

# FUTURE PUNISHMENT.

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A TEST CASE.

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CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE.

BY

REV. H. L. HAMMOND.

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# FUTURE PUNISHMENT

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## A TEST CASE

The Chicago Tribune of January 26, 1878, in an editorial entitled "Beecher on Hell," contained the following illustration:

"We will suppose the case of a man who has led an exemplary life. He has always been a peaceable, law-abiding, industrious citizen. He has been charitably disposed and has done great good to his fellow-man. He has won the respect and admiration of the community in which he resides. He is not, however, a religious man. He has not been converted. His heart has not been changed, and he is looked upon by church people as unregenerate. Some night, while on his way homeward, he is set upon, as poor McConville was the other day, and murdered without provocation or cause by a drunken, bloodthirsty desperado, who has long been the terror of the community. The degraded, brutal wretch is arrested and is put upon his trial. By some miracle the technicalities of the laws and the decisions of lenient and maudlin Judges do not assist him to escape. He is found guilty and is sentenced to be hanged. In the interim between his trial and his execution he meets with a change of heart and experiences religion. He goes to the gallows singing psalms, shouting glory, praying, expressing to the crowd his new-found peace of heart, and enthusiastically anticipating his immediate entrance into the New Jerusalem. Now, if we are to accept the Calvinistic doctrines literally as Calvinists would have us to accept the Scriptures, the victim of this murderer is plunged into the abyss of Hell by the murder's knife, there to suffer for endless ages the torments of the damned, because he was an unregenerate man, while the desperado himself, having been regenerated, goes to Heaven, and, with harp in hand or vigorously waving his palm-branch, looks down with complacency upon his unregenerate victim, writhing in the torments to which he sent him. Now, Mr. Beecher does not believe in this disposition of the two men. He does not believe the murdered man when to Hell because he was unregenerate, nor that the murderer went to Heaven because he was regenerate. We would like to put this same case before our Calvinistic clergyman and to ask them what they really believe is the future destiny of the murderer and his victim. It is a fair test case, and we should like to know their views without quibble or evasion."

# THE MURDERER AND HIS VICTIM.

*To the Editor of the Chicago Tribune.*

DEAR SIR: I have waited for the pastors of the city to comment on your "Suppositious case of a murderer who dies regenerate and his victim who dies unregenerate," found in the *Tribune* of January 26. But there may be many good reasons why they do not answer, which do not imply inability to meet the case, and I cannot longer repress a desire to say something on the subject myself.

(1.) The supposition is not a new one. Seldom, perhaps has it been put as graphically as in your editorial, yet I have been familiar with it, in substance, for many years. Indeed, it is, I think, a favorite illustrative argument against future punishment with certain controversialists. I do not, however, object to it on account of its age, but mention this merely to show that, as it has not heretofore been thought unanswerable by the clergy, it will not probably be now.

(2.) Why you should call specially on the "Calvinistic" clergy for reply, rather than on the Lutheran, Arminian, Episcopalian, and Roman Catholic clergy, who all teach future punishment, is not apparent; but, waiving that, I would say:

(3.) The supposition assumes and appeals to an instinctive demand for equity or justice in the treatment of men by their Creator, and so far so good. If the great principles of justice were more thoroughly discussed in connection with this matter, better results would be reached.

(4.) It assumes that when there is an apparent want of equity, reason demands an explanation; and this is just what makes a day of judgment necessary, for public revelation of the righteousness of God's dealings with men. And so there is one of the specific doctrines of evangelical religion implied, if not granted. Thanks for that.

