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DO I BLASPHEME?

AN ORATION

BY

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Do I Blaspheme ?

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—Nothing can be more certain than that no human being can by any possibility control his thought. We are in this world—we see, we hear, we feel, we taste; and everything in nature makes an impression upon the brain, and that wonderful something enthroned there, with these materials, weaves what we call thought, and the brain can no more help thinking than the heart can help beating. The blood pursues its old accustomed round without our will. The heart beats without asking leave of us, and the brain thinks in spite of all we can do. This being true, no human being can justly be held responsible for his thought, any more than for the beating of his heart, any more than for the course pursued by the blood, any more than for his breathing the air. And yet, for thousands of years, thought has been held to be a crime, and thousands and millions have threatened us with eternal fire if we give to others the product of our brain! Each brain, in my judgment, is a field where nature sows the seed of thought, and thought is the crop that man reaps, and it certainly cannot be a crime to gather it; it certainly cannot be crime to tell it, which simply amounts to the right to sell your crop or exchange your product for the product of another man's brain. That is all it is. Most brains—at least some—are rather poor fields, and the orthodox

the sea, was better than prayers, better than the influence of priests; and that you had better have a good captain on board, attending to business, than thousands of priests ashore praying.

We also found that we could cure some diseases, and just as soon as we found that we could cure disease we dismissed the priest. We have left him out now of all of them, except it may be cholera and small-pox. When visited by a plague some people get frightened enough to go back to the old idea—to go back to the priest—and the priest says, “It has been sent as a punishment.” Well, sensible people began to look about; they saw that the good died as readily as the bad; they saw that disease would attack the dimpled child in the cradle and allow the murderer to go unpunished; and so they began to think, in time, that it was not sent as a punishment; that it was a natural result; and thus the priest has stepped out of medicine. In agriculture we need him no longer; he has nothing to do with the crops. All the clergymen in this world can never get one drop of rain out of the sky; and all the clergymen in the civilised world cannot save one human life. They tried it. Oh, but they say, “We do not expect a direct answer to prayer; it is the reflex action we are after.” It is like a man endeavoring to lift himself up by the straps of his boots; he will never do it, but he will get a great deal of useful exercise. The missionary goes to some pagan land and there finds a man praying to a god of stone, and it excites the wrath of the good man. I ask you to-night, does not that god answer prayer just as well as ours? Does he not cause rain? Does he not delay frost? Does he not snatch the ones that we love from the grasp of death, precisely the same as others? Is not the reflex action as wholesome in his case as in ours? Yet we have ministers that are still engaged in that business. They tell us that they have been “called”; that they do not go into their profession as other people do, but

take from the world the solace of orthodox Christianity?" What is that solace? Let us be honest. What is it? If the Christian religion be true, the grandest, greatest, noblest of the world are now in hell, and the narrowest and meanest are now in heaven. Humboldt, the Shakespeare of science, the most learned man of the most learned nation—with a mind grand enough to grasp not simply this globe, but this constellation—a man who shed light upon the whole earth, a man who honored human nature, and who won all his victories upon the field of thought—that man, pure and upright, noble beyond description, if Christianity be true, is in hell this moment. That is what they call "solace," "tidings of great joy." La Place, who read the heavens like an open book, who enlarged the horizon of human thought, is there too. Beethoven, master of melody and harmony, who added to the joy of human life, and who has borne upon the wings of harmony and melody millions of spirits to the heights of joy, with his heart still filled with melody—he is in hell to-day. Robert Burns, poet of love and liberty, from whose heart like a spring gurgling and running down the highways have come poems that have filled the world with music and added lustre to human love—that man who, in four lines, gave all the philosophy of human life; he is there with the rest. Charles Dickens, whose genius will be a perpetual shield, saving thousands and millions of children from blows; who did more to make us tender with children than any other writer that ever touched a pen—he is there with the rest, according to our Christian religion. A little while ago there died in this country a philosopher, Ralph Waldo Emerson, a man of the loftiest ideal, a perfect model of integrity, whose mind was like a placid lake and reflected truths like stars. If the Christian religion be true, he is in perdition to-night. And yet he sowed the seeds of thought, and raised the whole world intellectually to a high plane.

greatest woman the English-speaking people ever produced ; she is with the rest. And this doctrine is called "glad tidings of great joy."

