

Robert Green Ingersoll

Robert Green "Bob" Ingersoll (August 11, 1833 – July 21, 1899) was a [Civil War](#) veteran, [American](#) political leader, and [orator](#) during the [Golden Age of Freethought](#), noted for his broad range of culture and his defense of [agnosticism](#). He was nicknamed "The Great Agnostic."

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Life and Career

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_G._Ingersoll)

Robert Ingersoll was born in [Dresden, New York](#). His father, [John Ingersoll](#), was an [abolitionist](#)-leaning [Congregationalist](#) preacher, whose radical views forced his family to move frequently. For a time, Rev. John Ingersoll filled the [pulpit](#) for American revivalist [Charles G. Finney](#) while Finney was on a tour of Europe. Upon Finney's return, Rev. Ingersoll remained for a few months as co-pastor/associate pastor under Finney. The elder Ingersoll's later pastoral experiences influenced young Robert negatively, however, as The Elmira Telegram described in 1890: [\[1\]](#)

Though for many years the most noted of American infidels, Colonel Ingersoll was born and reared in a devoutly Christian household. His father, John Ingersoll, was a Congregationalist minister and a man of mark in his time, a deep thinker, a logical and eloquent speaker, broad minded and generously tolerant of the views of others. The popular impression which credits Ingersoll's infidelity in the main to his father's severe

orthodoxy and the austere and gloomy surroundings in which his boyhood was spent is wholly wrong. On the contrary the elder Ingersoll's liberal views were a source of constant trouble between him and his narrow-minded parishioners. They caused him to frequently change his charges, and several times made him the defendant in church trials. His ministerial career was, in fact, substantially brought to a close by a church trial which occurred while he was pastor of the Congregational Church at Madison, Ohio, and at which his third wife appeared as prosecutor. Upon this occasion he was charged with prevarication and unministerial conduct. The evidence adduced—the trial is one of the abiding traditions of the dull little town of Madison—was of the most trivial and ridiculous character, but the committee which heard it decided that though he had done "nothing inconsistent with his Christian character," he was "inconsistent with his ministerial character," and forbade him to preach in the future. Elder John went before the higher church authorities and was permitted to continue his clerical labors. However, he soon removed to Wisconsin, going from there to Illinois, where he died. The Madison trial occurred when young Robert was nine years old, and it was the unjust and bigoted treatment his father received which made him the enemy, first of Calvinism, and later of Christianity in its other forms.

In 1853, "Bob" Ingersoll taught a term of school in [Metropolis, Illinois](#), where he let one of his students, the future Judge [Angus M. L. McBane](#), do the "greater part of the teaching, while Latin and history occupied his own attention". At some point prior to his Metropolis position, Ingersoll had also taught school in [Mount Vernon, Illinois](#).^[1]



Robert G. Ingersoll

Later that year, the family settled in [Marion, Illinois](#), where Robert and his brother [Ebon Clarke Ingersoll](#) were admitted to the bar in 1854. A county historian writing 22 years later noted that local residents considered the Ingersolls as a "very intellectual family; but, being Abolitionists, and the boys being [deists](#), rendered obnoxious to our people in that respect."^[2]

While in Marion, he studied law under Judge [Willis Allen](#) and served as deputy clerk for [John M. Cunningham](#), Williamson County's County Clerk and Circuit Clerk. In 1855, after Cunningham was named registrar for the federal land office in southeastern Illinois at [Shawneetown, Illinois](#), Ingersoll followed him to the riverfront city along the [Ohio River](#). After a short time there he took the deputy clerk position with [John E. Hall](#), the county clerk and circuit clerk of Gallatin County, and also a son-in-law of [John Hart Crenshaw](#).^[3] On November 11, 1856, Ingersoll caught Hall in his arms when the son of a political opponent assassinated his employer in their office.^[4]

When he moved to Shawneetown, he continued to [read law](#) under Judge [William G. Bowman](#) who had a large library of both law and the classics. In addition to his job as a clerk, he and his brother opened their law practice under the name "E.C. and R.G. Ingersoll".^[5] During this time they also had an office in [Raleigh, Illinois](#), then the county seat of neighboring [Saline County](#). As attorneys following the court circuit he often practiced along side Cunningham's soon-to-be son-in-law, [John A. Logan](#), the state's attorney and political ally to Hall.

As the trial of Hall's assassin dominated the scene and with his earlier mentor Cunningham having moved back to Marion following the land office's closing in 1856, and Logan's move to [Benton, Illinois](#), after his marriage that fall, Ingersoll and his brother moved to [Peoria, Illinois](#), where they finally settled in 1857.

With the outbreak of the [American Civil War](#), he raised the [11th Regiment Illinois Volunteer Cavalry](#) and took command. The regiment fought in the [Battle of Shiloh](#). Ingersoll was later captured, then released on his promise that he would not fight again, which was common practice early in the war.

After the war, he served as [Illinois Attorney General](#). He was a prominent member of the [Republican Party](#) and, though he never held an elected position, he was nonetheless an active participant in politics. According to [Robert Nisbet](#), Ingersoll was a "staunch conservative Republican."^[6] His speech nominating [James G. Blaine](#) for the 1876 presidential election was unsuccessful, as [Rutherford B. Hayes](#) received the

Republican nomination, but the speech itself, known as the "Plumed Knight" speech, was considered a model of political oratory. ([Franklin Roosevelt](#) probably used it as a model for his "Happy Warrior" speech when nominating [Alfred E. Smith](#) for president in 1928). His radical views on [religion](#), [slavery](#), woman's [suffrage](#), and other issues of the day effectively prevented him from ever pursuing or holding political offices higher than that of state attorney general. [Illinois](#) Republicans tried to pressure him into running for governor on the condition that Ingersoll conceal his [agnosticism](#) during the campaign, which he refused to do on the basis that concealing information from the public was immoral.

Ingersoll was involved in several prominent trials as an attorney, notably the [Star Route](#) trials, a major political scandal in which his clients were acquitted. He also defended a [New Jersey](#) man charged with [blasphemy](#). Although he did not win acquittal, his vigorous defense is considered to have discredited blasphemy laws and few other prosecutions followed.

Ingersoll represented the noted con-artist, James Reavis, the '[Baron of Arizona](#)' for a time, pronouncing his Peralta Land Grant claim airtight.^[7]



The only known image of Ingersoll addressing an audience.

Ingersoll was most noted as an [orator](#), the most popular of the age, when oratory was public entertainment. He spoke on every subject, from [Shakespeare](#) to [Reconstruction](#), but his most popular subjects were [agnosticism](#) and the sanctity and refuge of the family. He committed his speeches to memory although they were sometimes more than three hours long. His audiences were said never to be restless.

Many of Ingersoll's speeches advocated [freethought](#) and [humanism](#), and often poked fun at religious belief. For this the press often attacked him, but neither his views nor the negative press could stop his rising popularity. At the height of Ingersoll's fame,

audiences would pay \$1 or more to hear him speak, a giant sum for his day.

In a lecture entitled "The Great Infidels," he attacked the Christian doctrine of Hell: "All the meanness, all the revenge, all the selfishness, all the cruelty, all the hatred, all the infamy of which the heart of man is capable, grew blossomed, and bore fruit in this one word--Hell."¹⁸¹

Ingersoll died from [congestive heart failure](#) at the age of 65. Soon after his death, his brother-in-law, [Clinton P. Farrell](#), collected copies of Ingersoll's speeches for publication. The 12-volume [Dresden Editions](#) kept interest in Ingersoll's ideas alive and preserved his speeches for future generations. Ingersoll's ashes are interred in [Arlington National Cemetery](#) (Section 3, Lot 1620, Grid S-16.5).

In 2005, a popular edition of Ingersoll's work was published by [Steerforth Press](#). Edited by the [Pulitzer Prize](#)-winning music critic [Tim Page](#), "What's God Got to Do With It: Robert Ingersoll on Free Speech, Honest Talk and the Separation of Church and State" brought Ingersoll's thinking to a new audience.

Essays

The Great Infidels (1881)

I have sometimes thought that it will not make great and splendid character to rock children in the cradle of hypocrisy. I do not believe that the tendency is to make men and women brave and glorious when you tell them that there are certain ideas upon certain subjects that they must never express; that they must go through life with a pretence as a shield; that their neighbors will think much more of them if they will only keep still; and that above all is a God who despises one who honestly expresses what he believes. For my part, I believe men will be nearer honest in business, in politics, grander in art -- in everything that is good and grand and beautiful, if they are taught from the cradle to the coffin to tell their honest opinion.

Neither do I believe thought to be dangerous. It is incredible that only idiots are absolutely sure of salvation. It is incredible that the more brain you have the less your chance is. There can be no danger in honest thought, and if the world ever advances

beyond what it is to-day, it must be led by men who express their real opinions.

We have passed midnight in the great struggle between Fact and Faith, between Science and Superstition. The brand of intellectual inferiority is now upon the orthodox brain. There is nothing grander than to rescue from the leprosy of slander the reputation of a good and generous man. Nothing can be nearer just than to benefit our benefactors.

The Infidels of one age have been the aureoled saints of the next. The destroyers of the old are the creators of the new. The old passes away, and the new becomes old. There is in the intellectual world, as in the material, decay and growth, and ever by the grave of buried age stand youth and joy. The history of intellectual progress is written in the lives of Infidels. Political rights have been preserved by traitors -- the liberty of the mind by heretics. To attack the king was treason -- to dispute the priest was blasphemy. The sword and cross were allies. They defended each other. The throne and altar were twins -- vultures from the same egg.

It was James I. who said: "No bishop, no king." He might have said: "No cross, no crown."

The king owned the bodies, and the priest the souls, of men. One lived on taxes, the other on alms. One was a robber, the other a beggar, and each was both.

These robbers and beggars controlled two worlds. The king made laws, the priest made creeds. With bowed backs the people received the burdens of the one, and with wonder's open mouth the dogmas of the other. If any aspired to be free they were crushed by the king, and every priest was a Herod who slaughtered the children of the brain. The king ruled by force, the priest by fear, and both by both.

The king said to the people: "God made you peasants, and he made me king. He made rags and hovels for you, robes and palaces for me. Such is the justice of God." And the priest said: "God made you ignorant and vile. He made me holy and wise. If you do not obey me, God will punish you here and torment you hereafter. Such is the mercy of God."

Infidels are intellectual discoverers. They sail the unknown seas and find new isles and continents in the infinite realms of thought.

An Infidel is one who has found a new fact, who has an idea of his own, and who in the

mental sky has seen another star.

He is an intellectual capitalist, and for that reason excites the envy and hatred of the theological pauper.

The Origin of God and Heaven, of the Devil and Hell

In the estimation of good orthodox Christians I am a criminal, because I am trying to take from loving mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, and lovers the consolations naturally arising from a belief in an eternity of grief and pain. I want to tear, break, and scatter to the winds the God that priests erected in the fields of innocent pleasure -- a God made of sticks called creeds, and of old clothes called myths. I shall endeavor to take from the coffin its horror, from the cradle its curse, and put out the fires of revenge kindled by an infinite fiend.

Is it necessary that Heaven should borrow its light from the glare of Hell?

Infinite punishment is infinite cruelty, endless injustice, immortal meanness. To worship an eternal goaler hardens, debases, and pollutes even the vilest soul. While there is one sad and breaking heart in the universe, no good being can be perfectly happy.

Against the heartlessness of the Christian religion every grand and tender soul should enter solemn protest. The God of Hell should be held in loathing, contempt and scorn. A God who threatens eternal pain should be hated, not loved -- cursed, not worshiped. A heaven presided over by such a God must be below the lowest hell. I want no part in any heaven in which the saved, the ransomed and redeemed will drown with shouts of joy the cries and sobs of hell -- in which happiness will forget misery, where the tears of the lost only increase laughter and double bliss.

The idea of hell was born of ignorance, brutality, fear, cowardice, and revenge. This idea testifies that our remote ancestors were the lowest beasts. Only from dens, lairs, and caves, only from mouths filled with cruel fangs, only from hearts of fear and hatred, only from the conscience of hunger and lust, only from the lowest and most debased could come this most cruel, heartless and bestial of all dogmas.

Our barbarian ancestors knew but little of nature. They were too astonished to investigate. They could not divest themselves of the idea that everything happened with reference to them; that they caused storms and earthquakes; that they brought the tempest and the whirlwind; that on account of something they had done, or omitted to

do, the lightning of vengeance leaped from the darkened sky. They made up their minds that at least two vast and powerful beings presided over this world; that one was good and the other bad; that both of these beings wished to get control of the souls of men; that they were relentless enemies, eternal foes; that both welcomed recruits and hated deserters; that both demanded praise and worship; that one offered rewards in this world, and the other in the next. The Devil has paid cash -- God buys on credit.

Man saw cruelty and mercy in nature, because he imagined that phenomena were produced to punish or to reward him. When his poor hut was torn and broken by the wind, he thought it a punishment. When some town or city was swept away by flood or sea, he imagined that the crimes of the inhabitants had been avenged. When the land was filled with plenty, when the seasons were kind, he thought that he had pleased the tyrant of the skies.

