

INGERSOLL ANSWERS HIS CRITICS.

A few weeks ago THE COURIER published the larger portion of an article written by R. G. Ingersoll on suicide, being a defense of self-murder. The wide publication of this article throughout the country was followed almost immediately by an epidemic of suicides and this still keeps up. Col. Ingersoll's glorification of suicide aroused a storm of comment, and he has been criticised by eminent divines, literary men, scientists and humorists. In answer to certain of his critics he has now written a second article as follows:

First. In the article written by me about suicide ground was taken that "under many circumstances a man has a right to kill himself."

This has been attacked with great fury by clergyman, critics and writers of letters. These people contend that the right of self-destruction does not and cannot exist. They insist that life is the gift of God and that he only has the right to end the days of men; that it is our duty to bear the sorrows that he sends with graceful patience. Some have denounced suicide as the worst of crimes—worse than the murder of another.

The first question, then, is:

Has a man under any circumstances the right to kill himself? A man is being slowly devoured by a cancer, his agony is intense, his suffering all that nerves can feel. His life is slowly being taken. Is this the work of the good God? Did the compassionate God create the cancer so that it might feed on the quivering flesh of the victim?

The man suffering agonies beyond the imagination to conceive, is of no use to himself. His life is but a succession of pangs. He is of no use to his wife, his children, his friends or society. Day after day he is rendered unconscious by drugs that numb the nerves and put the brain to sleep. Has he the right to render himself unconscious? Is it proper for him to take refuge in sleep? If there be a good God I cannot believe that he takes pleasure in the sufferings of men—that he gloats over the agonies of his children. If there be a good God, he will, to the extent of his power, lessen the evils of life. So, I insist that the man being eaten by the cancer—a burden to himself and others—useless in every way, has the right to end his pain and pass through happy sleep to dreamless rest. But those who have answered me would say to this man: "It is your duty to be devoured. The good God wishes you to suffer. Your life is the gift of God. You hold it in trust and you have no right to end it. The cancer is the creation of God, and it is your duty to furnish it with food."

Take another case: A man is on a burning ship, the crew and the rest of the passengers have escaped—gone to the life-boats—and he is left alone. In the wide horizon there is no sail, no sign of hope. He cannot swim. If he leaps into the sea he drowns; if he remains on deck he burns. In any event he can live but a few moments. Those who have answered me, those who insist that under no circumstances a man has the right to take his own life, would say to this man: "Remember where you are. It is the desire of your loving, heavenly Father that you be clothed in flames—that you slowly roast—that your eyes be scorched to blindness and that you die insane with pain. Your life is not your own; only the agony is yours." I would say to this man: "Do as you wish. If you prefer drowning to burning, leap into the sea. Between inevitable evils you have the right of choice. You can help no one, even God, by allowing yourself to be burned, and you can injure no one, not even God by choosing the easier death."

Let us suppose another case: A man has been captured by savages in Central Africa. He is about to be tortured to death. His captors are going to thrust splinters of pine into his flesh and then set them on fire. He watches them as they make the preparations. He knows what they are about to do and what he is about to suffer. There is no hope of rescue, of help. He has a vial of poison. He knows that he can take it and in one moment pass beyond their power, leaving to them only the dead body. Is the man under obligations to keep his life because God gave it until the savages by torture take it? Are the savages the agents of God? Are they servants of the infinite? Is it the duty of this man to allow them to wrap his quivering body in a garment of flame? Has he no right to defend himself? Is it the will of God that he die by torture? What would any man of ordinary intelligence do in a case like this? Is there room for discussion? If the man took the poison, shortened his life for a few moments, escaped the tortures of the savage, is it possible that he would in another world be tortured forever?

Suppose another case: In the good old days when the Inquisition flourished, when men loved their enemies and murdered their friends, many frightful and ingenious ways were devised to touch the nerve of pain. Those who loved God, who had been "born twice," would take a fellow man who had been convicted of heresy, lay him upon the floor of a dungeon, secure his arms and legs with chains, fasten him to the earth so that he could not move, put an iron vessel, the opening downward, on his stomach, place in the vessel several rats, then tie it securely to his body. Then those worshippers of God would wait until the rats, seeking food and liberty, would gnaw through the body of the victim. Now, if a man about to be subjected to this torture had within his hand a dagger, would it excite the wrath of the "good God" if with one quick stroke he found the protection of death?

To this question there can be but one answer.

In the cases I have supposed it seems to me that each person would have the right to destroy himself. It does not seem possible that the man was under obligation to be devoured by a cancer; to remain upon the ship and perish in flame; to throw away the poison and be tortured to death by savages; to drop the dagger and endure the "mercies" of the church.

If in the cases I have supposed men would have the right to take their lives, then I was right when I said that "under many circumstances a man has the right to kill himself."

2. I denied that persons who killed themselves were physical cowards. They may lack moral courage; they may exaggerate their misfortunes, lose the sense of proportion, but the man who plunges the dagger in his heart, who sends the bullet through his brain, who leaps from some roof and dashes himself against the stones beneath, is not and cannot be a physical coward. The basis of cowardice is the fear of injury or the fear of death, and when that fear is not only gone, but in its place is the desire to die, no matter by what means, it is impossible that cowardice should exist. The suicide wants the very thing that cowardice endeavors to escape. So the man, forced to a choice of evils, choosing the less, is not a coward, but a reasonable man. It must be admitted that the suicide is honest with himself. He is to bear the injury of it alone. Certainly there is no hypocrisy and just as certainly there is no physical cowardice. Is the man who takes morphine rather than be eaten to death by a cancer a coward? Is the man who leaps into the sea rather than be burned to death a coward? Is the man who takes poison rather than be tortured to death by savages or "Christians" a coward.

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