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Truth First and Faith Afterwards

# Morality Without God

Including Letter to  
Right Rev. Bishop Anderson

A Lecture Delivered Before  
the Independent Religious  
Society, Orchestra Hall,  
Michigan Ave. and Adams,  
Chicago, Sunday at 11 A. M.



By  
M. M. MANGASARIAN

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CHICAGO, ILL., Oct. 23, 1905.

Right Rev. Bishop Anderson,  
Chicago, Ill.

Reverend and Dear Sir:—

Last Sunday's papers announced that the Episcopal Church has arranged for a series of meetings in this city "to arouse a national revival of interest in church extension at home and abroad." The report also furnished the names of the distinguished speakers who will address these meetings at Orchestra Hall.

I write this note to suggest that, if agreeable to you and your committee, a representative of your church be sent next Sunday morning to deliver an address before the Independent Religious Society, which holds its Sunday meetings at Orchestra Hall. We shall be very much pleased to have you deliver this address, but it will be equally agreeable to us to welcome anyone whom you may delegate in your place.

If you have no objection, I request that your address be on the following important and timely question: "Can there be any morality without a belief in God?" This subject will offer you, or your representative whom you may send in your place, an opportunity to show the importance of the church in the moral education of the people.

It is understood, of course, that the lecturer of the Independent Religious Society will be upon the platform with you at Orchestra Hall, to introduce you, and to present his thoughts on the same subject. You may speak first, or if you prefer to make the closing address, there will be no objection to it.

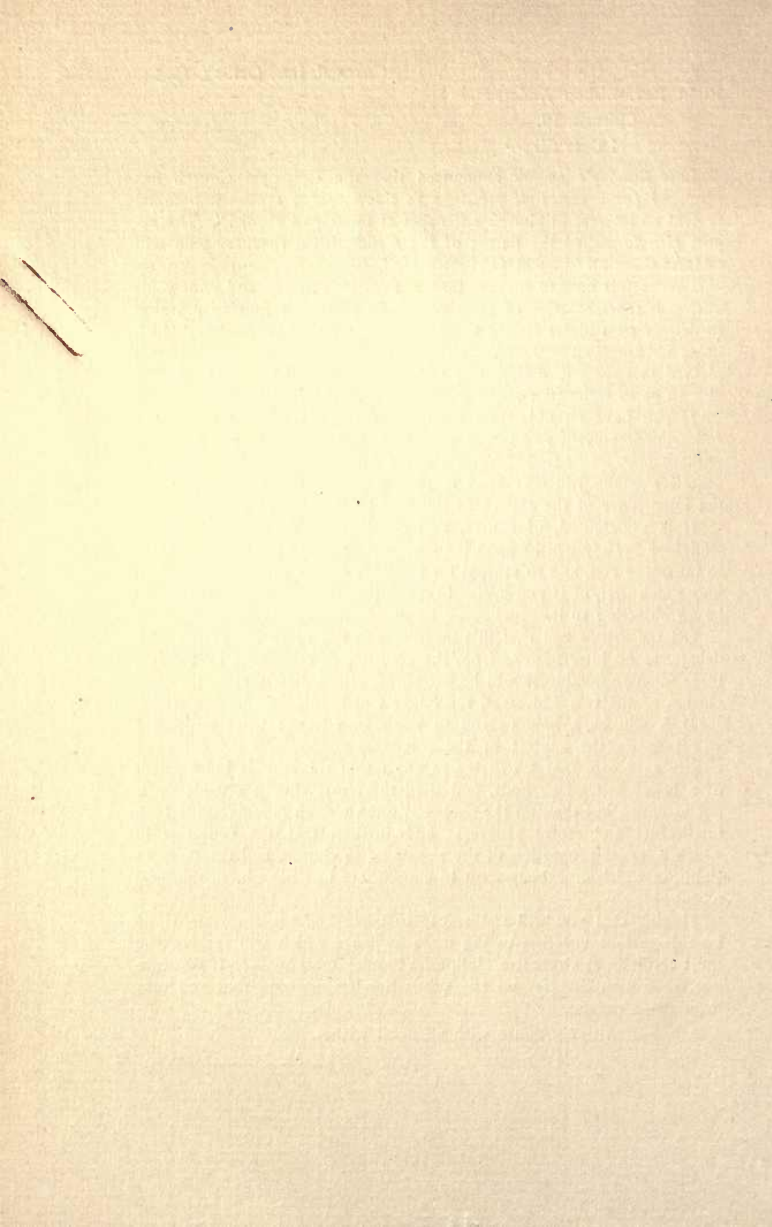
Let me assure you that this meeting will not be in the nature of a debate, as no interruptions from the audience or comments by the lecturer upon your address will be permitted. Immediately upon the conclusion of the two addresses, the house will be dismissed.

