

FOOTE GEORGE WILLIAM

FLOWERS OF
FREETHOUGHT (FIRST
SERIES)

George Foote

Flowers of Freethought (First Series)

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G. W. Foote

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PREFACE

Heinrich Heine called himself a soldier in the army of human liberation. It was a modest description of himself, for he was more; his position was that of a leader, and his sword was like the mystic Excalibur, flashing with the hues of his genius, and dealing death to the enemies of freedom.

Humbler fighters than Heine may count themselves as simple soldiers in that great army, whose leaders' names are graven deep in the history of modern Europe. I also venture to rank myself with them, and it is the summit of my ambition. To be indeed a soldier in that army, however low and obscure, is not to have lived in vain; to persevere, to fight to the end, is to live (if unknown) in the future of humanity.

In the course of my service to "the cause" I have wielded tongue and pen as weapons. The spoken word has gone, like spilt water, except as it may have made an impression on the listeners. The written word remains. Most of it, in truth, was only the week's work, done honestly, but under no special impulse. Some of the rest – as I have been told, and as in a few cases I feel – is of less doubtful value; having occasionally the merit of a free play of mind on subjects that are too often treated with ignorance, timidity, or hypocrisy.

This is my reason for publishing in a separate and durable form the articles in this collection. Whether it is a sufficient reason the reader will judge for himself.

No serious attempt has been made at classification. Here and there articles have been placed in intended proximity, though written at different intervals in the past ten years. Sometimes, for an obvious reason, the date of composition has been indicated. Otherwise there is no approach to systematic arrangement; and if this is a defect, the reader has on the other hand the benefit of variety.

The ambitious, and hardly excusable, thing about this collection is its title. But the selection of a label for such a miscellany was not an easy task, and I ask the reader's indulgence in consideration of the difficulty. The title I have chosen is at least a pretty one, and in a sense it is appropriate. These articles are flowers of *my* Freethought; the blossomings of my mind on particular occasions, after much investigation and pondering.

Wherever I have made a rash statement I shall be happy to be corrected; wherever I may have argued wrongly, I shall be happy to be set right. But I am less amenable to appeals on the ground of "taste." They are almost invariably made by those who wish failure to one's propaganda. A fair controversialist will refrain from personalities. I have done this, and I will do no more. I believe in free thought and honest speech. In the war of ideas there is neither treaty nor truce. To ask for quarter is to admit defeat; and to give it is treachery to Truth.

April, 1893. G. W. FOOTE.

OLD NICK

This gentleman is of very ancient descent. His lineage dwarfs that of the proudest nobles and kings. English peers whose ancestors came in with the Conqueror; the Guelphs, Hapsburgs, and Hohenzollens of our European thrones; are things of yesterday compared with his Highness the Devil. The Cæsars themselves, the more ancient rulers of Assyria, and even the Pharaohs of the first dynasty, are modern beside him. His origin is lost in the impenetrable obscurity of primitive times. Nay, there have been sages who maintained his eternity, who made him coeval with God, and placed upon his head the crown of a divided sovereignty of the infinite universe.

But time and change are lords of all, and the most durable things come to an end. Celestial and infernal, like earthly, powers are subject to the law of decay. Mutability touches them with her dissolving wand, and strong necessity, the lord of gods and men, brings them to the inevitable stroke of Death. Senility falls on all beings and institutions – if they are allowed to perish naturally; and as our august Monarchy is the joke of wits, and our ancient House of Lords is an object of popular derision, so the high and mighty Devil in his palsied old age is the laughing-stock of those who once trembled at the sound of his name. They omit the lofty titles he was once addressed by, and fearless of his feeble thunders and lightnings, they familiarly style him Old Nick. Alas, how are the mighty fallen! The potentate who was more terrible than an army with manners is now the sport of children and a common figure in melodrama. Even the genius of Milton, Goethe, and Byron, has not been able to save him from this miserable fate.

When this sobriquet of Old Nick first came into use is unknown. Macaulay, in his essay on Machiavelli, says that "Out of his surname they have coined an epithet for a knave, and out of his Christian name a synonym for the Devil." A couplet from *Hudibras* is cited to support this view.

Nick Machiavel had ne'er a trick Tho' he gave his name to our Old Nick.

"But we believe," adds Macaulay, "there is a schism on this subject among the antiquaries." The learned Zachary Gray's edition of *Hudibras* shows that "our English writers, before Machiavel's time, used the word Old Nick very commonly to signify the Devil," and that "it came from our Saxon ancestors, who called him Old Nicka." No doubt Butler, whose learning was so great that he "knew everything," was well acquainted with this fact. He probably meant the couplet as a broad stroke of humor. But there was perhaps a chronological basis for the joke. Our Saxon ancestors did not speak of Old Nicka in a spirit of jest or levity. The bantering sense of our modern sobriquet for the Devil appears to have crept in during the decline of witchcraft. That frightful saturnalia of superstition was the Devil's heyday. He was almost omnipotent and omnipresent. But as witchcraft died out, partly through the growth of knowledge, and partly through sheer weariness on the part of its devotees, the Devil began to lose his power. His agency in human affairs was seen to be less potent than was imagined. People called him Old Nick playfully, as they might talk of a toothless old mastiff whose bark was worse than his bite. At length he was regarded as a perfect fraud, and his sobriquet took a tinge of contempt. He is now utterly played out except in church and chapel, where the sky-pilots still represent him as a roaring lion. Yet, as a curious relic of old times, it may be noted that in the law-courts, where conservatism reigns in the cumbrous wig on the judge's head, and in the cumbrous phraseology of indictments, criminals are still charged with being instigated by the Devil. Nearly all the judges look upon this as so much nonsense, but occasionally there is a pious fossil who treats it seriously. We then hear a Judge North regret that a prisoner has devoted the abilities God gave him to the Devil's service, and give the renegade a year's leisure to reconsider which master he ought to serve.

During the witch mania the world was treated to a great deal of curious information about Old Nick. What Robert Burns says of him in *Tam O'Shanter* is only a faint reminiscence of the wealth of demonology which existed a few generations earlier. Old Nick used to appear at the witches' Sabbaths in the form of a goat, or a brawny black man, who courted all the pretty young witches and made them

submit to his embraces. Some of these crazy creatures, under examination or torture, gave the most circumstantial accounts of their intercourse with Satan; their revelations being of such an obscene character that they must be left under the veil of a dead tongue. It is, of course, absurd to suppose that anything of the kind occurred. Religious hysteria and lubricity are closely allied, as every physician knows, and the filthy fancies of a lively witch deserve no more attention than those of many females in our lunatic asylums.

Behind these tales of the Devil there was the pagan tradition of Pan, whose upper part was that of a man and his lower part that of a goat. The devils of one religion are generally the gods of its predecessor; and the great Pan, whose myth is so beautifully expounded by Bacon, was degraded by Christianity into a fiend. Representing, as he did, the nature which Christianity trampled under foot, he became a fit incarnation of the Devil. The horns and hooves and the goat thighs were preserved; and the emblems of strength, fecundity and wisdom in the god became the emblems of bestiality and cunning in the demon.

Heine's magnificent *Gods in Exile* shows how the deities of Olympus avenged themselves for this ill-treatment. They haunted the mountains and forests, beguiling knights and travellers from their allegiance to Christ. Venus wooed the men who were taught by an ascetic creed to despise sexual love; and Pan, appearing as the Devil, led the women a frightful dance to hell.

But as the Christian superstition declined, the gods of Paganism also disappeared. Their vengeance was completed, and they retired with the knowledge that the gods of Calvary were mortal like the gods of Olympus.

During the last two centuries the Devil has gradually become a subject for joking. In Shakespeare's plays he is still a serious personage, although we fancy that the mighty bard had no belief himself in any such being. But, as a dramatist, he was obliged to suit himself to the current fashion of thought, and he refers to the Devil when it serves his purpose just as he introduces ghosts and witches. His Satanic Majesty not being then a comic figure, he is spoken of or alluded to with gravity. Even when Macbeth flies at the messenger in a towering rage, and cries "the Devil damn thee black, thou cream-faced loon," he does not lose his sense of the Devil's dignity. In Milton's great epic Satan is really the central figure, and he is always splendid and heroic. Shelley, in fact, complained in his preface to *Prometheus Unbound* that "the character of Satan engenders in the mind a pernicious casuistry, which leads us to weigh his faults with his wrongs, and to excuse the former because the latter exceed all measure." Goethe's Mephistopheles is less dignified than Milton's Satan, but he is full of energy and intellect, and if Faust eventually escapes from his clutches it is only by a miracle. At any rate, Mephistopheles is not an object of derision; on the contrary, the laugh is generally on his own side. Still, Goethe is playing with the Devil all the time. He does not believe in the actual existence of the Prince of Evil, but simply uses the familiar old figure to work out a psychological drama. The same is true of Byron. Satan, in the *Vision of Judgment*, is a superb presence, moving with a princely splendor; but had it suited his purpose, Byron could have made him a very different character.

The Devil is, indeed, treated with much greater levity by Coleridge and Southey, and Shelley knocks him about a good deal in *Peter Bell the Third*—

The Devil, I safely can aver,
Has neither hoof, nor tail, nor sting;
Nor is he, as some sages swear,
A spirit, neither here nor there,
In nothing – yet in everything.
He is – what we are! for sometimes
The Devil is a gentleman;
At others a bard bartering rhymes
For sack; a statesman spinning crimes;

A swindler, living as he can.