Who are in heaven ? How could there be much of a heaven without the men I have named, the great men who have endeavored to make the world grander ; such men as Voltaire, such men as Diderot, such men as the encyclopedists, such men as Hume, such men as Bruno, such men as Thomas Paine ? If Christianity is true, that man who spent his life in breaking chains is now wearing the chains of God ; that man who wished to break down the prison walls of tyranny is now in the prison of the most merciful Christ. It will not do. I can hardly express to you to-night my contempt for such a doctrine ; and if it be true, I make my choice to-day, and I prefer hell.

Who is in heaven ? John Calvin ! John Knox ! Jonathan Edwards ! Torquemada !—the builders of dungeons ; the men who have obstructed the march of the human race. These are the men who are in heaven ; and who else ? Those who never had brain enough to harbor a doubt. And they ask me : "How can you be wicked enough to attack the Christian religion ?"

"Oh," but they say, "God will never forgive you if you attack the orthodox religion." Now, when I read the history of this world, and when I think of my fellow men ; when I think of the millions living in poverty, and when I know that in the very air we breathe and the sunlight that visits our homes there lurks an assassin ready to take our lives, and even when we believe we are in the fulness of health and joy, they are undermining us with their contagion—when I know that we are surrounded by all these evils, and when I think what man has suffered, I do not wonder if God can forgive man, but I do often ask myself, "Can man forgive God ?"

There is another thing. Some of these ministers—

ing at the map. What is blasphemy? It is what the mistake says about the fact. It is what last year's leaf says about this year's bud. It is the last cry of the defeated priest. Blasphemy is the little breastwork behind which hypocrisy hides; behind which mental impotency feels safe. There is no blasphemy but the open avowal of your honest thought, and he who speaks as he thinks blasphemes.

What is the next thing? That I have had the hardihood—it doesn't take much—to attack the sacred Scriptures. I have simply given my opinion. And yet they tell me that the book is holy—that you can make rags, make pulp, put ink on it, bind it in leather, and make something holy. The Catholics have a man for a Pope; the Protestants have a book. The Catholics have the best of it. If they elect an idiot he will not last for ever, but it is impossible for us to get rid of the barbarisms in our book. The Catholics said, "We will not let the common people read the Bible." That was right. If it is necessary to believe it in order to get to heaven, no man should run the risk of reading it. To allow a man to read the Bible on such conditions was to set a trap for his soul. The right way is never to open it, and when you get to the day of judgment, and they ask you if you believe it, say, "Yes, I have never read it." The Protestant gives the book to a poor man and says, "Read it, you are at liberty to read." "Well, suppose I don't believe it when I get through?" "Then you will be damned." No man should be allowed to read it on these conditions. And yet Protestants have done that infinitely cruel thing. If I thought it was necessary to believe it I would say, never read another line in it, but just believe it and stick to it. And yet these people really think that there is something miraculous about that book. They regard it as a fetish—a kind of amulet—a something charmed, that will keep off evil spirits, or bad luck; stop bullets, or do a thousand handy things for

potence is simply all-powerful, and what good would strength do with nothing? The weakest man ever born could lift as much nothing as God. And he could do as much with it after he got it lifted. And yet a doctor of divinity tells me that this world was made of omnipotence.

And right here let me say that I find even in the mind of this clergyman the seeds of infidelity. He is trying to explain things. That is a bad symptom. The greater the miracle the greater the reward for believing it. God cannot afford to reward a man for believing anything reasonable. Why, even the scribes and Pharisees would believe a reasonable thing. Do you suppose God is to crown you with eternal joy, and give you a musical instrument for believing something when the evidence is clear? No, sir! The larger the miracle the more the faith. And let me advise ministers of Chicago, and of this country, never to explain a miracle. A miracle cannot be explained. If you succeed in explaining it, the miracle is gone. If you fail, *you* are gone! My advice to the clergy is, use assertion; just say, "it is so," and the larger the miracle the greater the glory reaped in believing it. And yet this man is trying to explain, pretending that God had some raw material of some kind on hand.

