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IS SUICIDE A SIN ?

AND

LAST WORDS ON SUICIDE.

BY

COLONEL R. G. INGERSOLL.

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[COLONEL INGERSOLL'S letter on "Is Suicide a Sin?" was written for the *New York World*, in August 1894. Many replies to it appeared in that journal, one of which was by Monsignor Ducey, a dignitary of the Romish Church in America. At the desire of the Editor, Colonel Ingersoll wound up the controversy with a general reply to his critics, under the heading of "Last Words on Suicide."]

IS SUICIDE A SIN?

I do not know whether self-killing is on the increase or not. If it is, then there must be, on the average, more trouble, more sorrow, more failure, and, consequently, more people are driven to despair. In civilised life there is a great struggle, great competition, and many fail. To fail in a great city is like being wrecked at sea. In the country a man has friends. He can get a little credit, a little help; but in the city it is different. The man is lost in the multitude. In the roar of the streets his cry is not heard. Death becomes his only friend. Death promises relief from want, from hunger and pain; and so the poor wretch lays down his burden, dashes it from his shoulders, and falls asleep.

To me all this seems very natural. The wonder is that so many endure and suffer to the natural end; that so many nurse the spark of life in huts and prisons; keep it and guard it through years of misery and want; support it by beggary, by eating the crust found in the gutter, and to whom it only gives days of weariness and nights of fear and dread. Why should the man, sitting amid the wreck of all he had—the loved ones dead; friends lost—seek to lengthen, to preserve his life? What can the future have for him?

Under many circumstances a man has the right to kill himself. When life is of no value to him, when he can be of no real assistance to others, why should a man continue? When he is of no benefit, when he is a burden to those he loves, why should he remain? The old idea was that God made us and placed us here for a purpose, and that it was our duty to remain until he

called us. The world is out-growing this absurdity. What pleasure can it give God to see a man devoured by a cancer? To see the quivering flesh slowly eaten? To see the nerves throbbing with pain? Is this a festival for God? Why should the poor wretch stay and suffer? A little morphine would give him sleep; the agony would be forgotten and he would pass unconsciously from happy dreams to painless death.

If God determines all births and deaths, of what use is medicine, and why should doctors defy, with pills and powders, the decrees of God? No one, except a few insane, act now according to this childish superstition. Why should a man, surrounded by flames in the midst of a burning building, from which there is no escape, hesitate to put a bullet through his brain or a dagger in his heart? Would it give God pleasure to see him burn? When did the man lose the right of self-defence?

So, when a man has committed some awful crime, why should he stay and ruin his family and friends? Why should he add to the injury? Why should he live, filling his days and nights, and the days and nights of others, with grief and pain, with agony and tears?

Why should a man, sentenced to imprisonment for life, hesitate to still his heart? The grave is better than the cell. Sleep is sweeter than the ache of toil. The dead have no master.

So the poor girl, betrayed and deserted—the door of home closed against her, the faces of friends averted, no hand that will help, no eye that will soften with pity, the future an abyss filled with monstrous shapes of dread and fear, her mind racked by fragments of thoughts like clouds broken by storm, pursued, surrounded by serpents of remorse, flying from horrors too great to bear—rushes with joy through the welcome door of death.

Undoubtedly there are many cases of perfectly justifiable suicide—cases in which not to end life would be a mistake, sometimes almost a crime.

As to the necessity of death, each must decide for himself. And if a man honestly decides that death is best—best for him and others—and acts upon the decision, why should he be blamed ?

Certainly the man who kills himself is not a physical coward. He may have lacked moral courage, but not physical. It may be said that some men fight duels because they are afraid to decline. They are between two fires—the chance of death and the certainty of dishonor, and they take the chance of death. So the Christian martyrs were, according to their belief between two fires—the flames of the fagot that could burn but for a few moments and the fires of God that were eternal. And they chose the flames of the fagot.

