

Hell

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Robert Green Ingersoll

THE idea of a hell was born of revenge and brutality on the one side, and cowardice on the other. In my judgment the American people are too brave, too charitable, too generous, too magnanimous, to believe in the infamous dogma of an eternal hell. I have no respect for any human being who believes in it. I have no respect for any man who preaches it. I have no respect for the man who will pollute the imagination of childhood with that infamous lie. I have no respect for the man who will add to the sorrows of this world with the frightful dogma. I have no respect for any man who endeavours to put that infinite cloud, that infinite shadow, over the heart of humanity.

For a good many years the learned intellects of Christendom have been examining into the religions of other countries in the world, the religions of the thousands that have passed away. They examined into the religions of Egypt, the religion of Greece, the religion of Rome and of the Scandinavian countries. In the presence of the ruins of those religions the learned men of Christendom insisted that those religions were baseless, that they were fraudulent. But they have all passed away. While this was being done the Christianity of our day applauded, and when the learned men got through with the religions of other countries they turned their attention to our religion. By the same mode of reasoning, by the same methods, by the same arguments that they used with the old religions, they were overturning the religion of our day.

Why? Every religion in this world is the work of man. Every book has been written by man. Men existed before the books. If books had existed before man, I might admit there was such a thing as a sacred volume. Man never had an idea-- man will never have an idea, except those supplied to him by his surroundings. Every idea in the world that man has come to him by nature. You can imagine an animal with the hoof of a bison, with the pouch of the kangaroo, with the wings of an eagle, with the beak of a bird, and with the tail of the lion; and yet every point of this monster you borrowed from nature. Every thing you can think of, every thing you can dream of, is borrowed from your surroundings. And there is nothing on this earth coming from any other sphere whatever. Man has produced every religion in the world. And

why? Because each religion bodes forth the knowledge and the belief of the people at the time it was made, and in no book is there any knowledge found, except that of the people who wrote it. In no book is there found any knowledge, except that of the time in which it was written. Barbarians have produced, and always will produce barbarian religions; barbarians have produced and always will produce ideas in harmony with their surroundings, and all the religions of the past were produced by barbarians. We are making religions to-day. That is to say, we are changing them, and the religion of to-day is not the religion of one year ago. What changed it? Science has done it; education and the growing heart of man has done it. And just to the extent that we become civilized ourselves, will we improve the religion of

our fathers. If the religion of one hundred years ago, compared with the religion of to-day is so low, what will it be in one thousand years?

If we continue making the inroads upon orthodoxy which we have been making during the last twenty-five years, what will it be fifty years from to-night? It will have to be remonetized by that time, or else it will not be legal tender. In my judgment, every religion that stands by appealing to miracles is dishonoured. Every religion in the world has denounced every other religion as a fraud. That proves to me that they all tell the truth--about others. Why? suppose Mr. Smith should tell Mr. Brown that he--Smith--saw a corpse get out of the grave, and that when he first saw it, it was covered with the worms of death, and that in his

presence it was re-clothed in healthy, beautiful flesh. And then suppose Mr. Brown should tell Mr. Smith, "I saw the same thing myself. I was in a graveyard once, and I saw a dead man rise." Suppose then that Smith should say to Brown, "You're a liar," and Brown should reply to Smith, "And you're a liar," what would you think? It would simply be because Smith, never having seen it himself, didn't believe Brown; and Brown, never having seen it, didn't believe Smith had. Now, if Smith had really seen it, and Brown told him he had seen it too, then Smith would regard it as a corroboration of his story, and he would regard Brown as one of his principal witnesses. But, on the contrary, he says, "You never saw it." So when a man says, "I was upon Mount Sinai, and there I met God, and he told me, 'Stand aside and let me drown these

people; " and another man says to him, "I was up upon a mountain, and there I met the Supreme Brahma," and Moses says, "That's not true," and contends that the other man never did see Brahma, and he contends that Moses never did see God, that is in my judgment proof that they both speak truly.

