

Heretics And Hericies (1874)

By Robert Green Ingersoll

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LIBERTY, A WORD WITHOUT WHICH ALL WORDS ARE VAIN.

WHOEVER has an opinion of his own, and honestly expresses it, will be guilty of heresy. Heresy is what the minority believe; it is the name given by the powerful to the doctrine of the weak. This word was born of the hatred, arrogance and cruelty of those who love their enemies, and who, when smitten on one cheek, turn the other. This word was born of intellectual slavery in the feudal ages of thought. It was an epithet used in the place of argument. From the commencement of the Christian era, every art has been exhausted and every conceivable punishment inflicted to force all people to hold the same religious opinions. This effort was born of the idea that a certain belief was necessary to the salvation of the soul. Christ taught, and the church still teaches. that unbelief is the blackest of crimes. God is supposed to hate with an infinite and implacable hatred, every heretic upon the earth, and the heretics who have died are supposed at this moment to be suffering the agonies of the damned. The church persecutes the living and her God burns, for all eternity, the dead.

It is claimed that God wrote a book called the Bible, and it is generally admitted that this book is somewhat difficult to understand. As long as the church had all the copies of this book, and the people were not allowed to read it, there was comparatively little heresy in the world; but when it was printed and read, people began honestly to differ as to its meaning. A few were independent and brave enough to give the world their real thoughts, and for the extermination of these men the church used all her power. Protestants and Catholics vied with each other in the work of enslaving the human mind. For ages they were rivals in the infamous effort to rid the earth of honest people. They infested every country, every city, town, hamlet and family. They appealed to the worst passions of the human heart. They sowed the seeds of discord and hatred in every land. Brother denounced brother, wives informed against their husbands, mothers accused their children, dungeons were crowded with the innocent; the flesh of the good and true rotted in the clasp of chains; the flames devoured the heroic, and in the name of the most merciful God, his children were exterminated with famine, sword, and fire. Over the wild waves of battle rose and fell the banner of Jesus Christ. for sixteen hundred years the robes of the church were red with innocent blood. The ingenuity of Christians was exhausted in devising punishment severe enough to be inflicted upon other Christians who honestly and sincerely differed with them upon any point whatever.

Give any orthodox church the power, and to-day they would punish heresy with whip, and chain, and fire. As long as a church deems a certain belief essential to salvation, just

so long it will kill and burn if it has the power. Why should the church pity a man whom her God hates? Why should she show mercy to a kind and noble heretic whom her God will burn in eternal fire? Why should a Christian be better than his God? It is impossible for the imagination to conceive of a greater atrocity than has been perpetrated by the church. Every nerve in the human body capable of pain has been sought out and touched.

Let it be remembered that all churches have persecuted heretics to the fullest extent of their power. Toleration has increased only when and where the power of the church has diminished. From Augustine until now the spirit of the Christians has remained the same. There has been the same intolerance, the same undying hatred of all who think for themselves, and the same determination to crush out of the human brain all knowledge inconsistent with an ignorant creed.

Every church pretends that it has a revelation from God, and that this revelation must be given to the people through the church; that the church acts through its priests, and that ordinary mortals must be content with a revelation -- not from God -- but from the church. Had the people submitted to this preposterous claim, of course there could have been but one church, and that church never could have advanced. It might have retrograded, because it is not necessary to think or investigate in order to forget. Without heresy there could have been no progress.

The highest type of the orthodox Christian does not forget; neither does he learn. He neither advances nor recedes. He is a living fossil embedded in that rock called faith. He makes no effort to better his condition, because all his strength is exhausted in keeping other people from improving theirs. The supreme desire of his heart is to force all others to adopt his creed, and in order to accomplish this object he denounces free thinking as a crime, and this crime he calls heresy. When he had power, heresy was the most terrible and formidable of words. It meant confiscation, exile, imprisonment, torture, and death.

In those days the cross and rack were inseparable companions. Across the open Bible lay the sword and fagot. Not content with burning such heretics as were alive, they even tried the dead, in order that the church might rob their wives and children. The property of all heretics was confiscated, and on this account they charged the dead with being heretical - - indicted, as it were, their dust -- to the end that the church might clutch the bread of orphans. Learned divines discussed the propriety of tearing out the tongues of heretics before they were burned, and the general opinion was, that this ought to be done so that the heretics should not be able, by uttering blasphemies, to shock the Christians who were burning them. With a mixture of ferocity and Christianity, the priests insisted that heretics ought to be burned at a slow fire, giving as a reason that more time was given them for repentance.

No wonder that Jesus Christ said, "I came not to bring peace, but a sword."