These and many other verses show what liberties Shelley took with the once formidable monarch of hell. The Devil's treatment by the pulpiteers is instructive. Take up an old sermon and you will find the Devil all over it. The smell of brimstone is on every page, and you see the whisk of his tail as you turn the leaf. But things are changed now. Satan is no longer a person, except in the vulgar circles of sheer illiteracy, where the preacher is as great an ignoramus as his congregation. If you take up any reputable volume of sermons by a Church parson or a Dissenting minister, you find the Devil either takes a back seat or disappears altogether in a metaphysical cloud. None of these subtle resolvers of ancient riddles, however, approaches grand old Donne, who said in one of his fine discourses that "the Devil himself is only concentrated stupidity." What a magnificent flash of insight! Yes, the great enemy of mankind is stupidity; and, alas, against that, as Schiller said, the gods themselves fight in vain. Yet time fights against it, and time is greater than the gods; so there is hope after all.

Gradually the Devil has dropped, until he has at last peached the lowest depth. He is now patronised by the Salvation Army. Booth exhibits him for a living, and all the Salvation Army Captains and Hallelujah Lasses parade him about to the terror of a few fools and the amusement of everyone else. Poor Devil! Belisarius begging an obolus was nothing to this. Surely the Lord himself might take pity on his old rival, and assist him out of this miserable plight.

Old Nick is now used to frighten children with, and by-and-bye he may be employed like the old garden-god to frighten away the crows. Even his scriptural reputation cannot save him from such a fate, for the Bible itself is falling into disbelief and contempt, and his adventures from Genesis to Revelation are become a subject of merriment. Talking to Mrs. Eve about apples in the form of a serpent; whispering in David's ear that a census would be a good thing, while Jehovah whispers a similar suggestion on the other side; asking Jesus to turn pebbles into penny loaves, lugging him through the air, perching him on a pinnacle, setting him on the top of a mountain whence both squinted round the globe, and playing for forty days and nights that preposterous pantomime of the temptation in the desert; getting miraculously multiplied, bewildering a herd of swine, and driving them into a watery grave; letting seven of himself occupy one lady called Magdalen, and others inhabit the bodies of lunatics; going about like a roaring lion, and then appearing in the new part of a dragon who lashes the stars with his tail; all these metamorphoses are ineffably ludicrous, and calculated to excite inextinguishable laughter. His one serious appearance in the history of Job is overwhelmed by this multitude of comic situations.

Poor Old Nick is on his last legs and cannot last much longer. May his end be peace! That is the least we can wish him. And when he is dead, let us hope he will receive a decent burial. Those to whom he has been the best friend should follow him to the grave. His obsequies, in that case, would be graced by the presence of all the clergy, and the Burial Service might be read by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Fancy them, burying their dear departed brother the Devil, in the sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection!

FIRE!!!

Do not be alarmed, dear reader; there is no need to rush out into the street, like poor old Lot flying from the doomed Cities of the Plain. Sit down and take it easy. Let your fire-insurance policy slumber in its nest. Lean back in your chair, stretch out your legs, and prepare to receive another dose of Free-thought physic – worth a guinea a bottle. So! Are you ready? Very well then, let us begin.

What would man be without fire? Would he not be a perfect barbarian? His very food, even the meat, would have to be eaten raw, and as knives and forks would be unknown, it would have to be devoured with hands and teeth. We read that the Tartar horseman will put a beefsteak under his saddle, and supple and cook it in a ten-mile ride; but we cannot all follow his example, and many would think the game was not worth the candle. But not only should we be obliged to eat our food uncooked; we should enjoy none of the blessings and comforts bestowed upon us by science, which absolutely depends on fire. Nay, our houses would be too cold to shelter us in the winter, and we should be compelled to burrow in the ground. The whole human race would have to live in tropical countries; all the temperate regions would be deserted; and as it is in the temperate regions that civilisation reaches its highest and most permanent developments, the world would be reduced to a condition of barbarism if not of savagery.

No wonder, then, that this mighty civiliser has figured so extensively in legend and mythology. "Next to the worship of the sun," says Max Müller, "there is probably no religious worship so widely diffused as that of Fire." At bottom, indeed, the two were nearly identical. The flame of burning wood was felt to be akin to the rays of the sun, and its very upward motion seemed an aspiration to its source. Sun and fire alike gave warmth, which meant life and joy; without them there reigned sterility and death. Do we not still speak of the *sunshine* of prosperity, and of basking in the *rays* of fortune? Do we not still speak of the *fire* of life, of inspiration, of love, of heroism? And thus when the tide of our being is at the flood, we instinctively think of our father the Sun, in whom, far more than in invisible gods, we live and move – for we are all his children.

Like everything else in civilised existence, fire was a human discovery. But superstitious ages imagined that so precious a thing must have descended from above. Accordingly the Greeks (to take but one illustration) fabled that Prometheus stole Jove's fire from Heaven and gave it to mankind. And as the gods of early ages are not too friendly to human beings, it was also fabled that Prometheus incurred the fierce anger of Jove, who fastened him to a rock on Mount Caucasus, where he was blistered by day and frozen by night, while Jove's vulture everlastingly preyed upon his vitals.

The sun himself, in oriental countries, shining down implacably in times of prolonged drought, became a terrible demon, and as Baal or Moloch was worshipped with cruel and bloody rites. The corruption of the best is the worst; beneficence changes to malignity. Thus fire, which is a splendid servant, is an awful master. The very wild beasts dread it. Famishing lions and tigers will not approach the camp-fire to seize their prey. Men have something of the same instinctive apprehension. How soon the nerves are disturbed by the smell of anything burning in the house. Raise the cry of "Fire!" in a crowded building, and at once the old savage bursts through the veneer of civilisation. It is helter-skelter, the Devil take the hindmost. The strong trample upon the weak. Men and women turn to devils. Even if the cry of "Fire!" be raised in a church – where a believer might wish to die, and where he might feel himself booked through to glory – there is just the same stampede. People who sit and listen complacently to the story of eternal roastings in an everlasting hell, will fight like maniacs to escape a singeing. Rather than go to heaven in a chariot of fire they will plod for half a century in this miserable vale of tears.

Man's dread of fire has been artfully seized upon by the priests. All over the world these gentlemen are in the same line of business – trading upon the credulous terrors of the multitude. They fill Hell with fire, because it frightens men easily, and the fuel costs nothing. If they had to find

the fuel themselves Hell would be cold in twenty-four hours. "Flee from the wrath to come," they exclaim. "What is it?" ask the people. "Consuming fire," the priests exclaim, "nay, not consuming; you will burn in it without dying, without losing a particle of flesh, for ever and ever." Then the people want to get saved, and the priests issue insurance policies, which are rendered void by change of opinion or failure to pay the premium.

Buddhist pictures of hell teach the eye the same lesson that is taught the ear by Christian sermons. There are the poor damned wretches rolling in the fire; there are the devils shovelling in fuel, and other devils with long toasting-forks thrusting back the victims that shove their noses out of the flames.

Wherever the priests retain their old power over the people's minds they still preach a hell of literal fire, and deliver twenty sermons on Hades to one on Paradise. Hell, in fact, is always as hot as the people will stand it. The priests reduce the temperature with natural reluctance. Every degree lost is a sinking of their power and profit.

Even in England – the land of Shakespeare and Shelley, Newton and Darwin, Mill and Spencer – the cry of "Fire!" is still raised in thousands of pulpits. Catholics bate no jot of their fiery damnation; Church of England clergymen hold forth on brimstone – with now and then a dash of treacle – in the rural districts and small towns; it is not long since the Wesleyans turned out a minister who was not cocksure about everlasting torment; Mr. Spurgeon preaches hell (hot, without sugar) in mercy to perishing souls; and General Booth, who caters for the silliest and most ignorant Christians, works hell into his trade-mark.

"Blood and Fire" is a splendid summary of the orthodox faith. All who would be saved must be washed in the Blood of the Lamb – a disgusting ablution! All who are not saved fall into the Fire. A blood-bath or a sulphur-bath is the only alternative.

Happily, however, the people are becoming more civilised and more humane. Science and popular education are working wonders. Reason, self-reliance, and sympathy are rapidly developing. The old primitive terrors are losing their hold upon us, and the callous dogmas of savage religion are growing impossible. Priests cannot frighten men who possess a high sense of human dignity; and the doctrine of an angry God, who will burn his own children in hell, is loathsome to those who will fight the flames and smoke of a burning house to save the life of an unknown fellow creature.

How amusing, in these circumstances, are the wriggings of the "advanced" Christians. Archdeacon Farrar, for instance, in despite of common sense and etymology, contends that "everlasting" fire only means "eternal" fire. What a comfort the distinction would be to a man in Hell! Away with such temporising! Let the ghastly old dogma be defied. Sensible people should simply laugh at the priests who still raise the cry of "Fire!"

SKY PILOTS

The authorship of the designation "sky pilot" is as unknown as that of the four gospels. Yet its origin is recent. It has only been in use for a few years, say ten, or at the outside twenty. Nobody knows, however, who was the first man from whose lips it fell. Probably he was an American, but his name and address are not ascertained. Surely this fact, which has thousands if not millions of parallels, should abate the impudence of religionists who ask "Who made the world?" when they do not know who made nine-tenths of the well-known things it contains.

Whatever its origin, the designation is a happy one. It fits like a glove, Repeat it to the first man you meet, and though he never heard it before, he will know that you mean a minister. For this very reason it makes the men of God angry. They feel insulted, and let you see it. They accuse you of calling them names, and if you smile too sarcastically they will indulge in some well-selected Bible language themselves.

There are some trades that will not bear honest designations, and the minister's is one of them. Call him what you please, except what he is, and he is not disquieted. But call him "sky-pilot" and he starts up like Macbeth at the ghost of Banquo, exclaiming "Come in any other form but that!"

Go down to the seaside and look at one of those bluff, weather-beaten, honest fellows, who know all the rocks and shoals, and tides and channels, for miles around. Call one of them a "pilot," and he will not be offended. The term is legitimate. It exactly denotes his business. He is rather proud of it. His calling is honorable and useful. He pilots ships through uncertain and dangerous waters to their destination. He does his work, takes his pay, and feels satisfied; and if you cry "pilot!" he answers merrily with a "what cheer?"