If it will be a help to you to know in advance what position I will take on the subject of the proposed addresses, let me say as clearly as I can, that I will try to show that morality is independent of a belief in God or gods, and that, therefore, church attendance is not essential, but that, on the contrary, often church going retards both intellectual and moral progress; and further, that the countries in which a larger proportion of the people go to church, and the Ages of Faith, in which everybody went to church, are and have been, the least moral.

Hoping that you will not refuse to come and present your views on this serious question to the large audience which will receive you most cordially at Orchestra Hall, next Sunday morning,—or if you cannot come next Sunday, on any other Sunday morning that you may appoint,—I remain,

Yours with all good wishes,

M. M. MANGASARIAN.





## Morality Without God.

When I invited Bishop Anderson of the Episcopal Church of this city to address you, it was from a sincere desire to give you an opportunity to hear in this house, and under the auspices of this movement, a strong and comprehensive statement from the other side, if I may use that expression. I invited the bishop because he is freer on Sundays than the average clergyman who has his own people to preach to, and in the second place, because he has the authority to send someone in his place if he could not come himself. In the third place, I addressed my letter to the Episcopalians because they were to have a convention in this same hall for the purpose of rousing interest in church work.

The Right Reverend Bishop Anderson of Chicago should have accepted cordially our invitation, yet not even of the courtesy of a reply has he deemed either you or me worthy. I do not know how to explain the good bishop's indifference to our invitation, except by saying that, either the bishop considered us hopelessly beyond the saving power of his religion, or that in his own heart he considered his creed, while good enough for the unquestioning, a little antiquated for an inquiring American audience. But the fact is now on record that he was invited to deliver his message to us, and he has not even acknowledged the invitation. To reconcile such action with the spirit of "brotherly love," publicly professed by the bishop, or with the divine command to preach the gospel to every creature, will require considerable mental dexterity.

We have heard the bishop and his people sing the hymn

*"Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war."*

Where are the soldiers? Why do they avoid a conflict if they *are soldiers*? We did not invite them to a fight; we did not ask them to a debate; we did not care to enter into a "duel of words," as some papers have put it. Far from it; we assured the bishop that there would be no questions asked by the audience, and no comments permitted. He would listen to our message and deliver his. But suppose we had invited him to a clash of ideas—to an argument—suppose we had asked him to give us "the reasons for the hope that is in him," as the Bible says—how could he decline such an invitation? The Apostle Paul reasoned before pagan rulers, and from Mars Hill, in Athens, he preached to pagan philoso-

phers—to doubters. Why should Bishop Anderson have less courage, or be more cautious?

When a great cause, or a cause that has been great once, declines a public opportunity to advance its interests, to justify its claims, to convince—to convert, it is a pretty sure sign that its fires are burning low, and that it has fallen into the “sere and yellow leaf.”

Christianity, once an aggressive and virile movement, now resorts to apologetics, compromise and concession to prolong her life. She seeks shelter against the spirit of the age. She is cultivating the art of silence. Yes, christianity is seeking a lower level. It attacks wooden idols seven thousand miles away, but at home,—in the presence of intellectual inquiry, it is paralyzed.

Of course it could be said that if we wished to hear the bishop’s gospel we could have gone to his church. Yes, we could. But so could he have come to us. Furthermore, the bishop does not say to the Hindoo, or to the Japanese, “If you want my religion, come and get it.” He sends it to them, and he even asks for iron-clads to compel the Japanese and the Chinese to hear his gospel. Yet at home he will not step around the corner to deliver his message to us.

The invitation to the bishop is a standing one; it will never be withdrawn.

The same invitation is extended herewith, this morning, to any clergyman or layman who is willing to come and deliver his message to us and to hear ours—on one condition, however—that the clergyman or the layman who accepts our invitation shall come as the representative of his denomination or church—he must come with his credentials—he must be commissioned by his church to speak for the church. And whenever any denomination in this city or country shall send a delegate to address us, he will be received with the greatest cordiality, and his message shall be listened to in a spirit of fairness.

The question: Can there be any morality without a belief in God, is a fundamental one, and the fact that we are willing to study it proves that we take more than a superficial interest in what might be called radical problems. To this question the first answer is that of philosophy, and the second is that of history. This morning we will confine ourselves to the theoretical or philosophical aspect of the question.

What is there in a belief in God which should be indispensable to the moral life? Why should the moral life be inseparably associated with a belief in God? The theological position, in which you and I were brought up, is, that morality is impossible without a belief in God. The scientist's position is that morality is independent of a belief in God. The scientist does not deny dogmatically, the existence of a God. The scientist is far from denying even that there is at the heart of the universe a mystery,—an insoluble problem, at least a problem that hitherto has refused to reveal its secret to the human mind,—but he contends that to associate the moral life with this mystery, this insoluble problem, is to envelope it in darkness and uncertainty.