Every priest regarded himself as the agent of God. He answered all questions by authority, and to treat him with disrespect was an insult offered to God. No one was asked to think, but all were commanded to obey.

In 1208 the Inquisition was established. Seven years afterward, the fourth council of the Lateran enjoined all kings and rulers to swear an oath that they would exterminate heretics from their dominions. The sword of the church was unsheathed, and the world was at the mercy of ignorant and infuriated priests, whose eyes feasted upon the agonies they inflicted. Acting, as they believed, or pretended to believe, under the command of God; stimulated by the hope of infinite reward in another world -- hating heretics with every drop of their bestial blood; savage beyond description; merciless beyond conception, -- these infamous priests, in a kind of frenzied joy, leaped upon the helpless victims of their rage. They crushed their bones in iron boots; tore their quivering flesh with iron hooks and pincers; cut off their lips and eyelids; pulled out their nails, and into the bleeding quick thrust needles; tore out their tongues; extinguished their eyes; stretched them upon racks; flayed them alive; crucified them with their heads downward; exposed them to wild beasts; burned them at the stake; mocked their cries and groans; robbed their children, and then prayed God to finish the holy work in hell.

Millions upon millions were sacrificed upon the altars of bigotry. The Catholic burned the Lutheran, the Lutheran burned the Catholic, the Episcopalian tortured the Presbyterian. the Presbyterian tortured the Episcopalian. Every denomination killed all it could of every other; and each Christian felt in duty bound to exterminate every other Christian who denied the smallest fraction of his creed.

In the reign of Henry VIII. -- that pious and moral founder of the apostolic Episcopal Church. -- there was passed by the parliament of England an act entitled "An act for abolishing of diversity of opinion." And in this act was set forth what a good Christian was obliged to believe:

First, That in the sacrament was the real body and blood of Jesus Christ.

Second, That the body and blood of Jesus Christ was in the bread, and the blood and body of Jesus Christ was in the wine.

Third, That priests should not marry.

Fourth, That vows of chastity were of perpetual obligation.

Fifth, That private masses ought to be continued; and,

Sixth, That auricular confession to a priest must be maintained.

This creed was made by law, in order that all men might know just what to believe by simply reading the statute. The church hated to see the people wearing out their brains in thinking upon these subjects. It was thought far better that a creed should be made by parliament, so that whatever might be lacking in evidence might be made up in force. The punishment for denying the first article was death by fire. For the denial of any other article, imprisonment, and for the second offence -- death.

Your attention is called to these six articles, established during the reign of Henry VIII., and by the Church of England, simply because not one of these articles is believed by that church to-day. If the law then made by the church could be enforced now, every Episcopalian would be burned at the stake.

Similar laws were passed in most Christian countries, as all orthodox churches firmly believed that mankind could be legislated into heaven. According to the creed of every church, slavery leads to heaven, liberty leads to hell. It was claimed that God had founded the church, and that to deny the authority of the church was to be a traitor to God, and consequently an ally of the devil. To torture and destroy one of the soldiers of Satan was a duty no good Christian cared to neglect. Nothing can be sweeter than to earn the gratitude of God by killing your own enemies. Such a mingling of profit and revenge, of heaven for yourself and damnation for those you dislike, is a temptation that your ordinary Christian never resists.

According to the theologians, God, the Father of us all, wrote a letter to his children. The children have always differed somewhat as to the meaning of this letter. In consequence of these honest differences, these brothers began to cut out each other's hearts. In every land, where this letter from God has been read, the children to whom and for whom it was written have been filled with hatred and malice. They have imprisoned and murdered each other, and the wives and children of each other. In the name of God every possible crime has been committed, every conceivable outrage has been perpetrated. Brave men, tender and loving women, beautiful girls, and prattling babes have been exterminated in the name of Jesus Christ. For more than fifty generations the church has carried the black flag. Her vengeance has been measured only by her power. During all these years of infamy no heretic has ever been forgiven. With the heart of a fiend she has hated; with the clutch of avarice she has grasped; with the jaws of a dragon she has devoured; pitiless as famine, merciless as fire, with the conscience of a serpent: such is the history of the Church of God.

I do not say, and I do not believe, that Christians are as bad as their creeds. In spite of church and dogma, there have been millions and millions of men and women true to the loftiest and most generous promptings of the human heart. They have been true to their convictions, and, with a self-denial and fortitude excelled by none, have labored and suffered for the salvation of men. Imbued with the spirit of self-sacrifice, believing that by personal effort they could rescue at least a few souls from the infinite shadow of hell, they have cheerfully endured every hardship and scorned every danger. And yet, notwithstanding all this, they believed that honest error was a crime. They knew that the Bible so declared, and they believed that all unbelievers would be eternally lost. They believed that religion was of God, and all heresy of the devil. They killed heretics in defence of their own souls and the souls of their children. They killed them because, according to their idea, they were the enemies of God, and because the Bible teaches that the blood of the unbeliever is a most acceptable sacrifice to heaven.