Men who fear death to that degree that they will bear all the pains and pangs that nerves can feel rather than die cannot afford to call the suicide a coward. It does not seem to me that Brutus was a coward, or that Seneca was. Surely Antony had nothing left to live for. Cato was not a craven. He acted on his judgment. So with hundreds of others who felt that they had reached the end—that the journey was done, the voyage was over, and, so feeling, stopped. It seems certain that the man who commits suicide, who “does the thing that stops all other deeds, that shackles accident and bolts up change,” is not lacking in physical courage.

If men had the courage, they would not linger in prisons, in almshouses, in hospitals; they would not bear the pangs of incurable disease, the stains of dishonor; they would not live in filth and want, in poverty and hunger; neither would they wear the chain of slavery. All this can be accounted for only by the fear of death or “of something after.”

Seneca, knowing that Nero intended to take his life, had no fear. He knew that he could defeat the emperor. He knew that "at the bottom of every river, in the coil of every rope, on the point of every dagger, Liberty sat and smiled." He knew that it was his own fault if he allowed himself to be tortured to death by his enemy. He said: "There is this blessing, that while life has but one entrance, it has exits innumerable; and, as I choose the house in which I live, the ship in which I will sail, so will I choose the time and manner of my death."

To me this is not cowardly, but manly and noble.

Under the Roman law persons found guilty of certain offences were not only destroyed, but their blood was polluted, and their children became outcasts. If, however, they died before conviction, their children were saved. Many committed suicide to save their babes. Certainly they were not cowards. Although guilty of great crimes, they had enough of honor, of manhood, left to save their innocent children. This was not cowardice.

Without doubt many suicides are caused by insanity. Men lose their property. The fear of the future overpowers them. Things lose proportion, they lose poise and balance, and, in a flash, a gleam of frenzy, kill themselves. The disappointed in love, broken in heart—the light fading from their lives—seek the refuge of death.

Those who take their lives in painful, barbarous ways—who mangle their throats with broken glass, dash themselves from towers and roofs, take poisons that torture like the rack—such persons must be insane. But those who take the facts into account, who weigh the arguments for and against, and who decide that death is best—the only good—and then resort to reasonable means, may be, so far as I can see, in full possession of their minds.

Life is not the same to all—to some a blessing, to some a curse, to some not much in any way. Some leave it with unspeakable regret, some with the keenest joy, and some with indifference.

Religion, or the decadence of religion, has a bearing upon the number of suicides. The fear of God, of judgment, of eternal pain, will stay the hand, and people so believing will suffer here until relieved by natural death. A belief in eternal agony beyond the grave will cause such believers to suffer the pangs of this life. When there is no fear of the future, when death is believed to be a dreamless sleep, men have less hesitation about ending their lives. On the other hand, orthodox religion has driven millions to insanity. It has caused parents to murder their children, and many thousands to destroy themselves and others.

It seems probable that all real, genuine orthodox believers who kill themselves must be insane, and to such a degree that their belief is forgotten. God and hell are out of their minds.

I am satisfied that many who commit suicide are insane, many are in the twilight or dusk of insanity, and many are perfectly sane.

The law we have in this State, making it a crime to attempt suicide, is cruel and absurd, and calculated to increase the number of successful suicides. When a man has suffered so much, when he has been so persecuted and pursued by disaster that he seeks the rest and sleep of death, why should the state add to the sufferings of that man? A man seeking death, knowing that he will be punished if he fails, will take extra pains and precautions to make death certain.

This law was born of superstition, passed by thoughtlessness, and enforced by ignorance and cruelty.

When the house of life becomes a prison, when the horizon has shrunk and narrowed to a cell, and when

the convict longs for the liberty of death, why should the effort to escape be regarded as a crime ?

Of course, I regard life from a natural point of view. I do not take gods, heavens, and hells into account. My horizon is the known, and my estimate of life is based upon what I know of life here in this world. People should not suffer for the sake of supernatural beings, or for other worlds, or the hopes and fears of some future state. Our joys, our sufferings, and our duties are here.