And then I objected to the fact that he didn't make the sun until the fourth day, and that, consequently, the grass could not have grown; could not have thrown its mantle of green over the shoulders of the hill, and that the trees could not blossom and cast their shade upon the sod without some sunshine. And what does this man say? Why, that the rocks, when they crystallised, emitted light—even enough to raise a crop by. And he says, "Vegetation must have depended on the glare of volcanoes in the moon." What do you think would be the fate of agriculture depending on "the glare of volcanoes in the moon"? Then he says "the aurora borealis." Why, you couldn't raise cucumbers

us believe that the infinite God of the universe made the worm that was at the root of Jonah's vine on purpose to vex Jonah. Great business !

The theologians admit that David and Solomon did many bad things, but they say the wrath of God pursued them, and they were punished for their crimes. And yet David is said to have been "a man after God's own heart," and if you will read the twenty-eighth chapter of first Chronicles you will find that David died full of years and honors. So I find in the great book of prophecy, concerning Solomon: "He shall reign in peace and quietness, he shall be my son, and I will be his father, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever." Was that true? Does that look like "being pursued by the wrath of God?"

It won't do. But they say God couldn't do away with slavery suddenly, nor with polygamy all at once; that he had to do it gradually, that if he had told these Jews you mustn't have slaves, and one man that he must have one wife, and one wife that she must have one husband, he would have lost the control over them, notwithstanding all the miraculous power he had displayed. Is it not wonderful that, when they did all these miracles, nobody paid any attention to them? Isn't it wonderful that, in Egypt, when he performed these wonders, when the waters were turned into blood, when all the people were smitten with disease and covered with horrible animals, isn't it wonderful that it had no influence on them? Do you know why all these miracles didn't affect the Egyptians? They were there at the time. Isn't it wonderful, too, that the Jews who had been brought from bondage, had followed cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, who had been miraculously fed, and for whose benefit water had leaped from the rocks and followed them up and down hill through all their journeyings, isn't it wonderful when they had seen the earth opened and their companions swallowed, when they had seen God

foundling hospital, "Home for Religious Liberty!" It won't do.

What is the next thing I have said? I have taken the ground, and I take it again to-day, that the Bible has only words of humiliation for women. The Bible treats woman as the slave, the serf, of man, and wherever that book is believed in thoroughly woman is a slave. It is the infidelity in the Church that gives her what liberty she has to-day. Oh, but says the gentleman, think of the heroines of the Bible. How could a book be opposed to woman which has pictured such heroines? Well, that is a good argument. Let's answer it. Who are the heroines? The first is Esther. Who was she? Esther is a very peculiar book, and the story is about this:—Ahasuerus was a king. His wife's name was Vashti. She didn't please him. He divorced her and advertised for another. A gentleman by the name of Mordecai had a good-looking niece, and he took her to market. Her name was Esther. I don't feel like reading the whole of the second chapter, giving the details of the mode of selection. It is sufficient to say she was selected. After a time there was a gentleman by the name of Haman, who, I should think, was the cabinet, according to the story. And this man Mordecai began to put on considerable style because his niece was the king's wife, and he would not bow, and he would not rise, or he would not meet this gentleman with marks of distinguished consideration, so he made up his mind to have Mordecai hanged. Then they got out an order to kill the Jews, and Esther went to see the king. In these days they believed in the Bismarckian style of government—all power came from the king, not from the people, and if anybody went to see the king without an invitation, and he failed to hold out his sceptre to him, the person was killed, just to preserve the dignity of the monarch. When Esther arrived he held out the sceptre, and thereupon she induced him to rescind the order for killing the Jews,

comes from the tomb, and I think that sometimes there must be some mistake about it, because when he came to die again thousands of people would say, "Why, he knows all about it." Would it not be noted? Would it not be noted if a man had two funerals? You know it is a very rare thing for a man to have two funerals.

Now, then, these are all the heroines they bring forward to show you how much they thought of woman in that day. In the days of the Old Testament they did not even tell us when the mother of us all (Eve) died, nor where she is buried, nor anything about it. They do not even tell us where the mother of Christ sleeps, nor when she did. Never is she spoken of after the morning of the resurrection. He who descended from the cross went not to see her; and the son had no word for the broken-hearted mother.

