

**THE MISTAKES OF
ROBERT G. INGERSOLL,
ON NATURE AND GOD**

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The Mistakes of Robert G. Ingersoll, on Nature and God by George W. Edgett

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MISTAKES OF INGERSOLL.

COL. ROBERT G. INGERSOLL has said that "felling forests is not the end of agriculture, driving pirates from the sea is not all there is of commerce." That is so, and though he may have done some good work in felling ghosts, clearing up the wilderness of hell, producing skulls in testimony of human progress, and pursuing the formal gods of the past to the end of all their power, yet when he leaves that field of labor, to pursue the Supreme Absolute to the extremity of nothing, unless of organic nature, he is reëntering the wilderness of ancient idolatry for his own system, with this difference; that his gods are a supposed infinity of things, while the ancients only took a few things for convenience' sake.

He is on the wrong trail, and that is what we propose to demonstrate.

He says, "A god must not only be material, but he must be an organism, capable of changing other forms of force into thought-force." He says, "A deity outside of nature exists in nothing, and is nothing." He thus reverses the creative theory, and falls into the opposite absurdity. He asserts material infinitude and infinitude of worlds, probably to give his chief organic god, or union of such gods, a chance of infinity.

But materiality, worlds and their products, so far as we know, are only individual things; and it is evident that individual parts can form no portion of absolute infinity, or that no limitless aggregation of parts can fill that one single mode of infinitude called space.

All organic forms are divisible into parts. Gas, air, rocks, trees, men, everything we know, can be divided into separate parts. Then, if such things could make an infinite, a part of infinity might be measured and divided. If this be true, we come to conceive of infinity as capable of being cut in two. And this gives us two infinites; for if you deny infinity as to one part, you must deny it as to the other, and also as to both parts together, each part being thus declared finite.

This brings us to the absurdity of one infinitude twice as great as either of those which compose it.

In the same manner, if we consider countless millions of parts as constituting infinity, we must conceive it as millions of times greater than each of those parts; and in order to maintain the idea of an infinitude so made, we are still compelled to assert that each of those parts is also infinite.

So, including all things, whether capable of thought or not, even though imagined as one thinking being, they could not constitute Infinite Intelligence, for infinitude of organic form is impossible. Hence we are forced to conclude, either that there is no infinite, or that Infinite Intelligence, if it does exist, can only be conceived of as indivisible, incapable of increase or diminution, existing by virtue of no organism, absent from no needle point of space.

Where stands the block of granite, God was; and if not still there, each instant the same, then has He changed to granite? But if granite expresses Him by form, you again come to the absurdity of making Him divisible, or finite. And if He is displaced by the granite, then He loses so much of His omnipresence, or is constantly diminished by just so much in the extent of His infinity, which is an absurdity just as great as the other. Therefore, we again see that the Intelligence or Spirit called God, to be in all and through all, forever formulating matter in shapes and ways beyond the wildest human fancy, could neither be caused nor constituted of material form.

When a material god, or none at all, is asserted, the philosopher testifies whereof he knows not; like a witness who swears to the non-existence of something, because he never knew it. The little speck that he does know, superficially by cause and effect, is made a sample of the boundless all that he does not know. He makes nature the asylum of his ignorance, in reasoning of God, the same as others make the will of God their refuge, in reasoning of nature.

Like the boy who imagined the end of the world and set out to find it, one learns a multitude of things as he travels on in thought, and all egotism is sure to diminish as the universe seems to increase. But when coming forever to the same point in the circle, whereof we try to find the end, why not learn like the boy, by experience, or by the efforts of humanity for thousands of years, that the object aimed at does not exist as we by inheritance supposed; that God has not a formal nature, and that organism, with all its products and refinements, cannot involve, nor pertain to, Absolute Being?

Let us see if this will not relieve us of the absurdities we come

to in other ways. Admit the eternity of matter, force, and motion, and so escape the absurd conclusions of the creative theory on the one hand, and meet the logic of the atheist on the other.

One absurdity thus avoidable is this: since it is self-evident that no part of creation could have been something and nothing at the same instant, all things must have been made of something called matter; and if there was nothing in existence before creation except God, then it follows that Himself was the matter whereof the universe was created.

And we also avoid another error of belief that men fell into from the old theory, that an act of human will and faith, by the power of God, might create or change things, the same as He was supposed to have done from the beginning; or, for example, that any other mountain besides a mountain of thought might be removed by perfect faith.

Now let us admit that throughout nature, between all forms, as between the rolling stars, there is an actual material power that belts them all together and apart in equilibrium, by an eternal force that forever eludes the analysis and pursuit of thought. And suppose just here that we are met by the consequent fact, demonstrated by science, that matter is impenetrable and not divisible, or only divisible by particles and not in its infinity. Then, in the same manner that we proved the Infinite God to be indivisible, or not composed of parts, so may we prove by a like division of parts, that no limitless number of parts can constitute the infinite essence of matter.

Then it is inquired, How does infinite matter in essence differ from Infinite God in essence, or can there be more than one infinite? We answer, Yes; not only more than one, but, to make an absolute and free infinity, there must be an infinity of infinities.

Imagine a line running through infinite space. Its extension *ad infinitum* goes on forever beyond our comprehension, and we call that line infinite. And you may conceive of parallel lines *ad infinitum*, each one also infinite, or an endless number of infinite lines not parallel, that are also possible. And so of planes in infinite extension, and so of circles. Commence with the circle of a silver dollar, and go on increasing the size of your ideal circles for a life-time, or till you come to the conception of one inclosing all visible stars, and you will never come to conceive the end of all possible circles, and so we call that idea of circles infinite; and

this not only with reference to size, but with reference to the limitless number possible, of the same size as each of the others. Or, to illustrate by another example, consider the infinite relations of effect, from every atom of all material forms; and then follow on from small to great, from Earth to stars, and know, of Mind, all things are infinite, in solar systems infinite.

