

necessary to salvation; that Christ was offered as an atonement for the sins of the world; that the punishment of the human soul will go on forever; that heaven is the reward of faith, and hell the penalty of honest investigation; take from it all miraculous stories,—and I admit that all the good passages are true. If they are true, it makes no difference whether they are inspired or not. Inspiration is only necessary to give authority to that which is repugnant to human reason. Only that which never happened needs to be substantiated by miracles. The universe is natural.

The Church must cease to insist that the passages upholding the institutions of savage men were inspired of God. The dogma of the atonement must be abandoned. Good deeds must take the place of faith. The savagery of eternal punishment must be renounced. Credulity is not a virtue, and investigation is not a crime. Miracles are the children of mendacity. Nothing can be more wonderful than the majestic, unbroken, sublime, and eternal procession of causes and effects.

Reason must be the final arbiter. "Inspired" books attested by miracles cannot stand against a demonstrated fact. A religion that does not command the respect of the greatest minds will, in a little while, excite the mockery of all. Every civilized man believes in the liberty of thought. Is it possible that God is intolerant? Is an act infamous in man one of the virtues of the Deity? Could there be progress in heaven without intellectual liberty? Is the freedom of the future to exist only in perdition? Is it not, after all, barely possible that a man acting like Christ can be saved? Is a man to be eternally rewarded for believing according to evidence, without evidence, or against evidence? Are we to be saved because we are good, or because another was virtuous? Is credulity to be winged and crowned, while honest doubt is chained and damned?

Do not misunderstand me. My position is that the cruel passages in the Old Testament are not inspired; that slavery, polygamy, wars of extermination, and religious persecution always have been, are, and forever will be, abhorred and cursed by the honest, the virtuous, and the loving; that the innocent cannot justly suffer for the guilty, and that vicarious vice and vicarious virtue are equally absurd; that eternal punishment is eternal revenge; that only the natural can happen; that miracles prove the dishonesty of the few and the credulity of the many; and that, according to Mat-

thew, Mark, and Luke, salvation does not depend upon belief, nor the atonement, nor a "second birth," but that these gospels are in exact harmony with the declaration of the great Persian: "Taking the first footstep with the good thought, the second with the good word, and the third with the good deed, I entered paradise."

The dogmas of the past no longer reach the level of the highest thought, nor satisfy the hunger of the heart. While dusty faiths, embalmed and sepulchred in ancient texts, remain the same, the sympathies of men enlarge; the brain no longer kills its young; the happy lips give liberty to honest thoughts; the mental firmament expands and lifts; the broken clouds drift by; the hideous dreams, the foul, misshapen children of the monstrous night, dissolve and fade.

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MR. BLACK.

"Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing, more than any man in all Venice; his reasons are as two grains of wheat hid in two bushels of chaff; you shall seek all day ere you find them; and when you have them, they are not worth the search."—*Merchant of Venice*.

THE request to answer the foregoing paper comes to me, not in the form but with the effect of a challenge, which I cannot decline without seeming to acknowledge that the religion of the civilized world is an absurd superstition, propagated by imposters, professed by hypocrites, and believed only by credulous dupes.

But why should I, an unlearned and unauthorized layman, be placed in such a predicament? The explanation is easy enough. This is no business of the priests. Their prescribed duty is to preach the word, in the full assurance that it will commend itself to all good and honest hearts by its own manifest veracity and the singular purity of its precepts. They cannot afford to turn away from their proper work, and leave willing hearers uninstructed, while they wrangle in vain with a predetermined opponent. They were warned to expect slander, indignity, and insult, and these are among the evils which they must not resist.

It will be seen that I am assuming no clerical function. I am not out on the forlorn hope of converting Mr. Ingersoll. I am no preacher exhorting a sinner to leave the seat of the scornful and come up to the bench of the penitents. My duty is more analogous to that of the