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CREEDS  
AND  
SPIRITUALITY

BY

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## C R E E D S .

(From the "New York Morning Advertiser.")

[WHATEVER may be said of his belief in revealed religion, Robert G. Ingersoll is respected by all intellectual antagonists for thorough sincerity, absolute fairness in debate, and unquestionable ability in the presentation of his argument.

His views, therefore, on the recent attitude of the general assembly at Detroit in the case of Dr. Briggs, the alleged heretical utterances of the Rev. Heber Newton, and the desertion of one creed for another by the Rev. Dr. Bridgman, are of peculiar interest just at this time. Colonel Ingersoll has just returned from a trip through the west, and in speaking of these incidents, he said :—]

THERE is a natural desire on the part of every intelligent human being to harmonise his information—to make his theories agree—in other words, to make what he knows, or thinks he knows, in one department agree with, and harmonise with, what he knows, or thinks he knows, in every other department of human knowledge.

The human race has not advanced in line, neither has it advanced in all departments with the same rapidity. It is with the race as it is with an individual. A man may turn his entire attention to some one subject—as, for instance, to geology—and neglect other sciences. He may be a good geologist, but an exceedingly poor astronomer ; or he may know nothing of politics or of political economy. So he may be a successful statesman and know nothing of theology. But if a man, successful in one direction, takes up some other question, he is bound to use the knowledge he has on one subject as a kind of standard to measure what he is told on some other subject. If he is a chemist, it will be natural for him, when studying some other question, to use what he knows in chemistry ; that is to say, he will expect to find cause, and everywhere succession and resemblance. He will say : It

must be in all other sciences as in chemistry—there must be no chance. The elements have no caprice. Iron is always the same. Gold does not change. Prussic acid is always poison—it has no freaks. So he will reason as to all facts in nature. He will be a believer in the atomic integrity of all matter, in the persistence of gravitation. Being so trained, and so convinced, his tendency will be to weigh what is called new information in the same scales that he has been using.

Now for the application of this. Progress in religion is the slowest, because man is kept back by sentimentality, by the efforts of parents, by old associations. A thousand unseen tendrils are twining about him that he must necessarily break if he advances. In other departments of knowledge inducements are held out and rewards are promised to the one who does succeed—to the one who really does advance—to the man who discovers new facts. But in religion, instead of rewards being promised, threats are made. The man is told that he must not advance; that if he takes a step forward it is at the peril of his soul; that if he thinks and investigates, he is in danger of exciting the wrath of God. Consequently religion has been of the slowest growth. Now, in most departments of knowledge man has advanced; and coming back to the original statement—a desire to harmonise all that we know—there is a growing desire on the part of intelligent men to have a religion fit to keep company with the other sciences.

#### THE MAKING OF CREEDS.

Our creeds were made in times of ignorance. They suited very well a flat world, and a God who lived in the sky just above us, and who used the lightning to destroy his enemies. This God was regarded much as a savage regarded the head of his tribe—as one having the right to reward and punish. And this God, being much greater than a chief of the tribe, could give greater rewards and inflict greater punishments. They knew that the ordinary chief, or the ordinary king, punished the slightest offences with death. They also knew that these chiefs and kings tortured their victims

as long as the victims could bear the torture. So when they described their God, they gave to this God power to keep the tortured victim alive for ever, because they knew that the earthly chief, or the earthly king, would prolong the life of the tortured for the sake of increasing the agonies of the victim. In those savage days they regarded punishment as the only means of protecting society. In consequence of this they built heaven and hell on an earthly plan, and they put God—that is to say, the chief, that is to say, the king—on a throne like an earthly king.

Of course, these views were all ignorant and barbaric ; but in that blessed day their geology and astronomy were on a par with their theology. There was a harmony in all departments of knowledge, or rather of ignorance. Since that time there has been a great advance made in the idea of government—the old idea being that the right to do came from God to the king, and from the king to the people. Now intelligent people believe that the source of authority has been changed, and that all just powers of government are derived from the consent of the governed. So there has been a great advance in the philosophy of punishment—in the treatment of criminals. So, too, in all the sciences. The earth is no longer flat ; heaven is not immediately above us ; the universe has been infinitely enlarged, and we have at last found that our earth is but a grain of sand, a speck on the great shores of the infinite. Consequently there is a discrepancy, a discord, a contradiction between our theology and the other sciences. Men of intelligence feel this. Dr. Briggs concluded that a perfectly good and intelligent God could not have created billions of sentient beings knowing that they were to be eternally miserable. No man could do such a thing, had he the power, without being infinitely malicious. Dr. Briggs began to have a little hope for the human race—began to think that maybe God is better than the creed describes him.