Nature never prompted a loving mother to throw her child into the Ganges. Nature never prompted men to exterminate each other for a difference of opinion concerning the

baptism of infants. These crimes have been produced by religions filled with all that is illogical, cruel and hideous. These religions were produced for the most part by ignorance, tyranny and hypocrisy. Under the impression that the infinite ruler and creator of the universe had commanded the destruction of heretics and infidels, the church perpetrated all these crimes.

Men and women have been burned for thinking there is but one God; that there was none; that the Holy Ghost is younger than God; that God was somewhat older than his son; for insisting that good works will save a man without faith; that faith will do without good works; for declaring that a sweet babe will not be burned eternally, because its parents failed to have its head wet by a priest; for speaking of God as though he had a nose; for denying that Christ was his own father; for contending that three persons, rightly added together, make more than one; for believing in purgatory; for denying the reality of hell; for pretending that priests can forgive sins; for preaching that God is an essence; for denying that witches rode through the air on sticks; for doubting the total depravity of the human heart; for laughing at irresistible grace, predestination and particular redemption; for denying that good bread could be made of the body of a dead man; for pretending that the pope was not managing this world for God, and in the place of God; for disputing the efficacy of a vicarious atonement; for thinking the Virgin Mary was born like other people; for thinking that a man's rib was hardly sufficient to make a good- sized woman; for denying that God used his finger for a pen; for asserting that prayers are not answered, that diseases are not sent to punish unbelief; for denying the authority of the Bible; for having a Bible in their possession; for attending mass, and for refusing to attend; for wearing a surplice; for carrying a cross, and for refusing; for being a Catholic, and for being a Protestant; for being an Episcopalian, a Presbyterian, a Baptist, and for being a Quaker. In short, every virtue has been a crime, and every crime a virtue. The church has burned honesty and rewarded hypocrisy. And all this, because it was commanded by a book -- a book that men had been taught implicitly to believe, long before they knew one word that was in it. They had been taught that to doubt the truth of this book -- to examine it, even -- was a crime of such enormity that it could not be forgiven, either in this world or in the next.

The Bible was the real persecutor. The Bible burned heretics, built dungeons, founded the Inquisition, and trampled upon all the liberties of men.

How long, O how long will mankind worship a book? How long will they grovel in the dust before the ignorant legends of the barbaric past? How long, O how long will they pursue phantoms in a darkness deeper than death?

Unfortunately for the world, about the beginning of the sixteenth century, a man by the name of Gerard Chauvin was married to Jeanne Lefranc, and still more unfortunately for the world, the fruit of this marriage was a son, called John Chauvin, who afterwards became famous as John Calvin, the founder of the Presbyterian Church.

This man forged five fetters for the brain. These fetters he called points. That is to say, predestination, particular redemption, total depravity, irresistible grace, and the

perseverance of the saints. About the neck of each follower he put a collar bristling with these live iron points. The presence of all these points on the collar is still the test of orthodoxy in the church he founded. This man, when in the flush of youth, was elected to the office of preacher in Geneva. He at once, in union with Farel, drew up a condensed statement of the Presbyterian doctrine, and all the citizens of Geneva, on pain of banishment, were compelled to take an oath that they believed this statement. Of this proceeding Calvin very innocently remarked that it produced great satisfaction. A man named Caroli had the audacity to dispute with Calvin. For this outrage he was banished.

To show you what great subjects occupied the attention of Calvin, it is only necessary to state that he furiously discussed the question as to whether the sacramental bread should be leavened or unleavened. He drew up laws regulating the cut of the citizens' clothes, and prescribing their diet, and all those whose garments were not in the Calvin fashion were refused the sacrament. At last, the people becoming tired of this petty theological tyranny, banished Calvin. In a few years, however, he was recalled and received with great enthusiasm. After this he was supreme, and the will of Calvin became the law of Geneva.

Under his benign administration, James Gruet was beheaded because he had written some profane verses. The slightest word against Calvin or his absurd doctrines was punished as a crime.