“No God, no morals,” says the theologian. He even earnestly desires all unbelievers in his creed to be immoral. He is really grieved and disappointed when he finds goodness among unbelievers in his religion. He knows that the people must have morality. He knows that the world cannot last without morality, and if he can get the people to think that they can't have morality without his creed, the future of his creed will be secure.

He either denies that goodness without his creed is goodness at all, or he tries to show that the credit of it really belongs to his religion. These good unbelievers are really believers, without knowing it, argues the theologian. If the Japanese can be patriotic and honest, it is due to christian missions, declares the preacher. If Darwin and Huxley were noble men, it was because they lived in a christian atmosphere. In short, directly or indirectly, according to the theologian, his religion is responsible for all the goodness in the world. We shall not stop to inquire, for the present, how so conceited and partisan a spirit can be reconciled with true morality. But it is evident that in associating belief with morality the preacher is trying to save “belief,” not morality.

But how are we going to dislodge him from his position? It is as if the Czar of Russia, whose people are having a strenuous time just now, were to say to them, “You cannot have either order or peace in Russia without the autocracy.” He knows the people desire order and security, and hopes to make autocracy permanent by associating it with the things the people want. It is like the Republican party going before the country



and saying "You cannot have prosperity in America, unless you keep the Republican party in power," or the Democrats claiming that they alone can save the country. It is taking advantage of the people's dependence upon order, peace and prosperity to promote partisan politics. And so the theologian who says "You cannot have morality unless you have my creed," is trying to play the role of a politician. He too would see the country ruined if that would advance his party or church.

We wish to see this morning how much truth there is in the theological position. The believer in God argues that to question the existence of God is a crime. He insinuates, nay, he declares boldly, that only the wicked question the existence of the deity,—just as only rebels would question the right of the Czar to be a despot.

But to call the man who questions the existence of God wicked, is no answer to his question at all. When you have no way of meeting the argument of your opponent and you attack his character, you only prove yourself to be in great distress. To call a man whose questions you can not answer, a "monster," a "blasphemer," a "devil," is, if I may have permission to say it, the policy of cowards. If you cannot answer his question, why attack his character?

But the theologian knows what he is about. If he can get people to believe that whoever questions his creed is a scoundrel and a wretch, he will succeed in associating, in the popular mind, inquiry or doubt with immorality, and thereby he will be strengthening his position that only believers in his creed could be good. Another result would be that, if he succeeds in defaming the character of the inquirer, people will avoid him—it will not be respectable to be seen in his company or to think as he does, all of which will protect him a little longer against the disturbing inquirer.

But, listen to this: Let us suppose that every one who questions the existence of God is a villain, would that relieve clergymen from the solemn obligation of producing their evidence—of proving their dogmas?

The other day a mass meeting was held in one of our public schools to denounce reckless automobile driving. One of the speakers, a clergyman, said that Darwinism and infidelity were responsible for criminal driving. This was the clergy-



man's way of confuting Darwinism. He thinks that if he can prove that the evolutionists kill people, he will have disproved Darwinism. But Darwinism is a scientific theory, and if it is true, why, even if it killed people wholesale, that would not prove it false. If Darwinism is false, on the other hand, all the painstaking and respect for human life on the part of Darwinian automobiles would not make it true. Darwinism does not stand or fall with the characters of automobilists. But this clergyman had no other way of answering Darwinism, so he said that. It is the argument of sheer desperation. He is trifling with a subject he feels is beyond him. Instead of discussing it, he calls it names. Small talk for small people!

The Christian religion in which we were brought up, teaches that to believe is a virtue, and—not to believe is a crime. Is it true? If I were to say to you, "You must believe that George Washington was the first president of America," would you deserve any credit for believing it? The evidence is so overwhelming that you cannot help but believe it. There is no virtue in believing in a statement which cannot be reasonably doubted.

But suppose I were to say "You must also believe that George Washington invented the theory of evolution." Could you be blamed for refusing to credit a statement which there is no evidence to establish? You believe in the first statement because it agrees with the facts, you object to the second because it does not agree with the facts. In other words, you believe or question according to the nature or force of the evidence.

It is precisely the same with religion. The priest says "God made the world in six days." If he can prove it we have to believe it. If he can not prove it, we are not to be blamed for saying "not proven." The priest says Jesus was born of a Virgin. We don't deny it—we ask for evidence. If a doctrine or proposition should be accepted as true in the absence of convincing evidence, why then is not Mohammedanism as true as Christianity? Why is not a bit of blue glass as good as a God? To believe intelligently, one must have evidence; to believe blindly, one religion is as good as another.