It must he remembered that both gods and devils were supposed to be presided over by the greatest God and the greatest Devil. The God could give infinite rewards and could inflict infinite torments. The Devil could assist man here; could give him wealth and place in this world, in consideration of owning his soul hereafter. Each human soul was a prize contended for by these deities. Of course this God and this Devil had innumerable spirits at their command, to execute their decrees. The God lived in heaven and the Devil in hell. Both were monarchs and were infinitely jealous of each other. The priests pretended to be the agents and recruiting sergeants of this God, and they were duly authorized to promise and threaten in his name; they had power to forgive and curse. These priests sought to govern the world by force and fear. Believing that men could be frightened into obedience, they magnified the tortures and terrors of perdition. Believing also that man could in part be influenced by the hope of reward, they magnified the joys of heaven. In other words, they promised eternal joy and threatened everlasting pain. Most of these priests, born of the ignorance of the time, believed what they taught. They proved that God was good, by sunlight and harvest, by health and happiness; that he was angry, by disease and death. Man, according to this doctrine, was led astray by the Devil, who delighted only in evil. It was supposed that God demanded worship; that he loved to be flattered; that he delighted in sacrifice; that nothing made him happier than to see ignorant faith upon its knees; that above all things he hated and despised doubters and heretics, and that he regarded all investigation as rebellion.

Now and then believers in these ideas, those who had gained great reputation for

learning and sanctity, or had enjoyed great power, wrote books, and these books after a time were considered sacred. Most of them were written to frighten mankind, and were filled with threatenings and curses for unbelievers and promises for the faithful. The more frightful the curses, the more extravagant the promises, the more sacred the books were considered. All of the gods were cruel and vindictive, unforgiving and relentless, and the devils were substantially the same. It was also believed that certain things must be accepted as true, no matter whether they were reasonable or not; that it was pleasing to God to believe a certain creed, especially if it happened to be the creed of the majority. Each community felt it a duty to see that the enemies of God were converted or killed. To allow a heretic to live in peace was to invite the wrath of God. Every public evil -- every misfortune -- was accounted for by something the community had permitted or done. When epidemics appeared, brought by ignorance and welcomed by filth, the heretic was brought out and sacrificed to appease the vengeance of God. From the knowledge they had -- from their premises -- they reasoned well. They said, if God will inflict such frightful torments upon us here, simply for allowing a few heretics to live, what will he do with the heretics? Of course the heretics would be punished forever. They knew how cruel was the barbarian king when he had the traitor in his power. They had seen every horror that man could inflict on man. Of course a God could do more than a king. He could punish forever. The fires he would kindle never could be quenched. The torments he would inflict would be eternal. They thought the amount of punishment would be measured only by the power of God.

These ideas were not only prevalent in what are called barbarous times, but they are received by the religious world of to-day.

No death could be conceived more horrible than that produced by flames. To these flames they added eternity, and hell was produced. They exhausted the idea of personal torture.

By putting intention behind what man called good, God was produced. By putting intention behind what man called bad, the Devil was created. Leave this "intention" out, and gods and devils fade away.

If not a human being existed the sun would continue to shine, and tempests now and then would devastate the world; the rain would fall in pleasant showers, and the bow of promise would adorn the cloud; violets would spread their velvet bosoms to the sun, and the earthquake would devour; birds would sing, and daisies bloom, and roses blush,

and the volcanoes would fill the heavens with their lurid glare; the procession of the seasons would not be broken, and the stars would shine just as serenely as though the world was filled with loving hearts and happy homes. But in the olden time man thought otherwise. He imagined that he was of great importance. Barbarians are always egotistic. They think that the stars are watching them; that the sun shines on their account; that the rain falls for them and that gods and devils are really troubling themselves about their poor and ignorant souls.

In those days men fought for their God as they did for their king. They killed the enemies of both. For this their king would reward them here, and their God hereafter. With them it was loyalty to destroy the disloyal. They did not regard God as a vague "spirit," nor as an "essence" without body or parts, but as a being, a person, an infinite man, a king, the monarch of the universe, who had garments of glory for believers and robes of flame for the heretic and infidel.

Do not imagine that this doctrine of hell belongs to Christianity alone. Nearly all religions have had this dogma for a corner-stone. Upon this burning foundation nearly all have built. Over the abyss of pain rose the glittering dome of pleasure. This world was regarded as one of trial. Here a God of infinite wisdom experimented with man. Between the outstretched paws of the Infinite the mouse, man, was allowed to play. Here man had the opportunity of hearing priests and kneeling in temples. Here he could read and hear read the sacred books. Here he could have the example of the pious and the counsels of the holy. Here he could build churches and cathedrals. Here he could burn incense, fast, wear haircloth, deny himself all the pleasures of life, confess to priests, count beads, be miserable one day in seven, make creeds, construct instruments of torture, bow before pictures and images, eat little square pieces of bread, sprinkle water on the heads of babes, shut his eyes and say words to the clouds, and slander and defame all who have the courage to despise superstition, and the goodness to tell their honest thoughts. After death, nothing could be done to make him better. When he should come into the presence of God, nothing was left except to damn him. Priests might convert him here, but God could do nothing there, -- all of which shows how much more a priest can do for a soul than its creator; how much more potent is the example of your average Christian than that of all the angels, and how much superior earth is to heaven for the moral development of the soul. In heaven the Devil is not allowed to enter. There all are pure and perfect, yet they cannot influence a soul for good.

Only here, on the earth, where the Devil is constantly active, only where his agents attack every soul, is there the slightest hope of moral improvement.

Strange! that a world cursed by God, filled with temptations and thick with fiends, should be the only place where hope exists, the only place where man can repent, the only place where reform is possible. Strange that heaven, filled with angels and presided over by God, is the only place where reformation is utterly impossible! Yet these are the teachings of all the believers in the eternity of punishment.

Masters frightened slaves with the threat of hell, and slaves got a kind of shadowy revenge by whispering back the threat. The poor have damned the rich and the rich the poor. The imprisoned imagined a hell for their gaolers; the weak built this place for the strong; the arrogant for their rivals; the vanquished for their victors; the priest for the thinker, religion for reason, superstition for science.

All the meanness, all the revenge, all the selfishness, all the cruelty, all the hatred, all the infamy of which the heart of man is capable, grew, blossomed and bore fruit in this one word -- Hell.

For the nourishment of this dogma cruelty was soil, ignorance was rain, and fear was light.

Christians have placed upon the throne of the universe a God of eternal hate. I cannot worship a being whose vengeance is boundless, whose cruelty is shoreless, and whose malice is increased by the agonies he inflicts.

APPEAL TO THE CEMETERY

Whoever attacks a custom or a creed, will be confronted with a list of the names of the dead who upheld the custom, or believed the creed. He is asked in a very triumphant and sneering way, if he knows more than all the great and honored of the past. Every defender of a creed has graven upon his memory the names of all "great" men whose actions or words can be tortured into evidence for his doctrine. The church is always anxious to have some king or president certify to the moral character of Christ, the authority of the Scriptures, and the justice of the Jewish God. Of late years, confessions of gentlemen about to be hanged have been considered of great value, and the scaffold is regarded as a means of grace.

All the churches of our day seek the rich. They are no longer the friends and defenders

of the poor. Poverty no longer feels at home in the house of God. In the Temple of the Most High, garments out of fashion are considered out of place. People now, before confessing to God what worthless souls they have, enrich their bodies. Now words of penitence mingle with the rustle of silk, and light thrown from diamonds adorns the repentant tear. We are told that the rich, the fortunate, the holders of place and office, the fashionable, the respectable, are all within the churches. And yet all these People grow eloquent over the poverty of Christ -- boast that he was born in a manger -- that the Holy Ghost passed by all the ladies of titled wealth and fashion and selected the wife of a poor and unknown mechanic for the Mother of God.

They admit that all the men of Jerusalem who held high positions -- all the people of wealth, influence and power -- were the enemies of the Savior and held his pretensions in contempt. They admit that he had influence only with the poor, and that he was so utterly unknown -- so indigent in acquaintance, that it was necessary to bribe one of his disciples to point him out to the police. They assert that he had done a great number of miracles -- had cured the sick, and raised the dead -- that he had preached to vast multitudes -- had made a kind of triumphal entry into Jerusalem -- had scourged from the temple the changers of money -- had disputed with the doctors -- and yet, notwithstanding all these things, he remained in the very depths of obscurity. Surely he and his disciples could have been met with the argument: that the "great" dead were opposed to the new religion.

The apostles, it is claimed, preached the doctrines of Christ in Rome and Athens, and the people of those cities could have used the arguments against Christianity that Christians now use in its support. They could have asked the apostles if they were wiser than all the philosophers, poets orators, and statesmen dead -- if they knew more coming as they did from a weak and barbarous nation, than the greatest men produced by the highest civilization of the known world. With what scorn would the Greeks listen to a barbarian's criticisms upon Socrates and Plato. How a Roman would laugh to hear a vagrant Hebrew attack a mythology that had been believed by Cato and Virgil.

Every new religion has to overcome this argument of the cemetery -- this logic of the grave. Old ideas take shelter behind a barricade of corpse and tombstones. They have epitaphs for battle cries, and malign the living in the name of the dead. The moment, however, that a new religion succeeds, it becomes the old religion and uses the same argument against a new idea that it once so gallantly refuted. The arguments used to-day against what they are pleased to call infidelity would have shut the mouth of every

religious reformer, from Christ to the founder of the last sect. The general objection to the new is, that it differs somewhat from the old, and the fact that it does differ is urged as an argument against its truth.

Every man is forced to admit that he does not agree with all the great men, living or dead. The average Catholic, if not a priest, as a rule will admit that Sir Isaac Newton was in some things his superior, that Demosthenes had the advantage of him in expressing his ideas in public, and that as a sculptor he is far below the unknown man of whose hand and brain was born the Venus de Milo, but he will not, on account of these admissions, change his views upon the important question of transubstantiation.

Most Protestants will cheerfully admit that they are inferior in brain and genius to some men who have lived and died in the Catholic Church; that in the matter of preaching funeral sermons they do not pretend to equal Bossuet; that their letters are not so interesting and polished as those of Pascal; that Torquemada excelled them in the genius of organization, and that for planning a massacre they would not for a moment dispute the palm with Catherine de Medici.

And yet, after all these admissions, they would insist that the Pope is an unblushing impostor, and that the Catholic Church is a vampire fattened by the best blood of a thousand years.

The truth is, that in favor of almost every sect, the names of some great men can be pronounced. In almost every church there have been men whose only weakness was their religion, and who in other directions achieved distinction. If you call men great because they were emperors, kings, noblemen, statesmen, millionaires -- because they commanded vast armies and wielded great influence in their day then more names can be found to support and prop the Church of Rome than any other Christian sect.

Is Protestantism willing to rest its claims upon the "great man" argument? Give me the idea, the religions, not that have been advanced and believed by the so-called great of the past, but that will be defended and believed by the great souls of the future.

It gives me pleasure to say that Lord Bacon was a great man; but I do not for that reason abandon the Copernican system of astronomy, and insist that the earth is stationary. Samuel Johnson was an excellent writer of latinized English, but I am confident that he never saw a real ghost. Matthew Hale was a reasonably good judge of law, but he was mistaken about witches causing children to vomit crooked pins. John

Wesley was quite a man, in a kind of religious way, but in this country few people sympathize with his hatred of republican government, or with his contempt for the Revolutionary Fathers. Sir Isaac Newton, in the domain of science, was the colossus of his time, but his commentary on the book of Revelation would hardly excite envy, even in the breast of a Spurgeon or a Talmage. Upon many questions, the opinions of Napoleon were of great value, and yet about his bed, when dying, he wanted to see burning the holy candles of Rome. John Calvin has been called a logician, and reasoned well from his premises, but the burning of Servetus did not make murder a virtue. Luther weakened somewhat the Power of the Catholic Church, and to that extent was a reformer, and yet Lord Brougham affirmed that his "Table Talk" was so obscene that no respectable English publisher would soil paper with a translation. He was a kind of religious Rabelais; and yet a man can defend Luther in his attack upon the church without justifying his obscenity. If every man in the Catholic Church was a good man that would not convince me that Ignatius Loyola ever met and conversed with the Virgin Mary. The fact is, very few men are right in everything.

Great virtues may draw attention from defects, they cannot sanctify them. A pebble surrounded by diamonds remains a common stone, and a diamond surrounded by pebbles is still a gem. No one should attempt to refute an argument by pronouncing the name of some man, unless he is willing to adopt all the ideas and beliefs of that man. It is better to give reasons and facts than names. An argument should not depend for its force upon the name of its author. Facts need no pedigree logic has no heraldry, and the living should not be awed by the mistakes of the dead.

The greatest men the world has produced have known but little. They had a few facts, mingled with mistakes without number. In some departments they towered above their fellows, while in others they fell below the common level of mankind.