Every religion, then, has charged every other religion with having been an unmitigated fraud; and yet, if any man had ever seen the miracle himself, his mind would be prepared to believe that another man had seen the same thing. Whenever a man appeals to a miracle he tells-what is not true. Truth relies upon reason, and the undeviating course of all the laws of nature.

Now, we have a religion--that is, some people have. I do not pretend to have religion myself. I believe in living for this world--that's my doctrine--to make everybody happy that you can. Let the future take care of itself, and if I ever touch the shores of another world, I will be just as ready and anxious to get into some remunerative employment as anybody else. Now, we have got in this country a religion which men have preached for about eighteen hundred years, and just in proportion as their belief in that religion has grown great, men have grown mean and wicked; just in proportion as they have ceased to believe it, men have become just and charitable. And if they believed it to-night as they once believed it, I wouldn't be allowed to speak in the city of New York. It is from the coldness and infidelity of

the churches that I get my right to preach; and I say it to their credit. Now we have a religion. What is it? They say in the first place that all this vast universe was created by a Deity. I don't know whether it was or not. They say, too, that had it not been for the first sin of Adam there would never have been any devil in this world, and if there had been no devil there would have been no sin, and if there had been no sin there never would have been any death. For my part I am glad there was death in this world, because that gave me a chance. Somebody had to die to give me room, and when my turn comes I'll be willing to let somebody else take my place. But whether there is another life or not, if there is duty being who gave me this, I shall thank him from the bottom of my heart, because, upon the whole, my life

has been a joy. Now they say, because of this first sin all man was consigned to eternal hell. And this because Adam was our representative. Well, I always had an idea that my representative ought to live somewhere about the same time I do. I always had an idea that I should have some voice in choosing my representative. And if I had a voice I never should have voted for the old gentleman called Adam. Now in order to regain man from the frightful hell of eternity, Christ himself came to this world and took upon himself flesh, and in order that we might know the road to eternal salvation he gave us a book, and that book is called the Bible, and wherever that Bible has been read men have immediately commenced cutting each others' throats. Wherever that Bible has been circulated, they have invented

inquisitions and instruments of torture, and have commenced hating each other with all their hearts. But I am told now, we are all told, that this Bible is the foundation of civilization; I say that this Bible is the foundation of hell, and we never shall get rid of the dogma of hell until we get rid of the idea that it is an inspired book.

Now, what does the Bible teach? I am not going to talk about what this minister or that minister says it teaches; the question is, "Ought a man to be sent to eternal hell for not believing this Bible to be the work of a merciful Father?" and the only way to find out is to read it; and as very few people do read it now, I will read a few passages. This is the book to be read in the schools, in order to make our children charitable and good; this is

the book that we must read in order that our children may have ideas of mercy, charity, and justice.

Does the Bible teach mercy? Now be honest. I read: "I will make mine arrows drunk with blood; and my sword shall devour flesh?" (Deut. xxxii. 42.) Pretty good start for a merciful God! "That thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thine enemies, and the tongue of thy dogs in the same?" (Ps. lxxviii. 23.) Again: "And the Lord thy God will put out those nations before thee by little and little; thou mayest not consume them at once, lest the beasts of the field increase upon thee?" (Deut vii. 23.)

Read the glorious exploits of Joshua, chosen captain of the Lord, and note how, having coveted the fertile land of

Goshen, he smote the people, houghed their horses, despoiled their cities, and put all that breathed to the edge of the sword, as the moral God had commanded. Moreover he came against them suddenly, not a solitary trumpet blast from the celestial orchestra was there calling upon the people to yield, or to move out their country, bag and baggage. No; instantaneous fire and butchery. Observe, too, the charming naivete of the statement: "There-was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites." Why? Because the Lord "hardened their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle that he might destroy them utterly."

Do you wish further examples of a God of mercy? Read in Exodus how the Lord

ordered the harrying of cities and the wholesale slaughter of the inhabitants. "Thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth; but thou shalt utterly destroy them." The old men and the maidens, and the sweet dimpled babe smiling upon the lap of its mother.