In 1553 a man was tried at Vienna by the Catholic Church for heresy. He was convicted and sentenced to death by burning. It was apparently his good fortune to escape. Pursued by the sleuth hounds of intolerance he fled to Geneva for protection. A dove flying from hawks, sought safety in the nest of a vulture. This fugitive from the cruelty of Rome asked shelter from John Calvin, who had written a book in favor of religious toleration. Serviettes had forgotten that this book was written by Calvin when in the minority; that it was written in weakness to be forgotten in power; that it was produced by fear instead of principle. He did not know that Calvin had caused his arrest at Vienna, in France, and had sent a copy of his work, which was claimed to be blasphemous, to the archbishop. He did not then know that the Protestant Calvin was acting as one of the detectives of the Catholic Church, and had been instrumental in procuring his conviction for heresy. Ignorant of all this unspeakable infamy, he put himself in the power of this very Calvin. The maker of the Presbyterian creed caused the fugitive Serviettes to be arrested for blasphemy. He was tried. Calvin was his accuser. He was convicted and condemned to death by fire. On the morning of the fatal day, Calvin saw him, and Serviettes, the victim, asked forgiveness of Calvin, the murderer. Serviettes was bound to the stake, and the fagots were lighted. The wind carried the flames somewhat away from his body, so that he slowly roasted for hours. Vainly he implored a speedy death. At last the flames climbed round his form; through smoke and fire his murderers saw a white heroic face. And there they watched until a man became a charred and shriveled mass.

Liberty was banished from Geneva, and nothing but Presbyterianism was left. Honor, justice, mercy, reason and charity were all exiled; but the five points of predestination,

particular redemption, irresistible grace, total depravity, and the certain perseverance of the saints remained instead.

Calvin founded a little theocracy, modeled after the Old Testament, and succeeded in erecting the most detestable government that ever existed, except the one from which it was copied.

Against all this intolerance, one man, a minister, raised his voice. The name of this man should never be forgotten. It was Castalio. This brave man had the goodness and the courage to declare the innocence of honest error. He was the first of the so-called reformers to take this noble ground. I wish I had the genius to pay a fitting tribute to his memory. Perhaps it would be impossible to pay him a grander compliment than to say. Castalio was in all things the opposite of Calvin. To plead for the right of individual judgment was considered a crime, and Castalio was driven from Geneva by John Calvin. By him he was denounced as a child of the devil, as a dog of Satan, as a beast from hell, and as one who, by this horrid blasphemy of the innocence of honest error, crucified Christ afresh, and by him he was pursued until rescued by the hand of death.

Upon the name of Castalio, Calvin heaped every epithet, until his malice was nearly satisfied and his imagination entirely exhausted. It is impossible to conceive how human nature can become so frightfully perverted as to pursue a fellow-man with the malignity of a fiend, simply because he is good, just, and generous.

Calvin was of a pallid, bloodless complexion, thin, sickly, irritable, gloomy, impatient, egotistic, tyrannical, heartless, and infamous. He was a strange compound of revengeful morality, malicious forgiveness, ferocious charity, egotistic humility, and a kind of hellish justice. In other words, he was as near like the God of the Old Testament as his health permitted. The best thing, however, about the Presbyterians of Geneva was, that they denied the power of the Pope, and the best thing about the Pope was, that he was not a Presbyterian.

The doctrines of Calvin spread rapidly, and were eagerly accepted by multitudes on the continent; but Scotland, in a few years, became the real fortress of Presbyterianism. The Scotch succeeded in establishing the same kind of theocracy that flourished in Geneva. The clergy took possession and control of everybody and everything. It is impossible to exaggerate the mental degradation, the abject superstition of the people of Scotland during the reign of Presbyterianism. Heretics were hunted and devoured as though they had been wild beasts. The gloomy insanity of Presbyterianism took possession of a great majority of the people. They regarded their ministers as the Jews did Moses and Aaron. They believed that they were the especial agents of God, and that whatsoever they bound in Scotland would be bound in heaven. There was not one particle of intellectual freedom. No man was allowed to differ with the church, or to even contradict a priest. Had Presbyterianism maintained its ascendancy, Scotland would have been peopled by savages to-day.

The revengeful spirit of Calvin took possession of the Puritans, and caused them to redden the soil of the New World with the brave blood of honest men. Clinging to the five points of Calvin, they too established governments in accordance with the teachings of the Old Testament. They too attached the penalty of death to the expression of honest thought. They too believed their church supreme, and exerted all their power to curse this continent with a spiritual despotism as infamous as it was absurd. They believed with Luther that universal toleration is universal error, and universal error is universal hell. Toleration was denounced as a crime.

