

Ingersollian Echoes.

Extracts from his New York Journal article on Gov. Rollins' "Decline of Religion" Proclamation.

The Governor of New Hampshire is right when he says that Christianity has declined. The flames of faith are flickering, zeal is cooling and even bigotry is beginning to see the other side. I admit that there are still millions of orthodox Christians whose minds are incapable of growth, and who care no more for facts than a monitor does for bullets. Such obstructions on the highway of progress are removed only by death.

Salvation by faith is growing weak. People are beginning to see that character is more important than belief; that virtue is above all creeds. Civilized people no longer believe in a God that will damn an honest, generous man. They see that it is not honest to offer a reward for belief. The promise of reward is not evidence. It is an attempt to bribe.

Christianity teaches that the man who does right carries a cross. The exact opposite of this is true. The cross is carried by the man who does wrong. I believe in the restraining influences of intelligence. Intelligence is the only lever capable of raising mankind. If you wish to make men moral and prosperous, develop the brain. Men must be taught to rely on themselves. To supplicate the supernatural is a waste of time.

No intelligent Christians believe in this atonement. It is utterly unphilosophic. The idea that man made salvation possible by murdering God is infinitely absurd. This makes salvation the blossom of a crime, the blessed fruit of murder. According to this the joys of heaven are born of the agonies of innocence. If the Jews had been civilized—if they had believed in freedom of conscience and had listened kindly and calmly to the teachings of Christ, the whole world, including Christ's mother, would have gone to hell.

Salvation for credulity means damnation for investigation.

Prayer is beggary, an effort to get something for nothing. Labor is the honest prayer.

The fact is that religion has reduced Spain to a guitar, Italy to a hand organ, and Ireland to exile. What are the restraining influences of religion? I admit that religion can prevent people from eating meat on Friday, from dancing in Lent, from going to the theatre on holy days and from swearing in

public. In other words, religion can restrain people from committing artificial offences. But the real question is: Can religion restrain people from committing natural crimes?

I do not think that the good and true in Christianity are declining. The good and true are more clearly perceived and more precious than ever. The supernatural, the miraculous part of Christianity is declining. The New Testament has been compelled to acknowledge the jurisdiction of reason. If Christianity continues to decline at the same rate and ratio that it has declined in this generation, in a few years all that is supernatural in the Christian religion will cease to exist. There is a conflict, a battle, between the natural and the supernatural. The natural was baffled and beaten for thousands of years. The flag of defeat was carried by the few, by the brave and wise, by the real heroes of the race. They were conquered, captured, imprisoned, tortured and burned. Others took their places. The banner was kept in the air. In spite of countless defeats, the army of the natural increased. It began to gain victories. It did not torture and kill the conquered. It enlightened and blessed. It fought ignorance with science, cruelty with kindness, slavery with justice, and all vices with virtues. In this great conflict we have passed midnight. When the morning comes its rays will gild

but one flag—the flag of the natural.

The zeal which flamed in the hearts of Calvin, Luther and Knox is cold and dead. Where are the Wesleys and Whitfields? Where are the old evangelists, the revivalists who swayed the hearts of their hearers with words of flame? The preachers of our day have lost the Promethean fire. They have lost the tone of certainty, of authority. "Thus saith the Lord" has dwindled to "perhaps". Sermons, messages from God, promises radiant with eternal joy, threats lurid with the flames of hell—have changed to colorless essays, to apologies and literary phrases, to inferences and peradventures. "The blood-dyed vestures of the redeemer are not waving in triumph over the ramparts of sin and rebellion," but over the fortresses of faith float the white flags of truce. The trumpets no longer sound for battle, but for parley. The fires of hell have been extinguished, and heaven itself is only a dream. The "eternal verities" have changed to doubts. The torch of inspiration, choked with ashes, has lost its flame. There is no longer in the church "a sound from heaven as of a mighty, rushing wind"; no "cloven tongues like as of fire"; no "wonders in the heavens above" and no "signs in the earth beneath". The miracles have faded away and the sceptre is passing from superstition to science—science, the only possible savior of mankind.

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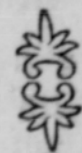
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