Daniel Webster had great respect for the Scriptures, but very little for the claims of his creditors. Most men are strangely inconsistent. Two propositions were introduced into the Confederate Congress by the same man. One was to hoist the black flag, and the other was to prevent carrying the mails on Sunday. George Whitefield defended the slave trade, because it brought the negroes within the sound of the gospel, and gave them the advantage of associating with the gentlemen who stole them. And yet this same Whitefield believed and taught the dogma of predestination. Volumes might be written upon the follies and imbecilities of great men. A full rounded man -- a man of sterling sense and natural logic -- is just as rare as a great painter, poet, or sculptor. If

you tell your friend that he is not a painter, that he has no genius for poetry, he will probably admit the truth of what you say, without feeling that he has been insulted in the least. But if you tell him that he is not a logician, that he has but little idea of the value of a fact, that he has no real conception of what evidence is, and that he never had an original thought in his life, he will cut your acquaintance. Thousands of men are most wonderful in mechanics, in trade, in certain professions, keen in business, knowing well the men among whom they live, and yet satisfied with religions infinitely stupid, with politics perfectly senseless and they will believe that wonderful things were common long ago, such things as no amount of evidence could convince them had happened in their day. A man may be a successful merchant, lawyer, doctor, mechanic, statesman, or theologian without one particle of originality, and almost without the ability to think logically upon any subject whatever. Other men display in some directions the most marvelous intellectual power, astonish mankind with their grasp and vigor, and at the same time, upon religious subjects drool and drivel like David at the gates of Gath.

We have found, at last, that other nations have sacred books much older than our own, and that these books and records were and are substantiated by traditions and monuments, by miracles and martyrs, christs and apostles, as well as by prophecies fulfilled. In all of these nations differences of opinion as to the authenticity and meaning of these books arose from time to time, precisely as they have done and still do with us, and upon these differences were founded sects that manufactured creeds. These sects denounced each other, and preached with the sword and endeavored to convince with the fagot. Our theologians were greatly astonished to find in other bibles the same stories, precepts, laws, customs and commands that adorn and stain our own. At first they accounted for this, by saying that these books were in part copies of the Jewish Scriptures, mingled with barbaric myths. To such an extent did they impose upon and insult probability, that they declared that all the morality of the world, all laws commanding right and prohibiting wrong, all ideas respecting the unity of a Supreme Being, were borrowed from the Jews, who obtained them directly from God. The Christian world asserts with warmth, not always born of candor, that the Bible is the source, origin, and fountain of law, liberty, love, charity, and justice; that it is the intellectual and moral sun of the world; that it alone gives happiness here, and alone points out the way to joy hereafter; that it contains the only revelation from the Infinite; that all others are the work of dishonest and mistaken men. They say these things in spite of the fact that the Jewish nation was one of the weakest and most barbaric of the

past; in spite of the fact that the civilization of Egypt and India had commenced to wane before that of Palestine existed. To account for all the morality contained in the sacred books of the Hindus by saying that it was borrowed from the wanderers in the Desert of Sinai, from the escaped slaves of the Egyptians, taxes to the utmost the credulity of ignorance, bigotry, and zeal.

The men who make these assertions are not superior to other men. They have only the facts common to all, and they must admit that these facts do not force the same conclusions upon all. They must admit that men equally honest, equally well-informed as themselves, deny their premises and conclusions. They must admit that had they been born and educated in some other country, they would have had a different religion, and would have regarded with reverence and awe the books they now hold as false and foolish. Most men are followers, and implicitly rely upon the judgment of others. They mistake solemnity for wisdom, and regard a grave countenance as the title page and Preface to a most learned volume. So they are easily imposed upon by forms, strange garments, and solemn ceremonies. And when the teaching of parents, the customs of neighbors, and the general tongue approve and justify a belief or creed, no matter how absurd, it is hard even for the strongest to hold the citadel of his soul. In each country, in defence of each religion, the same arguments would be urged. There is the same evidence in favor of the inspiration of the Koran and Bible. Both are substantiated in exactly the same way. It is just as wicked and unreasonable to be a heretic in Constantinople as in New York. To deny the claims of Christ and Mohammed is alike blasphemous. It all depends upon where you are when you make the denial. No religion has ever fallen that carried with it down to dumb death a solitary fact. Mistakes moulder with the temples in which they were taught, and countless superstitions sleep with their dead priests.

Yet Christians insist that the religions of all nations that have fallen from wealth and power were false, with of course the solitary exception of the Jewish, simply because the nations teaching them dropped from their dying hands the swords of power. This argument drawn from the fate of nations proves no more than would one based upon the history of persons. With nations as with individuals, the struggle for life is perpetual, and the law of the survival of the fittest applies equally to both.

It may be that the fabric of our civilization will crumbling fall to unmeaning chaos and to formless dust, where oblivion broods and even memory forgets. Perhaps the blind Samson of some imprisoned force, released by thoughtless chance, may so wreck and

strand the world that man, in stress and strain of want and fear, will shudderingly crawl back to savage and barbaric night. The time may come in which this thrilled and throbbing earth, shorn of all life, will in its soundless orbit wheel a barren star, on which the light will fall as fruitlessly as falls the gaze of love upon the cold, pathetic face of death.

FEAR

There is a view quite prevalent, that in some way you can prove whether the theories defended or advanced by a man are right or not, by showing what kind of man he was, what kind of life he lived, and what manner of death he died.

A man entertains certain opinions; he is persecuted. He refuses to change his mind; he is burned, and in the midst of flames cries out that he dies without change. Hundreds then say that he has sealed his testimony with his blood, and his doctrines must be true.

All the martyrs in the history of the world are not sufficient to establish the correctness of an opinion. Martyrdom, as a rule, establishes the sincerity of the martyr, -- never the correctness of his thought. Things are true or false in themselves. Truth cannot be affected by opinions; it cannot be changed, established, or affected by martyrdom. An error cannot be believed sincerely enough to make it a truth.

No Christian will admit that any amount of heroism displayed by a Mormon is sufficient to prove that Joseph Smith was divinely inspired. All the courage and culture, all the poetry and art of ancient Greece, do not even tend to establish the truth of any myth.

The testimony of the dying concerning some other world, or in regard to the supernatural, cannot be any better, to say the least, than that of the living. In the early days of Christianity a serene and intrepid death was regarded as a testimony in favor of the church. At that time Pagans were being converted to Christianity -- were throwing Jupiter away and taking the Hebrew God instead. In the moment of death many of these converts, without doubt, retraced their steps and died in the faith of their ancestors. But whenever one died clinging to the cross of the new religion, this was seized upon as an evidence of the truth of the gospel. After a time the Christians taught that an unbeliever, one who spoke or wrote against their doctrines, could not meet death with composure -- that the infidel in his last moments would necessarily be a prey to the serpent of remorse. For more than a thousand years they have made the "facts"

to fit this theory. Crimes against men have been considered as nothing when compared with a denial of the truth of the Bible, the divinity of Christ, or the existence of God.

According to the theologians, God has always acted in this way. As long as men did nothing except to render their fellows wretched; as long as they only butchered and burnt the innocent and helpless, God maintained the strictest and most heartless neutrality; but when some honest man, some great and tender soul expressed a doubt as to the truth of the Scriptures, or prayed to the wrong God, or to the right one by the wrong name, then the real God leaped like a wounded tiger upon his victim, and from his quivering flesh tore his wretched soul.

There is no recorded instance where the uplifted hand of murder has been paralyzed -- no truthful account in all the literature of the world of the innocent being shielded by God. Thousands of crimes are committed every day -- men are this moment lying in wait for their human prey -- wives are whipped and crushed, driven to insanity and death -- little children begging for mercy, lifting imploring, tear-filled eyes to the brutal faces of fathers and mothers -- sweet girls are deceived, lured, and outraged, but God has no time to prevent these things -- no time to defend the good and to protect the pure. He is too busy numbering hairs and watching sparrows.

He listens for blasphemy; looks for persons who laugh at priests; examines baptismal registers; watches professors in colleges who begin to doubt the geology of Moses and the astronomy of Joshua. He does not particularly object to stealing if you won't swear. A great many persons have fallen dead in the act of taking God's name in vain, but millions of men, women, and children have been stolen from their homes and used as beasts of burden, but no one engaged in this infamy has ever been touched by the wrathful hand of God.

All kinds of criminals, except infidels, meet death with reasonable serenity. As a rule, there is nothing in the death of a pirate to cast any discredit on his profession. The murderer upon the scaffold, with a priest on either side, smilingly exhorts the multitude to meet him in heaven. The man who has succeeded in making his home a hell, meets death without a quiver, provided he has never expressed any doubt as to the divinity of Christ, or the eternal "procession" of the Holy Ghost. The king who has waged cruel and useless war, who has filled countries with widows and fatherless children, with the maimed and diseased, and who has succeeded in offering to the Moloch of ambition the best and bravest of his subjects, dies like a saint.

The Emperor Constantine, who lifted Christianity into power, murdered his wife Fausta, and his eldest son Crispus, the same year that he convened the Council of Nice to decide whether Jesus Christ was a man or the Son of God. The council decided that Christ was consubstantial with the father. This was in the year 325. We are thus indebted to a wife-murderer for settling the vexed question of the divinity of the Savior. Theodosius called a council at Constantinople in 381, and this council decided that the Holy Ghost proceeded from the Father. Theodosius, the younger, assembled another council at Ephesus to ascertain who the Virgin Mary really was, and it was solemnly decided in the year 431 that she was the Mother of God. In 451 it was decided by a council held at Chalcedon, called together by the Emperor Marcian, that Christ had two natures -- the human and divine. In 680, in another general council, held at Constantinople, convened by order of Pognatius, it was also decided that Christ had two wills, and in the year 1274 it was decided at the Council of Lyons, that the Holy Ghost proceeded not only from the Father, but from the Son as well. Had it not been for these councils, we might have been without a Trinity even unto this day. When we take into consideration the fact that a belief in the Trinity is absolutely essential to salvation, how unfortunate it was for the world that this doctrine was not established until the year 1274. Think of the millions that dropped into hell while these questions were being discussed.

This, however, is a digression. Let us go back to Constantine. This Emperor, stained with every crime, is supposed to have died like a Christian. We hear nothing of fiends leering at him in the shadows of death. He does not see the forms of his murdered wife and son covered with the blood he shed. From his white and shrivelled lips issued no shrieks of terror. He does not cover his glazed eyes with thin and trembling hands to shut out the visions of hell. His chamber is filled with the rustle of wings -- of wings waiting to bear his soul to the thrilling realms of joy.

Against the Emperor Constantine the church has hurled no anathema. She has accepted the story of his vision in the clouds, and his holy memory has been guarded by priest and pope. All the persecutors sleep in peace, and the ashes of those who burned their brothers in the name of Christ rest in consecrated ground. Whole libraries could not contain even the names of the wretches who have filled the world with violence and death in defence of book and creed, and yet they all died the death of the righteous, and no priest or minister describes the agony and fear, the remorse and horror, with which their guilty souls were filled in the last moments of their lives. These men had never

doubted -- they accepted the creed -- they were not infidels -- they had not denied the divinity of Christ -- they had been baptized -- they had partaken of the Last Supper -- they had respected priests -- they admitted that the Holy Ghost had "proceeded," and these things put pillows beneath their dying heads, and covered them with the drapery of peace.

Now and then, in the history of this world, a man of genius, of sense, of intellectual honesty has appeared. These men have denounced the superstitions of their day. They pitied the multitude. To see priests devour the substance of the people filled them with indignation. These men were honest enough to tell their thoughts. Then they were denounced, tried, condemned, executed. Some of them escaped the fury of the people who loved their enemies, and died naturally in their beds.

It would not do for the church to admit that they died peacefully. That would show that religion was not actually necessary in the last moment. Religion got much of its power from the terror of death.

THE DEATH TEST

You had better live well and die wicked, you had better live well and die cursing than live badly and die praying.

It would not do to have the common people understand that a man could deny the Bible, refuse to look at the cross, contend that Christ was only a man, and yet die as calmly as Calvin did after he had murdered Servetus, or as did King David after advising one son to kill another.

The church has taken great pains to show that the last moments of all infidels (that Christians did not succeed in burning) were infinitely wretched and despairing. It was alleged that words could not paint the horrors that were endured by a dying infidel. Every good Christian was expected to, and generally did, believe these accounts. They have been told and retold in every pulpit of the world. Protestant ministers have repeated the inventions of Catholic priests, and Catholics, by a kind of theological comity, have sworn to the falsehoods told by Protestants. Upon this point they have always stood together, and will as long as the same calumny can be used by both.

Upon the death-bed subject the clergy grow eloquent. When describing the shudderings and shrieks of the dying unbeliever, their eyes glitter with delight.

It is a festival.

They are no longer men. They become hyenas. They dig open graves. They devour the reputations of the dead.

It is a banquet.

Unsatisfied still, they paint the terrors of hell. They gaze at the souls of the infidels writhing in the coils of the worm that never dies. They see them in flames -- in oceans of fire -- in gulfs of pain -- in abysses of despair. They shout with joy. They applaud.

It is an auto da fe, presided over by God and his angels.

The men they thus describe were not atheists; they were all believers in God, in special providence, and in the immortality of the soul. They believed in the accountability of man -- in the practice of virtue, in justice. and liberty, but they did not believe in that collection of follies and fables called the Bible. In order to show that an infidel must die overwhelmed with remorse and fear, they have generally selected from all the "unbelievers" since the day of Christ five men -- the Emperor Julian, Spinoza, Voltaire, Diderot, David Hume, and Thomas Paine.

Hardly a minister in the United States has attempted to "answer" me without referring to the death of one or more of these men. In vain have these calumniators of the dead been called upon to prove their statements. In vain have rewards been offered to any priestly malinger to bring forward the evidence.