The law of New York about the attempt to commit suicide and the law as to divorce are about equal. Both are idiotic. Law cannot prevent suicide. Those who have lost all fear of death care nothing for law and its penalties. Death is liberty, absolute and eternal.

We should remember that nothing happens but the natural. Back of every suicide and every attempt to commit suicide is the natural and efficient cause. Nothing happens by chance. In this world the facts touch each other. There is no space between—no room for chance. Given a certain heart and brain, certain conditions, and suicide is the necessary result. If we wish to prevent suicide, we must change conditions. We must, by education, by invention, by art, by civilisation, add to the value of the average life. We must cultivate the brain and heart—do away with false pride and false modesty. We must become generous enough to help our fellows without degrading them. We must make industry—useful work of all kinds—honorable. We must mingle a little affection with our charity—a little fellowship. We should allow those who have sinned to really reform. We should not think only of what the wicked have done, but we should think of what we have wanted to do. People do not hate the sick. Why should they despise the mentally weak—the diseased in brain ?

Our actions are the fruit, the result of circumstances—of conditions—and we do as we must. This great truth should fill the heart with pity for the failures of our race.

Sometimes I have wondered that Christians denounce the suicide; that in old times they buried him where the roads crossed, and drove a stake through his body. They took his property from his children and gave it to the State.

If Christians would only think, they would see that orthodox religion rests upon suicide—that man was redeemed by suicide, and that, without suicide, the whole world would have been lost.

If Christ was God, then he had the power to protect himself from the Jews without hurting them. But, instead of using his power, he allowed them to take his life.

If a strong man should allow a few little children to hack him to death with knives, when he could easily have brushed them aside, would we not say that he committed suicide ?

There is no escape. If Christ was in fact God, and allowed the Jews to kill him, then he consented to his own death—refused, though perfectly able, to defend and protect himself, and was, in fact, a suicide.

We cannot reform the world by law or by superstition. As long as there shall be pain and failure, want and sorrow, agony and crime, men and women will untie life's knot and seek the peace of death.

To the hopelessly imprisoned—to the dishonored and despised—to those who have failed, who have no future, no hope—to the abandoned, the broken-hearted, to those who are only remnants and fragments of men and women—how consoling, how enchanting, is the thought of death !

And even to the most fortunate death at last is a welcome deliverer. Death is as natural and as merciful

as life. When we have journeyed long—when we are weary—when we wish for the twilight, for the dusk, for the cool kisses of the night—when the senses are dull—when the pulse is faint and low—when the mists gather on the mirror of memory—when the past is almost forgotten, the present hardly perceived—when the future has but empty hands—death is as welcome as a strain of music.

After all, death is not so terrible as joyless life. Next to eternal happiness is to sleep in the soft clasp of the cool earth, disturbed by no dream, by no thought, by no pain, by no fear, unconscious of all and for ever.

The wonder is that so many live, that, in spite of rags and want, in spite of tenement and gutter, of filth and pain, they limp and stagger and crawl beneath their burdens to the natural end. The wonder is that so few of the miserable are brave enough to die—that so many are terrified by the “something after death”—by the spectres and phantoms of superstition.

Most people are in love with life. How they cling to it in the arctic snows—how they struggle in the waves and currents of the sea—how they linger in famine—how they fight disaster and despair! On the crumbling edge of death they keep the flag flying, and go down at last full of hope and courage.

But many have not such natures. They cannot bear defeat. They are disheartened by disaster. They lie down on the field of conflict, and give the earth their blood.

They are our unfortunate brothers and sisters. We should not curse or blame—we should pity. On their pallid faces our tears should fall.

One of the best men I ever knew, with an affectionate wife, a charming and loving daughter, committed suicide. He was a man of generous impulses. His heart was loving and tender. He was conscientious, and so sensi-

tive that he blamed himself for having done what at the time he thought was wise and best. He was the victim of his virtues. Let us be merciful in our judgments.