Recollect, these instructions were given to an army of invasion, and the people who were fighting were guilty of the crime of fighting for their homes. The Old Testament is full of curses, vengeance, jealousy, and hatred; of barbarity and brutality. Now, do not for one moment believe that these words were written by the most merciful God. Don't pluck from the heart the sweet flowers of piety and crush them by superstition. Do not believe that God ever ordered the murder of innocent women and helpless babes.

Do not let this supposition turn your hearts into stone. When anything is said to have been written by the most merciful God, and the thing is not merciful, then I deny it, and say he never wrote it. I will live by the standard of reason, and if thinking in accordance with reason takes me to perdition, then I will go to hell with my reason rather than to heaven without it.

Now, does this Bible teach political freedom, or does it teach political tyranny? Does it teach a man to resist oppression? Does it teach a man to tear from the throne of tyranny the crowned thing and robber called a king? Let us see. "Let every soul be subject to the higher 'powers; for there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." (Rom. xiii. 1.) All the kings, and

princes, and governors, and thieves, and robbers that happened to be in authority were placed there by the infinite father of all! "Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God." And when George Washington resisted the power of George the Third, he resisted the power of God. And when our fathers said "resistance to tyrants is obedience to God," they falsified the Bible itself. "For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject not only for wrath, but also for conscience's sake." (Rom. xiii. 4. 5.)

I deny this wretched doctrine. Wherever the sword of rebellion is drawn to protect

the rights of man, I am a rebel. Wherever the sword of rebellion is drawn to give man liberty, to clothe him in all his just rights, I am on the side of that rebellion. I deny that rulers are crowned by the Most High; the rulers are the people, and the presidents and others are but the servants of the people. All authority comes from the people, and not from the aristocracy of the air. Upon these texts of Scripture which I have just read rest the thrones of Europe, and these are the voices that are repeated from age to age by brainless kings and heartless kings.

Does the Bible give woman her rights? Is this Bible humane? Does it treat woman as she ought to be treated, or is it barbarian? Let us see. "Let women learn in silence with all subjection." (1 Timothy

ii. 11.) If a woman would know anything let her ask her husband.

Imagine the ignorance of a lady who had only that source of information. "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but be in silence." Observe the magnificent reason. "For Adam was first formed, then Eve, And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, was in the transgression." Splendid! "But I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God." That is to say, there is as much difference between the woman and the man as there is between Christ and man. There is the liberty of woman. "For the man is not of the woman, but the woman is of the man. Neither was the

man created for the woman." Well, what was he created for? "But the woman was created for the man. Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands, as unto the Lord." There's liberty! "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church; and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ so let the wives to be their own husbands in every thing." Even the Saviour didn't put man and woman upon any equality. The man could divorce the wife, but the wife could not divorce the husband, and according to the Old Testament, the mother had to ask forgiveness for being the mother of babes. Splendid!

Here is something from the Old Testament: "When thou goest forth to war against thine enemies, and the Lord

thy God hath delivered them into thine hands, and thou hast taken them captive. And seest among the captives a beautiful woman, and hast a desire unto her, that thou wouldst have her to thy wife. Then thou shalt bring her home to thine house; and she shall shave her head, and pare her nails," (Deut. xxi. 10, 11, 12.) That is in self-defence, I suppose!

This sacred book, this foundation of human liberty, of morality, does it teach concubinage and polygamy? Read the thirty-first chapter of Numbers, read the twenty-first chapter of Deuteronomy, read the blessed lives of Abraham, of David, or of Solomon, and then tell me that the sacred scripture does not teach polygamy and concubinage? All the language of the world is not sufficient to express the infamy of polygamy; it

makes man a beast and woman a stone. It destroys the fireside and makes virtue an outcast. And yet it is the doctrine of the Bible. The doctrine defended by Luther and Melancthon! It takes from our language those sweetest words--father, husband, wife, and mother, and takes us back to barbarism and fills our hearts with the crawling, slimy serpents.