But "sky" in front of "pilot" makes all the difference. It makes the man of God feel like having a cold shower bath; then the reaction sets in and he grows hot – sometimes as hot as H – well, Hades.

We are not going to swear if the parson does,
But after all, he *is* a "pilot" and a "sky" pilot.
He undertakes to pilot people to Heaven.

Let him board your ship and take the helm, and he will guide you over the Black Sea of Death to Port Felicity that, at least, is what he says in his trade circular, though it turns out very differently in practice, as we shall see presently.

Let us first notice a great difference between the sea pilot and the sky pilot. The honest salt boards the ship, and takes her out to sea, or brings her into port. When the work is over he presents his bill, or it is done for him. He does not ask for payment in advance. He neither takes nor gives credit. But the sky pilot does take credit and he gives none. He is always paid beforehand. Every year he expects a good retaining fee in the shape of a stipend or a benefice, or a good percentage of the pew rents and collections. But when his services are really wanted he leaves you in the lurch. You do not need a pilot to Heaven until you come to die. Then your voyage begins in real earnest. But the sky-pilot does not go with you. Oh dear no! That is no part of *his* bargain. "Ah my friend," he says, "I must leave you now. You must do the rest for yourself. I have coached you for years in celestial navigation; if you remember my lessons you will have a prosperous voyage. Good day, dear friend. I'm going to see another customer. But we shall meet again."

Now this is not a fair contract. It is really obtaining money under false pretences. The sky pilot has never been to Heaven himself. He does not know the way. Anyhow, there are hundreds of different routes, and they cannot all lead to the same place. Certainly they all start from this world, but that is all they have in common, and where they end is a puzzle. To pay money in such circumstances is foolish and an encouragement to fraud. The best way to pay for goods is on delivery; in the same way the sky pilot should be paid at the finish.

But how is that to be done? Well, easily. All you have to do is to address the sky pilot in this fashion – "Dearly beloved pilot to the land of bliss! let our contract be fair and mutual. Give me credit as I give you credit. Don't ask for cash on account. I'll pay at the finish. Your directions may be sound; they ought to be, for you are very dogmatic. Still, there is room for doubt, and I don't want to be diddled. You tell me to follow your rules of celestial navigation. Well, I will. You say we shall meet at Port Felicity. Well, I hope so; and when we do meet I'll square up."

Of course, it may be objected that this would starve the sky pilots. But why should it do anything of the kind? Have *they* no faith! Must all the faith be on *our* side? Should they not practise a little of what they preach? God tells them to *pray* for their daily bread, and no doubt he would add some cheese and butter. All they have to do is to *ask* for it. "Ask and ye shall receive," says the text, and it has many confirmations. For forty years the Jews were among the unemployed, and Jehovah sent them food daily. "He rained down bread from heaven." The prophet Elijah, also, lived in the wilderness on the sandwiches God sent him – bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening. There was likewise the widow's cruse of oil and barrel of flour, which supported her and the man of God day by day without diminishing. These things actually happened. They are as true as the Bible. And they may happen again. At any rate they *should* happen. The sky-pilots should subsist on the fruits of prayer. Let them live by faith – not *our* faith, but *their* own. This will prove their sincerity, and give us some trust in their teaching. And if they *should* starve in the experiment – well, it is worth making, and they will fall martyrs to truth and human happiness. *One* batch of martyrs will suffice. There will be no need of what Gibbon calls "an annual consumption."

The men of God pilot *us* to Heaven, but they are very loth to go there themselves. Heaven is their "home," but they prefer exile, even in this miserable vale of tears. When they fall ill, they do not welcome it as a call from the Father. They do not sing "Nearer my God to thee." We do not find them going about saying "I shall be home shortly." Oh no! They indulge freely in self-pity. Like a limpet to a rock do they cling to this wretched, sinful world. Congregations are asked if they cannot "do something," a subscription is got up, and the man of God rushes off to the seaside, where prayer, in co-operation with oxygen and ozone, restore him to health, enable him to dodge "going home," and qualify him for another term of penal servitude on earth.

It appears to us that sky pilots, like other men, should be judged by their practice. If they show no belief in what they preach, we are foolish to believe in it any more than they do. It also appears to us that their profession is as fraudulent as fortune-telling. Many a poor old woman has been imprisoned for taking sixpence from a servant girl, after promising her a tall, dark husband and eight fine children; but men dressed in black coats and white chokers are allowed to take money for promises of good fortune in the "beautiful land above." It further appears to us that the sky pilots should be compelled to come to a reasonable agreement before their trade is licensed. They should settle *where Heaven* is before they begin business. Better still, perhaps, every applicant for a license should prove that *some* human soul *has been* piloted to Heaven. Until that is done, the profession is only robbery and imposture.

DEVIL DODGERS

Most people suppose this phrase to be a recent Americanism. It occurs, however, in the *Memoirs of James Lackington*, published in 1791. Speaking of certain ranting preachers, he says – "These *devil-dodgers* happened to be so very powerful that they soon sent John home, crying out, that he should be damned."

Admitting the age of the phrase, some will ask, Is it respectable? Well, that is a matter of taste. Is there any standard of respectability? Does it not vary with time, place, and circumstance? Some people hate wearing gloves, while other people feel half naked without them. A box hat is a great sign of respectability; when a vestryman wears one he overawes philosophers; yet some men would as soon wear the helmet of Don Quixote. Flannel suits are quite shocking in town; at the seaside they are the height of fashion. And as it is with dress so it is with speech. The "respectable" classes are apt to rob language of its savor, clipping and trimming it like the trees in a Dutch garden. You must go to the common, unrespectable classes for racy vigor of tongue. They avoid circumlocutions, eschew diffuseness, go straight to the point, and prefer concrete to abstract expressions. They don't speak of a foolish man, they call him a fool; a cowardly talebearer they call a sneak; and so on to the end of the chapter. But is this really vulgar? Open your Shakespeare, or any other dramatic poet, and you will find it is not so. A look, a gesture, is more expressive than words; and concrete language carries more weight than the biggest abstractions.

Let us break up the phrase, and see where the "vulgarity" comes in. There is nothing vulgar about the Devil. He is reputed to be a highly-accomplished gentleman. Milton, Goethe, and Byron have even felt his grandeur. And is not "dodger" clear as well as expressive? David dodged Saul's javelin. That was smart and proper. Afterwards he attempted a dodge on Uriah. That was mean and dirty. So that "dodge" may be good, bad, or indifferent, like "man" or "woman." There is nothing objectionable about it *per se*. And if "devil" and "dodger" are respectable in their single state, how do they become vulgar when they are married?

Of course it is quite natural for the clergy and their thorough-paced dupes to cry out against plain language. The clerical trade is founded on mystery, and "behind every mystery there is a cheat." Calling things by their right names will always be ugly to impostors.

"Reverend" sounds so much nicer than "mystery-man," "priest" is more dignified than "fortuneteller," "clergyman" is pleasanter than "sky-pilot," and "minister" is more soothing than "devil-dodger." But plain speech is always wholesome if you keep within the bounds of truth. It does us good to see ourselves occasionally as others see us. And if this article should fall under the eyes of a Christian man of God, we beg him to keep his temper and read on to the end.

We tell the men of God, of every denomination, that they are Devil Dodgers, and when they cease to be that their occupation is going. Old Nick, in some form or other, is the basis of every kind of Christianity. Indeed, the dread of evil, the terror of calamity, is at the bottom of all religion; while the science which gives us foresight and power, and enables us to protect ourselves and promote our comfort, is religion's deadliest enemy. Science wars against evil practically; religion wars against it theoretically. Science sees the material causes that are at work, and counteracts them; religion is too lazy and conceited to study the causes, it takes the evil in a lump, personifies it, and christens it "the Devil." Thus it keeps men off the real path of deliverance, and teaches them to fear the Bogie-Man, who is simply a phantom of superstition, and always vanishes at the first forward step of courage.

What is the Christian scheme in a nutshell? God made man perfect – though some people, after reading the life of Adam, say that God made him a perfect fool. This perfect man was tackled by the Devil, a sort of spiritual Pasteur, who inoculated him with sin, which was transmitted to his posterity as *original sin*. God desires man's welfare, but the Devil is too strong for Omnipotence. Jesus Christ steps in with the Holy Ghost and saves a few men and women, but the Devil bags all the rest, and

Hell is thronged while Heaven is half empty; the one place having three families on every flat, the other having leagues of spacious mansions "to let."

Now in every generation the Devil is after us. Without schools, or churches, or armies of professional helpers, or even so much as an occasional collection, he carries on single-handed a most successful business. The clergy tell us, as the Bible tells them, that he is monstrously able, active and enterprising; never overlooking a single customer, and delivering damnation at the door, and even carrying it upstairs, without charging for carriage or waiting for his bill. All that sort of thing he leaves to the opposition firm, whose agents are clamorous for payment, and contrive to accumulate immense sums of the filthy lucre which they affect to despise.

This accommodating fiend is the *bête noir* of the clergy. They are always on his track, or rather he is on theirs. They help us to dodge him, to get out of his way, to be from home when he calls, to escape his meshes, to frustrate his wiles, to save our souls alive – O. "Here you are," they say, "he's coming down the street. We are just running an escape party. If you want to keep out of Hell, come and join us. Don't ask questions. There's no time for that. Hurry up, or you'll be left behind." And when the party turns the corner the clergy say, "Ah, that was a narrow escape. Some of you had a very close shave." And the next morning a collector calls for a subscription for the gentleman who saved you from the Devil.