All we can say is that the good and the bad, the loving and the malignant, the conscientious and the vicious, the educated and the ignorant, actuated by many motives, urged and pushed by circumstances and conditions—sometimes in the calm of judgment, sometimes in passion's storm and stress, sometimes in whirl and tempest of insanity—raise their hands against themselves, and desperately put out the light of life.

Those who attempt suicide should not be punished. If they are insane, they should, if possible, be restored to reason; if sane, they should be reasoned with, calmed, and assisted.

LAST WORDS ON SUICIDE.

FIRST,—In the article written by me about suicide, and published in the *World*, the ground was taken that “under many circumstances a man has a right to kill himself.”

This has been attacked with great fury by clergymen, editors, and the writers of letters. These people contend that the right of self-destruction does not, and cannot, exist. They insist that life is the gift of God, and that he only has the right to end the days of men; that it is our duty to bear the sorrows that he sends with grateful

patience. Some have denounced suicide as the worst of crimes—worse than the murder of another.

The first question, then, is :—

Has a man, under any circumstances, the right to kill himself ?

A man is being slowly devoured by a cancer ; his agony is intense, his suffering all that nerves can feel. His life is slowly being taken. Is this the work of the good God ? Did the compassionate God create the cancer so that it might feed on the quivering flesh of this victim ?

This man, suffering agonies beyond the imagination to conceive, is of no use to himself. His life is but a succession of pangs. He is of no use to his wife, his children, his friends, or society. Day after day he is rendered unconscious by drugs that numb the nerves and put the brain to sleep.

Has he the right to render himself unconscious ? Is it proper for him to take refuge in sleep ?

If there be a good God, I cannot believe that he takes pleasure in the sufferings of men—that he gloats over the agonies of his children. If there be a good God, he will, to the extent of his power, lessen the evils of life.

So I insist that the man being eaten by the cancer—a burden to himself and others, useless in every way—has the right to end his pain and pass through happy sleep to dreamless rest.

But those who have answered me would say to this man : “ It is your duty to be devoured. The good God wishes you to suffer. Your life is the gift of God. You hold it in trust, and you have no right to end it. The cancer is the creation of God, and it is your duty to furnish it with food.”

Take another case. A man is on a burning ship, the crew and the rest of the passengers have escaped—gone in the lifeboats—and he is left alone. In the wide horizon

there is no sail, no sign of help. He cannot swim. If he leaps into the sea, he drowns ; if he remains on the ship, he burns. In any event he can live but a few moments.

Those who have answered me, those who insist that under no circumstances a man has the right to take his life, would say to this man on the deck : " Remain where you are. It is the desire of your loving, heavenly Father that you be clothed in flame, that you slowly roast, that your eyes be scorched to blindness, and that you die insane with pain. Your life is not your own, only the agony is yours."

I would say to this man : " Do as you wish. If you prefer drowning to burning, leap into the sea. Between inevitable evils you have the right of choice. You can help no one, not even God, by allowing yourself to be burned, and you can injure no one, not even God, by choosing the easier death."

Let us suppose another case :—

A man has been captured by savages in Central Africa. He is about to be tortured to death. His captors are going to thrust splinters of pine into his flesh, and then set them on fire. He watches them as they make the preparations. He knows what they are about to do, and what he is about to suffer. There is no hope of rescue—of help. He has a vial of poison. He knows that he can take it, and in one moment pass beyond their power, leaving to them only the dead body.

Is this man under obligation to keep his life because God gave it until the savages, by torture, take it ? Are the savages the agents of the good God ? Are they the servants of the infinite ? Is it the duty of this man to allow them to wrap his quivering body in a garment of flame ? Has he no right to defend himself ? Is it the will of God that he die by torture ? What would any man of ordinary intelligence do in a case like this ? Is there room for discussion ?

If the man took the poison, shortened his life a few moments, escaped the tortures of savages, is it possible that he would, in another world, be tortured for ever by an infinite savage ?

Suppose another case : In the good old days when the Inquisition flourished, when men loved their enemies and murdered their friends, many frightful and ingenious ways were devised to touch the nerves of pain.

