

REAL BLASPHEMY

A LECTURE

BY

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REAL BLASPHEMY.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN :—There is an old story of a missionary trying to convert an Indian. The Indian made a little circle in the sand and said, “That is what the Indian knows.” Then he made another circle a little larger and said, “That is what missionary knows, but outside there the Indian knows just as much as missionary.” I am going to talk mostly outside that circle to-night. (Laughter.)

First—What is the origin of the crime known as blasphemy? It is the belief in a God who is cruel, revengeful, quick-tempered and capricious; a God who punishes the innocent for the guilty; a God who listens with delight to the shrieks of the tortured and gazes enraptured on their spurting blood. You must hold this belief before you can believe in the doctrine of blasphemy. You must believe that this God loves ceremonies; that this God knows certain men to whom he has told all his will. It then follows that, if this God loves ceremonies and has certain men to teach his will and perform these ceremonies, these men must have a place to live in. This place was called a temple,

and it was sacred. (Laughter.) And the pots and pans and kettles and all in it were sacred, too. No one but the priests must touch them.

Then this God wrote a book, in which he told his covenants to men, and he gave this book to priests to interpret. While it was sacrilege to touch with the hands the pots and pans of the temple, it was blasphemy to doubt or question anything in the book. And then the right to think was gone, and the right to use the brain that God had given was taken away, and religion was intrenched behind that citadel called blasphemy. God was a kind of juggler. He did not wish man to be impudent or curious about how he did things. You must sit in audience and watch the tricks and ask no questions. In front of every fact he has hung the impenetrable curtain of blasphemy. Now, then, all the little reason that poor man had is useless. To say anything against the priests was blasphemy, and to say anything against God was blasphemy; to ask a question was blasphemy. Finally, we sank to the level of fetishism. We began to worship inanimate things. If you will read your Bible, you will find that the Jews had a sacred box. In it were the rod of Aaron and a piece of manna and the tables of stone. To touch this box was a crime. You remember that one time, when a careless Jew thought the box was going to tip, he held it. God killed him. (Laughter.) What a warning to baggage smashers of the present day!— (Great laughter.) We find also that God concocted a hair-oil, and threatened death to any one who imitated it. And we see that he also made a certain perfume, and it was death to make anything that smelt like it. It seems to me that is carrying protection too far— (Laughter.)

It has always been blasphemy to say, "I do not know whether God exists or not." In all Catholic countries it is blasphemy to doubt the Bible, to doubt the sacredness of the relics. It always has been blasphemy to laugh at a priest, to ask questions, to investigate the Trinity. In a world of superstition, reason is blasphemy. In a world of ignorance, facts are blasphemy. In a world of cruelty, sympathy is a crime; and in a world of lies, truth is blasphemy.

Who are the real blasphemers? Webster offers the definition: "Blasphemy is an insult offered to God by attributing to him a nature and qualities differing from his real nature and qualities and dishonoring him." A very good definition, if you only know what his nature and qualities are. (Laughter.) But this is not revealed; for, studying him through the medium of the Bible, we find him illimitably contradictory. He commands us not to work on the Sabbath day, because it is holy. Yet God works himself on the Sabbath day. The sun, moon and stars swing round in their orbits, and all the creation attributed to this God goes on as on other days.

He says, Honor thy father and mother; and yet this God, in the person of Christ, offered honors and glory and happiness an hundredfold to any who would desert their father and mother for him. "Thou shalt not kill," yet God killed the firstborn of Egypt, and he commanded Joshua to kill all his enemies, not sparing old or young, man, woman or child—even an unborn child. "Thou shalt not commit adultery," he says, and yet this God gave the wives of defeated enemies to his soldiers of Joshua's army. Then again he says, "Thou shalt not steal." By this command he protected the inanimate property and the cattle of one man against

the hand of another, and yet this God who said "Thou shalt not steal," established human slavery. The products of industry were not to be interfered with, but the producer might be stolen as often as possible. "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." And yet the God who said this said also, "I have sent lying spirits unto Ahab." The only commandment he really kept was "Thou shalt have none other gods but me."