And right here it may be well enough to remark that no man has ever been declared a heretic for thinking God bad. Heresy has consisted in thinking God

better than the church said he was. The man who said God will damn nearly everybody was orthodox. The man who said God will save everybody was denounced as a blaspheming wretch, as one who assailed and maligned the character of God. I can remember when the Universalists were denounced as vehemently and maliciously as the Atheists are to-day.

THE CASE OF DR. BRIGGS.

Now, continued Colonel Ingersoll, Dr. Briggs is undoubtedly an intelligent man. He knows that nobody on the earth knows who wrote the five books of Moses. He knows that they were not written until hundred of years after Moses was dead. He knows that two or more persons were the authors of Isaiah. He knows that David did not write to exceed three or four of the Psalms. He knows that the book of Job is not a Jewish book. He knows that the songs of Solomon were not written by Solomon. He knows that the book of Ecclesiastes was written by a Free-thinker. He also knows that there is not in existence to-day—so far as anybody knows—any of the manuscripts of the Old or New Testament.

So about the New Testament, Dr. Briggs knows that nobody lives who has ever seen an original manuscript, or who ever saw anybody that did see one, or that claims to have seen one. He knows that nobody knows who wrote Matthew, or Mark, or Luke, or John. He knows that John did not write John, and that gospel was not written until long after John was dead. He knows that no one knows who wrote the Hebrews. He also knows that the book of Revelation is an insane production, Dr. Briggs also knows the way in which these books came to be canonical, and he knows that the way was no more binding than a resolution passed by a political convention.

He also knows that many books were left out that had for centuries equal authority with those that were put in. He also knows that many passages—and the very passages upon which many churches are founded—are interpolations. He knows that the last chapter of Mark, beginning with the sixteenth verse to the end, is an interpolation ; and he also knows that neither

Matthew, nor Mark, nor Luke, ever said one word about the necessity of believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, or of believing anything—not one word about believing in the Bible or joining the church, or doing any particular thing in the way of ceremony to ensure salvation. He knows that, according to Matthew, God agreed to forgive us when we would forgive others. Consequently he knows that there is not one particle of what is called modern theology in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. He knows that the trouble commenced in John, and that John was not written until probably one hundred and fifty years—possibly two hundred years—after Christ was dead. So he also knows that the sin against the Holy Ghost is an interpolation; that “I came not to bring peace but a sword,” if not an interpolation, is an absolute contradiction.

Knowing those things, and knowing, in addition to what I have stated, that there are 30,000 or 40,000 mistakes in the Old Testament, that there are a great many contradictions and absurdities, that many of the laws are cruel and infamous, and could have been made only by a barbarous people, Dr. Briggs has concluded that, after all, the torch that sheds the serenest and divinest light is the human reason, and that we must investigate the Bible as we do other books. At least, I suppose he has reached such conclusion. He may imagine that the pure gold of inspiration still runs through the quartz and porphyry of ignorance and mistake, and that all we have to do is to extract the shining metal by some process that may be called theological smelting; and if so I have no fault to find. Dr. Briggs has taken a step in advance—that is to say, the tree is growing, and when the tree goes the bark splits; when the new leaves come the old leaves are rotting on the ground.

#### AS TO PRESBYTERIANISM.

The Presbyterian Creed is a very bad creed. It has been the stumbling block, not only of the head, but of the heart for many generations. I do not know that it is, in fact, worse than any other orthodox creed; but the bad features are stated with an explicitness and emphasised with a candor that render the creed

absolutely appalling. It is amazing to me that any man ever wrote it, or that any set of men ever produced it. It is more amazing to me that any human being thought it wicked not to believe it. It is more amazing still than all the others combined that any human being ever wanted it to be true.