Those who loved God, who had been "born twice," would take a fellow man who had been convicted of heresy, lay him upon the floor of a dungeon, secure his arms and legs with chains, fasten him to the earth so that he could not move, put an iron vessel, the opening downward, on his stomach, place in the vessel several rats, then tie it securely to his body. Then these worshipers of God would wait until the rats, seeking food and liberty, would gnaw through the body of the victim.

Now, if a man about to be subjected to this torture, had within his hand a dagger, would it excite the wrath of the "good God" if, with one quick stroke, he found the protection of death ?

To this question there can be but one answer.

In the cases I have supposed it seems to me that each person would have the right to destroy himself. It does not seem possible that the man was under obligation to be devoured by cancer ; to remain upon the ship and perish in flame ; to throw away the poison and be tortured to death by savages ; to drop the dagger and endure the "mercies" of the Church.

If, in the cases I have supposed, men would have the right to take their lives, then I was right when I said that "under many circumstances a man has a right to kill himself."

SECOND,—I denied that persons who killed themselves were physical cowards. They may lack moral courage ;

they may exaggerate their misfortunes, lose the sense of proportion ; but the man who plunges the dagger in his heart, who sends the bullet through his brain, who leaps from some roof and dashes himself against the stones beneath, is not and cannot be a physical coward.

The basis of cowardice is the fear of injury or the fear of death, and when that fear is not only gone, but in its place is the desire to die, no matter by what means, it is impossible that cowardice should exist. The suicide wants the very thing that a coward fears. He seeks the very thing that cowardice endeavors to escape.

So the man, forced to a choice of evils, choosing the less, is not a coward, but a reasonable man.

It must be admitted that the suicide is honest with himself. He is to bear the injury, if it be one. Certainly there is no hypocrisy, and just as certainly there is no physical cowardice.

Is the man who takes morphine, rather than be eaten to death by a cancer, a coward ?

Is the man who leaps into the sea, rather than be burned, a coward ?

Is the man who takes poison, rather than be tortured to death by savages or "Christians," a coward ?

THIRD,—I also took the position that some suicides were sane ; that they acted on their best judgment ; and that they were in full possession of their minds.

Now, if, under some circumstances, a man has the right to take his life, and if, under such circumstances, he does take his life, then it cannot be said that he was insane.

Most of the persons who have tried to answer me have not only taken the ground that suicide is a crime, but some of them have said that it is the greatest of crimes. Now, if it be a crime, then the suicide must have been sane. So all persons who denounce the suicide as a

criminal admit that he was sane. Under the law, an insane person is incapable of committing a crime. All the clergymen who have answered me, and who have passionately asserted that suicide is a crime, have by that assertion admitted that those who killed themselves were sane.

They agree with me, and not only admit, but assert, that "some who have committed suicide were sane and in full possession of their minds."

It seems to me that these three propositions have been demonstrated to be true: First, that under some circumstances a man has the right to take his life; second, that the man who commits suicide is not a physical coward; and, third, that some who have committed suicide were at the time sane and in full possession of their minds.

FOURTH,—I insisted, and still insist, that suicide was and is the foundation of the Christian religion.

I still insist that, if Christ were God, he had the power to protect himself without injuring his assailants; that, having that power, it was his duty to use it; and that, failing to use it, he consented to his own death, and was guilty of suicide.

To this the clergy answer that it was self-sacrifice for the redemption of man, and that he made an atonement for the sins of believers. These ideas about redemption and atonement are born of a belief in the "fall of man," on account of the sins of our "first parents," and of the declaration that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin." The foundation has crumbled. No intelligent person now believes in the "fall of man"—that our first parents were perfect, and that their descendants grew worse and worse, at least until the coming of Christ.

Intelligent men now believe that the general course of the human race has been upward; that, while some

tribes and nations have gone backward and perished, others have advanced ; that the world is nearer civilised to-day than ever before.