Nearly fifty thousand gentlemen are engaged in this line of business, to say nothing of the Salvation Army. Fifty thousand Devil Dodgers! And this in England alone. If we include Europe, America, South Africa, and Australia, there are hundreds of thousands of them, maintained at the expense of probably a hundred millions a year. Yet the Devil is not outwitted. Mr. Spurgeon says he is as successful as ever; and, to use Mr. Stead's expression, Spurgeon has "tips from God."

By their own confession, therefore, the Devil Dodgers are perfectly useless. They take our money, but they do little else. Honesty would make them disband. But they will never do that. They will have to be cashiered, or starved out by cutting off the supplies. The real truth is, they never *were* useful. They were always parasites. They gained their livings by false pretences. They dodged an imaginary enemy. The Devil is played out in educated circles. Presently he will be laughed at by everybody. Then the people will dismiss the priests, and there will be an end of Devil Dodgers.

FIGHTING SPOOKS

"Spooks" means ghosts, sprites, goblins, and other such phantasms. The word is not yet endenized in England, but it will probably take out letters of naturalisation here, settle down, and become a very respectable member of the English vocabulary.

Twelve months ago I met an American in London, who told me that he was a Freethinker, but he did not trouble himself about Freethought. His mind was made up on the supernatural, and he did not care to spend his time in "fighting spooks." That is, being emancipated himself from superstition, he was indifferent about the matter, although millions of his fellow men were still in bondage.

This American gentleman's remark shows how people can be misled by phrases. "Fighting spooks" is a pretty locution, and every Freethinker would admit that fighting spooks is a most unprofitable business. But, in reality, it is not the aggressive Secularist or Atheist who fights these imaginary beings. He fights those who do fight them – which is a very different thing.

Let the priests and preachers of all religions and denominations cease abusing the callow mind of childhood; let them refrain from teaching their fanciful conjectures about "the unseen"; let them desist from a peopling the air with the wild creations of their own lawless imagination; let them tell no more than they know, and confine their tongues within the strict limits of honest speech; let them do this, and Free-thought will be happy to expire in the blaze of its triumph. There is no joy in fighting superstition, any more than there is joy in attacking disease. Each labor is beneficent and is attended by a *relative* satisfaction; but health is better than the best doctoring, and mental sanity than the subtlest cure.

The clergy are the fighters of spooks. They babble of gods, who get angry with us; of devils, who must be guarded against; of angels, who fly from heaven to earth, and earth to heaven; of saints, who can do us a good turn if they are properly supplicated. But the chief spooks are of course the devils, headed by *the* Devil, Satan, Beelzebub, Lucifer, Abaddon, the Serpent – in short, Old Nick. "We have an army of red coats," said old Fox, "to fight the French; and an army of black coats to fight the Devil – of whom he standeth not in awe."

Before the great procession of Humanity go the priests. "Hush!" they cry, "the hedges are full of devils. Softly, gently, beloved! Do not rush into unspeakable danger. We will bear the brunt of it, out of our fatherly affection for you. See, we stand in front, on the perilous edge of battle. We dare the demons who lie in wait to catch your immortal souls. We beat the bushes, and dislodge them from their hiding-places; strong not in our own strength, but in the grace of God. And behold they fly! Did you not see them? Did you not perceive the flutter of their black wings? Did you not smell their sulphurous taint? Beloved, the road is now clear, the hedges are safe. Forward then! But forget not our loyal services. Remember, beloved, that the laborer is worthy of his hire, and – shell out!"

The services of the black-coats are imaginary, and their payment should be of the same description. Let them live on *their own* faith, and trust to him who fed Elijah in the desert with sandwiches brought by ravens' beaks.

Clearly the belief in spooks is profitable to the clergy. Just as clearly it is expensive to the people. Whistling between the hedges is as good as keeping a parson. But that is not the priest's teaching. He says the spooks are real, and he is the only person to keep them off. Grant the first point, and the second is sure to follow. But *are* the spooks real? Can the clergy show a single live specimen? They cannot, and they know they cannot, either for love or money. Why then does the business hold out? Because an imaginary spook is as good as a real spook, if the clergy can twist and prejudice the youthful mind in their direction. If a showman never lifts the curtain, it does not matter whether he has anything or nothing on the other side.

The belief in spooks is more than profitable to the priests. It enervates and paralyses the human mind. It is the parent of all sorts of mischief. It is our worst inheritance from our savage progenitors.

The black spirits that haunted the swamps and forests of primeval ages, and terrified the ape-man who lived in mystery and fear, are not suffered to depart with the ignorance that gave them birth. They are cultivated by priests, and used to overawe the cradles and schools of civilisation.

The Freethinker does not fight spooks. He would not waste an ounce of powder upon them. He fights the fighters of spooks. He assails the superstition on which they flourish. He seeks to free the human mind from gratuitous fears. He dispels the shadows and deepens the sunshine of life.

Surely this is a good work. Whoever takes part in it is giving the race an unmixed blessing. War with the army of enslavement! Down with the seducers of childhood – the spiritual profligates who debauch the youthful mind! Banish them, with their spooks, from the school, the college, the court of justice, the hall of legislation! Let us train generations of sound minds in sound bodies, full of rich blood, and nervous energy, and frank inquiry, and dauntless courage, and starry hope; with faces that never pale at truth, hearts that hold no terms with falsehood, knees that never bend before power or mystery, heads that always keep a manly poise, and eyes that boldly challenge all things from height to depth.

DAMNED SINNERS

"Thou shalt be brought unto the blood of sprinkling, as an undone helpless, damned sinner."

– *John Wesley, Sermon on "Justification by Faith."*

Polite ears, which are often the longest, will be shocked at the title of this article. This is an age in which it is accounted vulgar to express plain doctrines in plain language. Spurgeon was the last doctor of a good old school. Their theology was hateful: an insult to man and a blasphemy against God – if such a being exists; but they did not beat about the bush, and if they thought you were booked for hell, as was most likely, they took care to let you know it. They called a spade a spade, not a common implement of agricultural industry. They were steeped in Bible English, and did not scruple to use its striking substantives and adjectives. When they pronounced "hell" they aspirated the "h" and gave the full weight of the two "l's." "Damn" and "damnation" shot from their mouths full and round, like a cannon ball sped with a full blast of gunpowder.

But, alas, how are the mighty fallen! No longer do the men of God indulge in thunderous Saxon. They latinise their sermons and diminish the effect of terrible teaching. You shall hear them designate "hell" with twenty roundabout euphemisms, and spin "damnation" into "condemnation" and "damned" into "condemned," until it has not force enough to frighten a cat off a garden wall.

Let us not be blamed, however, if we emulate the plain speech of the honest old theologians, and of the English Bible which is still used in our public schools. We despise the hypocritical cry of "vulgar!" We are going to write, not on "condemned transgressors," but on "damned sinners." Yes, DAMNED SINNERS.

Now, beloved reader, it behoves us to define and distinguish, as well as amplify and expatiate. We must therefore separate the "damned" from the "sinners." Not indeed in fact, for they are inseparable, being in truth one and the same thing; for the adjective is the substantive, and the substantive is the adjective, and the "damned" are "sinners" and "sinners" are the "damned." The separation is merely *mental*, for reasons of *convenience*; just as we separate the inseparable, length from breadth, in our definition of a line. This is necessary to clear and coherent thought; man's mind being finite, and incapable of operating in all directions at once.

What then are *sinners*? A simple question, but not so easy to answer. *All men are sinners*. But what is a *man*? A featherless biped? So was the plucked fowl of Diogenes. A man is – well a man; and a sinner is – well a sinner. And this is near enough for most people. But it does not satisfy a rational investigator, to say nothing of your born critic, who will go on splitting hairs till his head is as bare as a plate, and then borrow materials from his neighbor's cranium.

In ancient Egypt it was a sin to kill a cat; in England cats are slain in myriads without a tremor of compunction. Among the Jews it is a sin to eat pork, but an English humorist writes you a delicious essay on Roast Pig. Bigamy is a sin in the whole of Europe but the south-eastern corner, and there it is a virtue, sanctioned by the laws of religion. Marrying your deceased wife's sister is a sin in England; four thousand years ago, in another part of the world, it was no sin at all; in fact, a gentleman of remarkable piety, whom God is said to have loved, married his wife's sister without waiting for a funeral. Did not Jacob take Rachel and Leah together, and walk out with them, one on each arm?

Sin as a *fact* changes with time and place. Sin as an *idea* is disobedience to the law of God; that is, to the doctrines of religion; that is, to the teaching of priests. *Crime* is quite another thing. It is far less heinous, and far more easily forgiven. Of course crime and sin may overlap; they may often be the same thing practically; but this is an accident, for there are crimes that are no sins, and sins that are no crimes. It is a crime, but not a sin, to torture a heretic; it is a sin, but not a crime, to eat meat on a Friday.

A sinner is a person on bad terms with his God. But who, it may be asked, is on good terms with him? No one. According to Christianity, at any rate, we have all sinned; nay, we are all full of original sin; we derived it from our parents, who derived it from Adam, who caught it from Old Nick, who picked it up God knows where. Now every sinner is a damned sinner. He may not know it, but he is so; and the great John Wesley advises him to recognise it, and come as a "damned sinner" to God, to be sprinkled or washed with the blood of Christ.

What is *damned* then? We take it that "damned sinners," that is *all* sinners, are persons to whom God says "Damn you!" To whom does he say it? To all sinners; that is, to all men. And why does he say it? Because he is wroth with them. And why is he wroth with them? Because they are sinners. And why are they sinners? Because they are men. And why are they men? Because they cannot help it. They were born in sin and shapen in iniquity, and in sin did their mothers conceive them.

Every Christian admits this – theoretically. He goes to church and confesses himself a "miserable sinner," but if you called him so as he came out of church he would call you something stronger.