Is it blasphemous to describe this God as malicious? You know that laughter is a good index of the character of a man. You like and rejoice with the man whose laugh is free and joyous and full of good will. You fear and dislike him of the sneering laugh. How does God laugh? He says, "I will laugh at their calamity and mock at their misfortunes," speaking of some who have sinned. Think of the malice and malignity of that in an infinite God when speaking of the sufferings he is going to impose upon his children! You know that it is said of a Roman emperor that he wrote laws very finely, and posted them so high on the walls that no one could read them, and then he punished the people who disobeyed the laws. That is the acme of tyranny: to provide a punishment for breach of laws the existence of which was unknown. Now we all know that there is a sin against the Holy Ghost which will not be forgiven in this world nor in the world to come.— Hundreds of thousands of people have been driven to the insane asylum by the thought that they had committed this unpardonable sin. Every educated minister knows that that part of the Bible is an interpolation, but they all preach it. What that sin against the Holy Ghost is, is not specified. I say, "Oh! but my good God, tell me what this sin is." And he answers,—

"Maybe, now, asking is the crime. Keep quiet." So I keep quiet and go about tortured with the fear that I have committed that sin.

Is it blasphemy to describe God as needing assistance from the Legislature? (Laughter.) Calling for the aid of a mob to enforce his will here? Compare that God with a man—even with Henry Bergh. (Applause.) See what Mr. Bergh has done to awaken pity in our people and call sympathy to the rescue of suffering animals. And yet our God was a torturer of dumb beasts. Is it blasphemy to say that our God sent the famine and dried the mother's breast from her infant's withered lips? Is it blasphemy to say that he is author of the pestilence; that he ordered some of his children to consume others with fire and sword? Is it blasphemy to believe what we read in the 109th Psalm? If these things are not blasphemy, then there is no blasphemy. If there be a God, I desire him to write in the book of judgment opposite to my name that I denied these lies for him. (Great applause).

Let us take another step; let us examine the Presbyterian Confession of Faith. If it be possible to commit blasphemy, then I contend that the Presbyterian creed is most blasphemous, for, according to that, God is a cruel, unrelenting, revengeful, malignant, and utterly unreasonable tyrant. I propose now to pay a little attention to that creed. First, it confesses that there is such a thing as a light of Nature. It is sufficient to make man inexcusable, but not sufficient for salvation; just light enough to lead men to hell. Now imagine a man who will put a false light on a hill-top to lure a ship to destruction. What would we say of that man? What can we say of a God who gives this false light of Nature which, if its lessons are followed, results in

hell? That is the Presbyterian God. I don't like him. (Laughter.) Now it occurred to God that the light of Nature was somewhat weak, and he thought he'd have another burner. (Great laughter.) Therefore he made his book and gave it to his servants, the priests, that they might give it to man. It was to be accepted not on the authority of Moses, or any other writer, but because it was the word of God. How do you know it's the word of God? You're not to take the word of Moses, or David, or Jeremiah, or Isaiah, or any other man, because the authority of their work has nothing to do with the matter; this creed expressly lets them out. (Laughter.) How are you to know that it is God's word? Because it is God's word. Why is it God's word? What proof have we that it is God's word? Because it is God's word.

Now, then, I find the next thing in this wonderful confession of faith of the Presbyterians is the decree of predestination.

"III. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.

"IV. These angels and men, thus predestinated and fore-ordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.

"V. Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, has chosen in Christ unto everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto; and all to the praise of his glorious grace.

I am pleased to assure you that it is not necessary to understand this. (Laughter.) You have only to believe it. (Laughter.) You see that by the decree of God some

men and angels are predestinated to heaven and others to eternal hell, and you observe that their number is so certain and definite that it can neither be changed nor altered. You are asked to believe that billions of years ago this God knew the names of all the men and women whom he was going to save. Had 'em in his book, that being the only thing except himself that then existed. He had chosen the names by the aid of the secret council. The reason they called it secret was because they knew all about it. (Laughter.) In making his choice, God was not all bigoted. He did not choose John Smith because he foresaw that Smith was to be a Presbyterian and was to possess a loving nature, was to be honest and true and noble in all his ways, doing good himself and encouraging others in the same. Oh, no ; he was quite as likely to pick Brown in spite of the fact that he knew long before that Brown would be a wicked wretch. You see he was just as apt to send Smith to the devil and take Brown to heaven—and all for “His glory.” This God also blinds and hardens—Ah ! he's a peculiar God. If sinners persevere, he will blind and harden and give them over at last to their own wickedness instead of trying to reclaim them.