Intelligent men now believe that ages and ages before the dawn of history man was a poor, naked, cruel, ignorant, and degraded savage, whose language consisted of a few sounds of terror, of hatred and delight ; that he devoured his fellow-man, having all the vices, but not all the virtues, of the beasts ; that the journey from the den to the home, the palace, has been long and painful, through many centuries of suffering, of cruelty and war ; through many ages of discovery, invention, self-sacrifice, and thought.

Redemption and atonement are left without a fact on which to rest. The idea that an infinite God, creator of all worlds, came to this grain of sand, learned the trade of a carpenter, discussed with Pharisees and scribes, and allowed a few infuriated Hebrews to put him to death that he might atone for the sins of men and redeem a few believers from the consequences of his own wrath, can find no lodgment in a good and natural brain.

In no mythology can anything more monstrously unbelievable be found.

But if Christ were a man and attacked the religion of his time because it was cruel and absurd ; if he endeavored to found a religion of kindness, of good deeds, to take the place of heartlessness and ceremony ; and if, rather than deny what he believed to be right and true, he suffered death, then he was a noble man—a benefactor of his race. But if he were God there was no need of this. The Jews did not wish to kill God. If he had only made himself known, all knees would have touched the ground. If he were God, it required no heroism to die. He knew that what we call death is but the opening of the gates of eternal life. If he were God, there was no

self-sacrifice. He had no need to suffer pain. He could have changed the crucifixion to a joy.

Even the editors of religious weeklies see that there is no escape from these conclusions—from these arguments; and so, instead of attacking the arguments, they attack the man who makes them.

FIFTH,—I denounced the law of New York that makes an attempt to commit suicide a crime.

It seems to me that one who has suffered so much that he passionately longs for death should be pitied, instead of punished—helped rather than imprisoned.

A despairing woman who had vainly sought for leave to toil, a woman without home, without friends, without bread, with clasped hands, with tear-filled eyes, with broken words of prayer, in the darkness of night, leaps from the dock, hoping, longing for the tearless sleep of death. She is rescued by a kind, courageous man, handed over to the authorities, indicted, tried, convicted, clothed in a convict's garb, and locked in a felon's cell.

To me this law seems barbarous and absurd, a law that only savages would enforce.

SIXTH,—In this discussion a curious thing has happened. For several centuries the clergy have declared that, while infidelity is a very good thing to live by, it is a bad support, a wretched consolation, in the hour of death. They have, in spite of the truth, declared that all the great unbelievers died trembling with fear, asking God for mercy, surrounded by fiends, in the torments of despair. Think of the thousands and thousands of clergymen who have described the last agonies of Voltaire, who died as peacefully as a happy child smilingly passes from play to slumber; the final anguish of Hume, who fell into his last sleep as serenely as a river, running between green and shaded banks, reaches the sea; the despair of

Thomas Paine, one of the bravest, one of the noblest men, who met the night of death untroubled as a star that meets the morning.

At the same time these ministers admitted that the average murderer could meet death on the scaffold with perfect serenity, and could smilingly ask the people, who had gathered to see him killed, to meet him in heaven.

But the honest man who has expressed his honest thoughts against the creed of the Church in power could not die in peace. God would see to it that his last moments should be filled with the insanity of fear—that with his last breath he should utter the shriek of remorse, the cry for pardon.

This has all changed, and now the clergy, in their sermons answering me, declare that the Atheists, the Freethinkers, have no fear of death—that to avoid some little annoyance, a passing inconvenience, they gladly and cheerfully put out the light of life. It is now said that infidels believe that death is the end; that it is a dreamless sleep; that it is without pain; that, therefore, they have no fear, care nothing for gods, or heavens, or hells, nothing for the threats of the pulpit, nothing for the Day of Judgment, and that when life becomes a burden they carelessly throw it down.

The infidels are so afraid of death that they commit suicide.

This certainly is a great change, and I congratulate myself on having forced the clergy to contradict themselves.

SEVENTH,—The clergy take the position that the Atheist, the unbeliever, has no standard of morality—that he can have no real conception of right and wrong. They are of the opinion that it is impossible for one to be moral or good unless he believes in some Being far above himself.

