

lecture on "The Gods" before the same audience, his answer was: "Give me an orthodox Presbyterian and I will take him," and I think he meant it, for his argument during the evening had been directed against the ultra forms of orthodoxy in our churches. Having classed us all together as believing that everything in the Bible between the two covers was divinely given, word for word, and figure for figure, he demolished us all with a few witty recitals of incongruities. Having predicated that all religious people had charged God with sending famine, and fire, and flood, and disease, it was easy for him to lay his finger upon fatal anomalies, and to point out most palpable flaws, and to say as the conclusion of it all—these people are weak-minded, and there is no God at all; no God but nature, and no religion but happiness. In precisely the same manner were we treated in his discussion of the doctrines of conversion, and heaven, and hell. Illustration after illustration, and story upon story were given to show the unreasonableness and absurdity of these doctrines. Most ribald fun, in most execrable taste was poked at the doctrine of a Judgment, and scenes imagined and pictured after a most exaggerated and sensational manner. By the doctrine of conversion he seemed to understand that any man by accepting the creed, especially "the rib story," and the order Joshua is said to have issued to the sun and the moon, and the account of Jonah's strange adventures, and at best, the teaching of the Bible about God, would, upon dying, go straight to heaven no matter how bad his life had been; whereas, the man who had lived a good, honest manly life, but did not believe "the rib story" and some other things would, on dying, go straight to hell. The idea of heaven with which the orthodox are credited is, that it is a place, or an open space, with raised seats around, upon which the people, or their released spirits sit and play harps; and it is well within sight of hell, which is a place of literal fire, unmitigated by any memory or any hope. Now, I need not say to you that this is an exaggeration of even orthodoxy. I will not say it is a caricature, for it is not exactly that, but it is an exaggeration. For example, we were given a picture: a man going to his home and wife and family, whom he loved truly and well, and for whom he laboured honestly; he does not accept the creeds, "the rib story" and others, but he is a true man—when suddenly a dastardly villain springs upon him, and stabs him to the death. The murdered man goes straight to hell, to wallow in tormenting fire, for ever and for evermore. The murderer is arrested, is tried, is condemned to death as the penalty of his crime; he appeals against the judgment, but it is not allowed; he petitions the supreme power for pardon, and it is refused, and *then*, he gets religion; says he believes in God and Christ; calls his friends and tells them he is forgiven, and is very joyful and is going to mount from the gallows to heaven, and be blessed for ever. Mr. Ingersoll derides that; points out cases of men who have died, not having believed the creeds, but have lived honest, dutiful lives, and at the judgment are condemned to hell, and others who have lived in all manners of wickedness, but have believed before dying, and they are adjudged to heaven and the order given to hand them a costly harp. Indeed, the lecturer tried hard to convey the impression that orthodox teaching is to the effect that the better lives men live the deeper they will be damned if they do not believe the creed, and the worse lives men live the higher they will be in honour and glory if they only believe. And he derides that! So do I. I am ashamed of it, and when I read those stories of villains about to carry out a just sentence on the scaffold, boasting of their faith and certainty of heaven, I could weep for the shame that is brought upon our common and glorious Christianity. And it is only fair to say that while orthodoxy makes such things possible, that is not orthodoxy. I believe that the churches in general would hesitate, if they would not refuse to acknowledge such teachings. I am sure the majority of the laity would, and I believe a majority of the clergy would. Mr. Ingersoll repudiates that! So do I, with all my mind and heart and soul. I do not accept the doctrine, and no Pope, no church, no presbytery, no synod, no conference, no diaconate shall ever make me. Put me down as opposed to that, and be sure that I shall not be afraid to speak against it.

Then I am an infidel? Good friends that is precisely what I am not. Put me down as opposed with all my mind and heart and soul to infidelity. And I want to enter my earnest protest here against that kind of speech which some of you have indulged in; you have said: "Mr. Bray does not say out all he thinks and feels about these matters." Why should I hide anything? What have I at stake that I should not have the courage of my convictions? If I were of other opinions, I would say it; and if I believed like Col. Ingersoll, I too could lecture for a living, or I could go into business or into politics, where my infidel notions would be of material service to me. I will tell you why some—they call themselves Free Thinkers, imagine and say I do not tell all my mind on these matters; they cannot think of a man taking up a position which is at neither extreme—that is to say, which is neither orthodox nor infidel. Mr. Ingersoll argued that way, and the audience seemed to accept the argument. Orthodoxy—that unreasonable and indefensible teaching about the murder and the harp, and the honest man and the flames—that to the letter and figure, or infidelity. That is absurd, said Ingersoll, therefore there is no God; the Bible is not a true book; the doctrines of conversion and heaven and hell are figments of diseased fancies, the chimeras of disordered brains, falsehoods