Fortunately for us, civilization has had a softening effect even upon the Presbyterian Church. To the ennobling influence of the arts and sciences the savage spirit of Calvinism has, in some slight degree, succumbed. True, the old creed remains substantially as it was written, but by a kind of tacit understanding it has come to be regarded as a relic of the past. The cry of "heresy" has been growing fainter and fainter, and, as a consequence, the ministers of that denomination have ventured, now and then, to express doubts as to the damnation of infants, and the doctrine of total depravity. The fact is, the old ideas became a little monotonous to the people. The fall of man, the scheme of redemption and irresistible grace, began to have a familiar sound. The preachers told the old stories while the congregations slept. Some of the ministers became tired of these stories themselves. The five points grew dull, and they felt that nothing short of irresistible grace could bear this endless repetition. The outside world was full of progress, and in every direction men advanced, while this church, anchored to a creed, idly rotted at the shore. Other denominations, imbued some little with the spirit of investigation, were springing up on every side, while the old Presbyterian ark rested on the Ararat of the past, filled with the theological monsters of another age.

Lured by the splendors of the outer world, tempted by the achievements of science, longing to feel the throb and heat of the mighty march of the human race, a few of the ministers of this conservative denomination were compelled, by irresistible sense, to say a few words in harmony with the splendid ideas of to-day.

These utterances have upon several occasions so nearly wakened some of the members that, rubbing their eyes, they have feebly inquired whether these grand ideas were not somewhat heretical. These ministers found that just in the proportion that their orthodoxy decreased, their congregations increased. Those who dealt in the pure unadulterated article found themselves demonstrating the five points to a less number of hearers than they had points. Stung to madness by this bitter truth this galling contrast, this harassing fact, the really orthodox have raised the cry of heresy, and expect with this cry to seal the lips of honest men. One of the Presbyterian ministers, and one who has been enjoying the luxury of a little honest thought, and the real rapture of expressing it, has already been indicted, and is about to be tried by the Presbyter of Illinois. He is charged --

First, With having neglected to preach that most comforting and consoling truth, the eternal damnation of the soul.

Surely, that man must be a monster who could wish to blot this blessed doctrine out and rob earth's wretched children of this blissful hope!

Who can estimate the misery that has been caused by this most infamous doctrine of eternal punishment? Think of the lives it has blighted, of the tears it has caused -- of the agony it has produced. Think of the millions who have been driven to insanity by this most terrible of dogmas. This doctrine renders God the basest and most cruel being in the universe. Compared with him, the most frightful deities of the most barbarous and degraded tribes are miracles of goodness and mercy. There is nothing more degrading than to worship such a god. Lower than this the soul can never sink. If the doctrine of eternal damnation is true, let me share the fate of the unconverted; let me have my portion in hell, rather than in heaven with a god infamous enough to inflict eternal misery upon any of the sons of men.

Second. With having spoken a few kind words of Robert Collyer and John Stuart Mill.

I have the honor of a slight acquaintance with Robert Collyer. I have read with pleasure some of his exquisite productions. He has a brain full of the dawn, the head of a philosopher, the imagination of a poet and the sincere heart of a child.

Is a minister to be silenced because he speaks fairly of a noble and candid adversary? Is it a crime to compliment a lover of justice, an advocate of liberty; one who devotes his life to the elevation of man, the discovery of truth, and the promulgation of what he believes to be right?

Can that tongue be palsied by a presbyter that praises a self-denying and heroic life? Is it a sin to speak a charitable word over the grave of John Stuart Mill? Is it heretical to pay a just and graceful tribute to departed worth? Must the true Presbyterian violate the sanctity of the tomb, dig open the grave and ask his God to curse the silent dust? Is Presbyterianism so narrow that it conceives of no excellence, of no purity of intention, of no spiritual and moral grandeur outside of its barbaric creed? Does it still retain within its stony heart all the malice of its founder? Is it still warming its fleshless hands at the flames that consumed Serviettes? Does it still glory in the damnation of infants, and does it still persist in emptying the cradle in order that perdition may be filled? Is it still starving the soul and famishing the heart? Is it still trembling and shivering, crouching and crawling before its ignorant Confession of Faith?

Had such men as Robert Collyer and John Stuart Mill been present at the burning of Serviettes, they would have extinguished the flames with their tears. Had the presbyter of Chicago been there, they would have quietly turned their backs, solemnly divided their coat tails, and warmed themselves.

Third. With having spoken disparagingly of the doctrine of predestination.

If there is any dogma that ought to be protected by law, predestination is that doctrine, Surely it is a cheerful, joyous thing, to one who is laboring, struggling, and suffering in

this weary world, to think that before he existed; before the earth was; before a star had glittered in the heavens; before a ray of light had left the quiver of the sun, his destiny had been irrevocably fixed, and that for an eternity before his birth he had been doomed to bear eternal pain.