Now we come to the comforting doctrine of the total depravity of man, and this leads us to consider how he came that way. Can any person read the first chapters of Genesis and believe them unless his logic was assassinated in the cradle ? We read that our first parents were placed in a pleasant garden ; that they were given the full run of the place and only forbidden to meddle with the orchard ; that they were tempted as God knew they were to be tempted ; that they fell as God knew they would fall, and that for this fall, which he knew would happen before he made them, he fixed the curse

of original sin upon them, to be continued to all their children. Why didn't he stop right there? Why didn't he kill Adam and Eve and make another pair who didn't like apples? Then, when he brought his flood, why did he rescue eight people if their descendants were to be totally depraved and wicked? Why didn't he have his flood first and drown the Devil? (Laughter.) That would have solved the problem and he could then have tried experiments unmolested. The Presbyterian Confession says this corruption was in all men. It was born with them, it lived through their life, and after death survived in the children. Well, can't man help himself? No. I'll show you. God's got him. (Laughter.) Listen to this.

Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.

So that a natural man is not only dead in sin and unable to accomplish salvation, but he is also incapable of preparing himself therefor. Absolutely incapable of taking a trick.—(Great laughter.) He is saved, if at all, by the mercy of God. If that's the case, then why doesn't he convert us all? Oh! he doesn't. He wishes to send the most of us to hell—to show his justice. (Laughter and applause.) Elect infants dying in infancy are regenerate. So also are all persons incapable of unbelief. That includes insane persons and idiots, because an idiot is incapable of unbelief. Idiots are the only fellows who've got the deadwood on God. (Laughter and applause.) Then according to this, the man who has lived according to the light of Nature, doing the best he knew how to make this earth

happy, will be damned by God because he never heard of his son. Whose fault is it that an infinite God does not advertise? (Great laughter.) Something wrong about that. I am inclined to think that the Presbyterian Church is wrong. (Applause.) I find here how utterly unpardonable sin is.

There is no sin so small but it is punished with hell, and away you go straight to the deepest burning pit unless your heart has been purified by this confession of faith—unless this snake has crawled in there and made itself a nest. Why should we help religion? I would like people to ask themselves that question. (Loud applause.) An infinite God, by practising a reasonable economy, can get along without our assistance. Loudly this confession proclaims that salvation comes from Christ alone. What then becomes of the savage who, having never known the name of Christ, has lived according to the light of Nature, kind and heroic and generous, and possessed of and cultivating all the natural virtues? He goes to hell. (Laughter.) God, you see, loves us. (Laughter.) If he had not loved us what would he have done? The light of Nature then shows that God is good and therefore to be feared—on account of his goodness—(laughter)—to be served and honored without ceasing. And yet this creed says that on the last day God will damn any one who has walked according to this light. It's blasphemy to walk by the light of Nature. (Laughter.)

The next great doctrine is on the preservation of the saints. Now there are peculiarities about the saints. (Laughter.) They are saints without their own knowledge or free will; they may even be down on saints—(laughter)—but it's no good. God has got a rolling hitch on them, and they have to come into the kingdom

sooner or later. (Laughter.) It all depends on whether they have been elected or not. God could have made me a saint just as easy as not, but he passed me by. (Laughter.) Now you know the Presbyterians say I trample on holy things. They believe in hell and I come and say there is no hell. I hurt their hearts, they say, and they add that I am going to hell myself. (Laughter.) I thank them for that, but now let's see what these tender Presbyterians say of other churches.

Here it is : This confession of faith calls the Pope of Rome Antichrist and a son of perdition. Now there are forty Roman Catholics to one Presbyterian upon this earth. Do not the Presbyterians rather trample on the things that are holy to the Roman Catholics, and do they respect their feelings ? But the Presbyterians have a Pope themselves, composed of the Presbyters and the preachers. This confession attributes to them the keys of heaven and hell and the power to forgive sins.

“ The Lord Jesus, as king and head of his church, hath therein appointed a government in the hand of church-officers, distinct from the civil magistrate.

“ II. To these officers the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed, by virtue whereof they have power respectively, to retain and remit sins, to shut that kingdom against the impenitent both by the word and censures ; and to open it unto penitent sinners, by the ministry of the gospel, and by absolution from censures, as occasion shall require.

Therefore these men must be infallible, for God would never be so foolish as to trust fallible men with the keys of heaven and hell. I care nothing for their keys, nor for any world those keys would open or lock. I prefer the country. (Applause and laughter.) We are told by this faith that at the last day all the men and women and children who have ever lived on the earth will appear in the self same bodies they have had

when on earth. Every one who knows anything, knows the constant exchange which is going on between the vegetable and animal kingdom.

The millions of atoms which compose one of our bodies have all come from animals and vegetables, and they in their turn drew them from the animals and vegetables which preceded them. The same atoms that are now in our bodies have previously been in the bodies of our ancestors. The negro from Central Africa has many times been mahogany, and the mahogany has many times been negro. (Laughter.) A missionary goes to the cannibal islands, and a cannibal eats him, and dies. The atoms which composed the missionary's body, may compose in a great part the cannibal's body. (Laughter.) To whom will those atoms belong on the morning of the resurrection? (Laughter.)