The existence of God has always been disputed and is still in dispute today. A hundred books are written to prove his existence; a hundred others question his existence. A great

thinker in the eighteenth century said "That which is the subject of eternal dispute cannot be a foundation for anything." The scientist, therefore, in striving to separate morality from theology (for it is theology and not true religion that we object to) is rendering a great service to the cause of righteousness. He is removing morality from the sphere of uncertainty and controversy into the air and light of day.

But it is not about the existence of God alone that there is uncertainty; there is misunderstanding and disagreement also about his character. It is not enough to say there is a God,—we must agree about his character. Yet that question is even more in dispute than his existence. If the mere belief in a God is enough, why is not the Mohammedan God enough? The Christian god has a son, and you cannot approach him except through his son. The Mohammedan god has no son. How can they be the same being? The god of the Christian believes in the atoning blood of Christ. The Mohammedan god repudiates such an idea. How can they be the same being? What are we going to do,—if we associate morality with a being whose character is in dispute? Are they the friends of the moral life, who perplex our conscience with conundrums? Even when we have decided that the Mohammedan god is no god at all, and agreed upon our own deity, are we sure that his character as represented to us is calculated to encourage the moral life? That is an important point. What do we know about the character of God except what the priests tell us, and what we read in their books about him.

Now, I wish to make an explanation. It is not the first time I have been compelled to make it either. It is very unpleasant to say unpopular things. To stand up here and say the things which make me appear sacrilegious and blasphemous in the eyes of the respectable majority is not, I assure you, a pleasure; it is a sacrifice. But I have undertaken the work and I must do it.

The character of God as painted for us in the Bible is not calculated, in my humble opinion, to encourage the moral life. The god of the Jewish and Christian scriptures is not a moral being. He does not live up to his profession. He violates his own commandments. I do not say this hastily or carelessly,—I have studied the question. Take the commandment,

"Thou shalt not kill." Jehovah breaks that commandment a hundred times, if the Bible is reliable. No sooner had Moses descended from Mt. Sinai, with the Ten Commandments, than God urged him to get the Jews to kill one another, and fifty thousand were slain in one passion. The repeated commandment of God to the Jews to exterminate their neighbors,—to put men, women and children to the edge of the sword, would indicate that he did not mean to live up to his profession.

In the same way he commands "Thou shalt not steal," and then tells his people how they may spoil their neighbors, destroy their altars and temples and seize their lands.

He says "Thou shalt not commit adultery," and then commands his soldiers to capture the daughters of the Gentiles and keep them forcibly.

He says "Thou shalt not bear false witness," and on every page in the Old Testament, everything base is said of the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Assyrians, whose character modern research has vindicated, and it has been proved that their civilization was far in advance of that of their accusers.

He says "Thou shalt not covet"—and then shows them the pleasant lands and homes of other peoples, to arouse their covetousness, to satisfy which they waded through a sea of blood from Egypt to the land of Canaan.

How can a being, who does not live up to his profession,—who breaks his own commandments, be our moral ideal or model? In our attempt to reconcile God's conduct with morality, we resort to sophistry. We say God is not bound by the same moral law that we are: He can take away life, land, or property from one man and give it to another. He is above all law. He is good even when he does that which if we did it would make us criminals, and so on. Thus, sophistry becomes a profession. We develop jesuitical powers; we become intellectual gymnasts, dancing on ropes and splitting hairs to prove that God can break all the moral commandments and still be our model and pattern for morality.

It is a fact, moreover, that close identification with such a being has contributed to corrupt both the church and the state. Tyrants have claimed the right to violate the moral law whenever it interfered with their personal pleasures. As the anointed of God, kings have tried to answer all protests against their misdeeds by quoting the example of God. Priests have persecuted and exterminated whole races, and have given the



example of God who destroys the heretics as their justification. The atmosphere created about us by the consciousness that our moral teacher has himself done the very things he has forbidden is an evil one.

But it may be answered that the Old Testament is no longer the authority it once was, and that the New Testament, or rather, the character of God as revealed in Christ, is our ideal. I have the highest reverence for the beautiful things Jesus is reported to have said. I rejoice that some of his words have made twenty centuries of the world's life fragrant. I would sooner die this instant than feel that I am guilty of misrepresenting the facts, of taking a fact and twisting it into an argument for my party. If I have any happiness in life, if I have any self-respect, it is from this source,—that I am honest with the facts.

