

forever.

*Labitur et labetur omne in volubilis ævum.*

Mr. Ingersoll is not, as some have estimated him, the most formidable enemy that Christianity has encountered since the time of Julian the Apostate. But he stands at the head of living infidels, "by merit raised to that bad eminence." His mental organization has the peculiar defects which fit him for such a place. He is all imagination and no discretion. He rises sometimes into a region of wild poetry, where he can colour everything to suit himself. His motto well expresses the character of his argumentation—"mountains are as unstable as clouds": a fancy is as good as a fact, and a high-sounding period is rather better than a logical demonstration. His inordinate self-confidence makes him at once ferocious and fearless. He was a practical politician before he "took the stump" against Christianity, and at all times he has proved his capacity to "split the ears of the groundlings," and make the unskillful laugh. The article before us is the least objectionable of all his productions. Its style is higher, and better suited to the weight of the theme. Here the violence of his fierce invective is moderated; his scurrility gives place to an attempt at sophistry less shocking if not more true; and his coarse jokes are either excluded altogether, or else veiled in the descent obscurity of general terms. Such a paper from such a man, at a time like the present, is not wholly unworthy of a grave contradiction.

He makes certain charges which we answer by an explicit denial, and thus an issue is made, upon which, as a pleader would say, we "put ourselves upon the country." He avers that a certain "something called Christianity" is a false faith imposed upon the world without evidence; that the facts it pretends to rest on are mere inventions; that its doctrines are pernicious; that its requirements are unreasonable; and that its sanctions are cruel. I deny all this, and assert, on the contrary, that its doctrines are divinely revealed; its fundamental facts incontestably proved; its morality perfectly free from all taint of error, and its influence most beneficent upon society in general, and upon all individuals who accept it and make it their rule of action.

How shall this be determined? Not by what we call divine revelation, for that would be begging the question; not by sentiment, taste, or temper, for these are as likely to be false as true; but by in-

ductive reasoning from evidence, of which the value is to be measured according to those rules of logic which enlightened and just men everywhere have adopted to guide them in the search for truth. We can appeal only to that rational love of justice, and that detestation of falsehood, which fair-minded persons of good intelligence bring to the consideration of other important subjects when it becomes their duty to decide upon them. In short, I want a decision upon sound judicial principles.

Gibson, the great Chief-Justice of Pennsylvania, once said to certain skeptical friends of his: "Give Christianity a common law trial; submit the evidence *pro* and *con* to an impartial jury under the direction of a competent court, and the verdict will assuredly be in its favour." This deliverance, coming from the most illustrious judge of his time, not at all given to expressions of sentimental piety, and quite incapable of speaking on any subject for mere effect, staggered the unbelief of those who heard it. I did not know him then, except by his great reputation for ability and integrity, but my thoughts were strongly influenced by his authority, and I learned to set a still higher value upon all his opinions when, in after life, I was honoured with his close and intimate friendship.

Let Christianity have a trial on Mr. Ingersoll's indictment, and give us a decision *secundum allegata et probata*. I will confine myself strictly to the record; that is to say, I will meet the accusations contained in this paper, and not those made elsewhere by him or others.

His first specification against Christianity is the belief of its disciples "that there is a personal God, the creator of the material universe." If God made the world it was a most stupendous miracle, and all miracles, according to Mr. Ingersoll's idea, are "the children of mendacity." To admit the one great miracle of creation would be an admission that other miracles are at least probable, and that would ruin his whole case. But you cannot catch the leviathan of atheism with a hook. The universe, he says, is natural—it came into being of its own accord; it made its own laws at the start, and afterward improved itself considerably by spontaneous evolution. It would be a mere waste of time and space to enumerate the proofs which show that the universe was created by a pre-existent and self-conscious Being, of power and wisdom to us inconceivable. Conviction of the fact (miraculous though it be) forces itself