This creed is a relic of the middle ages. It has in it the malice, the malicious logic, the total depravity, the utter heartlessness of John Calvin, and it gives me a great pleasure to say that no Presbyterian was ever as bad as his creed. And here let me say, as I have said many times, that I do not hate Presbyterians—because among them I count some of my best friends—but I hate Presbyterianism. And I cannot illustrate this any better than by saying, I do not hate a man because he has the rheumatism, but I hate the rheumatism because it has a man.

The Presbyterian Church is growing, and is growing because, as I said at first, there is a universal tendency in the mind of a man to harmonise all that he knows or thinks he knows. This growth may be delayed. The buds of heresy may be kept back by the north wind of Princeton and by the early frost called Patton. In spite of these souvenirs of the dark ages the church must continue to grow. The theologians who regard theology as something higher than a trade tend toward Liberalism. Those who regard preaching as a business, and the inculcation of sentiment as a trade, will stand by the lowest possible views. They will cling to the letter and throw away the spirit. They prefer the dead limb to a new bud or to a new leaf. They want no more sap. They delight in the dead tree, in its unbending nature, and they mistake the stiffness of death for the vigor and resistance of life.

Now, as with Dr. Briggs, so with Dr. Bridgman, although it seems to me that he has simply jumped from the frying-pan into the fire; and why he should prefer the Episcopal creed to the Baptist is more than I can imagine. The Episcopal creed is, in fact, just as bad as the Presbyterian. It calmly and with unruffled brow utters the sentence of eternal punishment on the majority of the human race, and the Episcopalian

expects to be happy in heaven, with his son or his daughter or his mother or his wife in hell.

Dr. Bridgman will find himself exactly in the position of the Rev. Mr. Newton, provided he expresses his thought. But I account for the Bridgmans and the Newtons by the fact there is still sympathy in the human heart, and that there is still intelligence in the human brain. For my part I am glad to see this growth in the orthodox churches, and the quicker they revise their creeds the better. I oppose nothing that is good in any creed—I attack only that which is only ignorant, cruel and absurd, and I make the attack in the interest of human liberty and for the sake of human happiness.

#### ORTHODOXY THE MASTER.

What do you think of the action of the Presbyterian General Assembly at Detroit, and what effect do you think it will have on the religious growth?" was asked.

That General Assembly was controlled by the orthodox within the Church, replied Colonel Ingersoll, by the strict constructionists and by the Calvinists; by the gentlemen who not only believe the creed, not only believe that a vast majority of people are going to hell, but are really glad of it; by gentlemen who, when they feel a little blue, read about total depravity to cheer up, and when they think of the mercy of God as exhibited in their salvation, and the justice of God as illustrated by the damnation of others, their hearts burst into a kind of efflorescence of joy.

These gentlemen are opposed to all kinds of amusements except reading the Bible, the Confession of Faith and the Creed and listening to Presbyterian sermons and prayers. All these things they regard as the food of cheerfulness. They warn the elect against theatres and operas, dancing and games of chance.

Well, if their doctrine is true, there ought to be no theatres, except exhibitions of hell; there ought to be no operas, except where the music is a succession of wails for the misfortunes of man. If their doctrine is true, I do not see how any human being could ever



smile again—I do not see how a mother could welcome her babe ; everything in nature would become hateful—flowers and sunshine would simply tell us of our fate.

My doctrine is exactly the opposite of this. Let us enjoy ourselves every moment that we can. The love of the dramatic is universal. The stage has not simply amused, but it has elevated mankind. The greatest genius of our world poured the treasures of his soul into the drama. I do not believe that any girl can be corrupted, or that any man can be injured, by becoming acquainted with Isabella, or Miranda, or Juliet, or Imogene, or any of the great heroines of Shakespeare.

So I regard the opera as one of the great civilisers. No one can listen to the symphonies of Beethoven or the music of Schubert, without receiving a benefit. And no one can hear the operas of Wagner without feeling that he has been ennobled and refined.