Yet the teachings of Jesus condensed in his direct command not to resist evil is the very negation of morality. We had recently the yellow fever in New Orleans. What did we do? We organized against it, threw ourselves against it, resisted it. It is the only way physical evil can be destroyed. There was a time when if the cholera came to a city it was said that God had sent it, and it was useless to fight it. Today we don't care who sent it, we don't want it, and shall not have it. We shall resist it. Consider the disclosures of dishonest banking houses and insurance companies. What do we do? We drag the guilty into the light; we examine, we investigate, we expose, we punish, we do not say to these people, you have taken so much of our money, take also what is left. We resist evil. In politics, in commerce, in every department of life we find that in resistance alone is our salvation, and yet Jesus, the Oriental monk, believing the end of the world to be close at hand, would tie our hands, paralyze our will and give evil, physical or moral, a free field. If we do not resist evil we will soon be so incapacitated for effort, so emptied of energy and ambition that we will become the victim not only of every physical pest but also of every moral iniquity. "Resist not" is just what a priest would say to his people, and a king to his subjects. But "resist" is what the liberator would say to his fellowmen.

But are there not examples of the highest morality in the Christian world? Yes, surely, and I am glad to admit it, but it is in spite of the Christian creed. It shows that,—listen to



this,—theology is listened to only one day in the week, the other six days we listen to common sense. We are better than our beliefs, better than our creeds. The Asiatic theology which we call inspired has not succeeded in perverting Anglo-Saxon human nature. That is what it proves.

What importance did Jesus attach to the moral life? Let us see. You know that when he was on the cross there were two thieves crucified with him. One of them reviled him, the other said to him "Lord, when thou comest into thy kingdom remember me," and Jesus said, "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." Ah, indeed!

What had this man done to deserve such sudden glorification? It gives me pain to say, but say I must, that a greater slight upon morality could not have been placed. Think of saying to a malefactor whom the laws of society were justly punishing,—that his life of guilt and crime, that the thefts and perhaps murders which he had committed,—were all forgiven him. Is the moral life as easy as that? Is it possible that by simply calling Jesus "Lord," and by accepting him as the Son of God, a malefactor can enter heaven, while the man whose whole life has been above reproach must go to perdition if he has not the faith of the malefactor? Why then be moral at all? What is required of men is that they use deferential language to Jesus, call him "Lord"—believe in him, and all their wickedness shall not prevent them from glory. If in one moment, and by a mere profession, a thief and a murderer can step ahead of the righteous and the honest, then the Christian religion is right, righteousness is but "filthy rags." No deeper accusation could be brought against Christianity than that it calls righteousness "filthy rags." But is such a religion—is the example of the malefactor taken to heaven, and his victims permitted to go to everlasting destruction—calculated to command the respect of noble minds? Charles Spurgeon must have had the example of Jesus in mind when he said to his hearers, in the London Tabernacle, that "thirty years of sin will take less than thirty minutes to wipe out in." To him repentance at the last moment was better than a whole life of "godless" morality.

But let us get a little closer to our subject: When the preachers state that morality is impossible without God, they really mean—without the Christian religion. As we intimated

above, the Mohammedan God and the Christian God, not being the same, can not both be true. And it is not enough to believe in the Christian God, one must also believe in Christ, the Holy Ghost, the atonement, and so on. Hence, the Christian religion is the only power that can save the world, according to the preachers. Let us follow this thought and see where it will lead us to. If you have imagination try to bring the whole world before your mind's eye. Think of the millions upon millions of human beings dwelling upon its surface—of the five hundred millions of Buddhists, the two hundred millions of Moslems, the one hundred and fifty millions of Brahmans, and to these add the millions who follow Confucius, who profess Shintoism, Judaism, Jainism, and the millions who once followed Zoroaster, Zeus, Apollo, Mithra and Isis. Compare with this tremendous host the number of people who during the last two thousand years have called themselves Christians, and tell me if it would be inspiring to think that the Christians who are but a handful compared with this innumerable majority are the only people who can be moral? If the heathen, so called by Christians, can be as moral as ourselves, then Christianity can not claim to be the only divine faith, but if it is, as the preachers claim, the only power that can save, then think of the gloom and the despair which must be the portion of every sensitive soul who realizes the hopelessness of the situation! For thousands of years our humanity was denied the Christian religion, and even now, twenty centuries after the birth of Jesus, only a handful, compared with the earth's population, have accepted the only true religion. Is this inspiring?

If we were to paint the globe in two colors—black and white—allowing the black to represent the “heathen,” and the white the Christian, we would see spread before our eyes a limitless sea of inky blackness, with a few white dots floating in it. Oh, how long will it take before this black earth of ours shall change its color? If we feel uncomfortable when we see an animal maltreated, how can we have the heart to subscribe to a doctrine that denies to the great majority of our human fellows, not only future bliss, but even the right to be moral? If instead of being a religion of love, Christianity were a religion of hate, could it be less generous? If instead of being the religion of the “meek and lowly” it were the religion of the proud and the haughty, could it have been more conceited? That people

can enjoy a religion which blackens the face of all mankind outside its pale is a pitiful commentary on human nature.