Let us once for all dispose of these slanders -- of these pious calumnies.

JULIAN

They say that the Emperor Julian was an "apostate;" that he was once a Christian; that he fell from grace, and that in his last moments, throwing some of his own blood into the air, he cried out to Jesus Christ, "Galilean, thou hast conquered!"

It must be remembered that the Christians had persecuted and imprisoned this very Julian; that they had exiled him; that they had threatened him with death. Many of his relatives were murdered by the Christians. He became emperor, and Christians conspired to take his life. The conspirators were discovered and they were pardoned. He did what he could to prevent the Christians from destroying each other. He held pomp and pride and luxury in contempt, and led his army on foot, sharing the

privations of the meanest soldier.

Upon ascending the throne he published an edict proclaiming universal religious toleration. He was then a Pagan. It is claimed by some that he never did entirely forget his Christian education. In this I am inclined to think there is some truth, because he revoked his edict of toleration, and for a time was nearly as unjust as though he had been a saint. He was emperor one year and seven months. In a battle with the Persians he was mortally wounded. "Brought back to his tent, and feeling that he had but a short time to live, he spent his last hours in discoursing with his friends on the immortality of the soul. He reviewed his reign and declared that he was satisfied with his conduct, and had neither penitence nor remorse to express for anything that he had done." His last words were: "I submit willingly to the eternal decrees of heaven, convinced that he who is captivated with life, when his last hour has arrived is more weak and pusillanimous than he who would rush to voluntary death when it is his duty still to live.

When we remember that a Christian emperor murdered Julian's father and most of his kindred, and that he narrowly escaped the same fate, we can hardly blame him for having a little prejudice against a church whose members were fierce, ignorant, and bloody -- whose priests were hypocrites, and whose bishops were assassins. If Julian had said he was a Christian -- no matter what he actually was, he would have satisfied the church.

The story that the dying emperor acknowledged that he was conquered by the Galilean was originated by some of the so-called Fathers of the Church, probably by Gregory or Theodoret. They are the same wretches who said that Julian sacrificed a woman to the moon, tearing out her entrails with his own hands. We are also informed by these hypocrites that he endeavored to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem, and that fire came out of the earth and consumed the laborers employed in the sacrilegious undertaking.

I did not suppose that an intelligent man could be found in the world who believed this childish fable, and yet in the January number for 1880, of the Princeton Review, the Rev. Stuart Robinson (whoever he may be) distinctly certifies to the truth of this story. He says: "Throughout the entire era of the planting of the Christian Church, the gospel preached was assailed not only by the malignant fanaticism of the Jew and the violence of Roman statecraft, but also by the intellectual weapons of philosophers, wits, and poets. Now Celsus denounced the new religion as base imposture. Now Tacitus described it as but another phase of the odium generis humani. Now Julian proposed

to bring into contempt the prophetic claims of its founder by the practical test of rebuilding the Temple." Here then in the year of grace 1880 is a Presbyterian preacher, who really believes that Julian tried to rebuild the Temple, and that God caused fire to issue from the earth and consume the innocent workmen.

All these stories rest upon the same foundation, the mendacity of priests.

Julian changed the religion of the Empire, and diverted the revenues of the church. Whoever steps between a priest and his salary, will find that he has committed every crime. No matter how often the slanders may be refuted, they will be repeated until the last priest has lost his body and found his wings. These falsehoods about Julian were invented some fifteen hundred years ago, and they are repeated to-day by just as honest and just as respectable people as these who told them at first. Whenever the church cannot answer the arguments of an opponent, she attacks his character. She resorts to falsehood, and in the domain of calumny she has stood for fifteen hundred years without a rival.

The great Empire was crumbling to its fall. The literature of the world was being destroyed by priests. The gods and goddesses were driven from the earth and sky. The paintings were torn and defaced. The statues were broken. The walls were left desolate, and the niches empty. Art, like Rachel, wept for her children, and would not be comforted. The streams and forests were deserted by the children of the imagination, and the whole earth was barren, poor and mean.

Christian ignorance, bigotry and hatred, in blind unreasoning zeal, had destroyed the treasures of our race. Art was abhorred, Knowledge was despised, Reason was an outcast. The sun was blotted from the intellectual heaven, every star extinguished, and there fell upon the world that shadow -- that midnight, -- known as "The Dark Ages."

This night lasted for a thousand years.

The First Great Star -- Herald of the Dawn -- was Bruno.

BRUNO

The night of the Middle Ages lasted for a thousand years. The first star that enriched the horizon of this universal gloom was Giordano Bruno. He was the herald of the dawn.

He was born in 1550, was educated for a priest, became a Dominican friar. At last his reason revolted against the doctrine of transubstantiation. He could not believe that the entire Trinity was in a wafer, or in a swallow of wine. He could not believe that a man could devour the Creator of the universe by eating a piece of bread. This led him to investigate other dogmas of the Catholic Church, and in every direction he found the same contradictions and impossibilities supported, not by reason, but by faith.

Those who loved their enemies threatened his life. He was obliged to flee from his native land, and he became a vagabond in nearly every nation of Europe. He declared that he fought, not what priests believed, but what they pretended to believe. He was driven from his native country because of his astronomical opinions. He had lost confidence in the Bible as a scientific work. He was in danger because he had discovered a truth.

He fled to England. He gave some lectures at Oxford. He found that institution controlled by priests. He found that they were teaching nothing of importance -- only the impossible and the hurtful. He called Oxford "the widow of true learning." There were in England, at that time, two men who knew more than the rest of the world. Shakespeare was then alive.

Bruno was driven from England. He was regarded as a dangerous man, -- he had opinions, he inquired after reasons, he expressed confidence in facts. He fled to France. He was not allowed to remain in that country. He discussed things -- that was enough. The church said, "move on." He went to Germany. He was not a believer -- he was an investigator. The Germans wanted believers: they regarded the whole Christian system as settled; they wanted witnesses; they wanted men who would assert. So he was driven from Germany.

He returned at last to his native land. He found himself without friends, because he had been true, not only to himself, but to the human race. But the world was false to him because he refused to crucify the Christ of his own soul between the two thieves of hypocrisy and bigotry. He was arrested for teaching that there are other worlds than this; that many of the stars are suns, around which other worlds revolve; that Nature did not exhaust all her energies on this grain of sand called the earth. He believed in a plurality of worlds, in the rotation of this, in the heliocentric theory. For these crimes, and for these alone, he was imprisoned for six years. He was kept in solitary confinement. He was allowed no books, no friends, no visitors. He was denied pen and

paper. In the darkness, in the loneliness, he had time to examine the great questions of origin, of existence, of destiny. He put to the test what is called the goodness of God. He found that he could neither depend upon man nor upon any deity. At last. the Inquisition demanded him. He was tried, condemned, excommunicated and sentenced to be burned. According to Professor Draper, he believed that this world is animated by an intelligent soul -- the cause of forms, but not of matter; that it lives in all things, even in such as seem not to live; that everything is ready to become organized; that matter is the mother of forms, and then their grave; that matter and the soul of things, together, constitute God. He was a pantheist -- that is to say, an atheist. He was a lover of Nature, -- a reaction from the asceticism of the church. He was tired of the gloom of the monastery. He loved the fields, the woods, the streams. He said to his brother-priests: Come out of your cells, out of your dungeons: come into the air and light. Throw away your beads and your crosses. Gather flowers; mingle with your fellow-men; have wives and children; scatter the seeds of joy; throw away the thorns and nettles of your creeds; enjoy the, perpetual miracle of life.

On the sixteenth day of February, in the year of grace 1600, by "the triumphant beast," the Church of Rome, this philosopher, this great and splendid man, was burned. He was offered his liberty if he would recant. There was no God to be offended by his recantation, and yet, as an apostle of what he believed to be the truth, he refused this offer. To those who passed the sentence upon him he said: "It is with greater fear that ye pass this sentence upon me than I receive it." This man, greater than any naturalist of his day; grander than the martyr of any religion, died willingly in defence of what he believed to be the sacred truth. He was great enough to know that real religion will not destroy the joy of life on earth; great enough to know that investigation is not a crime -- that the really useful is not hidden in the mysteries of faith. He knew that the Jewish records were below the level of the Greek and Roman myths; that there is no such thing as special providence; that prayer is useless; that liberty and necessity are the same, and that good and evil are but relative. He was the first real martyr, -- neither frightened by perdition, nor bribed by heaven. He was the first of all the world who died for truth without expectation of reward. He did not anticipate a crown of glory. His imagination had not peopled the heavens with angels waiting for his soul. He had not been promised an eternity of joy if he stood firm, nor had he been threatened with the fires of hell if he wavered and recanted. He expected as his reward an eternal nothing! Death was to him an everlasting end -- nothing beyond but a sleep without a dream, a night without a star, without a dawn -- nothing but extinction, blank, utter, and eternal. No

crown, no palm, no "well done, good and faithful servant," no shout of welcome, no song of praise, no smile of God, no kiss of Christ, no mansion in the fair skies -- not even a grave within the earth -- nothing but ashes, wind-blown and priest-scattered, mixed with earth and trampled beneath the feet of men and beasts.

The murder of this man will never be completely and perfectly avenged until from Rome shall be swept every vestige of priest and pope, until over the shapeless ruin of St. Peter's, the crumbled Vatican and the fallen cross, shall rise a monument to Bruno, - the thinker, philosopher, philanthropist, atheist, martyr.

THE CHURCH IN THE TIME OF VOLTAIRE

When Voltaire was born, the natural was about the only thing in which the church did not believe. The monks sold little amulets of consecrated paper. They would cure diseases. If laid in a cradle they would prevent a child being bewitched. So, they could be put into houses and barns to keep devils away, or buried in a field to prevent bad weather, to delay frost, and to insure good crops. There was a regular formulary by which they were made, ending with a prayer, after which the amulets were sprinkled with holy water. The church contended that its servants were the only legitimate physicians. The priests cured in the name of the church, and in the name of God, by exorcism, relics, water, salt, and oil. St. Valentine cured epilepsy, St. Gervasius was good for rheumatism, St. Michael de Sanatis for cancer, St. Judas for coughs, St. Ovidius for deafness, St. Sebastian for poisonous bites, St. Apollonia for toothache, St. Clara for rheum in the eye, St. Hubert for hydrophobia. Devils were driven out with wax tapers, with incense, with holy water, by pronouncing prayers. The church, as late as the middle of the twelfth century, prohibited good Catholics from having anything to do with physicians.

It was believed that the devils produced storms of wind, of rain and of fire from heaven; that the atmosphere was a battlefield between angels and devils; that Lucifer had power to destroy fields and vineyards and dwellings, and the principal business of the church was to protect the people from the Devil. This was the origin of church bells. These bells were sprinkled with holy water, and their clangor cleared the air of imps and fiends. The bells also prevented storms and lightning. The church used to anathematize insects. In the sixteenth century, regular suits were commenced against rats, and judgment was rendered. Every monastery had its master magician, who sold magic incense, salt, and tapers, consecrated palms and relics.

Every science was regarded as an outcast, an enemy. Every fact held the creed of the church in scorn. Investigators were enemies in disguise. Thinkers were traitors, and the church exerted its vast power for centuries to prevent the intellectual progress of man. There was no liberty, no education, no philosophy, no science; nothing but credulity, ignorance, and superstition. The world was really under the control of Satan and his agents. The church, for the purpose of increasing her power, exhausted every means to convince the people of the existence of witches, devils, and fiends. In this way the church had every enemy within her power. She simply had to charge him with being a wizard, of holding communication with devils, and the ignorant mob were ready to tear him to pieces.

To such an extent was this frightful course pursued, and such was the prevalence of the belief in the supernatural, that the worship of the devil was absolutely established. The poor people, brutalized by the church, filled with fear of Satanic influence, finding that the church did not protect, as a last resort began to worship the Devil. The power of the Devil was proven by the Bible. The history of Job, the temptation of Christ in the desert, the carrying of Christ to the top of the temple, and hundreds of other instances, were relied upon as establishing his power; and when people laughed about witches riding upon anointed sticks in the air, invisible, they were reminded of a like voyage when the Devil carried Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple.

This frightful doctrine filled every friend with suspicion of his friend. It made the husband denounce the wife, the children the parents, and the parents the children. It destroyed all the sweet relations of humanity. It did away with justice in the courts. It destroyed the charity of religion. It broke the bond of friendship. It filled with poison the golden cup of life. It turned earth into a very hell, peopled with ignorant, tyrannical, and malicious demons.

Such was the result of a few centuries of Christianity. Such was the result of a belief in the supernatural. Such was the result of giving up the evidence of our own senses, and relying upon dreams, visions, and fears. Such was the result of destroying human reason, of depending upon the supernatural, of living here for another world instead of for this, of depending upon priests instead of upon ourselves. The Protestants vied with the Catholics. Luther stood side by side with the priests he had deserted, in promoting this belief in devils and fiends. To the Catholic, every Protestant was possessed by a devil. To the Protestant, every Catholic was the homestead of a fiend. All order, all regular succession of causes and effects, were known no more. The natural ceased to

exist. The learned and the ignorant were on a level. The priest had been caught in the net spread for the peasant, and Christendom was a vast madhouse, with insane priests for keepers.

