

TRUTH VERSUS ORTHODOXY AND INFIDELITY.

Such sentiments as the above are the natural conclusions of many a truly noble soul whose faith in the religion of the Bible has been destroyed by unfaithful professors of religion who are first and loudest in their denunciations of the open and avowed unbeliever. It is surprising, indeed, that there is not more infidelity than there is; but we apprehend that there is a great deal more infidelity in fact, than finds open expression.

But the time is rapidly approaching when all those who are really infidel will plainly declare it; and there are thousands of them within the nominal church, as well as out of it. The very same thing that keeps many who have seen much of the truth of God's Word and the errors of so-called orthodoxy from openly declaring their convictions, also keeps many who have not seen the truth, but who do see the errors and inconsistencies of orthodoxy, from openly declaring their infidelity; and that is the popularity and worldly influence of the nominal church – an influence which very largely affects both business and social interests.

Many dogmas are advanced as truth and enforced upon a credulous people on the asserted peril of eternal torment which have not the slightest foundation either in the Scriptures or in our God-given reason. And not only so, but there are thousands of those who profess to be guided in their daily life and conversation by the high principles of Christianity, while beyond a mere profession and appearance, there is nothing of it, and the unrenewed dispositions of a depraved nature have nearly full sway.

Those who claim to be the living epistles of God are known and read of men before they think of reading the written epistle,

and if the world becomes disgusted and indignant with the former, it is not likely that they will esteem or consult the latter. Many a son goes out from a home whose inmates are professing Christians, but whose unbridled tempers, avarice, selfishness, pride and unholy ambitions, have proven to him the falsity of their claims and confirmed him in unbelief. And who can justly condemn such if they choose what seems to them a more excellent way? if they take as their guiding star the most noble power which they see – their reason – and follow where it leads and take the consequences?

We honor the man who is true to his convictions and to the highest principles of action of which he is aware. We believe, with Mr. Ingersol, that the so-called orthodox religion of to-day has outlived its usefulness; that orthodox Christianity is a sick man. Yes, it is dying, but it dies hard. Why? "Because the people are ignorant and the priests cunning."

We also believe, with Mr. Ingersol, that "We are past midnight," – the midnight of superstition, ignorance, want and woe. But we do not arrive at our conclusions in the same way, nor from such uncertain data. He sees human reason struggling for freedom from oppression, and hopes, against a great barrier of doubt and uncertainty, for the good time coming when right and reason shall prevail and bring about a better order of things than we see at present.

If the barriers which unfaithful professing Christians have themselves erected could be entirely removed, reasonable and unbiased minds might see with us the satisfactory evidence contained in the Scriptures that it is a positive and unmistakable fact that "we are past midnight" and that a better day is beginning to dawn.

Mr. Ingersol, with thousands like him, stand away on the outskirts of God's great plan, too remote to see or hear the great

Commander, and even doubting that there is a commander; yet they [R675 : page 4] note the direction in which the current of events is tending; and though they see not the almighty hand that moulds and shapes them, they realize that the tendency is toward a better state of things: that is a better time for future generations, but beyond a faint hope and desire, they know not that they also shall have part in it.

But, as sons of God, we have been privileged to know not only that He is, but that he is working all things according to the counsel of his own will. And while Mr. Ingersol may take his reason which he believes to be the only torch which nature has given him to light him through this dark night called life, (and a blessed God-given torch it is); and while by its glimmering light he can leave his dead under the feeling of hope; and while his benevolence can reach out beyond his own kindred and "Hope for future joy for the whole human race," thank God the Bible reveals the blessed fact that in due time this hope will be realized in the glorious restitution of all things; for that time the whole creation is groaning and waiting in ignorance. Yet not without hope do they groan and wait, who heed the light of reason's torch. (Rom. 8:22,19.)

But let us say to all such, If you can surmount the barriers in your way and throw away your prejudices, the faithful following of that very torch (God-given) will lead you straight to the Word of God, who says:

"COME, LET US REASON TOGETHER."

Let us do this. Here is a book which claims to be a revelation of God's will and purposes concerning man. How do we know its claim is true?

First, we would say that if it is true, we should expect it to bear the evidence of its truthfulness within itself, since, if it is the Word of God, in the very nature of things there could be nothing higher to bear witness to it. Outside evidences may and do corroborate its truth, but on its own internal evidence it must stand or fall; and we should bear in mind that nothing can be properly considered evidence which does not satisfy our reason. That is not faith, but mere credulity and superstition, which accepts as truth things contrary to all reason. Such a faith meets neither the reward or approval of God.