But let us follow the lead of the preacher a little further. He says there can be no morality without God, which means, no morality without the Christian religion. But which Christian religion does he mean? The Catholics denounce protestantism as a perversion; the Protestants call catholicism an imposture. Which, then, is the Christian religion without which there can be no morality? If the one is as Christian as the other, why then do they try to convert each other—why do the Catholics send missionaries to the Protestants? Evidently, it must be the protestant religion which is alone Christian, at least we in this country seem to think so. If true, then there is no morality possible without the protestant faith. Now see to what a small faith and to what a pale and sickly hope the preacher has brought us. Ah! he has led us into an alley—moldy, stuffy, and choking. The world is no longer in sight, the sun and stars have disappeared, the winds that sweep the face of the earth and the sky are heard no more. Yes, we are in an alley!

Now this protestant religion which is alone the hope of the world, what is it? A moment ago we asked, which is the Christian religion? We now ask, which is the protestant religion? Is it the church of England? Is it Lutheranism? Is it Methodism? Is it Presbyterianism? Is it Unitarianism? Is it the Baptist Church? Is it Christian Science? We believe we have mentioned enough to select from. It will not do to say that all these sects are equally Christian. Why, then, are they separated? Why do not the Baptists commune at the Lord's table with the Presbyterians, and why do the Episcopalians claim that they alone have the apostolic ordination? A Methodist preacher is not allowed to speak from an Episcopal altar—his ordination is not considered valid, and his church is only a sect in the eyes of the church of England. Which of these, then, is the true protestant religion without which no morality is possible in this world or salvation in the next? The proposition that there can be no morality without God when analyzed, comes to this: There can be no morality without the protestant religion, and it is as yet uncertain which is the Protestant religion.

How educated people can find cheer and comfort in an alley and mistake its darkness for a horizon—how they can be



happy in the belief that no one can be good or brave without believing as they do,—is beyond my comprehension. And when we remember that this Protestant religion did not exist before the sixteenth century—that it is only about three hundred years old, and that, if it is the only true religion, it waited a long time—until mankind had reached middle life—until the world had begun to turn gray—before it commenced to minister to its needs—we begin to realize that there is no thoroughfare to the alley to which the preacher has conducted us—for it is a *blind* alley, and we feel creeping upon us the chill of death and despair!

Oh, let us turn back! Let us hasten out of this darkness! Let us return to the kisses of the sun and the wind, to the air and the light! To think that the whole world, past and present, has been, is, and will be irrevocably lost, unless it accepts our three hundred years old and much-divided religion! What gentle and refined mind can stand the strain? Who can walk straight under the weight of such crushing pessimism? Is it not fortunate that only one day in seven is devoted to church-going?

When I was a Presbyterian minister, one of the hymns we used to sing in church began with the words "From Greenland's Icy Mountains," and went on to speak of "India's Coral Strands" and "Africa's Sunny Fountains," ending with this sentiment:

*"Where every prospect pleases  
And man alone is vile."*

Think of the essentially unmoral mind of the man who could write such a hymn, and of the callousness of the people who can sing it! Think of putting so false, so uncharitable, so conceited, so mean and small a thought into music, and singing it! If they wept over it, if they mourned over it, it would be less incongruous, but to sit in their pews and with the help of organ and piano to sing about the vileness of the earth's greater population seems to me in my haste, to lend considerable support to the doctrine of total depravity. The Christian will trade with the "heathen," he will travel into their country, he will trust them in business, but, on Sunday, when he is in church, when he is kneeling at the altar, in the house of his God, he calls them "vile." If the only way we can appreciate our own morality is by defaming the majority of humanity,



how contemptible must our morality be? When we sing that all the Hindoos, the Chinese, the Japanese and the rest of the non-Christian world are "vile,"—that there is no love, no devotion, no patriotism, no honesty, no friendship, no temperance, no philanthropy, no chastity, no truthfulness, no mercy and no honor, in these heathen lands—when we deny that in these parts of the world any virtue can exist, are we not bearing false witness against our neighbors?

To preach the brotherhood of man in one breath, and in the next, to call your brothers who do not believe in your creed "vile," has about it the unmistakable air of cant and hypocrisy. Is it any wonder that the "heathen" distrust the Christian nations of Europe and America?