A sinner may be damned here, apparently, without being damned hereafter. He is liable to hell until he dies, but after that event he is sometimes reprieved and sent to heaven. But the vast majority of the human race have no share in the atoning blood of Christ. They were "damned sinners" *in posse* before they were born, they are "damned sinners" *in esse* while they live, and they will be "damned sinners" for ever when they leap from this life into eternity, and join the immortal fry Of almost everybody born to die.

This is a very comfortable doctrine for the narrow, conceited, selfish elect. For other people – all the rest of us – it is calculated to provoke unparliamentary language. Why should God "damn" men? And how can men be "sinners"? Certainly they can sin against each other, because they can injure each other. But how can they sin against God? Can they injure him? He is unchangeable. Can they rob him? He is infinite. Can they deceive him? He is omniscient.

Can they limit his happiness? He is omnipotent. No, they *cannot* sin against him, but he *can* sin against them. And if he exists he *has* sinned against every one of them. Not one human being has ever been as strong, healthy, wise, noble, and happy as God might have made him. Nor is man indebted to God for his creation. There cannot be a debt where there is no contract. It is the creator and not the creature who is responsible, and the theological doctrine of responsibility is the truth turned upside down.

Suppose a man had the power of creating another thinking and feeling being. Suppose he could endow him with any qualities he chose. Suppose he created him sickly, foolish, and vicious. Would he not be responsible for the curse of that being's existence?

Man is what he is because he is. He is practically without choice. The cards are dealt out to him, and he must take them as they come. Is it just to damn him for holding a bad hand? Is it honest to give him hell for not winning the game?

Let us use for a moment the cant language of theology. Let us imagine the *vilest* of "damned sinners" in Gehenna. Does not every scientist, and every philosopher, know that the orb of his fate was predetermined? Would not that "lost soul" have the right to curse his maker? Might he not justly exclaim "I am holier than thou"?

Do not imagine, reader, that this new reading of the book of fate has no practical significance. When we get rid of the idea of "damned sinners," when we abolish the idea of "sin" altogether and its correlative "punishment," and learn to regard man as a complicated effect in a universe of causation, we shall bring wisdom and humanity into our treatment of the "criminal classes," we shall look upon them as moral lunatics and deal with them accordingly. And this spirit will extend itself to all human relations. It will make us less impatient and angry with each other. We shall see that "to know all is to pardon all." Thus will the overthrow of theology be the preparation for a new moral development. Another link of the old serpent of superstition will be uncoiled from the life of humanity, leaving

it freer to learn the splendid truth, taught by that divine man Socrates, that wisdom and virtue are one and indivisible.

WHERE IS HELL?

This is a question of great importance, or at least of very great interest. According to the Christian scheme of salvation, the vast majority of us will have to spend eternity in "sulphurous and tormenting flames," and we are naturally curious as to the situation of a place in which we shall experience such delightful sensations.

But there is hardly any subject on which we can obtain so little information. The clergy are becoming more and more reticent about it. What little they ever knew is being secreted in the depths of their inner consciousness. When they are pressed for particulars they look injured. Sometimes they piteously exclaim "Don't." At other times they wax wroth, and exclaim to the questioners about the situation of hell, "Wait till you get there."

Just as heaven used to be spoken of as "up above," hell was referred to as "down below." At one time, indeed, it was believed to be underground. Many dark caves were thought to lead to it, and some of them were called "Hell Mouth." Volcanoes were regarded as entrances to the fiery regions, and when there was an eruption it was thought that hell was boiling over. Classic mythology, before the time of Christ, had its entrances to hell at Acherusia, in Bithynia; at Avernus, in Campania, where Ulysses began his journey to the grisly abodes; the Sibyl's cave at Cumæ, in Argolis; at Tænarus, in the southern Peloponnesus, where Hercules descended, and dragged Cerberus up to the daylight; and the cave of Trophonius, in Lebadea, not to mention a dozen less noted places.

The Bible always speaks of hell as "down," and the Apostles' Creed tells us that Christ "descended" into hell. Exercising his imagination on this basis, the learned Faber discovered that after the Second Advent the saints would dwell on the crust of the earth, a thousand miles thick, and the damned in a sea of liquid fire inside. Thus the saints would tread over the heads of sinners, and flowers would bloom over the lake of damnation.

Sir John Maundeville, a most engaging old liar, says he found a descent into hell "in a perilous vale" in Abyssinia. According to the Celtic legend of "St. Brandon's Voyage," hell was not "down below," but in the moon, where the saint found Judas Iscariot suffering incredible tortures, but let off every Sunday to enjoy himself and prepare for a fresh week's agony. That master of bathos, Martin Tupper, finds this idea very suitable. He apostrophises the moon as "the wakeful eye of hell." Bailey, the author of *Festus*, is somewhat vaguer. Hell, he says, is in a world which rolls thief-like round the universe, imperceptible to human eyes:

A blind world, yet unlit by God,
Boiling around the extremest edge of light,
Where all things are disaster and decay.

Imaginations, of course, will differ. While Martin Tupper and other gentlemen look for hell in the direction of the moon, the Platonists, according to Macrobus, reckoned as the infernal regions the whole space between the moon and the earth. Whiston thought the comet which appeared in his day was hell. An English clergyman, referred to by Alger, maintained that hell was in the sun, whose spots were gatherings of the damned.

The reader may take his choice, and it is a liberal one. He may regard hell as under the earth, or in the moon, or in the sun, or in a comet, or in some concealed body careering through infinite space. And if the choice does not satisfy him, he is perfectly free to set up a theory of his own.

Father Pinamonti is the author of a little book called *Hell Open to Christians*, which is stamped with the authority of the Catholic Church, and issued for the special edification of children. This

book declares that hell is four thousand miles distant, but it does not indicate the direction. Anyhow, the distance is so small that the priests might easily set up communication with the place. But perhaps it only exists in the geography or astronomy of faith.

Father Pinamonti seems particularly well informed on this subject. He says the walls of hell are "more than four thousand miles thick." That is a great thickness. But is it quite as thick as the heads of the fools who believe it?

Our belief is that hell is far nearer than the clergy teach. Omar Khayyam, the grand old Persian poet, the "large infidel," as Tennyson calls him, wrote as follows – in the splendid rendering of Edward Fitzgerald: —

I sent my soul through the invisible, Some letter of that after-life to spell, And by and bye my soul returned to me, And answered, I myself am heaven and hell.

Hell, like heaven, is within us, and about us in the hearts of our fellow-men. Yes, hell is on earth. Man's ignorance, superstition, stupidity, and selfishness, make a hell for him in this life. Let us cease, then, to dread the fabled hell of the priests, and set ourselves to the task of abolishing the real hell of hunger, vice, and misery.

The very Churches are getting ashamed of their theological hell. They are becoming more and more secularised. They call on the disciples of Christ to remedy the evils of this life, and respond to the cry of the poor for a better share of the happiness of this world. Their methods are generally childish, for they overlook the causes of social evil, but it is gratifying to see them drifting from the old moorings, and little by little abandoning the old dogmas. Some of the clergy, like Archdeacon Farrar, go to the length of saying that "hell is not a place." Precisely so, and that is the teaching of Secularism.

SPURGEON AND HELL

Charles Lamb was one of the best men that ever lived. He had his failings, but he never harmed anyone but himself. He was capable of astonishing generosity, and those acquainted with the inner tragedy of his life know that it was a long act of self-denial. He was also extremely modest but not utterly devoid of indignation; and if he could not denounce bitterly, he could speed a shaft of satire into the breast of wickedness or cruelty. On one occasion, in the days of his youth, he was justly annoyed by his friend Coleridge, whose character was very inferior to his own, though he always assumed a tone of moral superiority. Lamb was so galled by Coleridge's air of virtue and piety, at a moment when the humorist was suffering terribly in consequence of his sister's calamity, that he sent the transcendental poet a list of stinging questions. One of them asked whether one of the seraphim could fall, and another whether a man might not be damned without knowing it.

This last question suggests itself in the case of Mr. Spurgeon. Mrs. Spurgeon, Dr. Pierson, and other of the great preacher's friends, are all assuring us that he is in glory. Writing seven days after his death, Mrs. Spurgeon said "he has now been a week in heaven." It is natural that she should think so, and we do not wish to rob her of any consolation, nor do we suppose that this article will ever come under her notice. But is it not just possible that Spurgeon has gone to hell? And why should not the question be raised? We mean no personal offence; we speak in the interest of justice and truth. Spurgeon was very glib in preaching about hell, and we do not know that he had a monopoly of that special line of business. He never blenched at the idea of millions of human beings writhing in everlasting torment; and why should it be blasphemy, or even incivility, to wonder if he himself has gone to perdition?

Predestination, as the Church of England article says, is wonderfully comforting to the elect; that is, to those who imagine themselves to be so. But what if they are mistaken? What if a man, yea a fancied saint, may be damned without knowing it? God Almighty has not published lists of the Sect. Many a Calvinistic Pharisee is perhaps a self-elected saint after all, and at the finish of his journey may find that he has been walking in the wrong direction.

One of Spurgeon's rooted notions was that unbelievers were *sure* of hell. They bore the mark of predestinate damnation broad upon their fore-heads. Now at the bottom this means that a man may be damned for believing wrongly. But how can anyone be sure that Spurgeon was absolutely right? The Baptists are only one division of Christians. There are scores of other divisions. All cannot be right, and all may be wrong. Even if one is entirely right, how do we know it is the Baptists? According to the law of probabilities, Spurgeon was very likely in the wrong; and if wrong belief, however sincere, entails damnation, it is quite possible that at 11.5 p.m. on Sunday, January 31, Spurgeon entered Hell instead of Heaven.¹

Far be it from us to wish a fellow creature in Hell, but there is always a certain pleasure in seeing the engineer hoist with his own petard. All tragedy has a touch of comedy. Fancy Spurgeon in Hades groaning "I sent other people here by the million, and here I am myself."