When Voltaire was born, the church ruled and owned France. It was a period of almost universal corruption. The priests were mostly libertines. The judges were nearly as cruel as venal. The royal palace was simply a house of assignation. The nobles were heartless, proud, arrogant, and cruel to the last degree. The common people were treated as beasts. It took the church a thousand years to bring about this happy condition of things.

The seeds of the revolution unconsciously were being scattered by every noble and by every priest. They germinated in the hearts of the helpless. They were watered by the tears of agony. Blows began to bear interest. There was a faint longing for blood. Workmen, blackened by the sun, bent by labor, looked at the white throats of scornful ladies and thought about cutting them.

In those days witnesses were cross-examined with instruments of torture. The church was the arsenal of superstition. Miracles, relics, angels and devils were as common as rags. Voltaire laughed at the evidences, attacked the pretended facts, held the Bible up to ridicule, and filled Europe with indignant protests against the cruelty, bigotry, and injustice of the time.

He was a believer in God, and in some ingenious way excused this God for allowing the Catholic Church to exist. He had an idea that, originally, mankind were believers in one God, and practiced all the virtues. Of course this was a mistake. He imagined that the church had corrupted the human race. In this he was right.

It may be that, at one time, the church relatively stood for progress, but when it gained power, it became an obstruction. The system of Voltaire was contradictory. He described a being of infinite goodness, who not only destroyed his children with pestilence and famine, but allowed them to destroy each other. While rejecting the God of the Bible, he accepted another God, who, to say the least, allowed the innocent to be burned for loving him.

Voltaire hated tyranny, and loved liberty. His arguments to prove the existence of a God were just as groundless as those of the reverend fathers of his day to prove the divinity of Christ, or that Mary was the mother of God. The theologians of his time

maligned and feared him. He regarded them as a spider does flies. He spread nets for them. They were caught, and he devoured them for the amusement and benefit of the public. He was educated by the Jesuits, and sometimes acted like one.

It is fashionable to say that he was not profound, This is because he was not stupid. In the presence of absurdity he laughed, and was called irreverent. He thought God would not damn even a priest forever: this was regarded as blasphemy. He endeavored to prevent Christians from murdering each other and did what he could to civilize the disciples of Christ. Had he founded a sect, obtained control of some country, and burned a few heretics at slow fires, he would have won the admiration, respect and love of the Christian world. Had he only pretended to believe all the fables of antiquity, had he mumbled Latin prayers, counted beads, crossed himself, devoured the flesh of God, and carried fagots to the feet of philosophy in the name of Christ, he might have been in heaven this moment, enjoying a sight of the damned.

Instead of doing these things, he willfully closed his eyes to the light of the gospel, examined the Bible for himself advocated intellectual liberty, struck from the brain the fetters of an arrogant faith, assisted the weak, cried out against the torture of man, appealed to reason, endeavored to establish universal toleration, succored the indigent, and defended the oppressed.

These were his crimes. Such a man God would not suffer to die in peace. If allowed to meet death with a smile, others might follow his example, until none would be left to light the holy fires of the auto da fe. It would not do for so great, so successful an enemy of the church, to die without leaving some shriek of fear, some shudder of remorse, some ghastly prayer of chattered horror, uttered by lips covered with blood and foam.

He was an old man of eighty-four. He had been surrounded with the comforts of life; he was a man of wealth, of genius. Among the literary men of the world he stood first. God had allowed him to have the appearance of success. His last years were filled with the intoxication of flattery. He stood at the summit of his age.

The priests became anxious. They began to fear that God would forget, in a multiplicity of business, to make a terrible example of Voltaire.

Toward the last of May, 1778, it was whispered in Paris that Voltaire was dying. Upon the fences of expectation gathered the unclean birds of superstition, impatiently waiting

for their prey.

"Two days before his death, his nephew went to seek the cure of Saint Sulpice and the Abbe Gautier and brought them into his uncle's sick chamber, who was informed that they were there. 'Ah, well!' said Voltaire, 'give them my compliments and my thanks.' The Abbe spoke some words to him, exhorting him to patience. The cure of Saint Sulpice then came forward, having announced himself, and asked of Voltaire, elevating his voice, if he acknowledged the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. The sick man pushed one of his hands against the cure's coif shoving him back, and cried, turning abruptly to the other side, 'Let me die in peace.' The cure seemingly considered his person soiled, and his coif dishonored, by the touch of the philosopher. He made the nurse give him a little brushing, and went out with the Abbe Gautier."

He expired, says Wagniere, on the 30th of May, 1778, at about a quarter past eleven at night, with the most perfect tranquillity. Ten minutes before his last breath he took the hand of Morand, his valet de chamber, who was watching by him, pressed it and said: "Adieu, my dear Morand, I am gone." These were his last words.

From this death, so simple and serene, so natural and peaceful; from, these words so utterly destitute of cant or dramatic touch, all the frightful pictures, all the despairing utterances, have been drawn and made. From these materials, and from these alone, have been constructed all the shameless lies about the death of this great and wonderful man, compared with whom all of his calumniators, dead and living. were and are but dust and vermin.

Voltaire was the intellectual autocrat of his time. From his throne at the foot of the Alps he pointed the finger of scorn at every hypocrite in Europe. He was the pioneer of his century. He was the assassin of superstition. He left the quiver of ridicule without an arrow. Through the shadows of faith and fable, through the darkness of myth and miracle, through the midnight of Christianity, through the blackness of bigotry, past cathedral and dungeon, past rack and stake, past altar and throne, he carried, with chivalric hands, the sacred torch of reason.

DIDEROT

DOUBT IS THE FIRST STEP TOWARD TRUTH

Diderot was born in 1713. His parents were in what may be called the humbler walks of

life. Like Voltaire he was educated by the Jesuits. He had in him something of the vagabond, and was for several years almost a beggar in Paris. He was endeavoring to live by his pen. In that day and generation, a man without a patron, endeavoring to live by literature, was necessarily almost a beggar. He nearly starved -- frequently going for days without food. Afterward, when he had something himself, he was as generous as the air. No man ever was more willing to give, and no man less willing to receive, than Diderot.

He wrote upon all conceivable subjects, that he might have bread. He even wrote sermons, and regretted it all his life. He and D'Alembert were the life and soul of the Encyclopedia. With infinite enthusiasm he helped to gather the knowledge of the world for the use of each and all. He harvested the fields of thought, separated the grain from the straw and chaff, and endeavored to throw away the seeds and fruit of superstition. His motto was, "Incredulity is the first step towards philosophy."

He had the vices of most Christians -- was nearly as immoral as the majority of priests. His vices he shared in common, his virtues were his own. All who knew him united in saying that he had the pity of a woman, the generosity of a prince, the self-denial of an anchorite, the courage of Caesar, and the enthusiasm of a poet. He attacked with every power of his mind the superstition of his day. He said what he thought. The priests hated him. He was in favor of universal education -- the church despised it. He wished to put the knowledge of the whole world within reach of the poorest.

He wished to drive from the gate of the Garden of Eden the cherubim of superstition, so that the child of Adam might return to eat once more the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Every Catholic was his enemy. His poor little desk was ransacked by the police searching for manuscripts in which something might be found that would justify the imprisonment of such a dangerous man. Whoever, in 1750, wished to increase the knowledge of mankind was regarded as the enemy of social order.

The intellectual superstructure of France rests upon the Encyclopedia. The knowledge given to the people was the impulse, the commencement, of the revolution that left the church without an altar and the king without a throne. Diderot thought for himself, and bravely gave his thoughts to others. For this reason he was regarded as a criminal. He did not expect his reward in another world. He did not do what he did to please some imaginary God. He labored for mankind. He wished to lighten the burdens of those who should live after him. Hear these noble words:

"The more man ascends through the past, and the more he launches into the future, the greater he will be, and all these philosophers and ministers and truth-telling men who have fallen victims to the stupidity of nations, the atrocities of priests, the fury of tyrants, what consolation was left for them in death? This: That prejudice would pass, and that posterity would pour out the vial of ignominy upon their enemies. O Posterity! Holy and sacred stay of the unhappy and the oppressed; thou who art just, thou who art incorruptible, thou who findest the good man, who unmaskest the hypocrite, who breakest down the tyrant, may thy sure faith, thy consoling faith never, never abandon me!" Posterity is for the philosopher what the other world is for the devotee.

Diderot took the ground that, if orthodox religion be true Christ was guilty of suicide. Having the power to defend himself he should have used it.

Of course it would not do for the church to allow a man to die in peace who had added to the intellectual wealth of the world. The moment Diderot was dead, Catholic priests began painting and recounting the horrors of his expiring moments. They described him as overcome with remorse, as insane with fear; and these falsehoods have been repeated by the Protestant world, and will probably be repeated by thousands of ministers after we are dead. The truth is, he had passed his three-score years and ten. He had lived for seventy-one years. He had eaten his supper. He had been conversing with his wife. He was reclining in his easy chair. His mind was at perfect rest. He had entered, without knowing it, the twilight of his last day. Above the horizon was the evening star, telling of sleep. The room grew still and the stillness was lulled by the murmur of the street. There were a few moments of perfect peace. The wife said, "He is asleep." She enjoyed his repose, and breathed softly that he might not be disturbed. The moments wore on, and still he slept. Lovingly, softly, at last she touched him. Yes, he was asleep. He had become a part of the eternal silence.

DAVID HUME

The worst religion of the world was the Presbyterianism of Scotland as it existed in the beginning of the eighteenth century. The Kirk had all the faults of the Church of Rome without a redeeming feature. The Kirk hated music, painting, statuary, and architecture. Anything touched with humanity -- with the dimples of joy -- was detested and accursed. God was to be feared -- not loved.

Life was a long battle with the Devil. Every desire was of Satan. Happiness was a snare, and human love was wicked, weak and vain. The Presbyterian priest of Scotland was as

cruel, bigoted and heartless as the familiar of the Inquisition.

One case will tell it all;

In the beginning of this, the nineteenth century, a boy seventeen years of age, Thomas Aikenhead, was indicted and tried at Edinburgh for blasphemy. He had denied the inspiration of the Bible. He had on several occasions, when cold, jocularly wished himself in hell that he might get warm. The poor, frightened boy recanted -- begged for mercy; but he was found guilty, hanged, thrown in a hole at the foot of the scaffold, and his weeping mother vainly begged that his bruised and bleeding body might be given to her.

This one case, multiplied again and again, gives you the condition of Scotland when, on the 26th of April, 1711, David Hume was born.

David Hume was one of the few Scotchmen of his day who were not owned by the church. He had the manliness to examine historical and religious questions for himself, and the courage to give his conclusions to the world. He was singularly capable of governing himself, He was a philosopher, and lived a calm and cheerful life, unstained by an unjust act, free from all excess, and devoted in a reasonable degree to benefiting his fellow-men. After examining the Bible he became convinced that it was not true. For failing to suppress his real opinion, for failing to tell a deliberate falsehood, he brought upon himself the hatred of the church.

Intellectual honesty is the sin against the Holy Ghost, and whether God will forgive this sin or not his church has not, and never will.

Hume took the ground that a miracle could not be used as evidence until the fact that it had happened was established. But how can a miracle be established? Take any miracle recorded in the Bible, and how could it be established now? You may say: Upon the testimony of those who wrote the account. Who were they? No one knows. How, could you prove the resurrection of Lazarus? Or of the widow's son? How could you substantiate, today, the ascension of Jesus Christ? In what way could you prove that the river Jordan was divided upon being struck by the coat of a prophet? How is it possible now to establish the fact that the fires of a furnace refused to burn three men? Where are the witnesses? Who, upon the whole earth, has the slightest knowledge upon this subject?

He insisted that at the bottom of all good was the useful; that human happiness was an end worth working and living for; that origin and destiny were alike unknown; that the best religion was to live temperately and to deal justly with our fellowmen; that the dogma of inspiration was absurd, and that an honest man had nothing to fear. Of course the Kirk hated him. He laughed at the creed.

To the lot of Hume fell ease, respect, success, and honor. While many disciples of God were the sport and prey of misfortune, he kept steadily advancing. Envious Christians bided their time. They waited as patiently as possible for the horrors of death to fall upon the heart and brain of David Hume. They knew that all the furies would be there, and that God would get his revenge.

Adam Smith, author of the "Wealth of Nations," speaking of Hume in his last sickness, says that in the presence of death "his cheerfulness was so great, and his conversation and amusements ran so much in the usual strain, that, notwithstanding all his bad symptoms, many people could not believe he was dying. A few days before his death Hume said: 'I am dying as fast as my enemies -- if I have any -- could wish, and as easily and tranquilly as my best friends could desire.'"

Col. Edmondstone shortly afterward wrote Hume a letter, of which the following is an extract:

"My heart is full, could not see you this morning. I thought it was better for us both. You cannot die -- you must live in the memory of your friends and acquaintances; and your works will render you immortal. I cannot conceive that it was possible for any one to dislike you, or hate you. He must be more than savage who could be an enemy to a man with the best head and heart and the most amiable manners. Adam Smith happened to go into his room while he was reading the above letter, which he immediately showed him. Smith said to Hume that he was sensible of how much he was weakening, and that appearances were in many respects bad; yet, that his cheerfulness was so great and the spirit of life still seemed to be so strong in him, that he could not keep from, entertaining some hopes.