Does the Bible teach the existence of devils? Of course it does. Yes, it teaches not only the existence of a good Being, but a bad being. This good Being had to have a home; that home was heaven. This bad being had to have a home; and that home was hell. This hell is supposed to be nearer to earth than I would care to have it, and to be peopled with spirits, hobgoblins, and all the fiery shapes with which the imagination of ignorance and

fear could people that horrible place; and the Bible teaches the existence of hell and this big devil and all these little devils. The Bible teaches the doctrine of witchcraft, and makes us believe that there are sorcerers and witches, and that the dead could be raised by the power of sorcery. Read the account of the spiritual seance at which Saul and the Witch of Endor assisted, and which resulted in the calling up of Samuel. Does any one believe that now?

In another place it is declared that witchcraft is an abomination unto the Lord. He wanted no rivals in this business. Now what does the New Testament teach? Turn to the story of Jesus being led into the wilderness for the devil to experiment upon him. He was starved forty days and forty nights, and

then asked to work a miracle! After that the devil placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, and asked him to cast himself down to prove that he was the Son of God. Is it possible that any one can believe that the devil absolutely took God Almighty, and put him on the pinnacle of the temple, and endeavoured to persuade him to jump down? "Again the devil taketh him into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan, for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." (Matt. iv. 8-11.) Now, the devil must have known at that time that he was God, and God at that time must have

known that the other was the devil. How could the latter be conceived to have the impudence to promise God a world in which he did not have a tax-title to an inch of land.

Then there is that pig story. When the "boss" devil had left Jesus and angels had ministered unto him, and he had taken a short sea voyage, there came out to meet him a man possessed of a number of minor devils, and a man whom no one could tame, nor bind, nor not with chains, and who dwelt among the tombs. A nice quiet citizen truly! And after some parley the devils beseech Jesus, saying:--"Send us into the swine that we may enter into them. And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine; and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the

sea (there were about two thousand) and were choked in the sea." No doubt a good riddance; but what the owner of the swine thought of the transaction, or whether he was indemnified for the loss of his porkers deponent cannot say. Are we reasonable men in the nineteenth century in the United States of America and believe this? I deny it. These fables of devils have covered the world with blood; they have filled the world with fear, and I am going to do what I can to free the world of these insatiate monsters. Small and great they have filled the world with monsters, they have made the world a synonym of liar and ferocity.

And it is this book that ought to be read in all the schools--this book that teaches man to enslave his brother. If it is larceny

to steal the result of labour, how much more is it larceny to steal the labourer himself. "Moreover, of the children of the strangers that do so sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you, which they begat in your land; and they shall be your possession. And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen for ever; but over your brethren the children of Israel, ye shall not rule one over another with rigour." (Lev. xv. 45, 46.) Why? Because they are not as good as you will buy of the heathen roundabout.

These are edifying texts. Consult also Exod. xxi. 1, where you will find a complete slave code. No detail is wanting. Under certain conditions the master is to

bring his servant to the judges, then he is to lug him to the doorpost and bore his ear through with an awl--; "And he shall serve him for ever." This is the doctrine which has ever lent itself to the chains of slavery, and makes a man imprison himself rather than desert wife and children. I hate it!

What does this same book with its glad tidings of great joy for all people say of the rights of children? Let us see how they are treated by the "most merciful God." "If a man hath a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them. Then shall his father and his mother lay hold of him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the

gate of his place. And they shall say unto the elders of his city: This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice, he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die; so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear and fear." (Deut. xxi. 18.)

Abraham was commanded to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice, and he intended to obey. The boy was not consulted.