The Word of God was given to us through human agency, those agents being under the special direction of God. That we might be sure that it was not a scheme devised by men or under the direction of man, it was written by different men scattered over a period of two thousand years. Each writer supplies an important part of the great chain of truth, and all are in perfect harmony with each other. The book complete tells the one story – the purpose of God concerning men. Some of the writers tell it in types, some in symbols, and some in prophetic utterances which cannot be understood until the events prophesied actually transpire. And, standing where we do to-day, when by far the greater part of prophecy has passed into history, the plan of God becomes clearer than it ever appeared before.

While we agree with Mr. Ingersol in some things, we cannot agree with him when he says that the soothsayer of the past has been superseded by the priest and the parson, and the prophets of the past by the philosophers of the present. No, we think the soothsayer has been superseded by the philosopher who follows the torch of reason, while the prophet, divinely inspired to foretell the future, has been superseded by the historian recording the

fulfillments. And it is the blessed privilege of our day to read them both by the combined light of reason and revelation.

The New Testament writers while adding their important links to the great chain of truth, also instruct us as to how, by comparison of scripture with scripture, history with prophecy, types with their antitypes, and reason with revelation, we may come to such an understanding of the truth as was not possible in earlier ages. Surely no other book can claim such authorship; and if reason in other things teaches us that for every effect there must have been an antecedent cause, we must conclude that the wonderful harmony of this wonderful book, written under such diverse circumstances, and by writers so remote from each other in time, must have been under the special direction of some master mind whose length of days is more than three score years and ten.

The Bible claims that its Author is also the Author of nature; that by his power all things were brought into existence, and that by the same power all things are sustained in existence. If this be true we should expect the testimony of nature and the testimony of revelation to agree perfectly when both are understood. If one reveals an author of benevolence and goodness, we should expect the other to do the same; and if some things in nature seem to be out of harmony with nature's general design, we should expect the clearer light of revelation to vindicate the wisdom and power of its Author in the permission of such lack of harmony.

And just so we find it. The general testimony of nature is that God is good, benevolent, loving, wise, and powerful; yet there are some things which seem strangely out of harmony. And as we turn to the written word we find that testimony repeated with emphasis and proved beyond the shadow of a doubt. It also shows that those things which seem out of harmony with the principles of benevolence, goodness, etc., are so because of sin; that the natural

consequences of sin – suffering and death – are for a time to be permitted, that men may learn a needed lesson from bitter experience, and that when that lesson is fully learned by the whole human family, all evil will be forever banished, and those who have suffered in gaining the experience shall be restored to life to reap the benefit of it.

Yes, it stands to reason that creatures of three-score-years-and-ten cannot understand the facts of the present, as they stand linked with the plan of God which began thousands of years before we had an existence, and reaches on into the distant future, unless he comes with a teachable spirit to the study of the written revelation. And it also stands to reason that we should expect such a revelation from a God who is wise and good.

But though Mr. Ingersol lays much stress upon reason, and promises to follow where it leads, we think that sometimes he forgets his torch and blindly stumbles into many foolish and absurd errors. For instance, he says, "Nobody knows whether there is a God." But how does he know that nobody knows? Perhaps he does not know, but why should he so confidently assume that others know no more? or why should he be in ignorance.

Reason never showed effects without competent causes. Mere chance was never known to produce anything but disorder and confusion, but we have spread out before us continually, worlds and systems of worlds, moving with perfect and exact precision according to fixed laws which admit of no variation or mishap. The elements of nature that surround us are beautifully adapted to human needs and human happiness, and with unerring finger every element in nature points to the great cause of all things. Who can think reasonably even of his own body, so wonderfully made, and conclude there is no God? Yes, nature's book alone, gives evidence conclusive that there is a God,

powerful, wise, and good; and those who discard its testimony are without excuse, and should forever keep silent about "reason."

The taking of life which God commanded under the Jewish economy, as we now understand it, was a part of that great typical Object Lesson which in due time will be made clear to the world as it is now being made clear to the saints. God had a right to do this. Man's life was forfeited anyhow, and in a short time these must have perished in some way; if not by the sword, by wasting disease. If the purpose of God for the future good of mankind could be better served and the object lesson made clearer by taking them away with the sword, pestilence, etc., than by natural decay, who has a right to object? Even so he took away the Sodomites as he "saw good," (Ezek. 16:50.) In all these things God had a wise purpose, and in his own time he will make that purpose manifest to all, as he even now makes it manifest to his saints.

Again, Mr. Ingersol seems to think the idea of an infinite God a very absurd one, and says: "They say he is maker of everything, but nobody knows it. What was he doing before he started? What does an infinite personality mean?"