In this connection we might ask how God can be moral or good unless he believes in some Being superior to himself.

What is morality? It is the best thing to do under the circumstances. What is the best thing to do under the circumstances? That which will increase the sum of human happiness—or lessen it the least. Happiness in its highest, noblest form, is the only good; that which increases or preserves or creates happiness is moral—that which decreases it, or puts it in peril, is immoral.

It is not hard for an Atheist—for an unbeliever—to keep his hands out of the fire. He knows that burning his hands will not increase his well-being, and he is moral enough to keep them out of the flames.

So it may be said that each man acts according to his intelligence—so far as what he considers his own good is concerned. Sometimes he is swayed by passion, by prejudice, by ignorance; but when he is really intelligent, master of himself, he does what he believes is best for him. If he is intelligent enough, he knows that what is really good for him is good for others—for all the world.

It is impossible for me to see why any belief in the supernatural is necessary to have a keen perception of right and wrong. Every man who has the capacity to suffer and enjoy, and has imagination enough to give the same capacity to others, has within himself the natural basis of all morality. The idea of morality was born here, in this world, of the experience, the intelligence, of mankind. Morality is not of supernatural origin. It did not fall from the clouds, and it needs no belief in the supernatural, no supernatural promises or threats, no supernatural heavens or hells, to give it force and life. Subjects who are governed by the threats and promises of a king are merely slaves. They are not governed by the ideal—by noble views of right and wrong. They

are obedient cowards, controlled by fear, or beggars governed by rewards—by alms.

Right and wrong exist in the nature of things. Murder was just as criminal before as after the promulgation of the Ten Commandments.

EIGHTH,—Many of the clergy, some editors, and some writers of letters who have answered me have said that suicide is the worst of crimes—that a man had better murder somebody else than himself. One clergyman gives as a reason for this statement that the suicide dies in an act of sin, and, therefore, he had better kill another person. Probably he would commit a less crime if he would murder his wife or mother.

I do not see that it is any worse to die than to live in sin. To say that it is not as wicked to murder another as yourself seems absurd. The man about to kill himself wishes to die. Why is it better for him to kill another man, who wishes to live ?

To my mind, it seems clear that you had better injure yourself than another. Better be a spendthrift than a thief. Better throw away your own money than steal the money of another—better kill yourself if you wish to die than murder one whose life is full of joy.

The clergy tell us that God is everywhere, and that it is one of the greatest possible crimes to rush into his presence. It is wonderful how much they know about God, and how little about their fellow men. Wonderful the amount of their information about other worlds, and how how limited their knowledge is of this.

There may or may not be an infinite Being. I neither affirm nor deny. I am honest enough to say that I do not know. I am candid enough to admit that the question is beyond the limitations of my mind. Yet I think I know as much on that subject as any human being knows or ever knew, and that is—nothing. I do

not say that there is not another world, another life, neither do I say that there is. I say that I do not know. It seems to me that every sane and honest man must say the same. But if there be an infinitely good God and another world, then the infinitely good God will be just as good to us in that world as he is in this. If this infinitely good God loves his children in this world, he will love them in another. If he loves a man when he is alive, he will not hate him the instant he is dead.

If we are the children of an infinitely wise and powerful God, he knew exactly what we would do—the temptations that we could and could not withstand—knew exactly the effect that everything would have upon us; knew under what circumstances we would take our lives, and produced such circumstances himself. It is perfectly apparent that there are many people incapable by nature of bearing the burdens of life, incapable of preserving their mental poise in stress and strain of disaster, disease, and loss, and who, by failure, by misfortune and want, are driven to despair and insanity, in whose darkened mind there comes, like a flash of lightning in the night, the thought of death—a thought so strong, so vivid, that all fear is lost, all ties broken, all duties, all obligations, all hopes forgotten, and naught remains except a fierce and wild desire to die. Thousands and thousands become moody, melancholy—brood upon loss of money, of position, of friends, until reason abdicates and frenzy takes possession of the soul. If there be an infinitely wise and powerful God, all this was known to him from the beginning, and he so created things, established relations, put in operation causes and effects, that all that has happened was the necessary result of his own acts.

