

a man be changed?—can he be bettered?—can he be altered? And the answer from every side is *yes*. Nature teaches that. You can graft the sweet on to the bitter, and greatly modify, if you do not altogether change it. Even the lightning will submit to have its course changed by an iron rod. And men believe that, and adopt their own methods for doing that work among themselves. Let me adopt an old word, and say, the world over men believe in conversion—they teach it, they preach it, they practise it. All the atheists included. Nihilism is one of their evangels, by which they attempt to convert despotism into liberal government, and the rulers into servants of the people. Ingersoll goes up and down and to and fro this continent endeavouring to convert men from what he considers the error of their thinking and doing. All are agreed then that men who think wrongly and do wrongly *should* be converted—and all are agreed that they *can* be converted, and all are further agreed that conversion means a turning of men from the doing of what is wrong to the doing of what is right. And may I put in a word again for the Bible—that Book which Free-thinkers tell me they “utterly repudiate”—by saying, that this is precisely the idea the men entertained who wrote this series of books, and this is the work they attempted with all their might of character and speech. That is what Moses set himself to do, and Isaiah, and David, and Jeremiah, and Jesus Christ, and all the Apostles; and that is what the whole Christian Church is aiming at now. Every endeavour is in that direction. We may be wrong in our creeds, and our methods of working, but the end sought is the same. We would ennoble humanity—we would teach men to put away evil, and think right, and speak right, and do right.

But all will allow again, I think, that when any man preaches conversion he must be ready to supply a motive. If I go to a man and tell him he ought to change his course of conduct, he will ask me “Why?” I may say: “You are sinning against the law of your being—you are perverting your true powers—you are making that dominant in you which should be your slave”; but he may answer “No; I am in strict accord with the law of my being, as it seems to me. I am slothful by the nature of me, and it certainly is easier to steal than to get money by hard work. I have strong passions, and it pleases me more to gratify than to repress them. You may say that more real and permanent enjoyment is to be found in repression, but that is not according to my experience, and I prefer to deal with what I know, and not speculate. It may be unpleasant to you that I shall do this or that—it may traverse all the lines of your interest—it may involve you in disaster, but it is mighty pleasant and profitable to me—so, if you please, I shall continue this way, and you can direct your preachments against some other pleasure-seeking mortal.” Now tell me, when you have got that answer, what will you say? You cannot find a motive in the man himself. Where will you find it? I have listened to Mr. Ingersoll's rhapsodies—I have read the books (many scores of them) of infidel writers—and I have nowhere found a text from which to preach a sermon on righteousness. If you could talk to a dog, what would you say to it as an inducement not to bark and bite and steal bones? You would preach the terrors of a stick or a boot—but what else? The dog would reduce the thing to a science—how to steal bones and escape the stick or the boot. And when you have persuaded man that he is only an animal blessed with a high degree of intelligence—that there is no good but nature, and that there is no responsibility attached to life beyond the day in which men live on the earth—then he simply has to ask, How shall I get most of pleasure and escape pain? True, nature supplies the motive for not thrusting your hand into the fire—for you will be burned if you do; if you throw yourself into the water you will be drowned; but why should you not steal your neighbour's coal to warm yourself? What has nature to say, if you push a man off the bridge into the river and you can prove an *alibi*? If nature teaches anything positive about this matter it is to the effect, that might is right and selfishness is the only profitable policy for life. I honestly confess to you that I can find no motive for conversion in the whole range of infidel teaching—no incentive to truth and justice and disinterested love—no call to patriotism and a far-reaching philanthropy—no inspiration that can lead to self-sacrifice and self-devotion to noble causes; for I find virtue unrewarded and vice unpunished—the wicked in high esteem and cunning triumphant. In truth, it is a war of animals, and the survival of the strongest in wit or in sinews. Said Mr. Ingersoll, in his lecture on “The Gods”:—“Nature, so far as we can discern, without passion and without intention, forms, transforms, and re-transforms for ever. She neither weeps nor rejoices. She produces man without purpose, and obliterates him without regret. She knows no distinction between the beneficial and the hurtful; poison and nutrition, pain and joy, smiles and tears, life and death are alike to her. She cannot be flattered by worship nor melted by tears. She does not know even the attitude of prayer. She appreciates no difference between poison in the fangs of snakes, and mercy in the hearts of men.” That blind, deaf, dumb, dead thing is the god he would have us adore, and from that lifeless thing he tells us we are to find a sufficient motive for converting the drunkard and the thief and the debauchee. Can you find it there? I solemnly protest that I cannot.

