

3. I also took the position that some suicides were sane, that they acted on their best judgment and that they were in full possession of their minds. Now, if under some circumstances a man has a right to take his life, and if under such circumstances he does take his life, then it cannot be said that he was insane. Most of the persons who have tried to answer me have taken the ground that suicide is not only a crime, but some of them have said that it is the greatest of crimes. Now, if it be a crime, then the suicide must have been sane. So all persons who denounce the suicide as a criminal admit that he was sane. Under the law an insane person is incapable of committing a crime. All the clergymen who have answered me, and who have passionately asserted that suicide is a crime, have by that assertion admitted the criminals who killed themselves were sane.

They agree with me, and not only admit but assert that "some who have committed suicide were sane and in the full possession of their minds."

It seems to me that these three propositions have been demonstrated to you: First, that under some circumstances a man has the right to take his life. Second, that the man who commits suicide is not a physical coward, and third, some who committed suicide were at the time sane and in the full possession of their minds.

4. I insisted and still insist that suicide was and is the foundation of Christian religion. I still insist that if Christ were God he had the power to protect himself without injuring his assailants, that having the power it was his duty to use it, and that failing to use it he consented to his own death and was merely a suicide.

To this the clergy answer that it was self-sacrifice for the redemption of man, that he made an atonement for the sins of unbelievers. Their ideas about redemption and atonement are born of a belief in the "fall of man" on account of the sins of our "first parents" and of the declaration that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin." The foundation has crumbled. No intelligent person now believes in the "fall of man," that our "first parents" were perfect and that their descendants grew worse and worse, at least until the coming of Christ.

Intelligent men now believe that the general course of the human race has been upward—that while some tribes and nations have gone backward and perished, others have advanced. That the world is nearer civilization today than ever before.

Intelligent men now believe that ages and ages before the dawn of history man was a poor, naked, cruel, ignorant and degraded savage, whose language consisted of a few sounds of terror and hatred and delight; that he devoured his fellow man, having all the vices, but not all the virtues of beasts; that the journey from the den to the house, the palace, has been long and painful, through many centuries of suffering, of cruelty and war; through many ages of discovery, invasion, self-sacrifice and thought. Redemption and atonement are left without a fact on which to rest. The idea that an infinite God, creator of all worlds, came to this grain of sand, learned the trade of a carpenter, discussed with Pharisees and scribes, and allowed a few infuriated Hebrews to put him to death, that he might atone for the sins of men and redeem a few believers from the consequences of his own wrath, can find no lodgment in a good and natural brain.

In no mythology can anything more monstrously unbelievable be found. But if Christ were a man and attacked the religion of his time because it was cruel and absurd; if he endeavors to found a religion of kindness, of good deeds, to take the place of heartlessness and ceremony, and if, rather than to deny what he believed to be right and true, he suffered death, then he was a noble man—a benefactor of his race.

But if he were God there was no need of this. The Jews did not wish to kill God. If he had only made himself known all knees would have touched the ground. If he were God it required no heroism to die. He knew that what we call death is but the opening of the gates of eternal life. If he were God there was no self-sacrifice. He had no need to suffer pain. He could have changed the crucifixion to a joy.

Even the editors of religious weeklies see that there is no escape from these conclusions, from these arguments, and so instead of attacking the arguments they attack the man who makes them.

I denounced the law of New York that makes an attempt to commit suicide a crime.

It seems to me that one who has suffered so much that he passionately longs for death should be pitied instead of punished, helped rather than imprisoned.

A despairing woman who had vainly sought for leave to toil, a woman without a home, without friends, without bread with clasped hands, with tear-filled eyes, with broken words of prayer, in the darkness of night, leaps from the dock, hoping, longing for the tearless sleep of death. She is rescued by a kind, courageous man, handed over to the authorities, indicted, tried, convicted, clothed in a convict's garb and locked in a felon's cell.

To me this law seems barbarous and absurd, a law that only savages would enforce.

In this discussion a curious thing has happened. For several centuries the clergy have declared that while infidelity is a very good thing to live by, it is a wretched consolation in the hour of death. They have said in spite of truth, that all the great unbelievers die trembling with fear, asking God for mercy, surrounded by friends in the torments of despair. Ten thousand and thousands of clergymen have described the last agonies of Voltaire who died as peaceful as a happy child immediately passes from play to slumber; the final anguish of Hume, who fell into his last sleep as serenely as a river running between green and shaded banks to the sea; the despair of Thomas Paine, one of the bravest, one of the noblest men, who met the night of death untroubled as a star that meets the morning. At the same time these ministers admitted that the average murderer could meet death on the scaffold with perfect serenity, and could smilingly ask the people who had gathered there to see him killed, to meet him in heaven.

But the honest man who had expressed his honest thoughts against the creed of the church in power could not die in peace. God would see to it that his last moments should be filled with insanity or fear—that with his last breath he should utter the shriek of remorse, the cry for pardon.

This has all changed, and now the clergy in their sermons answering me, declare the atheists, the free thinkers have no fear of death—that to avoid some little annoyance, a passing inconvenience, they gladly and cheerfully put out the light of life. It is now said that infidels believe that death is the end—that it is a deathless sleep—that it is without pain, that, therefore, they have no fear, care nothing for gods, or heavens, or hell, nothing for the threats of pulpit, nothing for the day of judgment and that when life becomes a burden they carelessly throw it down. The infidels are so afraid of death that they commit suicide.

This is certainly a great change, and I congratulate myself on having forced the clergy to contradict themselves.

7. The clergy take the position that the atheist, the unbeliever, has no standard of morality—that he can have no real conception of right and wrong. They are of the opinion that it is impossible for one to be moral or good unless he believes in some being far above himself.

In this connection we might ask how God can be moral or good unless he believes in some being superior to himself.

What is morality? It is the best thing to do under the circumstances. What is the best thing to do under the circumstances? That which will increase the sum of human happiness, or lessen it the least. Happiness in its highest, noblest form is the only good that which increases or preserves or creates happiness is moral—that which decreases it or puts it in peril, is immoral.

It is not hard for an atheist—for an unbeliever—to keep his hands out of the fire. He knows that burning his hands will not increase his well-being, and he is moral enough to keep them out of the flames.

So it may be said that each man acts according to his intelligence so far as what he considers his own good is concerned. Sometimes he is swayed by passion, by prejudice, by ignorance, but when he is really intelligent, master of himself, he does what he believes is best for him. If he is intelligent enough he knows that what is really good for him is good for others—for all the world.

It is impossible for me to see why any belief in the supernatural is necessary to have a keen perception of right and wrong. Very many who have the capacity to suffer and enjoy, and have imagination enough to give the same capacity to others, have within themselves the natural basis of all morality. The idea of morality was born here, in this world, of the experience, the intelligence of mankind. Morality is not of supernatural origin. It did not fall from the clouds and it needs no belief in the supernatural, no supernatural promises or threats, no supernatural heavens or hells to give it force of life. Subjects who are governed by the threats and promises of a king are merely slaves. They are not governed by the ideal, by noble views of right and wrong. They are obedient cowards, con-