The story is not true. I believe Christ was a great and good man, but he had nothing about him miraculous except the courage to tell what he thought about the religion of his day. The New Testament, in relating what occurred between Christ and his mother, mentions three instances. Once, when they thought he had been lost in Jerusalem, when he said to them, "Wist ye not that I must be about my father's business?" Next, at the marriage of Cana, when he said to his mother, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?"—words which he never said; and again from the cross, "Mother, behold thy son"; and to the disciple, "Behold thy mother!"

So of Mary Magdalene. In some respects there is no character in the New Testament that so appeals to us as one who truly loved Christ. She was first at the sepulchre; and yet when he meets her, after the resurrection, he had for her the comfort only of the chilling words, "Touch me not?" I don't believe it. There were thousand of heroic women then, there are thousands of heroic women now. Think of women who

good in the neighborhood where she resides. I have never had any other opinion. I was endeavoring to show that we are now to have an aristocracy of brain and heart—that is all; and I said, speaking of Louis Napoleon, that he was not satisfied with simply being an emperor, and having a little crown on his head, but wanted to prove that he had something in his head, so he wrote the life of Julius Cæsar, and that made him a member of the French Academy; and speaking of King William, upon whose head had been poured the divine petroleum of authority, I asked how he would like to exchange brains with Hæckel, the philosopher. Then I went over to England, and said, “Queen Victoria wears the garments of power given her by blind fortune, by eyeless chance, whilst George Eliot is arrayed in robes of glory woven in the loom of her own genius.” Thereupon I am charged with disparaging a woman. And this priest, in order to get even with me, digs open the grave of George Eliot and endeavors to stain her unresisting dust. He calls her an adulteress—the vilest word in the languages of men, and he does it because she hated the Presbyterian creed; because she, according to his definition, was an Atheist; because she lived without faith and died without fear; because she grandly bore the taunts and slanders of the Christian world. George Eliot carried tenderly in her heart the faults and frailties of her race. She saw the highway of eternal right through all the winding paths where folly vainly plucks with thorn-pierced hands the fading flowers of selfish joy; and whatever you may think, or I may think, of the one mistake in all her sad and loving life, I know and feel that in the court where her conscience sat as judge, she stood acquitted pure as light and stainless as a star. George Eliot has joined the choir invisible, whose music is the gladness of this world, and her wondrous lines, her touching poems, will be read hundreds of years after every sermon in which a priest has sought to stain her name

should say, "That can't be; the *Herald* has the largest circulation of any paper in the world."

Three hundred millions of Christians, and here are the nations that prove the truth of Christianity—Russia, 80,000,000 of Christians, I am willing to admit it, a country without freedom of speech, without freedom of press, a country in which every mouth is a bastille and every tongue a prisoner for life, a country in which assassins are the best men in it. They call that Christian. Girls sixteen years of age, for having spoken in favor of human liberty, are now working in Siberian mines. That is a Christian country. Only a little while ago a man shot at the Emperor twice. The Emperor was protected by his armor. The man was convicted, and they asked him if he wished religious consolation. "No." "Do you believe in a God?" "If there was a God there would be no Russia." Sixteen millions of Christians in Spain; Spain, that never touched a shore except as a robber; Spain, that took the gold and silver of the New World and used it as an engine of oppression in the old; a country in which cruelty was worship and murder was prayer, a country where flourished the Inquisition. I admit that Spain is a Christian country. If you don't believe it I do. Read the history of Holland, read the history of South America, read the history of Mexico—a chapter of cruelty beyond the power of language to express. I admit that Spain is orthodox. If you go there you will find the man who robs you and who asks God to forgive you, both Christians! Spain is a country where infidelity has not made much headway, but where we see now a little dawn of a brighter day, where such men as Castelar and others, who begin to see that one school-house is equal to three cathedrals, and one teacher worth all the priests. Italy is another Christian nation, with 28,000,000 of Christians. In Italy lives "the only authorised agent" of God—the Pope. For hundreds of years Italy was the beggar of