Fourth. With failing to preach the efficacy of a "vicarious sacrifice."

Suppose a man had been convicted of murder, and was about to be hanged -- the governor acting as the executioner; and suppose that just as the doomed man was about to suffer death some one in the crowd should step forward and say, "I am willing to die in the place of that murderer. He has a family, and I have none." And suppose further, that the governor should reply, "Come forward, young man, your offer is accepted. A murder has been committed and somebody must be hung, and your death will satisfy the law just as well as the death of the murderer." What would you then think of the doctrine of "vicarious sacrifice"?

This doctrine is the consummation of two outrages -- forgiving one crime and committing another.

Fifth. With having inculcated a phase of the doctrine commonly known as "evolution," or "development."

The church believes and teaches the exact opposite of this doctrine. According to the philosophy of theology, man has continued to degenerate for six thousand years. To teach that there is that in nature which impels to higher forms and grander ends, is heresy, of course. The Deity will damn Spencer and his "Evolution," Darwin and his "Origin of Species," Huxley and his "Protoplasm," Tyndall and his "Prayer Gauge," and will save those, and those only, who declare that the universe has been cursed, from the smallest atom to the grandest star; that everything tends to evil and to that only, and that the only perfect thing in nature is the Presbyterian Confession of Faith.

Sixth. With having intimated that the reception of Socrates and Penelope at heaven's gate was, to say the least, a trifle more cordial than that of Catharine II. Penelope, waiting patiently and trustfully for Her lord's return, delaying her suitors, while sadly weaving and unweaving the shroud of Laertes, is the most perfect type of wife and woman produced by the civilization of Greece.

Socrates, whose life was above reproach and whose death was beyond all praise, stands to-day, in the estimation of every thoughtful man, at least the peer of Christ.

Catharine II. assassinated her husband. Stepping upon his corpse, she mounted the throne. She was the murderess of Prince Iwan, grand nephew of Peter the Great, who was imprisoned for eighteen years, and who during all that time saw the sky but once. Taken all in all, Catharine was probably one of the most intellectual beasts that ever wore a crown.

Catharine, however, was the head of the Greek Church, Socrates was a heretic and Penelope lived and died without having once heard of "particular redemption" or of "irresistible grace."

Seventh. With repudiating the idea of a "call" to the ministry, and pretending that men were "called" to preach as they were to the other avocations of life.

If this doctrine is true, God, to say the least of it, is an exceedingly poor judge of human nature. It is more than a century since a man of true genius has been found in an orthodox pulpit. Every minister is heretical just to the extent that his intellect is above the average. The Lord seems to be satisfied with mediocrity; but the people are not.

An old deacon, wishing to get rid of an unpopular preacher, advised him to give up the ministry and turn his attention to something else. The preacher replied that he could not conscientiously desert the pulpit, as he had a "call" to the ministry. To which the deacon replied, "That may be so, but it's very unfortunate for you, that when God called you to preach, he forgot to call anybody to hear you."

There is nothing more stupidly egotistic than the claim of the clergy that they are, in some divine sense set apart to the service of the Lord; that they have been chosen, and sanctified; that there is an infinite difference between them and persons employed in secular affairs. They teach us that all other professions must take care of themselves; that God allows anybody to be a doctor, a lawyer, statesman, soldier, or artist; that the Motts and Coopers -- the Mansfields and Marshalls -- the Wilberforces and Sumners -- the Angelos and Raphaels, were never honored by a "call." They chose their professions and won their laurels without the assistance of the Lord. All these men were left free to follow their own inclinations, while God was busily engaged selecting and "calling" priests, rectors, elders, ministers and exhorters.

Eight. With having doubted that God was the author of the 109th Psalm.

The portion of that psalm which carries with it the clearest and most satisfactory evidences of inspiration, and which has afforded almost unspeakable consolation to the Presbyterian Church, is as follows:

Set thou a wicked man over him; and let Satan stand at his right hand.

When he shall be judged, let him be condemned; and let his prayer become sin.

Let his days be few; and let another take his office.

Let his children be fatherless and his wife a widow.

Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg; let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places.

Let the extortioner catch all that he hath; and let the stranger spoil his labor.

Let there be none to extend mercy unto him; neither let there be any to favor his fatherless children.

Let his posterity be cut off: and in the generation following let there name be blotted out.

* * * * *

But do thou for me, O God the Lord, for Thy name's sake; because; Thy mercy is good, deliver Thou me. * * I will greatly praise the Lord with my mouth.

