

Defense of Ingersoll.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE OREGONIAN:

In your issues of the 22d and 23d inst. you made editorial reference to the late Robert G. Ingersoll, and though very kind in tone, in the main, I think, the said estimates of him were hardly fair in one or two particulars. I have waited two days in the hope that somebody better able than I would speak in his behalf, but, as I have seen nothing from any other source, I will ask the indulgence of your columns for a few words on the subject.

You say: "He dies loved by a few, admired by thousands, feared and hated by millions. He was not content to doubt, he must revile. It was not enough for him to disbelieve, he must blaspheme." In reply, it may be said that few men have ever antagonized the dominant ideas of their time—and, particularly, the so-called religious ideas—without receiving as a reward for their pains the execration of their fellows; but it does not follow that a later and wiser generation will not do him justice. He can afford to await the test of time as to that. There is, however, seemingly unintentional evidence of the correctness of his opinion of the effect of supernatural religion upon men, in your assertion that "millions" of those who believe in "the gospel of love" now "hate" him.

If he "was not content to doubt," but "must revile," he certainly had much justification therefore in the teaching of the old Scripture, on the "eye-for-an-eye and tooth-for-a-tooth" basis, for he was himself the object of constant, insistent, vociferous and unanimous vituperation on the part of the pulpit of the Christian world. And, as to his inclination to "blaspheme," I think you are mistaken. I think it impossible for anybody to blaspheme unless the thing attacked is regarded by him as sacred. If that is true, Mr. Ingersoll was never guilty of blasphemy, because he never attacked anything that he regarded as sacred; and, if my contention in that particular is not true, he was simply following the example set him by every Christian pulpit in every land—in so far as I have ever heard—for it is the habit of all pulpits, I think, to attack and ridicule the gods and beliefs of those who are called "heathen." All worship of the supernatural was heathenish to Mr. Ingersoll, and he used against it any weapon which he thought effective. If the reader—if I should have one—will turn to 1 Kings xviii, and read the story of the contest between Elijah and the priests of Baal, he will find that the former (who was God's immediate representative), laughed at and "reviled" the latter for their failure, with truly Ingersollian irony, by saying: "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursu-

ing, or he is on a journey, or he is sleeping and must be awaked." Whether or not such utterances are wise, it ill-becomes the preachers and teachers of the present day to take Mr. Ingersoll to task for resorting to their use.

You say: "Ingersoll gave men and women nothing to replace the bread of faith he took from their hungry hands." Without pausing to fully enjoy the thought of so mixed a metaphor from so clever a source, I will say that neither Mr. Ingersoll nor anybody else ever took from "hungry hands" any faith that was not replaced with some idea which more than repaid the loss of the former. Those who most agonizingly bewail such so-called robbery are the ones who still hold on to the "faith" they deem so precious. Those who have exchanged the said faith for something else have done so because they found satisfaction in it; else it would not have been done.

Mr Ingersoll never attacked that which was kindly and helpful to humanity in its earthly environment. He was kindly, thoughtful, generous and helpful to an unusual degree; but simply because he not only did not believe in, but was bitterly opposed to certain supernatural teachings which he regarded as evil in their tendencies, you say he "made shipwreck" of his life! If that be so, I hope I may be so fortunate as to shipwreck mine.

Here are a few quotations from his writings which may serve as warnings to enable the young man of the day to avoid making shipwreck of their lives:

Happiness is the only good; the place to be happy is here; the time to be happy is now; and the way to be happy is in making others happy.

When a fact can be demonstrated force is unnecessary; and when it cannot be demonstrated force is infamous.

The spirit of worship is the spirit of tyranny. The intellect has no knees.

It is a terrible thing to wake up in the night, when sleeping alone, and be compelled to say, "There is a rascal in this bed."

To obey is slavish; but to act from a sense of obligation, perceived by the reason, is noble.

I want no heaven for which I must give up my reason; no happiness in exchange for my liberty; no immortality that demands the surrender of my individuality.

There are in nature neither rewards nor punishments; there are only consequences.

When every church becomes a school, every cathedral a university, every clergyman a teacher, and all the hearers brave and honest thinkers, the dream of poet, philanthropist, patriot and philosopher will become a great and splendid reality.

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