and as Christianity has persecuted millions, the cause of the persecution must be the something else that was added to morality. I cannot agree with you in your extravagant, wild, and untrue statements that 'Christianity has taught mankind the priceless value and dignity of human nature.' On the other hand, Christianity has taught that the whole human race is by nature damned, and that the only way to be saved in accordance with his sense of justice all of the sons of men would be doomed to eternal pain. Human nature has been degraded, has been held up to contempt and scorn, and has been assailed as denounced as wicked and filthy."

"Dr. De Costa asserts that Christianity has taught mankind the value of freedom. It certainly has not been the advocate of free thought, and what is freedom when the mind is to be enslaved? Dr. De Costa knows that millions have been sacrificed in their efforts to be free; that is, millions have been sacrificed for exercising their freedom as against the church. He is not true that the church has taught and established the fact of human brotherhood. This has been the result of a civilization to which Christianity itself has been hostile. Can we grope that the church established human brotherhood by banishing the Jews from Spain, by driving out the Moors, by the tortures of the inquisition, by butchering the converts of Scotland, by the burning of Bruno and Servetus, by the persecution of the Irish, by whipping and hanging Quakers in New England, by the slave trade, and by the hundreds of wars waged in the name of Christ? We all know that the Bible upholds slavery in its worst and most cruel form; and how it can be said that a religion founded upon a Bible that upholds the institution of slavery, has taught and established the fact of human brotherhood, is beyond my imagination to conceive."

A Warning—Don't Use Big Words. In promulgating esoteric cogitations or articulating superficial sentimentalities and philosophical or psychological observations, beware of blatant ponderousness. Let your statements possess a clarified concision, compactness, comprehensibility, consistent, consistent, and a concentrated cogency. Eschew all conglomerations of fatulent garrulity, jejune babblement and amine affectations. In trying to impress upon others the superiority of the Wisconsin Central line, and why you and so many others use this thoroughfare from St. Paul and Minneapolis and Duluth and Ashland to Milwaukee, Chicago and points east and south. It is not necessary to use big words, let your statements possess a clarified concision, compactness, comprehensibility, consistent, consistent, and a concentrated cogency. Eschew all conglomerations of fatulent garrulity, jejune babblement and amine affectations. 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