Pagan; it is human. Our fathers retired all the gods from politics. Our fathers laid down the doctrine that the right to govern comes, not from the clouds, but from the consent to be governed. Our fathers knew that if they put an infinite God into the Constitution there would be no room left for the people. Our fathers used the language of Lincoln, and they made a government of the people, for the people, by the people. This is not a Christian country. A gentleman, in one of my lectures, interrupted me to ask, "How about Delaware?" I replied: There was a man in Washington, some twenty or thirty years ago, who came there and said he was a Revolutionary soldier and wanted a pension. He was so bent and bowed over that the wind blew his shoe-strings into his eyes. They asked him how old he was, and he said fifty years. "Why, good man, you can't get a pension, because the war was over before you were born. You mustn't fool us." "Well," said he, "I'll tell you the truth; I lived sixty years in Delaware, but I never count those years, and hope God won't." And these Christian nations which have been brought forward as the witnesses of the truth of the Scriptures, owe 25,000,000,000 dols., which represents Christian war, Christian swords, Christian cannon, Christian shot, and Christian shell. The sum is so great that the imagination is dazed in its contemplation. That is the result of loving your neighbor as yourself.

The next great argument brought forward by these gentlemen is the persecution of the Jews. We are told in the nineteenth century that God has the Jews persecuted simply for the purpose of establishing the authenticity of the Scriptures, and that every Jewish home burned in Russia throws light on the gospel, and every violated Jewish maiden is another instance that God still takes an interest in the holy Scriptures. That is their doctrine. They are "fulfilling prophecy." The Christian grasps the Jew, strips him, robs him,

cerity of the martyr, and the barbarity of his persecutors. That is all it proves. But you must remember that this gentleman who believes in this doctrine is a Presbyterian, and why should a Presbyterian object? After a few hundred years of burning he expects to enjoy the eternal *auto-da-fé* of hell—an *auto-da-fé* that will be presided over by God and his angels, and they will be expected to applaud. He is a Presbyterian; and what is that? It is the worst religion of this earth. I admit that thousands and millions of Presbyterians are good people—no man ever being half so bad as his creed. I am not attacking them. I am attacking their creed. I am attacking what this religion calls “Glad tidings of great joy.” And according to these “tidings,” hundreds of billions and billions of years ago our fate was irrevocably and for ever fixed; and God, in the secret counsels of his own inscrutable will, made up his mind whom he would save and whom he would damn. When thinking of that God I always think of a mistake of a Methodist minister during the war. He commenced the prayer—and never did one more appropriate for the Presbyterian or Methodist God go up—“O, thou great and unscrupulous God.” This Presbyterian believes that billions of years before that baby in the cradle—that little dimpled child basking in the light of a mother’s smile—was born, God had made up his mind to damn it; and when Talmage looks at one of those children who will probably be damned he is cheerful about it; he enjoys it. That is Presbyterianism—that God made man and damned him for his own glory. If there is such a God I hate him with every drop of my blood; and if there is a heaven it must be where he is not. Now think of that doctrine! Only a little while ago there was a ship from Liverpool out eighty days with the rudder washed away: for ten days nothing to eat—nothing but bare decks and hunger; and the captain took a revolver in his hand, put it to his brain and said,

The Bible is not inspired. Ministers know nothing about another world. They don't know. I am satisfied there is no world of eternal pain. If there is a world of joy, so much the better. I have never put out the faintest star of human hope that ever trembled in the night of life. All I can say is, there was a time when I was not : after that I was ; now I am. And it is just as probable that I will live again as it was that I could have lived before I did.

But they say to me, "If we let the churches go, what will be left?" The world will still be here. Men and women will be here. The page of history will be here. The walls of the world will be adorned with art, the niches rich with sculpture ; music will be here, and all there is of life and joy. And there will be homes here and the fireside, and there will be a common hope without a common fear. Love will be here, and love is the only bow on life's dark cloud. Love was the first to dream immortality. Love is the morning and the evening star. It shines upon the cradle ; it sheds its radiance upon the peaceful tomb. Love is the mother of melody, for music is its voice. Love is the builder of every home, the kindler of every fire upon every hearth. Love is the enchanter, the magician that changes worthless things to joy, and makes right royal kings and queens of common clay. Love is the perfume of that wondrous flower, the heart. Without that sacred passion, that divine swoon, we are less than beasts, and with it earth is heaven, and we are gods.

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