Think of a God wicked and malicious enough to inspire this prayer. Think of one infamous enough to answer it.

Had this inspired psalm been found in some temple erected for the worship of snakes, or in the possession of some cannibal king, written with blood upon the dried skins of babes, there would have been a perfect harmony between its surroundings and its sentiments.

No wonder that the author of this inspired psalm coldly received Socrates and Penelope, and reserved his sweetest smiles for Catharine the Second.

Ninth. With having said that the battles in which the Israelites engaged, with the approval and command of Jehovah, surpassed in cruelty those of Julius Caesar.

Was it Julius Caesar who said, "And the Lord our God delivered him before us; and we smote him, and his sons, and all his people. And we took all his cities, and utterly destroyed the men, and the women, and the little ones, of every city, we left none to remain"?

Did Julius Caesar send the following report to the Roman senate? "And we took all his cities at that time, there was not a city which we took not from them, three-score cities, all the region of Argob, the kingdom of Og in Bashan. All these cities were fenced with high walls, gates, and Bars; beside unwalled towns a great many. And we utterly destroyed them, as we did unto Sihon, king of Heshbon, utterly destroying the men, women, and children of every city."

Did Caesar take the city of Jericho "and utterly destroy all that was in the city, both men and women, young and old"? Did he smite "all the country of the hills, and of the south, and of the vale, and of the springs, and all their kings, and leave none remaining that breathed, as the Lord God had commanded"?

Search the records of the whole world, find out the history of every barbarous tribe, and you can find no crime that touched a lower depth of infamy than those the Bible's God commanded and approved. For such a God I have no words to express my loathing and contempt, and all the words in all the languages of man would scarcely be sufficient.

Away with such a God! Give me Jupiter rather, with Io and Europa, or even Siva with his skulls and snakes.

Tenth. With having repudiated the doctrine of "total depravity."

What a precious doctrine is that of the total depravity of the human heart! How sweet it is to believe that the lives of all the good and great were continual sins and perpetual crimes; that the love a mother bears her child is, in the sight of God, a sin; that the gratitude of the natural heart is simple meanness; that the tears of pity are impure; that for the unconverted to live and labor for others is an offence to heaven; that the noblest aspirations of the soul are low and groveling in the sight of God; that man should fall upon his knees and ask forgiveness, simply for loving his wife and child, and that even the act of asking forgiveness is in fact a crime!

Surely it is a kind of bliss to feel that every woman and child in the wide world, with the exception of those who believe the five points, or some other equally cruel creed, and such children as have been baptized, ought at this very moment to be dashed down to the lowest glowing gulf of hell.

Take from the Christian the history of his own church -- leave that entirely out of the question -- and he has no argument left with which to substantiate the total depravity of man.

Eleventh. With having doubted the "perseverance of the saints."

I suppose the real meaning of this doctrine is, that Presbyterians are just as sure of going to heaven as all other folks are of going to hell. The real idea being, that it all depends upon the will of God, and not upon the character of the person to be damned or saved; that God has the weakness to send Presbyterians to Paradise. and the justice to doom the rest of mankind to eternal fire.

It is admitted that no unconverted brain can see the least particle of sense in this doctrine; that it is abhorrent to all who have not been the recipients of a "new heart;" that only the perfectly good can justify the perfectly infamous.

It is contended that the saints do not persevere of their own free will -- that they are entitled to no credit for persevering; but that God forces them to persevere, while on the other hand, every crime is committed in accordance with the secret will of God, who does all things for his own glory.

Compared with this doctrine, there is no other idea, that has ever been believed by man, that can properly be called absurd.

Twelfth. With having spoken and written somewhat lightly of the idea of converting the heathen with doctrinal sermons.

Of all the failures of which we have any history or knowledge, the missionary effort is the most conspicuous. The whole question has been decided here, in our own country, and conclusively settled, We have nearly exterminated the Indians, but we have converted none. From the days of John Eliot to the execution of the last Modoc, not one Indian has been the subject of irresistible grace or particular redemption. The few red men who roam the western wilderness have no thought or care concerning the five points of Calvin. They are utterly oblivious to the great and vital truths contained in the Thirty-nine Articles, the Saybrook platform, and the resolutions of the Evangelical Alliance. No Indian has ever scalped another on account of his religious belief. This of itself shows conclusively that the missionaries have had no effect.

