



Religion.

Truth and goodness is the glorious
Great religion which we own;
Reason can accept it fully
And delight to make it known;
Learned and unlearned spirits
Cannot cavil at its creed,
Nor can any helpless victim
Ever on its altar bleed.

Goodness in the heart abounding,
Truth in actions budding forth,
Kindness in the conduct beaming,
Love for every manly worth;
Feeling care for one another,
Ready help for all in need—
That is my profession, brother,
That is my religious creed.

Freedom from the lips to utter,
All the living truths we know;
Freedom for the feet to travel
Where convictions bid us go;
Freedom for all men to differ,
Freedom, also, to agree—
That is the religious power
That will make us good and free.
—[Munollog.]

God's Mistakes

By R. G. Ingersoll.

"And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, 'Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure, he sleepeth and must be awakened.'"

Do you consider that the proper way to attack the god of another? Did not Elijah know that the name of Baal "was encircled in the heart of every believer with the profoundest reverence and love"? Did he "violate the laws of social morality and decency"?

But Jehovah and Elijah did not stop at this point. They were not satisfied with mocking the prophets of Baal, but they brought them down to the brook Kishon—four hundred and fifty of them—and there they murdered every one.

Does it appear to you that on that occasion, on the banks of the brook Kishon—"Mercy and judgment met together, and that righteousness and peace kissed each other"?

The question arises: Has every one who reads the Old Testament the right to express his thought as to the character of Jehovah? You will admit that as he reads, his mind will receive some impression, and that when he finishes the "inspired volume" he will have some opinion as to the character of Jehovah. Has he the right to express that opinion? Is the bible a revelation from God to man? Is it a revelation to the man who reads it, or to the man who does not read it? If to the man who reads it, has he the right to give to others the revelation that God has given to him? If he comes to the conclusion at which you have arrived,—that Jehovah is God,—has

he the right to express that opinion?

If he concludes, as I have done, that Jehovah is a myth, must he refrain from giving his honest thoughts? Christians do not hesitate to give their opinion of heretics, philosophers, and infidels. They are not restrained by the "laws of social morality and decency." They have persecuted to the extent of their power, and their Jehovah pronounced upon unbelievers every curse capable of being expressed in the Hebrew dialect. At this moment, thousands of missionaries are attacking the gods of the heathen world, and heaping contempt on the religion of others.

But as you have seen proper to defend Jehovah, let us for a moment examine this deity of the ancient Jews. There are several tests of character. It may be that all the virtues can be expressed in the word "kindness," and that nearly all the vices are gathered together in the word "cruelty."

Laughter is a test of character. When we know what a man laughs at, we know what he really is. Does he laugh at misfortune, at poverty, at honesty in rags, at industry without food, at the angonies of his fellow men? Does he laugh when he sees the convict clothed in the garments of shame—at the criminal on the scaffold? Does he rub his hands with glee over the embers of an enemy's home? Think of a man capable of laughing while looking at Marguerite in the prison cell with her dead babe by her side. What must be the real character of a God who laughs at the calamities of his children, mocks at their fears, their desolation, their distress and anguish? Would an infinitely loving God hold his ignorant children in derision? Would he pity, or mock? Save, or destroy? Educate, or exterminate? Would he lead them with gentle hands toward the light, or lie in wait for them like a wild beast? Think of the echoes of Jehovah's laughter in the rayless caverns of the eternal prison. Can a good man mock at the children of deformity? Will he deride the misshapen? Your Jehovah deformed some of his own children, and then held them up to scorn and hatred. These divine mistakes—these blunders of the infinite—were not allowed to enter the temple erected in honor of him who had dishonored them. Does a kind father mock his deformed child? What would you think of a mother who would deride and

taunt her misshapen babe?

There is another test. How does a man use power? Is he gentle or cruel? Does he defend the weak, succor the oppressed, or trample on the fallen?

If you will read again the twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, you will find how Jehovah, the compassionate, whose name is enshrined in so many hearts, threatened to use his power.

"The Lord shall smite thee with consumption, and with a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning, and with the sword, and with blasting and mildew. And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron. The Lord shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust."

"And thy carcass shall be meat unto all fowls of the air and unto the beasts of the earth."

"The Lord shall smite thee with madness and blindness. And thou shalt eat of the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and thy daughters. The tender and delicate woman among you, . . . her eye shall be evil . . . toward her young one and toward her children which she shall bear; for she shall eat them."

Should it be found that these curses were in fact uttered by the God of hell, and that the translators had made a mistake in attributing them to Jehovah, could you say that the sentiments expressed are inconsistent with the supposed character of the Infinite Fiend?

A nation is judged by its laws—by the punishment it inflicts. The nation that punishes ordinary offences with death is regarded as barbarous, and the nation that tortures before it kills is denounced as savage.

What can you say of the government of Jehovah, in which death was the penalty for hundreds of offences?—death for the expression of an honest thought—death for touching with a good intention a sacred ark—death for making hair oil—for eating shew bread—for imitating incense and perfumery?

In the history of the world a more cruel code cannot be found. Crimes seem to have been invented to gratify a fiendish desire to shed the blood of men.

There is another test: How does a man treat the animals in his power—his faithful horse—his patient ox—his loving dog?

How did Jehovah treat the animals in Egypt? Would a loving God, with fierce hail from heaven, bruise and kill the innocent cattle for the crimes of their owners?

Would he torment, torture and destroy them for the sins of men? Jehovah was a God of blood. His altar was adorned with the horns of a beast. He established a religion in which every temple was a slaughter house, and every priest a butcher—a religion that demanded the death of the first-born, and delighted in the destruction of life.

Free Inquiry,
By F. L. Oswald.

The right of free inquiry is the first condition of progress, and dogmatists who dispute that right virtually impeach the evidence or the morality of their own dogmas. An exception from that rule may, under certain conditions, be admitted in favor of theological tenets. Unobtrusive mystics have a right to expound the unknowable after their own fashion. The priests of Isis and the adepts of the Eleusinian Mysteries had the privilege to veil the secrets of their sacred rites. The discreet Pythagoreans could not be obliged to explain the bean-law of their master or their reason for believing in his ghost stories as firmly as in the evidence of his geometrical theorems. Even nocturnal Devil-worshippers may be permitted to mumble about their altars, if they do not dress them at the expense of their neighbors.

But it alters the case if such creeds become aggressive. The right of secrecy does not pertain to religions that have devastated our earth by a series of murderous wars, that have enforced their anti-natural dogmas by destroying the prosperity of whole nations, and their ghost dogmas by the torture and slaughter of millions; religions which, after the loss of their political power, have used all their moral influence to obstruct the progress of freedom and science, to arrogate the education of our children, and to interfere with the recreations of our holidays,—all under the pretext of promoting the propaganda of an infallible revelation. The votaries of such creeds cannot plead the privileges of the ancient mystics, for the right to investigate their claims has become a social and religious duty.—[Preface to "The Secret of the East"]

The Pagan gods were the deified powers of nature, the patrons of mariners, shepherds and husbandmen. The Christian gods were the deified enemies of nature.