Did you ever hear the story of Jephthah's daughter? Is there in the history of the world a sadder story than that? Can a God who would accept such a sacrifice be worthy of the worship of civilized men? I believe in the rights of children, I plead for the republic at home, for the

democracy of the fireside, and for this I am called a heathen and a devil by those who believe in the cheerful and comforting doctrine of eternal damnation. Read the book of Job! God met the devil and asked him where he had been, and he said: "Walking up and down the country," and the Lord said to him: "Have you noticed my man Job over here, how good he is?" And the devil said: "Of course he's good, you give him everything he wants. Just take away his property and he'll curse you. You just try it." And he did try it, and took away his goods, but Job still remained good. The devil laughed and said that he had not been tried enough. Then the Lord touched his flesh, but he was still true. Then he took away his children, but he remained faithful, and in the end, to show how much Job made by this fidelity,

his property was all doubled, and he had more children than ever. If you have a child, and you love it, would you be satisfied with a God who would destroy it, and endeavour to make it up by giving you another that was better looking? No, you want that one; you want no other, and yet this is the idea of the love of children taught in the Bible.

Does the Bible teach you freedom of religion? To-day we say that every man has a right to worship God or not, to worship him as he pleases. Is it the doctrine of the Bible? Read Deut. xii. 6. If a brother, or son, or daughter, or wife proposes to serve any god but your own, or that of your fathers, thou shalt not pity, nor spare, nor conceal. "Thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be the first upon him to put him to death, and

thou shalt stone him with stones that he die."

And do you know, according to that, if you had lived in Palestine, and your wife that you love as your own soul had said to you, "Let us worship the sun whose golden beams clothe the world in glory; let us bow to that great luminary; I love the sun because it gave me your face; because it gave me the features of my babe; let us worship the sun;" it was then your duty to lay your hands upon her, your eye must not pity her, but it was your duty to cast the first stone against that tender and loving breast! I hate such doctrine! I hate such books! I hate gods that will write such books 1 I tell you that it is infamous! That is the religious liberty of the Bible--that's it And this God taught that doctrine to the Jews, and said to

them, "Any one that teaches a different religion, kill him!" Now, let me ask, and I want to-do it reverently:

If, as is contended, God gave these frightful laws to the Jews, and afterwards this same God took upon himself flesh, and came among the Jews, and taught a different religion, and these Jews, in accordance with the laws which this same God gave them, crucified him, did he not reap what he had sown? The mercy of all this comes in what is called "the plan of salvation." What is that plan? According to this great plan, the innocent suffer for the guilty to satisfy a law.

What sort of a law must it be that would be satisfied with the suffering of innocence? According to this plan, the salvation of the whole world depends

upon the bigotry of the Jews and the treachery of Judas. According to the same plan, there would have been no death in the world if there had been no sin, and if there had been no death you and I would not have been called into existence, and if we did not exist we could not have been saved; so we owe our salvation to the bigotry of the Jews and the treachery of Judas, and we are indebted to the devil for our existence. I speak this reverently. It strikes me that what they call the atonement is a kind of moral bankruptcy. Under its merciful provisions man is allowed the privilege of sinning credit, and whenever he is guilty of a mean action, he says, "Charge it." In my judgment, this kind of bookkeeping breeds extravagance in sin.

Suppose we had a law in New York that every merchant should give credit to every man who asked it, under pain and penitentiary, and that every man should take the benefit of the bankruptcy statute any Saturdays night? Doesn't the credit system in morals breed extravagance in sin? That's the question. Who's afraid of punishment which is so far away? Whom does the doctrine of hell stop? The great, the rich, the powerful? No; the poor, the weak, the despised, the mean. Did you ever hear of a man going to hell who died in New York worth a million of dollars, or with an income of twenty-five thousand a year? Did you ever hear of a man going to hell who rode in a carriage? Never. They are the gentlemen who talk about their assets, and who say, "Hell is not for me; it is for the poor. I have all the

luxuries I want, give that to the poor."
Who go to hell? Tramps!

Let me tell you a story. There was once a frightful rain, and all the animals held a convention, to see whose fault it was, and the fox nominated the lion for chairman. The wolf seconded the motion, and the hyena said that suits. When the convention was called to order the fox was called upon to confess his sins. He stated, however, that it would be much more appropriate for the lion to commence first. Thereupon the lion said: "I am not conscious of having committed evil. It is true I have devoured a few men, but for what other purpose were men made?" And they all cheered, and were satisfied. The fox gave his views upon the goose question, and the wolf admitted that he had devoured sheep,

and occasionally had killed a shepherd, but "all acquainted with the history of my family will bear me out when I say that shepherds have been the enemies of my family from the beginning of the world."