invented to dethrone our lordly reason and beguile the unwary people. I answer, Not so: these things are absurd, therefore let us seek the truth. I am not compelled to choose between this orthodoxy and that infidelity—I can find reason and right at neither; but it does not follow that I can nowhere find reason and right. Mr. Ingersoll says: Take that picture of the murdered man and the murderer—the one driven into hell because he has not believed what he could not believe, and had not a last and supreme moment to consider; and the murderer, who has exhausted all possible means of escaping the penalty of his crime, and who never would have believed if his life had been spared, getting religion, and dying in pomp, and going to heaven and joy forever—that is unreasonable. Yes, that is unreasonable; but what do you offer me? You say, Therefore there is no God, no conversion, no heaven, no hell. What then of those men? The murdered man, what has he suffered? Had he lived a week longer he might have met with some cruel disaster which would have made life a misery and dying a torture. At any rate, so far as he was concerned, his life of care and toil was only abridged a little, and he was put to sleep suddenly. And the murderer, what do you visit upon him? Nothing much. You put an end to a life of villainy, which could not have much joy in it; you kill him dramatically; and there they lie, murdered and murderer, their bones turning to dust and mingling together, and that is the end of the story. As if a dog had killed a dog; in rage you rush upon the scene and kill the survivor, and that is the end of it all. The stream of time flows on—bubbles rise and float awhile and break; but nothing more. You say that in that orthodoxy there is no reason: and I say that in your theory of atheism there is an utter lack of justice. I want the Reason which I do not find in orthodoxy, and the Justice which I do not find in infidelity.

Let us look into these things a little carefully and without prejudice. Be careful about putting away old and widely-believed doctrines—for generally they are or have been the outgrowth of great and important facts. First of all you will admit that we live, and that we are under some kind of moral law. No matter now from whence it came, here it is. We have written and unwritten rules for our guidance. The law of the land prohibits certain wrongs and punishes them, but wrongs are possible of doing which no statute law can reach. We are sure that they are wrongs—not because it is written in a book, but our moral sense tells us that they are wrongs, and by moral law they are prohibited. But the moral law is not strong enough to prevent the working of evil. So that there is sin in the world; that is an actual fact. Things are twisted out of their proper shape; things which should be straight are made crooked; there are perversions and deflections everywhere. That is the teaching of nature; your reason will not deny that, for it is a fact of experience; and my free-thinking friends will allow me to say that the same thing is found in the Bible—that is to say, the Bible recognises the fact of sin in man. I want to establish these points of agreement, in order, first of all, that we may have some common ground to stand upon, and secondly, that I may rid myself of the charge many have brought against me during the last few days, to the effect that like all orthodox arguers I rush to the Bible for everything—"a book," say my critics, "which we utterly repudiate." You see that I do not do that at all. I find man here, and wrong in man—wrong entering into his thoughts and breaking out in all his life. I find hideous plague spots over all the body of humanity—the rich grind the faces of the poor, the strong oppress the weak, the cunning cheat the slow of brain, the far-seeing outwit the near-sighted; there is wrong in private and in public life. The Bible recognises that fact, and tells us the story of its evil working. So that you cannot utterly repudiate the Bible so far as that part of it goes. Well, a step further. I find in nature a very evident struggle against that wrong. She tries to heal the damage done by flood and fire, by rending earthquake and fierce volcano; strong winds break up heavy vapours, and the strong rays of the sun, which burn up the grass and the corn, suck up the water from the sea and send it along as cloud to pour out in rain upon the parched field. Mr. Ingersoll told us that he had once frightened a man who asked him how he would have made the earth better if he had had the power, by saying, "I would have made good health catching." If Mr. Ingersoll will study the laws of his god a little more, he will find that just the improvement he suggests was thought of and made long ago, and good health is wonderfully catching. And so I find among men a disposition to interfere with this sin or wrong doing. It is the one subject which agitates society; it is the object of our legislation, of our reformatories and penitentiaries and prisons; we try to prevent it; we punish men when they have been guilty of it, if law or public opinion can reach them; and we try to cure it. And all that they did three thousand years and more ago. Moses worked that way; so did all the prophets and many of the priests. You can read the story of it there, in that book which free-thinkers "utterly repudiate."

Now, I want to take another step. Sin is a fact of life and experience, which implies that right—rightness of thought, of word, and of deed—is a fact of life and experience. The primary object of all law is to make men do right always—to make right-thinking the normal condition of the mind, and right doing the habit of the hand. But the law has not prevailed—for the general mind has not that normal condition, and the hand is not habituated to the doing of good works of justice and truth. Then comes the question, *Can*