Hume answered, "When I lie down in the evening I feel myself weaker than when I arose in the morning; and when I rise in the morning, weaker than when I lay down in the evening. I am sensible, besides, that some of my vital parts are affected so that I must soon die."

"Well." said Mr. Smith, "if it must be so, you have at least the satisfaction of leaving all your friends, and the members of your brother's family in particular, in great prosperity."

He replied that he was so sensible of his situation that when he was reading Lucian's Dialogues of the Dead, among all the excuses which are alleged to Charon for not entering readily into his boat, he could not find one that fitted him. He had no house to finish; he had no daughter to provide for; he had no enemies upon whom he wished to revenge himself; "and I could not well," said he, "imagine what excuse I could make to Charon in order to obtain a little delay. I have done everything of consequence which I ever meant to do, and I could, at no time expect to leave my relations and friends in a better situation than that in which I am now likely to leave them; and I have, therefore, every reason to die contented."

"Upon further consideration," said he, "I thought I might say to him, 'Good Charon, I have been correcting my works for a new edition. Allow me a little time that I may see how the public receives the alterations.' 'But,' Charon would answer, 'when you have seen the effect of this, you will be for making other alterations. There will be no end to such excuses; so, my honest friend, please step into the boat.' 'But,' I might still urge, 'have a little patience, good Charon; I have been endeavoring to open the eyes of the public; if I live a few years longer, I may have the satisfaction of seeing the downfall of some of the prevailing systems of superstition.' And Charon would then lose all temper and decency, and would cry out, 'You loitering rogue, that will not happen these many hundred years. Do you fancy I will grant you a lease for so long a time? Get into the boat this instant.'"

To the Comtesse de Boufflers, the dying man, with the perfect serenity that springs from an honest and loving life, writes:

"I see death approach gradually without any anxiety or regret. * * * I salute you with great affection and regard, for the last time."

On the 25th of August, 1776, the philosopher, the historian, the infidel, the honest man, and a benefactor of his race, in the composure born of a noble life, passed quietly and pangslessly away.

Dr Black wrote the following account of his death;

"Monday, 26 August, 1776.

"Dear Sir: Yesterday, about four o'clock in the afternoon, Mr. Hume expired. The near approach of his death became evident on the evening between Thursday and Friday, when his disease became exhaustive, and soon weakened him so much that he could no longer rise from his bed. He continued to the last perfectly sensible, and free from much pain or feeling of distress. He never dropped the smallest expression of impatience; but when he had occasion to speak to the people about him, always did it with all affection and tenderness. * * * When he became very weak, it cost him an effort to speak, and he died in such happy composure of mind that nothing could exceed it."

Dr. Cullen writes Dr. Hunter on the 17th of September, 1776, from which the following extracts are made:

"You desire an account of Mr. Hume's last days, and I give it to you with great pleasure. * * * It was truly an example des grands hommes qui sont morts en plaisantant; and to me, who have been so often shocked with the horrors of superstition, the reflection on such a death is truly agreeable. For many weeks before his death he was very sensible of his gradual decay; and his answer to inquiries after his health was, several times, that he was going as fast as his enemies could wish, and as easily as his friends could desire. He passed most of the time in his drawing-room, admitting the visits of his friends, and with his usual spirit conversed with them upon literature and politics and whatever else was started. In conversation he seemed to be perfectly at ease; and to the last abounded with that pleasantry and those curious and entertaining anecdotes which ever distinguished him. * * * His senses and judgment did not fail him to the last hour of his life. He constantly discovered a strong sensibility of the attention and care of his friends; and midst great uneasiness and languor never betrayed any peevishness or impatience." (Here follows the conversation with Charon.) "These are a few particulars which may, perhaps, appear trivial; but to me, no particulars seem trivial which relate to so great a man. It is perhaps from trifles that we can best distinguish the tranquillity and cheerfulness of the philosopher at a time when the most part of mankind are under disquiet, and sometimes even horror. I consider the sacrifice of the cock as a more certain evidence of the tranquillity of Socrates than his discourse on immortality."

The Christians took it for granted that this serene and placid man died filled with remorse for having given his real opinions, and proceeded to describe, with every incident and detail of horror, the terrors of his last moments. Brainless clergymen,

incapable of understanding what Hume had written, knowing only in a general way that he had held their creeds in contempt, answered his arguments by maligning his character.

Christians took it for granted that he died in horror and recounted the terrible scenes.

When the facts of his death became generally known to intelligent men, the ministers redoubled their efforts to maintain the old calumnies, and most of them are in this employment even unto this day. Finding it impossible to tell enough falsehoods to hide the truth, a few of the more intelligent among the priests admitted that Hume not only died without showing any particular fear, but was guilty of unbecoming levity. The first charge was that he died like a coward; the next that he did not care enough, and went through the shadowy doors of the dread unknown with a smile upon his lips. The dying smile of David Hume scandalized the believers in a God of love. They felt shocked to see a man dying without fear who denied the miracles of the Bible; who had spent a life investigating the opinions of men; in endeavoring to prove to the world that the right way is the best way; that happiness is a real and substantial good, and that virtue is not a termagant with sunken cheeks and hollow eyes.

Christians hated to admit that a philosopher had died serenely without the aid of superstition -- one who had taught that man could not make God happy by making himself miserable, and that a useful life, after all, was the best possible religion. They imagined that death would fill such a man with remorse and terror. He had never persecuted his fellowmen for the honor of God, and must needs die in despair. They were mistaken.

He died as he had lived. Like a peaceful river with green and shaded banks he passed, without a murmur, into that waveless sea where life at last is rest.

BENEDICT SPINOZA

One of the greatest thinkers was Benedict Spinoza, a Jew, born at Amsterdam, in 1632. He studied medicine and afterward theology. He endeavored to understand what he studied. In theology he necessarily failed. Theology is not intended to be understood, -- it is only to be believed. It is an act, not of reason, but of faith. Spinoza put to the rabbis so many questions, and so persistently asked for reasons, that he became the most troublesome of students. When the rabbis found it impossible to answer the questions, they concluded to silence the questioner. He was tried, found guilty, and

excommunicated from the synagogue.

By the terrible curse of the Jewish religion, he was made an outcast from every Jewish home. His father could not give him shelter. His mother could not give him bread -- could not speak to him, without becoming an outcast herself. All the cruelty of Jehovah, all the infamy of the Old Testament, was in this curse. In the darkness of the synagogue the rabbis lighted their torches, and while pronouncing the curse, extinguished them in blood, imploring God that in like manner the soul of Benedict Spinoza might be extinguished.

Spinoza was but twenty-four years old when he found himself without kindred, without friends, surrounded only by enemies. He uttered no complaint. He earned his bread with willing hands, and cheerfully divided his crust with those still poorer than himself.

He tried to solve the problem of existence. To him, the universe was One. The Infinite embraced the All. The All was God. According to his belief, the universe did not commence to be. It is; from eternity it was; to eternity it will be.

He was right. The universe is all there is, or was, or will be. It is both subject and object, contemplator and contemplated, creator and created, destroyer and destroyed, preserver and preserved, and hath within itself all causes, modes, motions and effects.

In this there is hope. This is a foundation and a star. The Infinite is the All. Without the All, the Infinite cannot be. I am something. Without me, the Infinite cannot exist.

Spinoza was a naturalist -- that is to say, a pantheist. He took the ground that the supernatural is, and forever will be, an infinite impossibility. His propositions are luminous as stars, and each of his demonstrations is a Gibraltar, behind which logic sits and smiles at all the sophistries of superstition.

Spinoza has been hated because he has not been answered. He was a real republican. He regarded the people as the true and only source of political power. He put the state above the church, the people above the priest. He believed in the absolute liberty of worship, thought and speech. In every relation of life he was just, true, gentle, patient, modest and loving. He respected the rights of others, and endeavored to enjoy his own, and yet he brought upon himself the hatred of the Jewish and the Christian world. In his day, logic was blasphemy, and to think was the unpardonable sin. The priest hated the philosopher, revelation reviled reason, and faith was the sworn foe of every fact.

Spinoza was a philosopher, a philanthropist. He lived in a world of his own. He avoided men. His life was an intellectual solitude. He was a mental hermit. Only in his own brain he found the liberty he loved. And yet the rabbis and the priests, the ignorant zealot and the cruel bigot, feeling that this quiet, thoughtful, modest man was in some way forging weapons to be used against the church, hated him with all their hearts.

He did not retaliate. He found excuses for their acts. Their ignorance, their malice, their misguided and revengeful zeal excited only pity in his breast. He injured no man. He did not live on alms. He was poor -- and yet, with the wealth of his brain, he enriched the world. On Sunday, February 21, 1677, Spinoza, one of the greatest and subtlest of metaphysicians -- one of the noblest and purest of human beings, -- at the age of forty-four, passed tranquilly away; and notwithstanding the curse of the synagogue under which he had lived and most lovingly labored, death left upon his lips the smile of perfect peace.

OUR INFIDELS

In our country there were three infidels -- Paine, Franklin and Jefferson. The colonies were filled with superstition, the Puritans with the spirit of persecution. Laws savage, ignorant and malignant had been passed in every colony, for the purpose of destroying intellectual liberty. Mental freedom was absolutely unknown. The Toleration Acts of Maryland tolerated only Christians -- not infidels, not thinkers, not investigators. The charity of Roger Williams was not extended to those who denied the Bible, or suspected the divinity of Christ. It was not based upon the rights of man, but upon the rights of believers, who differed in non-essential points.

The moment the colonies began to deny the rights of the king they suspected the power of the priest. In digging down to find an excuse for fighting George the Third, they unwittingly undermined the church. They went through the Revolution together. They found that all denominations fought equally well. They also found that persons without religion had patriotism and courage, and were willing to die that a new nation might be born. As a matter of fact the pulpit was not in hearty sympathy with our fathers. Many priests were imprisoned because they would not pray for the Continental Congress. After victory had enriched our standard, and it became necessary to make a constitution -- to establish a government -- the infidels -- the men like Paine, like Jefferson, and like Franklin, saw that the church must be left out; that a government deriving its just powers from the consent of the governed could make no contract with a church

pretending to derive its powers from an infinite God.

By the efforts of these infidels, the name of God was left out of the Constitution of the United States. They knew that if an infinite being was put in, no room would be left for the people. They knew that if any church was made the mistress of the state, that mistress, like all others, would corrupt, weaken, and destroy. Washington wished a church established by law in Virginia. He was prevented by Thomas Jefferson. It was only a little while ago that people were compelled to attend church by law in the Eastern States, and taxes were raised for the support of churches the same as for the construction of highways and bridges. The great principle enunciated in the Constitution has silently repealed most of these laws. In the presence of this great instrument, the constitutions of the States grew small and mean, and in a few years every law that puts a chain upon the mind, except in Delaware, will be repealed, and for these our children may thank the Infidels of 1776.

The church never has pretended that Jefferson or Franklin died in fear. Franklin wrote no books against the fables of the ancient Jews. He thought it useless to cast the pearls of thought before the swine of ignorance and fear. Jefferson was a statesman. He was the father of a great party. He gave his views in letters and to trusted friends. He was a Virginian, author of the Declaration of Independence, founder of a university, father of a political party, President of the United States, a statesman and philosopher. He was too powerful for the divided churches of his day. Paine was a foreigner, a citizen of the world. He had attacked Washington and the Bible. He had done these things openly, and what he had said could not be answered. His arguments were so good that his character was bad.

THOMAS PAINE

THOMAS PAINE was born in Thetford, England. He came from the common people. At the age of thirty-seven he left England for America. He was the first to perceive the destiny of the New World. He wrote the pamphlet "Common Sense," and in a few months the Continental Congress declared the colonies free and independent States -- a new nation was born. Paine having aroused the spirit of independence, gave every energy of his soul to keep the spirit alive. He was with the army. He shared its defeats and its glory. When the situation became desperate, he gave them "The Crisis." It was a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night, leading the way to freedom, honor, and to victory.

The writings of Paine are gemmed with compact statements that carry conviction to the dullest. Day and night he labored for America, until there was a government of the people and for the people. At the close of the Revolution, no one stood higher than Thomas Paine. Had he been willing to live a hypocrite, he would have been respectable, he at least could have died surrounded by other hypocrites, and at his death there would have been an imposing funeral, with miles of carriages, filled with hypocrites, and above his hypocritical dust there would have been a hypocritical monument covered with lies.

Having done so much for man in America, he went to France. The seeds sown by the great infidels were bearing fruit in Europe. The eighteenth century was crowning its gray hairs with the wreath of progress. Upon his arrival in France he was elected a member of the French Convention -- in fact, he was selected about the same time by the people of no less than four Departments. He was one of the committee to draft a constitution for France. In the Assembly, where nearly all were demanding the execution of the king, he had the courage to vote against death. To vote against the death of the king was to vote against his own life. This was the sublimity of devotion to principle. For this he was arrested, imprisoned, and doomed to death. While under sentence of death, while in the gloomy cell of his prison, Thomas Paine wrote to Washington, asking him to say one word to Robespierre in favor of the author of "Common Sense." Washington did not reply. He wrote again. Washington, the President, paid no attention to Thomas Paine, the prisoner. The letter was thrown into the wastebasket of forgetfulness, and Thomas Paine remained condemned to death. Afterward he gave his opinion of Washington at length, and I must say, that I have never found it in my heart to greatly blame him.