Why should we convert the heathen of China and kill our own? Why should we send missionaries across the seas, and soldiers over the plains? Why should we send Bibles to the east and muskets to the west? If it is impossible to convert Indians who have no religion of their own; no prejudice for or against the "eternal procession of the Holy Ghost," how can we expect to convert a heathen who has a religion; who has plenty of gods and Bibles and prophets and Christs, and who has a religious literature far grander than our own? Can we hope with the story of Daniel in the lions' den to rival the stupendous miracles of India? Is there anything in our Bible as lofty and loving as the prayer of the Buddhist? Compare your "Confession of Faith" with the following: "Never will I seek nor receive private individual salvation -- never enter into final peace alone; but forever and everywhere will I live and strive for the universal redemption of every creature throughout all worlds. Until all are delivered, never will I leave the world of sin, sorrow, and struggle, but will remain where I am."

Think of sending an average Presbyterian to convert a man who daily offers this tender, this infinitely generous, this incomparable prayer. Think of reading the 109th Psalm to a heathen who has a Bible of his own in which is found this passage. "Blessed is that man and beloved of all the gods, who is afraid of no man, and of whom no man is afraid."

Why should you read even the New Testament to a Hindu, when his own Chrishna has said, "If a man strike thee, and in striking drop his staff, pick it up and hand it to him again"? Why send a Presbyterian to a Sufi, who says, "Better one moment of silent contemplation and inward love, than seventy thousand years of outward worship? "Who would carelessly tread one worm that crawls on earth, that heartless one is darkly alienated from God; but he that, living, embraceth all things in his love, to live with him God bursts all bounds above, below."

Compare this prayer with the curses and cruelties of the Old Testament -- with the infamies commanded and approved by the being whom we are taught to worship as a God -- and with the following tender product of Presbyterianism: "It may seem absurd to human wisdom that God should harden, blind, and deliver up some men to a reprobate sense; that he should first deliver them over to evil, and then condemn them for that evil; but the believing spiritual man sees no absurdity in all this, knowing that God would be never a whit less good even though he should destroy all men."

Of all the religions that have been produced by the egotism, the malice, the ignorance and ambition of man, Presbyterianism is the most hideous.

But what shall I say more, for the time would fail me to tell of Sabellianism, of a "Modal Trinity," and the "Eternal Procession of the Holy Ghost"?

Upon these charges, a minister is to be tried, here in Chicago; in this city of pluck and progress -- this marvel of energy -- this miracle of nerve. The cry of "heresy," here, sounds like a wail from the Dark Ages -- a shriek from the Inquisition, or a groan from the grave of Calvin.

Another effort is being made to enslave a man.

It is claimed that every member of the church has solemnly agreed never to outgrow the creed; that he has pledged himself to remain an intellectual dwarf. Upon this condition the church agrees to save his soul, and he hands over his brains to bind the bargain. Should a fact be found inconsistent with the creed, he binds himself to deny the fact and curse the finder. With scraps of dogmas and crumbs of doctrine, he agrees that his soul shall be satisfied forever. What an intellectual feast the Confession of Faith must be! It reminds one of the dinner described by Sydney Smith, where everything was cold except the water, and everything sour except the vinegar.

Every member of a church promises to remain orthodox, that is to say -- stationary. Growth is heresy. Orthodox ideas are the feathers that have been molted by the eagle of progress. They are the dead leaves under the majestic palm, while heresy is the bud and blossom at the top.

Imagine a vine that grows at one end and decays at the other. The end that grows is heresy, the end that rots is orthodox. The dead are orthodox, and your cemetery is the most perfect type of a well regulated church. No thought, no progress, no heresy there. Slowly and silently, side by side, the satisfied members peacefully decay. There is only this difference -- the dead do not persecute.

And what does a trial for heresy mean? It means that the church says to a heretic, "Believe as I do, or I will withdraw my support. I will not employ you. I will pursue you until your garments are rags; until your children cry for bread; until your cheeks are furrowed with tears. I will hunt you to the very portals of the tomb, and then my God will do the rest. I will not imprison you. I will not burn you. The law prevents my doing that. I helped make the law, not however to protect you, nor to deprive me of the right to exterminate you, but in order to keep other churches from exterminating me."

A trial for heresy means that the spirit of persecution still lingers in the church; that it still denies the right of private judgment; that it still thinks more of creed than truth, and that it is still determined to prevent the intellectual growth of man. It means that churches are shambles in which are bought and sold the souls of men. It means that the church is still guilty of the barbarity of opposing thought with force. It means that if it had the power,

the mental horizon would be bounded by a creed; that it would bring again the whips and chains and dungeon keys, the rack and fagot of the past.

But let me tell the church it lacks the power. There have been, and still are, too many men who own themselves -- too much thought, too much knowledge for the church to grasp again the sword of power. The church must abdicate. For the Eglon of superstition Science has a message from Truth.