Now, let us analyze this very plausible illustration a little. Are you shocked in this case at the idea that a penitent murderer should go to Heaven? Is murder, then, and unpardonable sin? If so, then there is on class of sinners who can't be saved, and so *universal* salvation is denied by this "suppositious case." But then what would become of prayer of Jesus for his murderers, "Father forgive them," if their forgiveness was impossible? And how could the Apostle Paul be forgiven, who persecuted the Christians unto death? Do you say, "Of course you did not mean this?" What, then, is it that shocks you in the supposition that this murderer goes to Heaven? Is it because he murdered an unregenerate man? If his victim had only been an innocent child or a saintly woman, he might on repentance go to Heaven unchallenged? But since he killed an unconverted man, there should be no admission for him within the gates? But what sort of reasoning is this which makes it a venial offense to kill a good man, but a mortal one to kill an unconverted man? This reasoning, too, would deny the salvation of all, for here would be one class of men that must perish.

Is the shock because this penitent murderer goes singing and rejoicing to the gallows? But if he is really penitent, and not hypocritical or self-deceived, why should he not sing and

rejoice? He has been “forgiven much.” Why should he not rejoice much? If he is going into a happy eternity, why should he not be happy in the prospect? Moreover, his joy now can add nothing to the woes of his “victim” who died months before, nor if he should go wailing to the gallows could that ameliorate the sorrows of the “victim.”

Is the objection to his salvation on account of his bad character previous to committing the murder? Then the case might be stated thus: The murderer of an unconverted man ought not to be forgiven if he was a bad man before committing the murder. Is this what you mean, and is there a class of sinners who can't be saved?

But perhaps you say, “We don't specially object to the salvation of this murderer, but it is the poor ‘victim’ we pity.” Very well, if it is understood that the salvation of the murderer has nothing to do with the case, and all the rhetoric about him was only for effect, we will leave him rejoicing in the wondrous mercy of a forgiving God, and look after the “victim.” And now observe (1) the murdered man is not lost because he was murdered; for if he had died by accident, by a fever, or smallpox. With an unregenerate heart, our belief is that he would have been miserable. On the other hand, if he had been converted, he would have gone to Heaven though murdered, as did Abel and Stephen when they were martyred.

Nor, again (2), is he lost because his murderer is saved. Heaven is not so narrow that the entrance of the murderer thither has crowded out this victim. Nor is there remaining any such antagonism on the part of the former murderer as should make it unsafe for the “victim” to be there too. For by the terms of the supposition there has been thorough repentance and a radical change of heart, and he is no longer disposed to harm anybody. If both were *fitted* for Heaven, there is no reason why they might not dwell together there in harmony.

But (3) here is the trouble. The victim has never repented of his sins and become *fitted* for Heaven. The supposition is that he is unregenerate, though he “has always been peaceable, law-abiding, industrious, charitably-disposed, has done great good to his fellow-man, and has won the respect and admiration of the community.” All good so far, but something more is needed to fit a man for citizenship on high. Supreme love for God is needed. One may be a good citizen here and not love Him at all. Every man of our race must be prepared to give the praise of his salvation to the Lord Jesus Christ, else he would not be in sympathy with the redeemed. Their united song is “unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, to Him be glory and honor.” But this “victim” has not, on the supposition, thus accepted Christ. He cannot sing that song. He thinks his own goodness sufficient to entitle him to Heaven. If admitted to that company, he would be out of sympathy with them. He could not be happy in their society, nor would they be happy with such a discordant element there. Moody is right when he says: “The man who should get into Heaven by his own good works would want a corner by himself, a harp by himself, and a song to himself.” He could not give all the glory to Christ. God will never allow the harmony of Heaven to be disturbed in that way; and why should not the blessed in Heaven rejoice that He will not? And although we cannot conceive of a saint “looking with complacency on the misery of the lost” in itself considered, why should he not be glad that God will maintain forever the harmony of Heaven by shutting out discordant elements?