How did the Devil, who had always lived in heaven among the best society, ever happen to become bad?—If a man surrounded by angels could become bad, why cannot a man surrounded by devils become good?

Here is the last Presbyterian joy. At the day of judgment the righteous shall be caught up to heaven, and shall stand at the right hand of Christ, and share with him in judging the wicked. Then the Presbyterian husband may have the ineffable pleasure of judging his wife and condemning her to eternal hell, and the boy will say to his mother—echoing the command of God—"Depart, thou accursed, into everlasting torment!" Here will come a man who has not believed in God. He was a soldier who took up arms to free the slave, and who rotted to death in Anderville Prison rather than accept the offer of his captors to fight against freedom. He loved his wife and his children, and his home and his native country and all mankind, and did

all the good he knew. God will say to the Presbyterians, "What shall we say to this man?" and they will answer, "Throw him into hell!" (Laughter.)—Last night there was a fire in Philadelphia, and at a window fifty feet above the ground Mr. King stood amidst flame and smoke, and pressed his children to his breast one after the other, kissed them, and threw them to the rescuers with a prayer. That was a man. At the last day God takes his children with a curse, and hurls them into eternal fire. That's your God as the Presbyterians describe him. Do you believe that God—if there is one—will ever damn me for thinking him better than he is? If this creed be true, God is the insane keeper of a mad-house.

We have in this city a clergyman who contends that this creed gives a correct picture of God, and furthermore says that God has the right to do with us what he pleases—because he made us. If I could change this lamp into a human being, that would not give me the right to torture him, and if I did torture him, and he cried out, "Why torturest thou me?" and I replied, "Because I made you," he would be right in replying, "You made me, therefore you are responsible for my happiness." No God has a right to add to the sum of human misery. And yet this minister believes an honest thought blasphemy! No doubt he is perfectly honest; otherwise he would have too much intellectual pride to take the position he does. He says that the Bible offers the only restraint to the saving passions of man. In lands where there has been no Bible, there have been mild and beneficent philosophers, like Buddha and Confucius. Is it possible that the Bible is the only restraint, and yet the nations among whom these men have lived, have been as moral as we? In

Brooklyn and New York you have the Bible, yet do you find that the restraint is a great success? Is there a city on the globe which lacks more in certain directions than some in Christendom, or even the United States? (Laughter.)

What are the natural virtues of man? Honesty, hospitality, mercy in the hour of victory, generosity. Do we not find these virtues among some savages? Do we find them among all Christians? (Applause.) I am also told by these gentlemen that the time will come when the Infidel will be silenced by society. Why, that time came long ago. Society gave the hemlock to Socrates. Society in Jerusalem cried out for Barrabas, and crucified Jesus. In every Christian country society has endeavored to crush the Infidel. Blasphemy is a padlock which hypocrisy tries to put on the lips of all honest men. At one time Christianity succeeded in silencing the Infidel, and then came Dark Ages, when all rule was ecclesiastical; when the air was filled with devils and spooks; when birth was a misfortune, life a prolonged misery of fear and torment, and death a horrible nightmare. They crushed the Infidels, Galileo, Kepler, Copernicus, Bruno, wherever a ray of light appeared in ecclesiastical darkness. But I want to tell this minister to-night, and all others like him, that that day is past. (Cheers and great applause.) All the churches in the United States cannot even crush me. (Renewed cheering.) The day for that has gone, never to return. If they think they can crush Freethought in this country, let them try it.

What must this minister think of you and the citizens of this Republic when he says, "Take the fear of hell out of men's hearts, and a majority of them will become ungovernably wicked"? Oh! think of an angel in

heaven having to allow that he was scared there ! This minister calls for my arrest. He thinks his God needs help, and would like to see the police crush the Infidel. I would advise Mr. Talmage—(hisses)—to furnish his God with a rattle, so that when he is in danger again, he can summon the police immediately ! (Laughter.)

I'll tell you what is blasphemy. It is blasphemy to live on the fruits of other men's labor, to prevent the growth of the human mind, to persecute for opinions' sake, to abuse your wife and children, to increase in any manner the sum of human misery. I'll tell you what is the true Bible. It is the sum of all the actual knowledge of man, and every man who discovers a new fact adds a new verse to this Bible. It is different from the other Bible, because that is the sum of all that its writers and readers do not know. (Applause.)