Thomas Paine, having done so much for political liberty, turned his attention to the superstitions of his age. He published "The Age of Reason;" and from that day to this, his character has been maligned by almost every priest in Christendom. He has been held up as the terrible example. Every man who has expressed an honest thought, has been warningly referred to Thomas Paine. All his services were forgotten. No kind word fell from any pulpit. His devotion to principle, his zeal for human rights, were no longer remembered. Paine simply took the ground that it is a contradiction to call a thing a revelation that comes to us second-hand. There can be no revelation beyond the first communication. All after that is hearsay. He also showed that the prophecies of the Old Testament had no relation whatever to Jesus Christ, and contended that Jesus Christ was simply a man. In other words, Paine was an enlightened Unitarian. Paine

thought the Old Testament too barbarous to have been the work of an infinitely benevolent God. He attacked the doctrine that salvation depends upon belief. He insisted that every man has the right to think.

After the publication of these views every falsehood that malignity could coin and malice pass was given to the world. On his return to America, after the election to the presidency of another infidel, Thomas Jefferson, it was not safe for him to appear in the public streets. He was in danger of being mobbed. Under the very flag he had helped to put in heaven his rights were not respected. Under the Constitution that he had suggested, his life was insecure. He had helped to give liberty to more than three millions of his fellow-citizens, and they were willing to deny it unto him. He was deserted, ostracized, shunned, maligned, and cursed. He enjoyed the seclusion of a leper; but he maintained through it all his integrity. He stood by the convictions of his mind. Never for one moment did he hesitate or waver.

He died almost alone. The moment he died Christians commenced manufacturing horrors for his death-bed. They had his chamber filled with devils rattling chains, and these ancient lies are annually certified to by the respectable Christians of the present day. The truth is, he died as he had lived. Some ministers were impolite enough to visit him against his will. Several of them he ordered from his room. A couple of Catholic priests, in all the meekness of hypocrisy, called that they might enjoy the agonies of a dying friend of man. Thomas Paine, rising in his bed, the few embers of expiring life blown into flame by the breath of indignation, had the goodness to curse them both. His physician, who seems to have been a meddling fool, just as the cold hand of death was touching the patriot's heart, whispered in the dull ear of the dying man: "Do you believe, or do you wish to believe, that Jesus Christ is the son of God?" And the reply was: "I have no wish to believe on that subject."

These were the last remembered words of Thomas Paine. He died as serenely as ever Christian passed away. He died in the full possession of his mind, and on the very brink and edge of death proclaimed the doctrines of his life.

Every Christian, every philanthropist, every believer in human liberty, should feel under obligation to Thomas Paine for the splendid service rendered by him in the darkest days of the American Revolution. In the midnight of Valley Forge, "The Crisis" was the first star that glittered in the wide horizon of despair. Every good man should remember with gratitude the brave words spoken by Thomas Paine in the French Convention

against the death of Louis. He said: "We will kill the king, but not the man. We will destroy monarchy, not the monarch."

Thomas Paine was a champion, in both hemispheres, of human liberty; one of the founders and fathers of this Republic; one of the foremost men of his age. He never wrote a word in favor of injustice. He was a despiser of slavery. He abhorred tyranny in every form. He was, in the widest and best sense, a friend of all his race. His head was as clear as his heart was good, and he had the courage to speak his honest thought.

He was the first man to write these words: "The United States of America" He proposed the present Federal Constitution. He furnished every thought that now glitters in the Declaration of Independence.

He believed in one God and no more. He was a believer even in special providence, and he hoped for immortality.

How can the world abhor the man who said:

"I believe in the equality of man, and that religious duties consist in doing justice, in loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow-creatures happy." --

"It is necessary to the happiness of man that he be mentally faithful to himself" --

"The word of God is the creation which we behold." --

"Belief in a cruel God makes a cruel man." --

"My opinion is, that those whose lives have been spent in doing good and endeavoring to make their fellow-mortals happy, will be happy hereafter." --

"One good schoolmaster is of more use than a hundred priests."

"I believe in one God, and no more, and I hope for happiness beyond this life." --

"Man has no property in man" -- and

"The key of heaven is not in the keeping of any sect!"

Had it not been for Thomas Paine I could not deliver this lecture here to-night.

It is still fashionable to calumniate this man -- and yet Channing, Theodore Parker, Longfellow, Emerson, and in fact all the liberal Unitarians and Universalists of the

world have adopted the opinions of Thomas Paine.

Let us compare these Infidels with the Christians of their time,;

Compare Julian with Constantine, -- the murderer of his wife, -- the murderer of his son -- and who established Christianity with the same sword he had wet with their blood. Compare him with all the Christian emperors -- with all, the robbers and murders and thieves -- the parricides and fratricides. and matricides that ever wore the imperial purple on the banks of the Tiber or the shores of the Bosphorus.

Let us compare Bruno with the Christians who burned him; and we will compare Spinoza, Voltaire. Diderot, Hume, Jefferson, Paine -- with the men who it is claimed have been the visible representatives of God.

Let it be remembered that the popes have committed every crime of which human nature is capable, and that not one of them was the friend of intellectual liberty -- that not one of them ever shed one ray of light.

Let us compare these Infidels with the founders of sectarian churches; you will see how narrow, how bigoted, how cruel were their founders, and how broad, how generous, how noble, were these infidels.

Let us be honest. The great effort of the human mind is to ascertain the order of facts by which we are surrounded -- the history of things.

Who has accomplished the most in this direction -- the church, or the unbelievers? Upon one side write all that the church has discovered -- every phenomenon that has been explained by a creed, every new fact in Nature that has been discovered by a church, and on the other side write the discoveries of Humboldt, and the observations and demonstrations of Darwin!

Who has made Germany famous -- her priests, or her scientists?

Goethe.

Kant: That immortal man who said: "Whoever thinks that he can please God in any way except by discharging his obligations to his fellows, is superstitious.

And that greatest and bravest of thinkers, Ernst Haeckel.

Humboldt.

Italy: -- Mazzini. Garibaldi.

In France who are and were the friends of freedom -- the Catholic priests, or Renan? the bishops, or Gambetta? -- Dupanloup, or Victor Hugo?

Michelet -- Taine -- Auguste Comte.

England -- Let us compare her priests with John Stewart Mill, -- Harriet Martineau, that "free rover on the breezy common of the universe." -- George Eliot -- with Huxley and Tydall, with Holyoake and Harrison -- and above and over all with Charles Darwin.

CONCLUSION

Let us be honest. Did all the priests of Rome increase the mental wealth of man as much as Bruno? Did all the priests of France do as great a work for the civilization of the world as Diderot and Voltaire? Did all the ministers of Scotland add as much to the sum of human knowledge as David Hume? Have all the clergymen, monks, friars, ministers, priests, bishops, cardinals and popes, from the day of Pentecost to the last election, done as much for human liberty as Thomas Paine? -- as much for science as Charles Darwin?

What would the world be if infidels had never been?

The infidels have been the brave and thoughtful men; the flower of all the world; the pioneers and heralds of the blessed day of liberty and love; the generous spirits of the unworthy past; the seers and prophets of our race; the great chivalric souls, proud victors on the battlefields of thought, the creditors of all the years to be.

Why should it be taken for granted that the men who devoted their lives to the liberation of their fellow-men should have been hissed at in the hour of death by the snakes of conscience, while men who defended slavery, practiced polygamy, justified the stealing of babes from the breasts of mothers, and lashed the naked hack of unpaid labor are supposed to have passed smilingly from earth to the embraces of the angels? Why should we think that the brave thinkers, the investigators, the honest men, must have left the crumbling shore of time in dread and fear, while the instigators of the massacre of St. Bartholomew; the inventors and users of thumbscrews, of iron boots and racks; the burners and tearers of human flesh; the stealers, the whippers and the

enslavers of men; the buyers and beaters of maidens, mothers, and babes; the founders of the Inquisition; the makers of chains; the builders of dungeons; the calumniators of the living; the slanderers of the dead, and even the murderers of Jesus Christ, all died in the odor of sanctity, with white, forgiven hands folded upon the breasts of peace, while the destroyers of prejudice, the apostles of humanity, the soldiers of liberty, the breakers of fetters, the creators of light, died surrounded by the fierce hands of God?

WHAT IS SUPERSTITION? (1898)

To believe in spite of evidence or without evidence.

To account for one mystery by another.

To believe that the world is governed by chance or caprice.

To disregard the true relation between cause and effect.

To put thought, intention and design back of nature.

To believe that mind created and controls matter.

To believe in force apart from substance, or in substance apart from force.

To believe in miracles, spells and charms, in dreams and prophecies.

To believe in the supernatural.

The foundation of superstition is ignorance, the superstructure is faith and the dome is a vain hope. Superstition is the child of ignorance and the mother of misery.

In nearly every brain is found some cloud of superstition.

A woman drops a cloth with which she is washing dishes, and she exclaims: "That means company."

Most people will admit that there is no possible connection between dropping the cloth and the coming of visitors. The falling cloth could not have put the visit desire

in the minds of people not present, and how could the cloth produce the desire to visit the particular person who dropped it? There is no possible connection between the dropping of the cloth and the anticipated effects.

A man catches a glimpse of the new moon over his left shoulder, and he says: "This is bad luck."

To see the moon over the right or left shoulder, or not to see it, could not by any possibility affect the moon, neither could it change the effect or influence of the moon on any earthly thing. Certainly the left-shoulder glance could in no way affect the nature of things. All the facts in nature would remain the same as though the glance had been over the right shoulder. We see no connection between the left shoulder glance and any possible evil effects upon the one who saw the moon in this way.

A girl counts the leaves of a flower, and she says: "One, he comes; two, he tarries; three, he courts; four, he marries; five, he goes away."

Of course the flower did not grow, and the number of its leaves was not determined with reference to the courtship or marriage of this girl, neither could there have been any intelligence that guided her hand when she selected that particular flower. So, counting the seeds in an apple cannot in any way determine whether the future of an individual is to be happy or miserable.

Thousands of persons believe in lucky and unlucky days, numbers, signs and jewels.

Many people regard Friday as an unlucky day -- as a bad day to commence a journey, to marry, to make any investment. The only reason given is that Friday is an unlucky day.

Starting across the sea on Friday could have no possible effect upon the winds, or waves, or tides, any more than starting on any other day, and the only possible reason for thinking Friday unlucky is the assertion that it is so.

So it is thought by many that it is dangerous for thirteen people to dine together. Now, if thirteen is a dangerous number, twenty-six ought to be twice as dangerous, and fifty-two four times as terrible.

It is said that one of the thirteen will die in a year. Now, there is no possible relation between the number and the digestion of each, between the number and the individual diseases. If fourteen dine together there is greater probability, if we take into account only the number, of a death within the year, than there would be if only thirteen were at the table.

Overturning the salt is very unlucky, but spilling the vinegar makes no difference.

Why salt should be revengeful and vinegar forgiving has never been told.

If the first person who enters a theater is cross eyed, the audience will be small and the "run" a failure.

How the peculiarity of the eyes of the first one who enters, changes the intention of a community, or how the intentions of a community cause the cross-eyed man to go early, has never been satisfactorily explained. Between this so-called cause and the so-called effect there is, so far as we can see, no possible relation.

To wear an opal is bad luck, but rubies bring health. How these stones affect the future, how they destroy causes and defeat effects, no one pretends to know.

So, there are thousands of lucky and unlucky things, warnings, omens and prophecies, but all sensible, sane and reasoning human beings know that every one is an absurd and idiotic superstition.

Let us take another step:

For many centuries it was believed that eclipses of the sun and moon were prophetic of pestilence or famine, and that comets foretold the death of kings, or the destruction of nations, the coming of war or plague. All strange appearances in the heavens -- the Northern Lights, circles about the moon, sun dogs, falling stars -- filled our intelligent ancestors with terror. They fell upon their knees -- did their best with sacrifice and prayer to avoid the threatened disaster. Their faces were ashen with fear as they closed their eyes and cried to the heavens for help. The clergy, who were as familiar with God then as the orthodox preachers are now, knew exactly the meaning of eclipses and sun dogs and Northern Lights; knew that God's patience was nearly exhausted; that he was then whetting the sword of his wrath, and that the people could save themselves only by obeying the priests, by counting their beads and doubling their subscriptions.

Earthquakes and cyclones filled the coffers of the church. In the midst of disasters the miser, with trembling hands, opened his purse. In the gloom of eclipses thieves and robbers divided their booty with God, and poor, honest, ignorant girls, remembering that they had forgotten to say a prayer, gave their little earnings to soften the heart of God.

Now we know that all these signs and wonders in the heavens have nothing to do with the fate of kings, nations or individuals; that they had no more reference to human beings than to colonies of ants, hives of bees or the eggs of insects. We now know that the signs and eclipses, the comets, and the falling stars, would have been just the same if not a human being had been upon the earth. We know now that eclipses come at certain times and that their coming can be exactly foretold.