Whatever other good traits a man may have, if he is not in sympathy with the redeemed about their Savior, the gates will not open for him. Do you call this hard? A few years ago there were in this land able, talented, educated, eloquent, gentlemanly men, and beautiful, accomplished, fascinating women, who were rebels against the Government. They spurned and spat on the old flag. Did they deserve to be treated as good citizens because of their ability and their beauty? On the contrary, did we not feel that their superior intelligence and culture made them more guilty than the "poor white" rebels? And lay aside the question of their deserts, how would these gentleman and ladies have enjoyed an old-fashioned Fourth of July celebration? How much pleasure would they have taken in singing "The Star Spangled Banner," and the "Red, White and Blue," with a multitude of loyal citizens?

Now, if this "victim" was lost because, and only because, he was not fitted for Heaven, what had the manner of his death to do with his ruin? Is it said that if he had not died so soon and so suddenly he would have become fit? Possibly he might; and then again he might not; but like many others, have grown more wicked as he grew older and been more Hell-deserving at 70 than at 35. Admit that his murderer sent him to perdition sooner than he otherwise would have gone, yet he may have gone less heavily burdened with guilt than if he had lived out his days. May we not presume from God's goodness that if He had foreseen the victim's repentance He would in some way have averted the murderous blow? Why may we not, in the absence of all knowledge, as well assume that as the opposite, to say the least? Now, if the "victim" did not go to perdition because he was murdered, nor the murderer to Heaven because he was a murderer, but each went at death to the place he was fitted for, what is left of this "suppositious case?"

The case of the penitent thief on the cross is somewhat analogous. Just suppose that one of the men from whom he stole was a moral Pharisee, very strict in all his interpretations of the law, and as blameless in his life as Saul of Tarsus before his conversion, but a rejecter of Christ. He, we will suppose, was standing near the cross, and heard the thief's confession and prayer, and the Savior's answer: "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." How indignantly he might have exclaimed: "hear that now! This fellow who stole my "pearl of great price," and is hanging for it there as he deserved to, is going straight to 'Paradise' 'to-day' according to the words of this Jesus of Nazareth! Did we not rightly reject such a Teacher? How absurd that He can be the Messiah!" Yet the world has rejoiced for eighteen hundred years that the penitent thief found a Savior.

As for the duration of this exclusion from Heaven, it must of necessity last as long as the *unfitness* lasts. The Savior says "Everlasting punishment," setting it over against the "eternal life" of the righteous. He puts into the mouth of the compassionate Father Abraham the statement that "there is a great gulf fixed" between Dives and Lazarus. If He who loved and pitied men enough to die on the cross for them says these things, who has the right to contradict Him? Who can claim to be more loving or more pitiful? Instead of spending breath to persuade men that future punishment may be limited, would it not be better to use it in persuading them by repentance to avoid all future punishment?

A boy is reported to have said: "Father, if I should live to grow up to be a man, I might get into jail sometime. Now, I have been contriving a great many ways to get out again."

"My son," was the reply, "you had better spend your time contriving how to keep out." I think I have met your "test case" "without quibble or evasion."

Yours respectfully,

H. L. HAMMOND.

CHICAGO, Feb. 1, 1878.

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## DIVINE AND HUMAN STANDARDS.

In a recent issue of the *Tribune*, we suggested a test case of a malicious murderer, who becomes regenerated after his conviction and goes to heaven, and his victim, who is moral, benevolent, and just, but unregenerate, and goes to Hell, to which the Rev. Mr. Hammond, in the last Sunday issue of the *Tribune*, made a very able and strong reply from his dogmatic standpoint. We "supposed" the case, not as a belief of the *Tribune*, but to elicit opinions on one of the most important of all human concerns as they appertain to the hereafter of the soul and the conditions of its future existence. We stated the case because it is impossible to overrate the magnitude of the question and the vital consequences involved in man's fate after death, and hence any information that may help settle the question whether that condition is one of endless sleep, of everlasting bliss or misery, or one of probation or purgatory and eventual restoration, would be gladly received by thousands of people whose minds are unsettled on these points. We have printed all sorts of arguments bearing upon the question, some favoring annihilation, some restoration, and some eternal punishment. As none of them, however, seemed to speak with that authority that carries conviction or to shed any new light upon the great and awful mystery that overshadows mortals in their earthly pilgrimage from the cradle to the grave, we put an extreme case, and it is this case which Mr. Hammond has discussed, and from his standpoint it is doubtful whether another word need be added to his argument that would be of any value. Nevertheless, there is one objection which arises in the mind that Mr. Hammond has not met, and it may be thus stated:

It is the almost universal view in all Christian countries that the Almighty has endowed man with a conscience and a sense of moral justice, notwithstanding the efforts of some of the philosophers to establish the theory that conscience—this inner tribunal set up in every man's heart—we establish a standard of right and wrong, of justice and injustice, of mercy and forgiveness, and we have no other standard to which we can resort for our moral decisions. This standard is taught in our pulpits, in our law books, in our courts, in our public journals, and by public opinion. In the Christian portion of the world there is no conception of the Almighty, considering the attributes of His character as they pertain to mercy and justice, that to human comprehension justifies Him in establishing a lower standard of right

for His own action and a higher one for ours. In other words, when a certain course of conduct, according to the light of civilization and an awakened conscience, is right for us, would it be right for the almighty to take a contrary course? If so, of what use are the divinely implanted conscience and the sense of justice and of right and wrong? This is the great question that arises in the human mind, and which leads man to revolt against this double standard of right and wrong.

Take the case we have “supposed.” Would it be right for a State Court, the Supreme Court of the United States, or any civil or religious tribunal, under our test, to consign the unregenerate, moral murdered man to everlasting torments for his sins of omission and his evanescent faults, and to reward the red-handed, malice-presence assassin, fresh from the blood of his innocent victim, with the ecstasies and beatitudes of the blest? If such a disposition of the two persons is in accordance with Mr. Hammond’s views of justice of the Almighty, then it is evident that he believes the Almighty acts upon a different code of ethics from that which He has implanted in the breasts of His creatures for their guide and government in dealing with each other.

But is not the difference between God and man this: that His mind is large and comprehensive, ours small and limited; and if we can comprehend His mind at all, how can we look at it in any other light except that He would possess less of the feelings of hate, revenge, anger, and unforgiveness even, than the best, most loving and merciful of men? Constituted as they are, it is difficult for reasoning men to see why ephemeral, finite creatures, born into this world not of their own will or consent, influenced by irresistible hereditary traits and by the environments of society, usage, custom, and circumstance, creatures of impulse and error, and the best of us only copyists of those who have gone before us, or of those about us whom we respect and look up to, should be consigned to infinite tortures as punishment of finite offenses. They have great difficulty in comprehending it, unless God is actuated by a different moral code and impulses, and works upon a different moral standard from themselves; and this condition is just as incomprehensible to them as the other. In stating this position, we once more assure orthodox Christians that we are not stating views which the *Tribune* entertains, but the views of great multitudes of “doubters,” which make them slow to accept orthodox teachings on the Hell question, and keep them out of churches. It is the difficulty of creating any other moral standard than that which God Himself planted in human breasts that makes such doubters as Beecher, Canon Farrar, Swing and Thomas; and what is doubt to them becomes positive unbelief in the brain of an Ingersoll. The difference between these men is principally a difference in their manner of stating their views, after all. Col. Ingersoll is an iconoclast by nature—a fierce, carnal, hearty hater, and a heavy hitter—and attacks eternal punishment “without gloves,” and has no sympathy for any one who believes in it, while the Rev. Mr. Beecher, being a spiritual teacher and reverential and emotional in his nature, reaches similar conclusions, so far as Hell is concerned, but by a smoother route. And yet, if Col. Ingersoll is honest in what he says, and speaks his real convictions, is he doing any more than following a conception that was planted in this mind, and acting upon the standard set up by his individual conscience? The

Rev. Mr. Hammond's argument is unanswerable if we concede that there are two kinds of justice and mercy and of right and wrong, different from each other, one for many and the other for the Almighty; but the difficulty of understanding this, and the general disbelief that the Almighty will judge us by a harder standard than that which we apply to our erring fellows, is the secret of all the doubt and much of the infidelity that now prevail in the Christian world.—*Tribune*, Feb. 10, 1878.