Then away in the rear there arose a simple donkey, with a kind of Abrahamic countenance. He said, "I expect it's me, I had eaten nothing for three days except three thistles. I was passing a monastery; the monks were at mass. The gates were open leading to a yard full of sweet clover. I knew it was wrong, but I did slip in and I took a mouthful, but my conscience smote me and I went out," and all the-animals shouted, "He's the fellow!" and in two minutes they had his hide on the fence. That's the kind of people that go to hell.

Now this doctrine of hell, that has been such a comfort to my race, which so many ministers are pleading for, has been defended for ages-by the fathers of the church. Your preacher says that the sovereignty of God implies that he has an absolute, unlimited, and independent right to dispose of his creatures as he will, because he made them. Has he? Suppose I take this book and change it immediately into a servient human being. Would I have a right to torture it because I made it? No; on the contrary. I would say, having brought you into existence, it is my duty to do the best for you I can. They say God has a right to damn me because he made me. I deny it.

Another one says, God is not obliged to save even those who believe in Christ, and that he can either bestow salvation

upon his children or retain it without any diminution of his glory. Another one says, God may save any sinner whatsoever, consistently with his justice. Let a natural person--and I claim to be one--moral or immoral, wise or unwise, let him be as just as he can, no matter what his prayers may be, what pains he may have taken to be saved, or whatever circumstances he may be in, God, according to this writer, can deny him salvation, without the least disparagement of his glory. His glories will not be in the least obscured; there is no natural man, be his character what it may, but God may cast down to hell without being charged with unfair-dealing in any respect with regard to that man. Theologians tell us that God's design in the creation was simply to glorify himself. Magnificent object! "The same shall drink

of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb." (Rev. i. 10.)

Do you know nobody would have had an idea of hell in this world if it hadn't been for volcanoes? They were looked upon as the chimneys of hell. The idea of eternal fire never would have polluted the imagination of man but for them. An eminent theologian, describing hell, says, "There is no recounting up the million of ages the damned shall suffer. All arithmetic ends here"--and all sense, too! "They shall have nothing to do in passing away this eternity but to conflict with torments. God shall have no other use or employment for them." These words were

said by gentlemen who died Christians, and who are now in the harp business in the world to come. Another declares there is nothing to keep any man or Christian out of hell except the mere pleasure of God, and their pains never grow any easier by their becoming accustomed to them. It is also declared that the devil goes about like a lion, ready to doom the wicked. Did it never occur to you what a contradiction it is to say that the devil will persecute his own friends? He wants all the recruits he can get; why then should he persecute his friends? In my judgment he should give them the best hell affords.

It is in the very nature of things that torments inflicted have no tendency to bring a wicked man to repentance. Then why torment him if it will not do him

good? It is simply unadulterated revenge. All the punishment in the world will not reform a man, unless he knows that he who inflicts it upon him does it for the sake of reformation, and really and truly loves him, and has his good at heart. Punishment inflicted for gratifying the appetite makes man afraid but debases him. Various reasons are given for punishing the wicked? first, that God will vindicate his injured majesty. Weil, I am glad of that! Second, he will glorify his justice--think of that. Third, he will show and glorify his grace. Every time the saved shall look upon the damned in hell it will cause in them a lively and admiring sense of the grace of God. Every look upon the damned will double the ardour and the joy of the saints in heaven. Can the believing husband in heaven look down upon the torments of the

unbelieving wife in hell and then feel a thrill of joy? That is the old doctrine--that if you saw your wife in hell--the wife you love, who, in your last sickness, nursed you, that perhaps supported you by her needle when you were ill; the wife who watched by your couch night and day, and held your corpse in her loving arms when you were dead--the sight would give you great joy. That doctrine is not preached to-day. They do not preach that the sight would give you joy! but they do preach that it will not diminish your happiness. That is the doctrine of every orthodox minister in New York, and I repeat that I have no respect for men who preach such doctrines. The sight of the torments of the damned in hell will increase the ecstasy of the saints for ever! On this principle a man never enjoys a good dinner so much as when a