A clergyman of Chicago, one of our leading, popular, successful, talented, and respected preachers—one who has had phenomenal success as a minister of the Gospel, and who addresses the largest Christian audiences in the country, speaking to the Young Men's Christian Association, declared that "this earth would have been a hell if Christ had not died on Golgotha." There must be something of the nature of a blight in a creed that can force from the lips of an educated and benevolent man such unlovely words. And there is. It is so self-centered, so intolerant, so exclusive, that in its eyes the whole world, except its own little corner, is nothing but "a hell." To intimate that the world which gave us our republic, the world which gave us our constitution—our jurisprudence, our law courts—the world which has crowded our galleries with works of imperishable beauty, and our libraries with immortal poetry, literature and philosophy—which has given to our universities their classical curriculum—which created Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Pericles, Seneca, Cicero and the Antonines—a world whose ruins are more wonderful than anything we possess, whose dead are more immortal than our living—to suggest that this pre-Christian world as well as the non-Christian countries to-day, was "a hell," takes my breath away. I never imagined that this fearful Asiatic creed could smite or sting an otherwise wholesome soul into such a contortion. What is there in this Palestinian Jew whom our famous preacher worships as his god that can tempt a man to bear even false witness for his sake? Heavens! How can a man with the example of heroic Japan fresh and fragrant before him, think of this earth

as a hell without his "shibboleth?" Victor Hugo says "It is a terrible thing to have been a priest once;" it is not less terrible to be an orthodox protestant preacher to-day. And why?

Because for the preacher there is something higher than the truth—his creed.

But the proposition that there can be no morality without God—that the earth would be a hell without Christ, in its final analysis means this: People will not be moral without the belief in a future life. It is the hope of future rewards which gives to the God idea its value. St. Paul himself admitted that if the Christians believed in Christ for this life only "they were of all men the most miserable." Were the clergy to tell their flocks this morning that although they felt sure of the existence of God, they had their doubts about another life, how many of them would return to worship on the following Sunday? Yes, it is the mingled hope and fear of the future which gives the belief in a God its importance. If there were no death—if men could live here forever, they would not much concern themselves about spirits and invisible beings. It is the idea that when we die we fall into the hands of God, the idea that it is a terrible thing, as the Bible says, to fall into the hands of the living God—it is this idea which lights the altars, bends the knee, and builds churches. To placate the deity that he may reward us in the future is, frankly, the object of all religious ceremonies. If this be true, then the proposition that without God there can be no morality amounts to this: Without future rewards and punishments no man will live a moral life.

This doctrine leads to the following conclusions: First, man is naturally immoral, and the only way he can be arrested in his career of vice and crime is to promise him future rewards if he will behave himself, and to menace him with hell-fire if he will not. Secondly, the proposition implies that morality *per se* is not desirable, that no one could be virtuous enough to desire virtue for its own sake, and that without great and eternal rewards morality would go a-begging. And this is religion! What then is atheism?

Why do people desire health? Certainly not for any post-mortem rewards. The health of the body is cultivated for its own beautiful sake. Health is joy, it is power, it is beauty, it is strength. Are not these enough to make it sacred to all

men? But if the health of the body does not need the prop of future rewards to commend itself to us, what good reason have we to think that morality, which is the health of the mind, is a wretched investment if there be no other life? Morality is temperance. How can our ideas about the unseen world change the nature of temperance so that instead of being a virtue it would become a stupid and irksome restraint? If it is good to be temperate in the pursuit of pleasure or wealth, or in the gratification of desire, why should our speculations about the hereafter alter our attitude toward the value of temperance and self-control in everything? God or no God, a future life or no future life, is not temperance better than intemperance? To ask why a man should practice temperance even if it be granted that it is better than intemperance is to go back to the terrible charge that man is by nature a monster, and that he will not behave well unless he is promised enormous returns in the shape of eternal rewards—palaces, mansions, crowns, thrones, in the next world.

Well, if the preachers are right it is a serious question whether so depraved a creature as man deserves to be saved at all. To have created so contemptible a creature was a great enough blunder, but think of perpetuating his race forever and ever!

Let us see how much truth there is in the preacher's estimate of human nature. Take the example of a father who is devoted to his little motherless girl. He lives for her, cares for her, protects her, and provides for her future that she may feel his blessing long after he has passed away. Will this father be less a father without the belief in future rewards? But to love and care for one's child is only natural morality, replies the clergyman. Of course it is. And that is why it is genuine, sweet, spontaneous, and untainted with expectations of a reward. It never enters his mind that he is going to be paid big wages for being good to his motherless child. He loved her, and that was heaven enough for him. It is artificial morality that pines for rewards and sickens and dies when the expected reward is questioned. If there is no future glory, who will abstain from meats on Friday, or sprinkle his children, or read the Bible or listen to sermons? But the natural virtues will spring up like flowers in the human soil. Men and women will love, will sacrifice, will perform heroic



deeds of devotion, whatever may be their theories concerning the hereafter.

Let us take another case. Why is an employer of labor good to his men? Is it because he expects to be rewarded for it in the next life? Analyze his motives and you will find that if he treats his hands well it is because he believes it to be the best way to get along with them, to earn their good will, to keep his own self-respect, and to merit the approval of the community in which he lives. He is not going to change his conduct toward his employes, nor will the motives which now influence his conduct lose their force immediately after he finds out that there is nothing coming to him in the next world for being good and just to his workmen.