But now, let me turn to this teaching of ours which was ridiculed. Can we supply a motive to righteousness? I answer yes, we can—one that is

reasonable, and at the same time powerful. But, I shall be asked: are you going to adopt and defend those doctrines of conversion just before hanging, and going straight to heaven to be happy for ever? and that the man who has lived a good life, but did not believe the creed is sent to hell fire for ever? No, I am neither going to adopt nor defend them. But they are in the Bible, said Mr. Ingersoll. I deny that; they are not in the Bible at all; they are perversions of Biblical teaching; nothing less. I believe in God, in redemption, in conversion, in the existence of heaven and of hell, but not in the God, the redemption, the heaven and the hell at which Col. Ingersoll poked so much rough fun. If he described a form of orthodoxy, then I am not orthodox. I hold and believe that man is responsible for his actions upon the earth; that he may find power to turn from his sin and do right; that is, be converted; and at any time; there in the prison cell; there on the scaffold, for the divine influence is always bearing upon him while the soul of him lives, and that conversion is the first step in the new way of right thinking and right doing. Faith in God can alone induce to that step, for if there be no God, no hereafter, no heaven and no hell, why should the step be taken? Infidelity never arrested a sinner yet; never made a drunkard a sober man, or turned a thief to honesty; but faith in a loving and just God has done it in countless instances, and is doing it now every hour of every day. But, I am not going to teach that because a man is converted—has changed his mind, his purposes, his conduct—has swung round to walk the other way, he is free from all his past transgressions, and has no more to do with the consequences of them. For I do not believe it. I do not believe that the villain goes from the deserved scaffold to a heaven of eternal happiness. I do not believe that a man may live in open and secret iniquity for three score years, and then, when his trembling limbs have told him that he is near to the gates of death, can teach his wretched mind, which for two score years has been under the control of self-interest, to believe in God and Christ, and then, wipe out the past and be treated as if all the life had been good and pure. I believe that God forgives the believing penitent, and helps him to recover what he has lost. I believe that Christ died for men, and in some way to us not known was their ransom. The prodigal returned to home and father, but, his goods and his health were gone; a drunkard recovers himself, but he cannot escape the penalty of what he has done; it is in every fibre of his body and every faculty of his mind. It is well to be converted—nay, it *must* be; you had better begin to think right and do right here and now; but, I believe that the sinner must bear the consequences of his sins; that no faith, no penitence, no prayers, no tears, no mercy of God and no cross of Christ can come between him and the penalty of his wrong-doing. There is law in eternity as surely as in time, and law is inexorable—“whatsoever a man sows *that* shall he also reap.” You cannot show me anywhere in all the Bible the teaching that because a man repents and believes, and feels conscious of forgiveness, he is at once severed from all the evil of his past life. Christ nowhere taught it. He taught men to believe in the infinite charity of God; He taught them to believe in a Redeemer and redemption; He taught them the reality of a new birth from sin to righteousness; He taught them the great doctrines of reward and punishment, of heaven and hell—but, reward and punishment for what? For believing or not believing a certain creed? No; but reward for right living, and punishment for sin. Yes, he condemned their unbelief, but it was not because they could not believe, it was because they *would* not believe; it was because they rejected the light, choosing darkness because their deeds were evil. If the Bible can be said to have a doctrine of conversion at all, it is simply this—a new birth, the beginning of a new life, a change of thought and purpose from the way of sin to the way of righteousness, and God's love and power and holiness supply the motive and the redemption.

But, heaven and hell! what of the doctrines as to these? To my mind nothing can be more absurd than the idea that heaven and hell are particular places, in the which all enjoy alike or suffer alike. I know that it was an idea the Jews had in the latter part of their history, and it would be quite easy, if I had the time, to trace the growth of it in their minds. They took it from Paganism and gave it a Jewish cast; and Christians have taken it from them and given it a Christian cast. There is but one passage in Scripture which seems to speak of an instant decision of one's destiny; the word of Christ to the dying thief—which to say the least of it is of doubtful interpretation. To talk of hell—a place where God is not and all is only torment, is to talk what is not true to common sense and the Bible. There can be no place where He is not; He is in every ray of light that gleams in the temple of heaven, and in every tongue of fire that scorches a conscience in hell. What then? I take it that heaven and hell are states, and not places at all, the torment or the happiness is from within, and not produced by outward circumstance. We know how it is now. Here on earth, in this city, in homes, in this church men meet and mingle, some of them walking in a very heaven of light and peace, the heart glad, the mind satisfied, the conscience sweetly at rest, and all life running over with music—while others are in hell, the heart full of a bitter remorse, the mind a very chaos, the conscience a vulture—the fires of hell have taken hold upon them. I know that there are some who neither suffer these torments,