Why is it the Presbyterians are so opposed to music in this world, and yet expect to have so much in heaven ? Is not music just as demoralising in the sky as on the earth, and does anybody believe that Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob, ever played any music comparable to Wagner ?

Why should we postpone our joy to another world ? Thousands of people take great pleasure in dancing, and I let them dance. Dancing is better than weeping and wailing over a theology born of ignorance and superstition.

And so with games of chance. There is a certain pleasure in playing games, and the pleasure is of the most innocent character. Let all these games be played at home and children will not prefer the saloon to the society of their parents. I believe in cards and billiards, and would believe in progressive euchre were it more of a game—the great objection to it is its lack of complexity. My idea is to get what little happiness you can out of this life, and to enjoy all sunshine that breaks through the clouds of misfortune. Life is poor enough at best. No one should fail to pick up every jewel of joy that can be found in his path. Every one

should be as happy as he can, provided he is not happy at the expense of another.

So let us get all we can of good between the cradle and the grave—all that we can of the truly dramatic, all that we can of enjoyment; and if, when death comes, that is the end, we have at least made the best of this life, and if there be another life, let us make the best of that.

I am doing what little I can to hasten the coming of the day when the human race will enjoy liberty—not simply of body, but liberty of mind. And by liberty of mind I mean freedom from superstition, and, added to that, the intelligence to find out the conditions of happiness; and, added to that, the wisdom to live in accordance with those conditions.

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## SPIRITUALITY.

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IF there is an abused word in our language, it is "spirituality."

It has been repeated over and over for several years by pious pretenders and snivellers as though it belonged exclusively to them.

In the early days of Christianity the "spiritual" renounced the world, with all its duties and obligations. They deserted their wives and children. They became hermits and dwelt in caves. They spent their useless years praying for their shrivelled and worthless souls.

They were too "spiritual" to love women, to build homes and to labor for children.

They were too "spiritual" to earn their bread, so they became beggars, and stood by the highway of life and held out their hands and asked alms of industry and courage.

They were too "spiritual" to be merciful. They preached the dogmas of eternal pain and gloried in "the wrath to come."

They were too "spiritual" to be civilised, so they persecuted their fellow-men for expressing their honest thoughts.

They were so "spiritual" that they invented instruments of torture, founded the Inquisition, appealed to the whip, the rack, the sword and the fagot.

They tore the flesh of their fellow-man with hooks of iron, buried their neighbors alive, cut off their eyelids, dashed out the brains of babes and cut off the breasts of mothers.

These "spiritual" wretches spent day and night on their knees praying for their own salvation and asking God to curse the best and noblest in the world.

John Calvin was intensely "spiritual" when he warmed his fleshless hands at the flames that consumed Servetus.

John Knox was constrained by his "spirituality" to utter low and loathsome calumnies against all women. All the witch-burners and quaker-maimers and mutilators were so "spiritual" that they constantly looked heavenward and longed for the skies.

These lovers of God—these haters of men—looked upon the Greek marbles as unclean, and denounced the glories of art as the snares and pitfalls of perdition.

These "spiritual" mendicants hated laughter and smiles and dimples, and exhausted their diseased and polluted imagination in the effort to make love loathsome.

From almost every pulpit was heard the denunciation of all that adds to the wealth, the joy, and glory of life. It became the fashion for the "spiritual" to malign every hope and passion that tends to humanise and refine the heart. Man was denounced as totally depraved. Woman was declared to be a perpetual temptation—her beauty a snare, and her touch pollution.

Even in our own time and country some of the ministers, no matter how radical they claim to be, retain the aroma, the odor, or the smell of the "spiritual."

They denounce some of the best and greatest—some of the benefactors of the race—for having lived on a low plane of usefulness, and for having had the pitiful ambition to make their fellows happy in this world.

Thomas Paine was a grovelling wretch because he devoted his life to the preservation of the rights of man, and Voltaire lacked the "spiritual" because he abolished torture in France, and attacked with the enthusiasm of a divine madness the monster that was endeavoring to drive the hope of liberty from the heart of man.

Humboldt was not "spiritual" enough to repeat with closed eyes the absurdities of superstition, but was so lost to all the "skyeey influences" that he was satisfied to add to the intellectual wealth of the world.