This theory of the infinity of infinite ideas is the only one possible that does not conflict with the fact that no infinite can be made up of those parts by which we form our conceptions, as we have already seen of that called the infinite extension of matter. And as nothing can be a part of infinity, so nothing known can be infinite in itself, but only as it is an idea of infinite mind in the mode of space. To deny infinity in this manner were to deny the infinite altogether; for if no part can complete an infinite, nor by any means be itself infinite, then there is no infinite.

Now as to matter in essence, Mr. Ingersoll admits that it is just as much unknown, by evidence in the forms of nature, as the God that he denies; but yet he declares that matter, in organic form capable of thought, is the only God possible!

With more cautious wisdom, the agnostic says of the two unknown, I am unable to deny or assert God of matter that I do not know, nor can I deny His existence otherwise because I do not know this. It may be said that names signify nothing as to the unknown, since differences must also be unknown. But by comparison of such conceptions as Supreme Intelligence and matter, we only follow the differences found in ourselves. Knowing nothing of two origins, manifest in different productions or in one, justifies no sound reason in supposing them to be the same when followed into the unknown.

But let us resume our hypothesis. By every form of nature, even unto worlds, we are made primarily conscious that formal matter is not an infinity of things, each one or all together, co-extensive with space; and reason tells us it can only be so by existence in the all-pervading ideas of Infinite Mind, just as lines, planes, and circles exist, in their infinite ideas. But then it is alleged that ideas of infinite circles, as well as all ideas of the numberless variety of other things, are only forms of the attribute of thought; and thought itself is an attribute of matter, existing, so far as we know, only in connection with organized forms of matter as a cause.

Now, sweep humanity and all its knowledge from Earth, or blot

this world of forms from existence, and would it destroy the true ideas of it? No, such a result can no more be conceived of than a first creation from nothing; because the indestructible matter which assumed the nature of this world had to contain the ideas of it; or, in other words, it had to be actuated by the undeniable power to produce just exactly what it has produced. But perhaps Mr. Ingersoll will deny that things become what they do become? Possibly this modern god-killer may only say that things do not become what they do become, according to any certain ideas. But, to be consistent, he must at least say that all things become what they do become, not because of any previous ideas before they began material form—not because of any ideas without which things could not be—oh no, but because nothing prevented them (prevented what?) from becoming what they did become.

Most magnificent reason! But what prevented or prevents all material from remaining as it was or as it is? Without a spirit-power, were life possible, or the struggle for any untried form of life, and the struggle to retain it against all resistance, easier than its non-existence? Then what, pray, made eternal matter set out to appear in different form from what it was, or to seek new relations in form of life? Follow the inquiry, and what makes an animalcule, a fish, a monkey, or a man, work about in different directions? Common sense tells us, it is all because everything exists in other attributes of Thinking Being, as well as the material, and because those attributes are in very self the ideas expressed in the material, according to conditions affecting their union.

It would appear indeed even more reasonable to assert that organized matter exists, so far as we know, only in connection with ideas as a cause, than to say that ideas exist only with organism as a cause. If either infinite attribute, mind or matter, could be conceived as being prior to the other, ideas would seem to have priority of power in the lines of creation, as far superior to the materials used as the mind of the artist is superior to the paints with which he gives us the blooming landscape.

SECTION II.

As to most things in nature, their very being, their embodiment of ideas and causes, are forever hid from them, for want of intelligent consciousness. And his immediate causes are hidden from man until long after he is born, when he learns, by hearsay, to whom his formation is due.

But the ultimate appearance of man's personal perception and thought, after the idea of his formation is expressed in his growth, is evidence of the fact that all the ideas involved in his being had existed forever, in relative lines of infinite sequences, just as conclusive as any evidence that the material had eternally existed by which his physical body came into personality. This will be apparent if we consider the nature of infinity — that nothing can be taken from it nor anything added to it — that nothing can be taken from, nor added to, either infinite Thinking Being or infinite matter, whether said to be one and the same or not. And because we know nothing except by material organism, as to object or subject, is no proof that what knows had no existence before it knew.

There are no possibles that do not exist previous to their demonstration. If there were, the nature of possibilities would depend upon demonstration, whereas the dependence is exactly the reverse. So, to be demonstrated, or to demonstrate itself, a possible thing must in some form previously exist; and all the ideas demonstrated in process of nature must have had a previous existence, *ad infinitum*, by the infinity of relations, in the infinite of Thinking Being.

And hence, we know that organism is not the source of thought, Thinking Being, or God made manifest, nor even the cause of that absurd god of whom Mr. Ingersoll claims to be a part, and of whose great magnitude we might learn more, if we only knew what consequent portion the Ingersoll part is of the whole god.

Honor bright, now, let us follow atheism beyond its own resources, by use of its own logic. No form of thought can exist without the same form of matter, and no form of matter without the same form of thought; that is, one cannot exist without the other, whether embodied in a stone, a vegetable, or animal life; and therefore, neither one can be the cause or effect of the other, in the thing itself. Hence it is concluded that mind and matter are one. But do not stop here. Both forms are the effect of their union, each one of which, followed through disappearing causes, like parallel lines, will never meet as one and the same, though both are mutually dependent for parallel existence.

For comparison, we might liken the union of thought and organism to the union of different chemicals. The product appears to be a new thing, of different power, one and the same throughout, till its identity is lost to view by a disunion into the two compound