fellow-creature is dying of famine before his eyes, or he never enjoys the cheerful warmth of his own fireside so greatly as when a poor and abandoned wretch is dying on his door-step. The saints enjoy the ecstasy, and the groans of the tormented are music to them. I say here to-night that you cannot commit a sin against an infinite being. I can sin against my brother or my neighbour, because I can injure them. There can be no sin where there is no injury. Neither can a finite being commit infinite sin.

An old saint believed that hell was in the interior of the earth, and that the rotation of the earth was caused by the souls trying to get away from the fire. The old church at Stratford-on-Avon, Shakespeare's home, is adorned with pictures of hell and the like. One of the

pictures represents resurrection-morning. People are getting out of their graves, and devils are catching hold of their heels. In one place there is a huge brass monster, and devils are driving scores of lost souls into his mouth. Over hot fires hang caldrons with fifty or sixty people in each, and devils are poking the fires. People are hung up on hooks by their tongues, and devils are lashing them. Up in the right-hand corner are some of the saved, with grins on their faces stretching from ear to ear. They seem to say: "Aha, what did I tell you?"

Some of the old saints--gentlemen who died in the odour of sanctity and are now in glory--insisted that heaven and hell would be plainly in view of each other. Only a few years ago, the Rev. J. Furness (an appropriate name), published a little

pamphlet called "A Sight in Hell" I remember when I first read that. My little child, seven years old, was ill and in bed. I thought she would not hear me, and I read some of it aloud. She arose and asked "Who says that?" I answered, "That's what they preach in some of the churches." "I never will enter a church as long as I live!" she said, and she never has.

The doctrine of orthodox Christianity is that the damned shall suffer torment for ever and for ever. And if you were a wanderer, footsore, weary, with parched tongue, dying for a drop of water, and you met one who divided his poor portion with you, and died as he saw you reviving --if he was an unbeliever and you a believer, and you died and went to heaven, and he called to you from hell for

a draught of water, it would be your duty to laugh at him.

Rev. Mr Spurgeon says that everywhere in hell will be written the words "for ever." They will be branded on every wave of flame, they will be forged in every link of every chain, they will be seen in every lurid flash of brimstone-- everywhere will be those words "for ever." Everybody will be yelling and screaming them. Just think of that picture of the mercy and justice of the eternal Father of us all. If these words are necessary why are they not written now everywhere in the world, on every tree, and every field, and on every blade of grass? I say I am entitled to have it so. I say that, it is God's duty to furnish me with the evidence. In old times they had to find a place for hell, and they found a

hundred places for it. One says that it was under Lake Avernus, but the Christian thought differently. One divine tells us that it must be below the earth because Christ descended into hell. Another gives it as his opinion that hell is in the sun, and he tells us that nobody, without an express revelation from God, can prove that it is not there. Most likely. Well, he had the idea at all events of utilizing the damned as fuel to warm the earth. Another divine preached a sermon no further back than 1876, in which he said that the damned will grow worse, and the same divine says that the devil was the first Universalist. Then I am on the side of the devil.

The fact is, that you have got not merely to believe the Bible, but you must also believe in a certain interpretation of it,

and, mind you, you must also believe in the doctrine of the Trinity. If you don't understand it, it is your own fault. You must believe in it all the same. If you do not, all the orthodox churches agree in condemning you to everlasting flames. We have got to burn through all our lives simply with the view of making them happy. We are taught to love our enemies, to pray for those that persecute us, to forgive. Should not the merciful God practice what he preaches? I say that reverently. Why should he say "Forgive your enemies" if he will not himself forgive? Why should he say "Pray for those that despise and persecute you, but if they refuse to believe my doctrine I will burn them for ever?" I cannot believe it. Here is a little child, residing in the purlieus of the city--some little boy who is taught that it is his duty to steal by his

mother who applauds his success, and pats him on the head and calls him a good boy--would it be just to condemn him to an eternity of torture? Suppose there is a God; let us bring to this question some common sense.