To this question we answer, All we know about it is what the Bible and reason teach. The Bible says that God is from everlasting to everlasting (Ps. 90:2); that he is immortal – self-existent – not dependent on any other being, conditions, or circumstances; and though our finite mind cannot grasp and comprehend the infinite, our reason says, It must be so. Causes must always precede effects, and back of all the inanimate causes, such as nature's laws, etc., there must be an INTELLIGENT FIRST CAUSE. Our reason unaided by revelation would name that intelligent first cause "a mighty one" – a God, and even more, the All-mighty.

If God had a beginning, then he must have been produced by the operation of some laws of nature that preceded him, and those

laws would also indicate an intelligent designer, and that designer would be God the first cause of all. And so if we follow reason alone, we cannot escape the conclusion not only that there is a God, but also that he is infinite.

And here he seems to have forgotten his other conclusion that his God should be his reason; for again he says, "the universe is God." This seems a little mixed, and we fear the gentleman would have some difficulty in harmonizing the statements. We prefer that he should stick to his torch and by-and-by we will hope for better conclusions. **[R676 : page 4]**

As to what he was doing before he began his work of creation, we presume that since he has not told us, it is none of our business. And if in future ages he ever gratifies our desire to know more of him, we will reverently hear. As to the orthodox teaching that God is without body, parts, or passions, which we admit is a fair description of nothing, we have simply to say that in this as in many other things, they attempt to be wise above what is written. When we come to the end of what is written, it is better to stop and say, We do not know, than to indulge in speculation.

But further. If, as reason teaches, there is a God, we should conclude even without a written revelation that his ways are higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts (Isa. 55:9). In other words, we have every reason to have faith in the supernatural. To presume that the mighty God who created all things is limited and confined in his power merely by those laws of nature which our human understanding can see and comprehend is absurd in the extreme.

As to God's providence, which Mr. Ingersol thinks is such a ridiculous thing, we would say that in it we have unbounded confidence. As it is represented by Orthodoxy, however, it does appear no less ridiculous than Mr. I.'s illustration shows. But

leaving Orthodoxy and [R676 : page 5] taking the Scriptural standpoint, viewing the wonderful plan of God, spanning the ages past, and reaching on through the ages to come, we gain an idea of his Fatherly providence which comports with the highest idea that reason can give us of God. (See "Food for Thinking Christians," and "The Chart of the Ages.") And while God's providence is thus over all his works, for special reasons (heretofore given) the Gospel Church is now the special object of his care.

"The whole creation is his charge,
But saints are his peculiar care."

Mr. Ingersol seems to think that the Orthodox Churches make a great mistake when they claim that he is

FIGHTING A MAN OF STRAW,

but we think that is the principal thing he is doing. He thinks he is fighting the Bible, and supposes it to be as their creeds (and in many instances their practices) represent it – a very bad book, a teacher of superstition, falsehood, and hypocrisy; but his principal effort is against the errors of so-called Orthodoxy, which the Bible itself show to be stubble which the wind shall drive away; and he is only helping to raise the breeze that shall do it; but the blessed old book shall not be moved. Whatever of truth men may have, whether they are in or out of so-called churches, will stand, but error must go down whether it be ignorantly or wilfully cherished. The selfish idea of God's providence which prays, "God bless me and my wife, my son John and his wife; us four, and no more," is bound to go down, together with that blasphemous falsehood against the character of God – eternal torment – when the wide range of God's loving providence shall be more clearly manifest.

The absurd idea of a resurrection of a body with the same identical atoms of matter that had been wasted by disease, eaten by worms, wild beasts or cannibals, burnt by fire, or which had

entered into vegetable or animal life, must go down before a reasonable study of the subject of the resurrection as presented in the Scriptures. And God's purpose in the permission of evil for a time, when made clear to all, as it has been made clear to us, will amply vindicate the glorious character of our God.

Of course men who are so mixed and uncertain in their views of God, and so ignorant of the character of his Word, however well informed they may be concerning other matters, and so blinded and deceived by misrepresentations of it, we cannot expect to comprehend the great scheme of redemption planned by Jehovah and wrought out in Christ. But we thank God that the mists are being rolled away – that chronology and the march of foretold events, already prove, what Mr. Ingersol supposes, that already "we are past midnight." Soon the Sun of Righteousness shall rise with healing in his wings, and the blind eyes shall be opened and the deaf ears unstopped, and the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the whole earth. But until then we, with the lecturer, leave the groaning creation under the feeling of hope, KNOWING that a glorious future awaits the whole human race in God's due time. But this blessed hope finds no support save in the Word of God which abundantly proves it to reasonable, unprejudiced minds who will give it the necessary study.