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## AGREEMENT OF THE "DIVINE AND HUMAN STANDARDS."

*To the Editor of the Chicago Tribune.*

DEAR SIR:—I have read your editorial of the 10<sup>th</sup> inst., entitled "Divine and Human Standards." Your courtesy and your kind appreciation of my argument in the *Tribune* of the 3d inst., encourage me to write again, with regard to that "one objection" which you think I have not met.

I perceive that you have omitted from the question with which your third paragraph begins, the fact that this murderer has become a truly penitent, regenerated man, before being rewarded "with the ecstasies and beatitudes of the blest." A very serious omission, accidental, no doubt, but which introduces a totally different man—"a red-handed, malice-prepense assassin, fresh from the blood of his innocent victim," with no hint of any change of disposition. That is a kind of man about whose salvation I have said nothing. He is not the man of your "suppositious case," and I have nothing at present to say of him

But give us back the old man with whom we have become acquainted in this argument, and then see whether the State Courts and the Almighty are in conflict.

The Court, after a fair trial, says: "This man has been guilty of a capital offense, and deserves to die."

The Almighty says—to Noah in the second beginning of the human race, for a law to the race—"Whoso sheddeth man's blood by man shall his blood be shed."

The Court says: "The well-being and protection of human society require that this man should die."

The Almighty says—this time to Moses when providing laws for His chosen people—"Ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer; for blood it defileth the land, and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein but by the blood of him that shed it."

The court passes sentence on the culprit, appoints a day for his execution, giving him a brief time to prepare for death, and then exhorts him to spend the few intervening days in

seeking that preparation, closing with the words—spoken often with tears—“And may God have mercy on your soul.”

The Almighty says: “let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, for He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”

And now this candidate for the gallows, by your own supposition, heeds the advice of the Court, and the voice of the Almighty, confesses his sins, truly repents, becomes a new man, and rejoices in the promises of grace. He goes uncomplainingly to the gallows, which both the Court and God says he has deserved, and thus disappears from mortal sight. God heeds the *prayer of the Court*, and does “have mercy on his soul.” Instead of any “different code of ethics,” here is absolutely a perfect agreement from first to last!

An appeal of the case to “the Supreme Court of the United States, or any civil or religious tribunal,” would show the same agreement. Is it not about time, then, to let your penitent criminal rest? True, he committed murder, but he “refused not to die” for it. He obeyed both Divine and human counsel in repenting and seeking mercy, and became another man. Is it fair to drag this regenerated man down again, besmear him with blood, and put the old dagger back into a hand that would now abhor to use it?

Compare now the human and the Divine standard as applied to the “moral” man in your “test case.” I admit, let me premise, the authority of the “human conscience and sense of moral justice.” I would include the *reason* also as God-given, and not the product of education. What, now, does this human standard require and declare?

1. That every man shall exercise a hearty, genuine good will toward all his fellow men.
2. That he shall shun all deeds and intents inconsistent with this good will.
3. It declares of any conduct seemingly benevolent and kind, which is proved to have sprung from some selfish motive, and to have been merely a device to secure some personal end, that it is to be condemned without hesitation, despite all the fair appearances.
4. It requires approbation of all other “good willers to men,” and even co-operation with them in all their wise plans of benevolence, to the extent of one’s ability and opportunities.
5. Inasmuch as God is recognized as the greatest conceivable “good-willer to men,” and the wisest of all planners for the good of men, the human standard requires the greatest approbation of God, and the most constant and faithful co-operation with Him in His plans.
6. Inasmuch as God’s government and laws are all in harmony with this good-willing to man, the human standard requires cordial submission to His laws and His government.
7. *To claim, then, a genuine good-will to man while refusing to love and obey the wisest and best Good-Willer to men, is a contradiction.*