How would this be worse than the groan of any other lost soul? Few men are devils or angels. Most are neither black nor white, but grey. Between the best and vilest how much difference is there in the eye of infinite wisdom? And if God, the all-knowing and all-powerful, created men as they are, strong and weak, wise and foolish, good, bad, and indifferent; there is no more injustice in Spurgeon's burning in Hell than in the damnation of the worst wretch that ever cursed the world.

Spurgeon used to preach hell with a certain gusto. Here is a hot and strong passage from his sermon on the Resurrection of the Dead:

¹ The next article will explain this matter.

"When thou diest', thy soul will be tormented alone; that will be a hell for it; but at the day of judgment thy body will join thy soul, and then thou wilt have twin-hells, thy soul sweating drops of blood, and thy body suffused with agony. In fire exactly like that which we have on earth thy body will lie, asbestos-like, for ever unconsumed, all thy veins roads for the feet of pain to travel on, every nerve a string on which the Devil shall for ever play his diabolical tune of Hell's Unutterable Lament."

After preaching this awful doctrine a man should be ill for a fortnight. Would it not afflict a kind-hearted man unspeakably to think that millions of his fellow beings, or hundreds, or even one, would suffer such a terrible fate? Would it not impair his sleep, and fill his dreams with terror? But it did not have this effect on Spurgeon. After preaching hell in that way, and rolling damnation over his tongue as a dainty morsel, he went home, dined with a good appetite, drank his wine, and smoked his cigar.

There was not the slightest doubt in Spurgeon's mind as to the endless doom of the damned. Here is an extract from another sermon —

"Thou wilt look up there on the throne of God and it shall be written, 'For ever!' When the damned jingle the burning irons of their torment they shall say, 'For ever!' When they howl, echo cries, 'For ever!'

'For ever' is written on their racks,
'For ever' on their chains;
'For ever' burneth in the fire,
'For ever' ever reigns."

How bodies are to burn without consuming, how a fire could last for ever, or how a good God could roast his own children in it, are questions that Spurgeon did not stop to answer. He took the damnable doctrine of damnation as he found it. He knew it was relished by myriads of callous, foolish people; and it gave such a pungent flavor to a long sermon! His listeners were not terrified. Oh dear no! Smith, the Newington greengrocer, was not alarmed; he twirled his thumbs, and said to himself, "Spurgeon's in fine form this morning!"

Archdeacon Farrar protests against the notion of a fiery, everlasting hell as the result of fear, superstition, ignorance, hate, and slavish letter-worship. He declares that he would resign all hope of immortality to save a single human soul from the hell of Mr. Spurgeon. But is not the hell of Mr. Spurgeon the hell of the New Testament? Does not Jesus speak of everlasting fire? Why seek to limit the duration of hell by some hocus-pocus of interpretation? It is idle to pretend that "everlasting" means something less than everlasting. If it means that in relation to hell it must also mean it in relation to heaven. Dr. Farrar cannot have two different meanings for the same word in the same verse; and should he ever go to hell (he will pardon us the supposition), how much consolation would he derive from knowing that his doom was not "everlasting" but only "eternal"? There was more honesty and straightforwardness in Mr. Spurgeon. He preached what the Bible taught him. He set forth a hateful creed in its true colors. His presentation of Christianity will continue to satisfy those who belong to the past, but it will drive many others out of the fold of faith into the broad pastures of Freethought.

IS SPURGEON IN HEAVEN?

When Mrs. Booth died, the wife of the famous "General," the "Army" reported her as "Promoted to Glory from Clacton-on-Sea." It was extremely funny. Clacton-on-Sea is such a prosaic anti-climax after Glory. One was reminded of Sir Horace Glendower:

Sprat. But the sense of humor is not acute in religious circles.

Mr. Spurgeon frequently gave expression to his dislike and mistrust of the antics of the Salvation Army. He was far from prim himself, but he held that if people were not "won over to Christ" by preaching, it was idle to bait the hook with mere sensationalism. Yet by a strange irony his closest friends, in announcing his death to his flock, actually improved on the extravagance of the Salvationists. Here is a copy of the telegram that was affixed to the rails of the Metropolitan Tabernacle the morning after his decease:

Mentone, 11.50.

Spurgeon's Tabernacle, London.

Our beloved pastor entered heaven 11.5 Sunday night.

Harrald.

This Harrald was Mr. Spurgeon's private secretary, but he writes like the private secretary of God Almighty. A leading statesman once said he wished he was as cocksure of anything as Tom Macaulay was cocksure of everything; but what was Macaulay's cocksureness to the cocksureness of Harrald? The gentleman could not have spoken with more assurance if he had been Saint Peter himself, and had opened the gate for Pastor Spurgeon.

We take it that Spurgeon expired at 11.5 on Sunday night. That is the *fact*. All the rest is conjecture.

How could his soul enter heaven at the very same moment? Is heaven in the atmosphere? He who asserts it is a very bold speculator. Is it out in the ether? If so, where? And how is it our telescopes cannot detect it? If heaven is a place, as it must be if it exists at all, it cannot very well be within the astronomical universe. Now the farthest stars are inconceivably remote. Our sun is more than 90,000,000 miles distant, and Sirius is more than 200,000 times farther off than the sun. There are stars so distant that their light takes more than a thousand years to reach us, and light travels at the rate of nearly two hundred thousands miles per second!

It is difficult to imagine Spurgeon's soul travelling faster than that; and if heaven is somewhere out in the vast void, beyond the sweep of telescopes or the register of the camera, Spurgeon's soul has so far *not* "entered heaven" that its journey thither is only just begun. In another thousand years, perhaps, it will be nearing the pearly gates. *Perhaps*, we say; for heaven may be a million times further off, and Spurgeon's soul may pull the bell and rouse Saint Peter long after the earth is a frozen ball, and not only the human race but all life has disappeared from its surface. Nay, by the time he arrives, the earth may have gone to pot, and the whole solar system may have vanished from the map of the universe.

What a terrible journey! Is it worth travelling so far to enter the Bible heaven, and sing hymns with the menagerie of the Apocalypse? Besides, a poor soul might lose its way, and dash about the billion-billion-miled universe like a lunatic meteor.

It appears to us, also, that Mr. Harrald and the rest of Mr. Spurgeon's friends have forgotten his own teaching. He thoroughly believed in the bodily resurrection of the dead, and an ultimate day of judgment, when body and soul would join together, and share a common fate for eternity. How is this reconcilable with the notion that Spurgeon's soul "entered heaven at 11.5" on Sunday evening, the thirty-first of January, 1892? Is it credible that the good man went to the New Jerusalem, will stay there in perfect felicity until the day of judgment, and will then have to return to this world,

rejoin his old body, and stand his trial at the great assize, with the possibility of having to shift his quarters afterwards? Would not this be extremely unjust, nay dreadfully cruel? And even if Spurgeon, as one of the "elect," only left heaven for form's sake at the day of judgment, to go through the farce of a predetermined trial, would it not be a gratuitous worry to snatch him away from unspeakable bliss to witness the trial of the human species, and the damnation of at least nine-tenths of all that ever breathed?

As a matter of fact, the Christian Church has never been able to make up its mind about the state or position of the soul immediately after death. Only a few weeks ago we saw that Sir G. G. Stokes, unconsciously following in the wake of divines like Archbishop Whately, holds the view that the soul on leaving the body will lie in absolute unconsciousness until the day when it has to wake up and stand in the dock. The controversies on this subject are infinite, and all sorts of ideas have been maintained, but nothing has been authoritatively decided. Mr. Spurgeon's friends have simply *cut* the Gordian knot; that is, they are only dogmatising.

Laying all such subtle disputes aside, we should like Mr. Harrald to tell us how he knows that Spurgeon has gone, is going, or ever will go to heaven. What certainty can they have in the matter? Saint Paul himself alluded to the possibility of his being "a castaway." How can an inferior apostle be *sure* of the kingdom of heaven?

Saint Paul taught predestination, and so did Spurgeon. According to this doctrine, God knew beforehand the exact number of human beings that would live on this planet, though Omniscience itself must have been taxed to decide where the anthropoid exactly shaded off into the man. He also knew the exact number of the elect who would go to heaven, and the exact number of the reprobate who would go to hell. The tally was decided before the spirit of God brooded over the realm of Chaos and old Night. Every child born into the world bears the stamp of his destiny. But the stamp is secret. No one can detect it. Lists of saved and damned are not published. If they were, it would save us a lot of anxiety. Some would say, "I'm all right." Others would say, "I'm in for it; I'll keep cool while I can." But we must all die before we ascertain our fate. We may feel confident of being in the right list, with the rest of the sheep; but confidence is not proof, and impressions are not facts. When we take the great leap we shall know. Until then no man has any certitude; not even the most pious Christian that ever rolled his eyes in prayer to his Maker, or whined out the confession of his contemptible sins. All are in the same perplexity, and Spurgeon was no exception to the rule.

When predestination was really believed, the friends of the greatest saint only *hoped* he had gone to heaven. When they are *sure* of it predestination is dead. Nay, hell itself is extinguished. Spurgeon's friends think he has gone to heaven because they feel he was too good to go to hell. They knew him personally, and it is hard to think that a man whose hand once lay in yours is howling in everlasting fire. Such exceptions prove a new rule. They show that the human heart has outgrown the horrible doctrine of future torment, that the human mind has outgrown foolish creeds, that man is better than his God.