Darwin lacked "spirituality," and in its place had nothing but sincerity, patience, intelligence, the spirit of investigation, and the courage to give his honest conclusions to the world. He contented himself with giving to his fellow men the greatest and the sublimest truths that man has spoken since lips have uttered speech.

But we are now told that these soldiers of science, these heroes of liberty, these sculptors and painters, these singers of songs, these composers of music, lacked "spirituality" and after all were only common clay.

This word "spirituality" is the fortress, the breast-work, the riflepit of the Pharisee. It sustains the same relation to sincerity that Dutch metal does to pure gold.

There seems to be something about a pulpit that poisons the occupant—that changes his nature—that causes him to denounce what he really loves and to laud with the fervor of insanity a joy that he never felt—a rapture that never thrilled his soul. Hypnotised by his surroundings, he unconsciously brings to market that which he supposes the purchasers desire.

In every church, whether orthodox or radical, there are two parties—one conservative, looking backward; one radical, looking forward—and generally a minister "spiritual" enough to look both ways.

A minister who seems to be a philosopher on the street, or in the home of a sensible man, cannot withstand the atmosphere of the pulpit. The moment he stands behind a Bible cushion, like Bottom, he is "translated" and the Titania of superstition "kisses his large, fair ears."

Nothing is more amusing than to hear a clergyman denounce worldliness—ask his hearers what it will profit them to build railways and palaces and lose their own souls—inquire of the common folks before him why they waste their precious years in following trades and professions, in gathering treasures that

moths corrupt and rust devours, giving their days to the vulgar business of making money—and then see him take up a collection, knowing perfectly well that only the worldly, the very people he has denounced, can by any possibility give a dollar.

“Spirituality,” for the most part, is a mask worn by idleness, arrogance, and greed.

Some people imagine they are “spiritual” when they are sickly.

It may be well enough to ask—What is it to be really spiritual?

The spiritual man lives up to his ideal. He endeavors to make others happy. He does not despise the passions that have filled the world with art and glory. He loves his wife and children—home and fireside. He cultivates the amenities and refinements of life. He is a friend and champion of the oppressed. His sympathies are with the poor and the suffering. He attacks what he believes to be wrong, though defended by the many, and he is willing to stand for the right against the world.

He enjoys the beautiful.

In the presence of the highest creations of Art his eyes are suffused with tears. When he listens to the great melodies, the divine harmonies, he feels the sorrows and the raptures of death and love. He is intensely human. He carries in his heart the burdens of the world. He searches for the deeper meanings. He appreciates the harmonies of conduct, the melody of a perfect life.

He loves his wife and children better than any God.

He cares more for the world he lives in than for any other. He tries to discharge the duties of this life, to help those that he can reach. He believes in being useful—in making money to feed and clothe and educate the ones he loves—to assist the deserving and to support himself. He does not want to be a burden on others. He is just, generous, and sincere.

Spirituality is all of this world. It is a child of this earth, born and cradled here. It comes from no heaven, but it makes a heaven where it is. There is

no possible connection between superstition and the spiritual, or between theology and the spiritual.

The spiritually-minded man is a poet. If he does not write poetry, he lives it. He is an artist. If he does not paint pictures or chisel statues, he feels them and their beauty softens his heart. He fills the temple of his soul with all that is beautiful and he worships at the shrine of the ideal.

In all the relations of life he is faithful and true. He asks for nothing that he does not earn. He does not wish to be happy in heaven if he must receive happiness as alms. He does not rely on the goodness of another. He is not ambitious to become a winged pauper.

Spirituality is the perfect health of the soul. It is noble, manly, generous, brave, free-spoken, natural, superb.

Nothing is more sickening than the "spiritual" whine—the pretence that crawls at first and talks about humility, and then suddenly becomes arrogant and says: "I am 'spiritual'—I hold in contempt the vulgar joys of this life. You work and toil and build homes and sing songs and weave your delicate robes. You love women and children and adorn yourselves. You subdue the earth and dig for gold. You have your theatres, your operas, and all the luxuries of life; but I, beggar that I am, Pharisee that I am, am your superior because I am 'spiritual.'"

Above all things, let us be sincere.

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