The theologians appear to labor under the impression that morality being irksome and undesirable, it would be an injustice not to reward the people who put up with it with a paradise of some kind. They think that the man who did not rob his neighbor, beat his wife and children, or get drunk, ought to be rewarded. Certainly he ought—if it is for a future reward that he does not do these things. If we have an influence at all we shall see that these people who have denied themselves the pleasure of cutting their neighbors' throats, or of leading an intemperate, dishonest and brutal life, shall receive their reward.

There is no doubt that some people are kept from doing wrong by the fear of a distant hell, and others are provoked to good works by the hope of a heavenly crown. But the mistake of the theologian consists in thinking that anybody actuated by such motives can be moral. A vicious dog is not made gentle by chaining him—he is only prevented from doing harm. It is true that to prevent a savage beast from hurting people is a service to humanity. It is also true that if by preaching the fear of hell the churches succeed in preventing vicious men from doing harm, they are benefactors. Fear, while not the highest motive, is nevertheless quite effective with some people. Of course, as far as my own preference goes, I would not preach the doctrine of everlasting hell even if I could be assured it was the only thing that could save mankind. I would not care to save mankind under those conditions. There is nothing more immoral than the idea of unending torture. The worst criminals are not half so im-



moral as the creators and perpetrators of the unquestionable hell of Christian theology. I can not think of a greater insult to the human conscience than to say that this fearful establishment with its everlasting stench in our nostrils is the parent of all virtue, and that if its fires were to be extinguished there would be an end to human morality.

"It is quite easy," I imagine the preacher saying, "to talk in this strain now, but wait until you are on your death-bed." But the frightful death-bed scenes we read of in religious literature are generally fictitious. When they are not impostures, a careful investigation will show that they are the effect of pulpit sensationalism. The dying thoughts of a sane and brave man or woman are as free from torture as the sleep which closes the tired eye-lids. What does a mother think of in her last moments? She thinks of her dear ones—her children! whom she has to leave motherless in the world. How noble is human nature! And it is this nobility which makes theology jealous. The dying mother should be thinking of her God,—her soul, her creed—she should be trembling with fear, and be filled with consternation, instead of thinking lovingly and tearfully of her little ones! And when theology can not get horrible death-bed scenes, she invents them. In *Theron Ware*, the deacons of the Methodist church say to their minister, "Give us more of the death-bed scenes of Voltaire and Thomas Paine." For a long time it was a part of the vocation of the theologians to postpone the attack upon an intellectual giant until he was dead or dying.

It is not true that when people come to die they confess that the preacher's hell and his heaven are real after all. The other day a negro shot his wife and babe fatally and ran away. When the neighbors arrived upon the scene of the tragedy, they found the dying mother with her arms around her infant trying to soothe its pains. She had torn a fragment of her bodice to stop with it the bleeding wound in the child's arm. Motherhood! Was she worrying about her own soul, about eternity, about God, about the devil, about heaven, about hell! Oh, no! She had one thought which puts all preaching to shame—to ease the pain of her dying child. She forgot she was dying herself. She forgot all about her future reward—but she did not forget her child. That is the way mothers die. No Christian can die a better death.

When preachers can speak to us of a God who can love like this negro mother,—or who in the words of the English poet, Wordsworth, will

*“Never blend his pleasure or his pride  
With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels,”*

then, we shall worship him,—not for his heaven, nor from fear of his hell, but for his own blessed self.

Others may be able to tell whether or not there is another life. I can not. But whether or not there is a life beyond the grave, I know that spring will come every year, that the gentle rains will fall, the sunlight will woo and kiss all it meets, the harvests will wave, and the world will sleep and wake each day. In the same way I know that whatever the preachers may say about a godless morality, the charities, the devotions, the humanities, the friendships, and the loves, will spring up eternal in our daily lives, and beauty and glory shall never perish from human nature.

“Conscience is born of love,” wrote Shakespeare. In the alembic of this glorious truth all the terrors of the Jewish-Christian religion dissolve into nothingness. A word from Shakespeare, and the nightmares of the past are no more. Love!—attachment, devotion, friendship,—behold the cradle in which conscience was born! Fear is a tomb—it lives upon hell. Love is a cradle, nursing into being and maturity all that is good, all that is true, all that is beautiful. Says Tennyson:

*“Perplexed in faith, but pure in deeds  
At last he beat his music out.  
There lives more faith in honest doubt,  
Believe me, than in half the creeds.”*

This is music, and it descends over the babel of wrangling creeds, as the sunlight, after a long storm, over the spent and weary waves.

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