I care nothing about the doctrines or religions or creeds of the past. Let us come to the bar of the nineteenth century and judge the matter by what we know, by what we think, by what we love. But they say to us, "If you throw away the Bible what are we to depend on then?" But no two persons in the world agree as to what the Bible is, what they are to believe, or what they are not to believe. It is like a guide-post that has been thrown down in some time of disaster, and has been put up the wrong way. Nobody can accept its guidance, for

nobody knows where it would direct him. I say, "Tear down the useless guidepost," but they answer, "Oh, do not do that or we will have nothing to go by." I would say, "Old Church, you take that road, and I will take this." Another minister has said that the Bible is the great town-clock, at which we may all set our watches. But I have said to a friend of that minister, "Suppose we all should set our watches by that town-clock, there would be many persons to tell you that in old times the long hand was the hour hand, and beside, the clock hasn't been wound up for a long time." I say, let us wait till the sun rises and set our watches by nature. For my part, I am willing to give up heaven to get rid of hell. I had rather there should be no heaven than that any solitary soul should be condemned to suffer for ever and ever.

But they tell me that the Bible is the book of hope. Now, in the Old Testament there is not, in my judgment, a single reference to another life. Is there a burial-service mentioned in it in which a word of hope is spoken at the grave of the dead? The idea of eternal life was not born of any book. That wave of hope and joy ebbs and flows, and will continue to ebb and flow as long as love kisses the lips of death.

Let me tell you a tale of the Persian religion--of a man who, having done good for long years of his life, presented himself at the gates of Paradise, but the gates remained closed against him. He went back and followed up his good works for seven years longer, and the gates of Paradise still remaining shut against him, he toiled in works of charity

until at last they were opened unto him. Think of that, and send out your missionaries among those people. There is no religion but goodness, but justice, but charity. Religion is not theory--it is life. It is not intellectual conviction--it is divine humanity, and nothing else. There is another tale from the Hindoo of a man who refused to enter Paradise without a faithful dog, urging that ingratitude was the blackest of all sins. "And the god," he said, "admitted him, dog and all." Compare that religion with the orthodox tenets of the city of New York.

There is a prayer which every Brahmin prays, in which he declares that he will never enter into a final state of bliss alone, but that everywhere he will strive for universal redemption; that never will he leave the world of sin and sorrow, but

remain suffering and striving and sorrowing after universal salvation. Compare that with the orthodox idea, and send out your missionaries to the benighted Hindoos.

The doctrine of hell is infamous beyond all power to express. I wish there were words mean enough to express my feelings of loathing on this subject. What harm has it not done? What waste places has it not made? It has planted misery and wretchedness in this world; it peoples the future with selfish joys and lurid abysses of eternal flame. But we are getting more sense every day. We begin to despise those monstrous doctrines. If you want to better men and women change their conditions here. Don't promise them something somewhere else. One biscuit will do more good than

all the tracts that were ever peddled in the world. Give them more whitewash, more light, more air. You have to change men physically before you change them intellectually.

I believe the time will come when every criminal will be treated as we now treat the diseased and sick, when every penitentiary will become a reformatory; and that if criminals go to them with hatred in their bosoms, they will leave them without feelings of revenge. Let me tell you the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. Eurydice had been carried away by the god of hell, and Orpheus, her lover, went in quest of her. He took with him his lyre, and played such exquisite music that all hell was amazed. Ixion forgot his labours at the wheel, the daughters of Danaus ceased from their

hopeless task, Tantalus forgot his thirst, even Pluto smiled, and, for the first time in the history of hell, the eyes of the Furies were wet with tears. As it was with the lyre of Orpheus, so it is to-day with the great harmonies of science, which are rescuing from the prisons of superstition the torn and bleeding heart of man.

— — — — The End — — — —

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