GOD IN JAPAN

Japan has just been visited by a terrible earthquake. Without a moment's warning it swept along, wrecking towns, killing people, and altering the very shape of mountains. A vast tidal wave also rushed against the coast and deluged whole tracts of low-lying country. It is estimated that 50,000 houses have been destroyed, and at least 5,000 men, women, and children. The first reports gave a total of 25,000 slain, but this is said to be an exaggeration. Nevertheless, as a hundred miles or so of railway is torn to pieces, and it is difficult to convey relief to the suffering survivors, the butcher's bill of this catastrophe may be doubled before the finish.

If earthquakes are the work of blind, unconscious Nature, it is idle to spend our breath in discussion or recrimination. Even regret is foolish. We have to take the world as we find it, with all its disadvantages, and make the best of a not too brilliant bargain. Instead of screaming we must study; instead of wailing we must reflect; and eventually, as we gain a deeper knowledge of the secrets of Nature, and a greater mastery over her forces, we shall be better able to foresee the approach of evil and to take precautionary measures against it.

But the standard teaching of England, to say nothing of less civilised nations, is not Naturalism but Theism. We are told that there is a God over all, and that he doeth all things well. On the practical side this deity is called Providence. It is Providence that sends fine weather, and Providence that sends bad weather; Providence that sends floods, and Providence that sends drought; Providence that favors us with a fine harvest, and Providence that blights the crops, reducing millions of people, as in Russia at this moment, to the most desperate shifts of self-preservation. It is Providence that saves Smith's precious life in a railway accident, and of course it is. Providence that smashes poor Jones, Brown and Robinson.

Now it will be observed that the favorable or adverse policy of Providence is quite irrespective of human conduct, There is no moral discrimination. If Grace Darling and Jack the Ripper were travelling by the same train, and it met with an accident, everybody knows that their chances of death are precisely equal. If there were any difference it would be in favor of Jack, who seems very careful of his own safety, and would probably take a seat in the least dangerous part of the train.

Some people, of course, and especially parsons, will contend that Providence does discriminate. They have already been heard to hint that the Russian famine is on account of the persecution of the Jews. But this act of brutality is the crime of the Government, and the famine falls upon multitudes of peasants who never saw a Jew in their lives. They have to suffer the pangs of hunger, but the Czar will not go without a single meal or a single bottle of champagne.

No doubt a pious idiot or two will go to the length of asserting or insinuating that the earthquake in Japan is a divine warning to the people, from the Mikado down to his meanest subject, that they are too slow in accepting Christianity. In fact there is a large collection of such pious idiots, only they are deterred by a wholesome fear of ridicule. Hundreds of thousands of people have seen Mr. Wilson Barrett in *Claudian*, without being in the least astonished that an earthquake, which ruins a whole city, should be got up for the hero's spiritual edification.

Let the pious idiots, however numerous, be swept aside, and let the Christian with a fair supply of brains in his skull consider Providence in the light of this earthquake. It is folly to pretend that the Japanese are particularly wicked at this moment. It is greater folly to pretend that the earthquake killed the most flagitious sinners. It slew like Jehovah's bandits in the land of Canaan, without regard to age, sex, or character. The terrible fact must be faced, that in a country not specially wicked, and in a portion of it not inhabited by select sinners, the Lord sent an earthquake to slay man, woman, and child, and if possible to "leave alive nothing that breatheth."

Lay your hand upon your heart, Christian, and honestly answer this question. Would you have done this deed? Of course not. Your cheek flames at the thought. You would rush to save the victims.

You would soothe the dying and reverently bury the dead. Why then do you worship a Moloch who laughs at the writhings of his victims and drinks their tears like wine? See, they are working and playing; they are at business and pleasure; one is toiling to support the loved ones at home; another is sitting with them in peace and joy; another is wooing the maiden who is dearer to him than life itself; another is pondering some benevolent project; another is planning a law or a poem that shall be a blessing and a delight to posterity. And lo the mandate of Moloch goes forth, and "his word shall not return unto him void." Swifter than thought calamity falls upon the gay and busy scene. Hearts that throbbed with joy now quiver with agony. The husband folds his wife in a last embrace. The mother gathers her children like Niobe. The lover clasps in the midst of horror the maiden no longer coy. Homes are shaken to dust, halls fall in ruins, the very temples of the gods are shattered. Brains are dashed out, blood flows in streams, limbs are twisted, bodies are pinned by falling masonry, cries of anguish pierce the air, groans follow, and lastly silence. Moloch then retires to his inmost sanctuary, filled and sated with death and pain.

Is it not better, Christian friend, to defy Moloch instead of worshipping him? Is it not still better to regard this deity as the creation of fanciful ignorance? Is not existence a terror if Providence may swoop upon us with inevitable talons and irresistible beak? And does not life become sweeter when we see no cruel intelligence behind the catastrophes of nature?

STANLEY ON PROVIDENCE

Buckle, the historian of Civilisation, points out that superstition is most rampant where men are most oppressed by external nature. Wild and terrible surroundings breed fear and awe in the human mind. Those who lead adventurous lives are subject to the same law. Sailors, for instance, are proverbially superstitious, and military men are scarcely less so. The fighter is not always moral, but he is nearly always religious.

No one acquainted with this truth will be surprised at the piety of explorers. There is a striking exception in Sir Richard Burton, but we do not remember another. From the days of Mungo Park down to our own age, they have been remarkable for their religious temperaments. Had they remained at home, in quiet and safety, they might not have been conspicuous in this respect; but a life of constant adventure, of daily peril and hairbreadth escapes, developed their superstitious tendencies. It is so natural to feel our helplessness in solitude and danger, and perhaps in sickness. It is so easy to feel that our escape from a calamity that hemmed us in on every side was due to a providential hand.

Whether Stanley, who is now the cynosure of all eyes, began with any considerable stock of piety, is a question we have no means of determining; but we can quite understand how a very little would go a very long way in Africa, amid long and painful marches through unknown territory, the haunting peril of strange enemies, and the oppressive gloom of interminable forests. Indeed, if the great explorer had become as superstitious as the natives themselves, we could have forgiven it as a frailty incident to human nature in such trying circumstances. But when he brings his mental weakness home with him, and addresses Englishmen in the language of ideas calculated for the latitude of equatorial Africa, it becomes necessary to utter a protest. Stanley has had a good spell of rest in Egypt, and plenty of time to get rid of the "creeps." He should, therefore, have returned to Europe clothed and in his right mind. But instead of this he deliberately sits down and writes the following rubbish for an American magazine, with one eye on God above and the other on a handsome cheque below:

"Constrained at the darkest hour humbly to confess that without God's help I was helpless, I vowed a vow in the forest solitudes that I would confess his aid before men. Silence, as of death, was round about me; it was midnight; I was weakened by illness, prostrated by fatigue, and wan with anxiety for my white and black companions, whose fate was a mystery. In this physical and mental distress I besought God to give me back my people. Nine hours later we were exulting with a rapturous joy. In full view of all was the crimson flag with the crescent, and beneath its waving folds was the long-lost rear column."

Danger and grief are apt to make us selfish, and no one would be hard on Stanley for showing weakness in such circumstances. But he rather glories in it. The danger is gone, and alas! the egotism remains. Others perished miserably, but he escaped. Omnipotence took care of him and let them go to the Devil. No doubt they prayed in their extremity as heartily as he did, but their prayers were unheard or neglected. Stanley was the lion of the party. Yes, and in parading his egotistic piety in this way, he is in danger of becoming a *lion comique*.

There is something absolutely farcical in Stanley's logic. While he was praying to God, millions of other persons were engaged in the same occupation. Agonised mothers were beseeching God to spare their dear children; wives were imploring him to restore the bread-winner of the family to health; entombed miners were praying in the dark depths of coalpits, and slowly perishing of starvation; shipwrecked sailors were asking for the help that never came. Providence could not, apparently, take on too much business at once, and while Stanley's fate trembled in the balance the rest of mankind might shift for themselves.

But the farce does not end here. Stanley's attitude was much like Jacob's. That smooth-skinned and smooth-tongued patriarch said that if God would guarantee him a safe journey, feed him, clothe him, find him pocket money, and bring him safe back again – well, then the Lord should be his God.

Stanley was not so exacting, but his attitude was similar. He asked God to give him back his people (a few short, killed or starved, did not matter), and promised in return to "confess his aid before men." Give me the solid pudding, he says, and I will give you the empty praise. And now he is safe back in Europe he fulfils his part of the contract, and goes about trumpeting the praise of Omnipotence; taking care, however, to get as much cash as possible for every note he blows on the instrument.

Even this does not end the farce. Stanley's piety runs away with his arithmetic. He reminds us of a Christian lady we heard of the other day. She prayed one night, on going to bed, for news from her daughter, and early the next morning a letter came bearing the Edinburgh post-mark. This was clearly an answer to her prayer. But a sceptical friend showed her that the letter must have been posted at Edinburgh before she prayed for it. Now Stanley reasons like that lady. Nine hours is no time in central Africa. The "long-lost rear column" must have been near, though invisible, when Stanley struck his little bargain with the Almighty. Had it been two or three hundred miles off, and miraculously transported, the hand of Providence would have been unmistakable; but in the circumstances its arrival was natural, and the miracle is obviously the creation of Stanley's heated brain. He was "weakened by illness" and "prostrated by fatigue," and the absurdity was pardonable. We only protest against his playing the child when he is well and strong.

GONE TO GOD

Stanley, the African traveller, is a man of piety. He seems to be on pretty familiar terms with the "one above." During his last expedition to relieve Emin – a sceptical gentleman, who gets along with less bloodshed than Stanley – he was troubled with "traitors"; that is, black fellows who thought they had a better right in Africa than the intrusive whites, and acted upon that opinion. This put Stanley in a towering rage. He resolved to teach the "traitors" a lesson. One of them was solemnly tried – by his executioners, and sentenced to be hung. A rope was noosed round his neck, and he was taken under a tree, which was to be his gallows. The poor devil screamed for mercy, but Stanley bent his inexorable brows, and cried, "Send him to God!"