NINTH,—Nearly all who have tried to answer what I said have been exceedingly careful to misquote me, and

then answer something that I never uttered. They have declared that I have advised people who were in trouble, somewhat annoyed, to kill themselves; that I have told men who have lost their money, who had failed in business, who were not in good health, to kill themselves at once, without taking into consideration any duty that they owed to wives, children, friends, or society.

No man has a right to leave his wife to fight the battle alone if he is able to help. No man has a right to desert his children if he can possibly be of use. As long as he can add to the comfort of those he loves, as long as he can stand between wife and misery, between child and want, as long as he can be of use, it is his duty to remain.

I believe in the cheerful view, in looking at the sunny side of things, in bearing with fortitude the evils of life, in struggling against adversity, in finding the fuel of laughter even in disaster, in having confidence in tomorrow, in finding the pearl of joy amid the flints and shards, and in changing, by the alchemy of patience, even evil things to good. I believe in the gospel of cheerfulness, of courage and good nature.

Of the future I have no fear. My fate is the fate of the world—of all that live. My anxieties are about this life—this world. About the phantoms called gods and their impossible hells I have no care, no fear.

The existence of God I neither affirm nor deny. I wait. The immortality of the soul I neither affirm nor deny. I hope—hope for all of the children of men. I have never denied the existence of another world, nor the immortality of the soul. For many years I have said that the idea of immortality, that, like a sea, has ebbed and flowed in the human heart, with its countless waves of hope and fear beating against the shores and rocks of time and fate, was not born of any book, nor of any creed, nor of any religion. It was born of human affec-

tion, and it will continue to ebb and flow beneath the mists and clouds of doubt and darkness as long as love kisses the lips of death.

What I deny is the immortality of pain, the eternity of torture.

After all, the instinct of self-preservation is strong. People do not kill themselves on the advice of friends or enemies. All wish to be happy, to enjoy life; all wish for food and roof and raiment, for friends, and as long as life gives joy the idea of self-destruction never enters the human mind.

The oppressors, the tyrants, those who trample on the rights of others, the robbers of the poor, those who put wages below the living point, the ministers who make people insane by preaching the dogma of eternal pain; these are the men who drive the weak, the suffering, and the helpless, down to death.

It will not do to say that "God" has appointed a time for each to die. Of this there is, and there can be, no evidence. There is no evidence that any god takes any interest in the affairs of men—that any sides with the right or helps the weak, protects the innocent or rescues the oppressed. Even the clergy admit that their God, through all ages, has allowed his friends, his worshipers, to be imprisoned, tortured, and murdered by his enemies. Such is the protection of God. Billions of prayers have been uttered; has one been answered? Who sends plague, pestilence, and famine? Who bids the earthquake devour, and the volcano to overwhelm?

TENTH,—Again, I say that it is wonderful to me that so many men, so many women, endure and carry their burdens to the natural end; that so many, in spite of "age, ache, and penury," guard with trembling hands the spark of life; that prisoners for life toil and suffer to the last; that the helpless wretches in poor-houses and

asylums cling to life; that the exiles in Siberia, loaded with chains, scarred with the knout, live on; that the incurables, whose every breath is a pang, and for whom the future has only pain, should fear the merciful touch and clasp of death.

It is but a few steps at most from the cradle to the grave—a short journey. The suicide hastens, shortens the path, loses the afternoon, the twilight, the dusk of life's day; loses what he does not want, what he cannot bear. In the tempêt of despair, in the blind fury of madness, or in the calm of thought and choice, the beleaguered soul finds the serenity of death.

Let us leave the dead where nature leaves them. We know nothing of any realm that lies beyond the horizon of the known, beyond the end of life. Let us be honest with ourselves and others. Let us pity the suffering, the despairing, the men and women hunted and pursued by grief and shame, by misery and want, by chance and fate, until their only friend is death.

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