I do not expand or illustrate these propositions, for they are self-evident. I infer from them that Genuine love to man and love to God are one thing in principle, and neither exists without the other. Each includes and implies the other. The “moral man” of your supposed case, then, who confessedly was not pious, was not regenerate, nor a religious man, *had no genuine good-will to man*. His apparent benevolence was spurious. It was at best only emotional or instinctive, springing from no settled purpose; and may even have been consciously selfish.

Thus far we have the human standard. What is the Divine standard? "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself." "If any man love not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" "This commandment we have from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also."

According to this standard, a man who does not love man cannot love God. The Apostle also reasons conversely: "By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and keep His commandments." The proof of love to man is found in love and obedience to God. Behold again how the Divine and the human standards agree!

But perhaps you say: The human standard would not punish this moral man. Human *law* would not, for this is imperfect, is confined to overt acts, and has only a limited time for its jurisdiction, while God has to deal with the soul forever. But the moral sense of mankind often condemns when the law acquits. An indignant public sentiment often banishes from society one who has escaped the meshes of the law.

Now, let me suppose a case. Suppose a similar man that, instead of dying at 50, lives on for 1,000 years. His heart never changes. His mental power never wanes; his bodily vigor is unabated. He has, as we have seen, no principle of benevolence, and what emotional benevolence he may have soon evaporates with his increasing years. But the selfish principle grows with his years like the greed of the miser. Experience makes him more shrewd in his plans, more capable of managing men and compassing his ends with every passing decade and every generation. How many generations would pass before his gigantic selfishness and consummate ability would make him the terror of mankind? Parents would warn their children and grand-children to beware of the man who had used them and their fathers and their grandfathers for his own selfish purposes. And very likely there would at length be a combination to rid the earth of his presence. If the human standard had to deal with the selfish man forever, it would be no more lenient than the Divine standard.

Consider further that the difference between the murderer and his victim was never one of principle, but only one of modes and particulars. Both violated the same law of love or good-will to fellows. For the same authority which said, "Thou shalt not kill," said also, "Thou shalt not covet." And the one precept is equally essential to the Divine government with the other. One man has violated this great principle of law, brutally and violently; the other, politely and reputably; the one with an offense against society, which society has punished, God approving, by hanging, and so balanced the account between the men, leaving both to be dealt with for their sins against God.

Is it still urged that "One of them is forgiven and taken to Heaven and the other not?" Yes; but both had the same offer of pardon and Heaven, on the same conditions. Doubtless the respectable man was oftener where the glorious Gospel was preached than the desperado, and was oftener urged to become reconciled to God. But he rejected, or at least neglected, the offer, while the other accepted. Is God partial, then, for blessing the one and withholding from the other the salvation which he would not accept, and could not enjoy without accepting?

For convenience, Mr. Editor, I have said “you” in this discussion, but I do not forget that you have disclaimed editorial responsibility for the sentiments, and only set them forth as the views of “doubters,” and to elicit answer. Indeed, without this disclaimer I should be very slow to impute to the *Tribune* and such excuses for evil doers as that they are “creatures of impulse and error,” with “irresistible hereditary traits,” and that their evil deeds are “evanescent faults.” It would be a sad thing if so influential a journal should thus undermine the foundations of responsibility.

The *nature* of future punishment, whether “torment” and “tortures” inflicted, or only the inherent tendencies and consequences of sin, and the proportion of the human race lost, I have not time now to discuss.

Yours respectfully,  
H. L. HAMMOND.

CHICAGO, Feb. 26, 1878.

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P. S.—In reply to inquiries received since the first edition was issued: I am not aware that to this date, May 17, 1878, any answer has been made or attempted to the argument.

H. L. H.