"We were troubled with no more traitors," says Stanley. Very likely. But the great man forgot to say what he meant by the exclamation, "Send him to God!" Did he mean "Send him to God for judgment?" If so, it was rather rough to hang the prisoner before his proper trial. Did he mean, "The fellow isn't fit for earth, so send him to heaven?" If so, it was a poor compliment to Paradise. Or did he simply use a pious, impressive form of speech to awe the spectators, and give them the notion that he had as much traffic with God as any African mystery-man or Mohammedan dervish?

The middle one of these three theories fits in best with the general sentiment, or at any rate the working sentiment, of Christian England. Some brutal, drunken, or passionate wretch commits a murder. He is carefully tried, solemnly sentenced, and religiously hanged. He is declared unfit to live on this planet. But he is still a likely candidate for heaven, which apparently yawns to receive all the refuse of earth. He is sedulously taken in hand by the gaol chaplain, or some other spiritual guide to glory, and is generally brought to a better frame of mind. Finally, he expresses sorrow for his position, forgives everybody he has ever injured, delivers himself of a good deal of highly edifying advice, and then swings from the gallows clean into the Kingdom of Heaven.

The grotesque absurdity of all this is enough to wrinkle the face of a cab horse. Society and the murderer are both playing the hypocrite, and of course Society is the worse of the two, for it is acting deliberately and methodically, while the poor devil about to be hung is like a hunted thing in a corner, up to any shift to ease his last moments and make peace with the powers of the life to come. Society says he has killed somebody, and he shall be killed; that he is not fit to live, but fit to die; that it must strangle him, and call him "brother" when the white cap is over his face, and God must save his soul; that he is too bad to dwell on earth, but it hopes to meet him in heaven.

Religion does not generate sense, logic, or humaneness in the mind of Society. Its effect on the doomed assassin is simply horrible. He is really a more satisfactory figure when committing the murder than when he is posing, and shuffling and twisting, and talking piously, and exhibiting the intense, unmitigated selfishness which is at the bottom of all religious sentiment. The essence of piety comes out in this tragi-comedy. Personal fear, personal hope, self, self, sell, is the be-all and the end-all of this sorry exhibition.

A case in point has just occurred at Leeds. James Stockwell was hung there on Tuesday morning. While under sentence of death, the report says, he slept well and ate heartily, so that remorse does not appear to have injured his digestion or any other part of his physical apparatus. On learning that he would not be reprieved, and must die, he became very attentive to the chaplain's ministrations; in fact, he took to preaching himself, and wrote several letters to his relatives, giving them sound teetotal advice, and warning them against the evils of drink.

But the fellow lied all the time. His crime was particularly atrocious. He outraged a poor servant girl, sixteen years of age, and then cut her throat. He was himself thirty-two years of age, with a wife and one child, so that he had not even the miserable excuse of an unmated animal. A plea of insanity was put forward on his behalf, but it did not avail. When the wretched creature found he was not to be reprieved, and took kindly to the chaplain's religion, he started a fresh theory to cover his crime.

He said he was drunk when he committed it. Now this was a lie. The porter's speech in *Macbeth* will explain our meaning. James Stockwell may have had a glass, but if he was really drunk, in the sense of not knowing what he was about, we believe it was simply impossible for him to make outrage the prelude to murder. If he had merely drunk enough to bring out the beast in him, without deranging the motor nerves, he was certainly not *drunk* in the proper sense of the word. He knew what he was doing, and both in the crime and in his flight he showed himself a perfect master of his actions.

Religion, therefore, did not "convict him of sin." It did not lay bare before him his awful wickedness. It simply made him hypocritical. It induced or permitted him to save his *amour propre* by a fresh falsehood.

James Stockwell's last letter from gaol was written the day before his execution. It was a comprehensive epistle, addressed to his father and mother and brothers and sisters. "God" and "Christ" appear in it like an eruption. The writer quotes the soothing text, "Come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." He was evidently familiar with Scripture, and thought this text especially applicable to himself. "Many a prayer," he says, "have I offered to God both on behalf of you and myself," and he winds up by "hoping to meet you all hereafter."

Not a word about his crime. Not a word about his injury to society. Not a word about the poor girl he outraged and murdered. James Stockwell had no thought for her or her relatives. He did not trouble about what had become of Kate Dennis. He was careless whether she was in heaven or hell. Not once, apparently, did it cross his mind that he had destroyed her young life after nameless horror; that he had killed her in the bloom of maidenhood; that at one fell swoop he had extinguished all that she might have been – perhaps a happy wife and mother, living to a white old age, with the prattle of grandchildren soothing her last steps to the grave. Such reflections do not occur to gentlemen who are anxious about their salvation, and in a hurry to get to heaven.

"I and mine" – my fate, my mother, my father, my sisters, my brothers – this was the sole concern of James Stockwell under the chaplain's ministrations. In this frame of mind, we presume, he has sailed to glory, and his family hope to meet him there snug in Abraham's bosom. Well, we don't. We hope to give the haunt of James Stockwell a wide berth. If he and others like him are in the upper circles, every decent person would rather be in the pit.

Let not the reader suppose that James Stockwell's case is uncommon. We have made a point of reading the letters of condemned murderers, and they all bear a family likeness. Religion simply stimulates and sanctifies selfishness. In selfishness it began and in selfishness it ends. Extreme cases only show the principle in a glaring light; they do not alter it, and the light is the light of truth.

James Stockwell has gone to God. No doubt the chaplain of Leeds gaol feels sure of it. Probably the fellow's relatives are just as sure. But what of Kate Dennis. Is *she* with God? What an awful farce it would be if she were in hell. Perhaps she is. She had no time to prepare for death. She was cut off "in her sins." But her murderer had three weeks to prepare for his freehold in New Jerusalem. He qualified himself for a place with the sore-legged Lazarus. He dwells in the presence of the Lamb. He drinks of the river of life. He twangs his hallelujah harp and blows his hallelujah trumpet. Maybe he looks over the battlements and sees Kate Dennis in Hades. The murderer in heaven, and the victim in hell! Nay more. It has been held that the bliss of the saved will be heightened by witnessing the tortures of the damned. In that case Kate Dennis may burn to make James Stockwell's holiday. He will watch her writhings with more than the relish of a sportsman who has hooked a lusty trout. "Ha, ha," the worthy James may exclaim, "I tortured her before I killed her, and now I shall enjoy her tortures for ever."

THANK GOD

The peculiarly selfish character of religion is often exemplified, but we do not remember a better illustration than the one which recently occurred at Folkestone. The twenty-seven seamen who were rescued from the *Benvenue* attended a thanksgiving service at the parish church, where the vicar delivered "a short address suitable to the occasion." Their captain and four of his crew were drowned, and the lucky survivors thanked the Lord for saving them, though he let the others perish in the yeasty waves.

We should like to see a copy of that vicar's suitable discourse. We suspect it would be an interesting study to a cynic. No doubt the man of God's chief motive was professional. The saving of those shipwrecked men was a splendid piece of work, but it required to be rounded off. It was not complete unless the parson blessed it and approved it with a text. He came in at the finish when the danger was all over, and gave the perfecting touch in the shape of a cheap benediction. Probably the man of God put in a good word for Providence. The poor sailors had been snatched from the jaws of death; their minds were therefore in a state of agitation, and at the very best they are not a logical or reflective race of men. Very likely, therefore, they assented to the theory that they owed their deliverance to the blessing of God, but a little quiet thought about the matter would possibly make them see it in a different light.

The persons who visibly *did* save them from drowning were gallant lifeboat-men, who put their own lives in deadly peril, fighting the storm inch by inch in the hope of rescuing a number of unknown fellow creatures. All honor to *them!* We would sooner doff the hat to them than to any prince in Christendom. Some of them, perhaps, take a drop too much occasionally, and their language may often be more vigorous than polite. But all that is superficial. The real test of a man is what he will do when he is put to it. When those rough fellows saw a brave task before them, all the skin-deep blackguardism dropped away; the heroic came out in supreme majesty, and they were consecrated by it more truly than any smug priest at his profitable altar. As they jumped into the boat they proved the nobility of human nature, and the damnable falsehood of the Christian doctrine of original sin.

What share Providence had in the matter is not very apparent. Strong arms and stout hearts were in the lifeboat, and that accounts for her reaching the wreck. Had the rowers the choice of a stimulus, we dare say they would have taken a swig of brandy in preference to any quantity of the Holy Spirit. What Providence *might* have done if he, she, or it was in the humor, was to keep the shipwrecked sailors safe until the lifeboat arrived. But this was *not* done. Those who were lashed to the rigging were saved, while the captain and four others, less fortunately situated, were lost. Where the *material* means were efficacious there was salvation, and where they failed there was disaster and death.

So much for the logical side of the matter. Now let us look at the moral side. Religion pretends to minister to the unselfish part of our nature. That is the theory, but how does it work out in practice? Thanking God for saving the survivors of a shipwreck implies that he could have saved those who perished. It also implies that he did not choose to do so. It further implies that the saved are more worthy, or more important, than the lost; at least, it implies that they are greater favorites in the "eye of heaven." Now this is a frightful piece of egotism, which everyone with a spark of manhood would be disgusted at if he saw it in its true colors.

Nor is this all. It is not even the worst. There is a viler aspect of this "thanksgiving" business. One man is saved in a disaster and another is killed. When the first realises his good luck he congratulates himself. This is natural and pardonable, but only for a moment. The least disinterestedness, the least sympathy, the least imagination, would make him think of his dead companion. "Did he suffer much, poor fellow? What will his wife do? How will his little ones get on without a father? After all, mightn't it have been better if he had been spared instead of me? Who knows?"

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