A little while ago the belief was general that there were certain healing virtues in inanimate things, in the bones of holy men and women, in the rags that had been torn from the foul clothing of still fowler saints, in hairs from martyrs, in bits of wood and rusty nails from the true cross, in the teeth and finger nails of pious men, and in a thousand other sacred things.

The diseased were cured by kissing a box in which was kept some bone, or rag, or bit of wood, some holy hairs, provided the kiss was preceded, or followed by a gift -- a something for the church. In some mysterious way the virtue in the bone, or rag, or piece of wood, crept or flowed from the box, took possession of the sick who had the necessary faith, and in the name of God drove out the devils who were the real disease.

This belief in the efficacy of bones or rags and holy hair was born of another belief -- the belief that all diseases were produced by evil spirits. The insane were supposed to be possessed by devils. Epilepsy and hysteria were produced by the imps of Satan. In short, every human affliction was the work of the malicious emissaries of the god of hell. This belief was almost universal, and even in our time the sacred bones are believed in by millions of people.

But to-day no intelligent man believes in the existence of devils -- no intelligent man believes that evil spirits cause disease -- consequently, no intelligent person believes that holy bones or rags, sacred hairs or pieces of wood, can drive disease out, or in any way bring back to the pallid cheek the rose of health.

Intelligent people now know that the bone of a saint has in it no greater virtue than the bone of any animal. That a rag from a wandering beggar is just as good as one from a saint, and that the hair of a horse will cure disease just as quickly and surely as the hair of a martyr. We now know that all the sacred relics are religious rubbish; that those who use them are for the most part dishonest, and that those who rely on them are almost idiotic.

This belief in amulets and charms, in ghosts and devils, is superstition, pure and simple.

Our ancestors did not regard these relics as medicine, having a curative power, but the idea was that evil spirits stood in dread of holy things -- that they fled from the bone of a saint, that they feared a piece of the true cross, and that when holy water was sprinkled on a man they immediately left the premises. So, these devils hated and dreaded the sound of holy bells, the light of sacred tapers, and, above all, the ever-blessed cross.

In those days the priests were fishers for money, and they used these relics for bait.

II

Let us take another step:

This belief in the Devil and evil spirits laid the foundation for another belief: Witchcraft.

It was believed that the devil had certain things to give in exchange for a soul. The old man, bowed and broken, could get back his youth -- the rounded form, the brown hair, the leaping heart of life's morning -- if he would sign and seal away his soul. So, it was thought that the malicious could by charm and spell obtain revenge, that the poor could be enriched, and that the ambitious could rise to place and power. All the good things of this life were at the disposal of the Devil. For those who resisted the temptations of the Evil One, rewards were waiting in another world, but the Devil rewarded here in this life. No one has imagination enough to paint the agonies that were endured by reason of this belief in witchcraft. Think of the families destroyed, of the fathers and mothers cast in prison, tortured and burned, of the firesides darkened, of the children murdered, of the old, the poor and helpless that were stretched on racks mangled and flayed!

Think of the days when superstition and fear were in every house, in every mind, when accusation was conviction, when assertion of innocence was regarded as a confession of guilt, and when Christendom was insane!

Now we know that all of these horrors were the result of superstition. Now we know that ignorance was the mother of all the agonies endured. Now we know that witches never lived, that human beings never bargained with any devil, and that our pious savage ancestors were mistaken.

Let us take another step:

Our fathers believed in miracles, in signs and wonders, eclipses and comets, in the virtues of bones, and in the powers attributed to evil spirits. All these belonged to the miraculous. The world was supposed to be full of magic; the spirits were sleight-of-hand performers -- necromancers. There were no natural causes behind events. A devil wished, and it happened. One who had sold his soul to Satan made a few motions, uttered some strange words, and the event was present. Natural causes were not believed in. Delusion and illusion, the monstrous and miraculous, ruled the world. The foundation was gone -- reason had abdicated. Credulity gave tongues and wings to lies, while the dumb and limping facts were left behind -- were disregarded and remained untold.

WHAT IS A MIRACLE?

An act performed by a master of nature without reference to the facts in nature. This is the only honest definition of a miracle.

If a man could make a perfect circle, the diameter of which was exactly one-half the circumference, that would be a miracle in geometry. If a man could make twice four, nine, that would be a miracle in mathematics. If a man could make a stone, falling in the air, pass through a space of ten feet the first second, twenty-five feet the second second, and five feet the third second, that would be a miracle in physics. If a man could put together hydrogen, oxygen and nitrogen and produce pure gold, that would be a miracle in chemistry. If a minister were to prove his creed, that would be a theological miracle. If Congress by law would make fifty cents worth of silver worth a dollar, that would be a financial miracle. To make a square triangle would be a most wonderful miracle. To cause a mirror to reflect the faces of persons who stand behind it, instead of those who stand in front, would be a miracle. To make

echo answer a question would be a miracle. In other words, to do anything contrary to or without regard to the facts in nature is to perform a miracle. Now we are convinced of what is called the "uniformity of nature." We believe that all things act and are acted upon in accordance with their nature; that under like conditions the results will always be substantially the same; that like ever has and ever will produce like. We now believe that events have natural parents and that none die childless.

Miracles are not simply impossible, but they are unthinkable by any man capable of thinking.

Now an intelligent man cannot believe that a miracle ever was, or ever will be, performed.

Ignorance is the soil in which belief in miracles grows.

III

Let us take another step:

While our ancestors filled the darkness with evil spirits, enemies of mankind, they also believed in the existence of good spirits. These good spirits sustained the same relation to God that the evil ones did to the Devil. These good spirits protected the faithful from the temptations and snares of the Evil One. They took care of those who carried amulets and charms, of those who repeated prayers and counted beads, of those who fasted and performed ceremonies. These good spirits would turn aside the sword and arrow from the breast of the faithful. They made poison harmless, they protected the credulous, and in a thousand ways defended and rescued the true believer. They drove doubts from the minds of the pious, sowed the seeds of credulity and faith, saved saints from the wiles of women, painted the glories of heaven for those who fasted and prayed, made it possible for the really good to dispense with the pleasures of sense and to hate the Devil.

These angels watched over infants who had been baptized, over persons who had made holy vows, over priests and nuns and wandering beggars who believed.

These spirits were of various kinds: Some had once been men or women. some had never lived in this world, and some had been angels from the commencement. Nobody pretended to know exactly what they were, or exactly how they looked, or in

what way they went from place to place, or how they affected or controlled the minds of men.

It was believed that the king of all these evil spirits was the Devil, and that the king of all the good spirits was God. It was also believed that God was in fact the king of all, and that the Devil himself was one of the children of this God. This God and this Devil were at war, each trying to secure the souls of men. God offered the rewards of eternal joy and threatened eternal pain. The Devil baited his traps with present pleasure, with the gratification of the senses, with the ecstasies of love, and laughed at the joys of heaven and the pangs of hell. With malicious hand he sowed the seeds of doubt -- induced men to investigate, to reason, to call for evidence, to rely upon themselves; planted in their hearts the love of liberty, assisted them to break their chains, to escape from their prisons and besought them to think. In this way he corrupted the children of men.

Our fathers believed that they could by prayer, by sacrifice, by fasting, by performing certain ceremonies, gain the assistance of this God and of these good spirits. They were not quite logical. They did not believe that the Devil was the author of all evil. They thought that flood and famine, plague and cyclone, earthquake and war, were sometimes sent by God as punishment for unbelief. They fell upon their knees and with white lips, prayed the good God to stay his hand. They humbled themselves, confessed their sins, and filled the heavens with their vows and cries. With priests and prayers they tried to stay the plague. They kissed the relics, fell at shrines, besought the Virgin and the saints, but the prayers all died in the heartless air, and the plague swept on to its natural end. Our poor fathers knew nothing of any science. Back of all events they put spirits, good or bad, angels or demons, gods or devils. To them nothing had what we call a natural cause. Everything was the work of spirits. All was done by the supernatural, and everything was done by evil spirits that they could do to ruin, punish, mislead and damn the children of men. This world was a field of battle, and here the hosts of heaven and hell waged war.

IV

Now no man in whose brain the torch of reason burns, no man who investigates, who really thinks, who is capable of weighing evidence, believes in signs, in lucky or unlucky days, in lucky or unlucky numbers. He knows that Fridays and Thursdays are alike; that thirteen is no more deadly than twelve. He knows that opals affect the

wearer the same as rubies, diamonds or common glass. He knows that the matrimonial chances of a maiden are not increased or decreased by the number of leaves of a flower or seeds in an apple. He knows that a glance at the moon over the left shoulder is as healthful and lucky as one over the right. He does not care whether the first comer to a theater is cross-eyed or hump-backed, bow-legged, or as well-proportioned as Apollo. He knows that a strange cat could be denied asylum without bringing any misfortune to the family. He knows that an owl does not hoot in the full of the moon because a distinguished man is about to die. He knows that comets and eclipses would come if all the folks were dead. He is not frightened by sun dogs, or the Morning of the North when the glittering lances pierce the shield of night. He knows that all these things occur without the slightest reference to the human race. He feels certain that floods would destroy and cyclones rend and earthquakes devour; that the stars would shine; that day and night would still pursue each other around the world; that flowers would give their perfume to the air, and light would paint the seven-hued arch upon the dusky bosom of the cloud if every human being was unconscious dust.

A man of thought and sense does not believe in the existence of the Devil. He feels certain that imps, goblins, demons and evil spirits exist only in the imagination of the ignorant and frightened. He knows how these malevolent myths were made. He knows the part they have played in all religions. He knows that for many centuries a belief in these devils, these evil spirits, was substantially universal. He knows that the priest believed as firmly as the peasant. In those days the best educated and the most ignorant were equal dupes. Kings and courtiers, ladies and clowns, soldiers and artists, slaves and convicts, believed as firmly in the Devil as they did in God.

Back of this belief there is no evidence, and there never has been. This belief did not rest on any fact. It was supported by mistakes, exaggerations and lies. The mistakes were natural, the exaggerations were mostly unconscious and the lies were generally honest. Back of these mistakes, these exaggerations, these lies, was the love of the marvelous. Wonder listened with greedy ears, with wide eyes, and ignorance with open mouth.

The man of sense knows the history of this belief, and he knows, also, that for many centuries its truth was established by the Holy Bible. He knows that the Old Testament is filled with allusions to the Devil, to evil spirits, and that the New

Testament is the same. He knows that Christ himself was a believer in the Devil, in evil spirits, and that his principal business was casting out devils from the bodies of men and women. He knows that Christ himself, according to the New Testament, was not only tempted by the Devil, but was carried by his Satanic Highness to the top of the temple. If the New Testament is the inspired word of God, then I admit that these devils, these imps, do actually exist and that they do take possession of human beings.

To deny the existence of these evil spirits, to deny the existence of the Devil, is to deny the truth of the New Testament. To deny the existence of these imps of darkness is to contradict the words of Jesus Christ. If these devils do not exist, if they do not cause disease, if they do not tempt and mislead their victims, then Christ was an ignorant, superstitious man, insane, an impostor, or the New Testament is not a true record of what he said and what he pretended to do. If we give up the belief in devils, we must give up the inspiration of the Old and New Testament. We must give up the divinity of Christ. To deny the existence of evil spirits is to utterly destroy the foundation of Christianity. There is no half-way ground. Compromise is impossible. If all the accounts in the New Testament of casting out devils are false, what part of the Blessed Book is true?

As a matter of fact, the success of the Devil in the Garden of Eden made the coming of Christ a necessity, laid the foundation for the atonement, crucified the Savior and gave us the Trinity.

If the Devil does not exist, the Christian creeds all crumble, and the superstructure known as "Christianity," built by the fathers, by popes, by priests and theologians -- built with mistakes and falsehoods, with miracles and wonders, with blood and flame, with lies and legends borrowed from the savage world, becomes a shapeless ruin.

If we give up the belief in devils and evil spirits, we are compelled to say that a witch never lived. No sensible human being now believes in witchcraft. We know that it was a delusion. We now

know that thousands and thousands of innocent men, women and children were tortured and burned for having been found guilty of an impossible crime, and we also

know, if our minds have not been deformed by faith, that all the books in which the existence of witches is taught were written by ignorant and superstitious men. We also know that the Old Testament asserted the existence of witches. According to that Holy Book, Jehovah was a believer in witchcraft, and said to his chosen people: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live."

This one commandment -- this simple line -- demonstrates that Jehovah was not only not God, but that he was a poor, ignorant, superstitious savage. This one line proves beyond all possible doubt that the Old Testament was written by men, by barbarians.

John Wesley was right when he said that to give up a belief in witchcraft was to give up the Bible.

Give up the Devil, and what can you do with the Book of Job? How will you account for the lying spirits that Jehovah sent to mislead Ahab?

Ministers who admit that witchcraft is a superstition will read the story of the Witch of Endor -- will read it in a solemn, reverential voice -- with a theological voice -- and will have the impudence to say that they believe it.

It would be delightful to know that angels hover in the air; that they guard the innocent, protect the good; that they bend over the cradles and give health and happy dreams to pallid babes; that they fill dungeons with the light of their presence and give hope to the imprisoned; that they follow the fallen, the erring, the outcasts, the friendless, and win them back to virtue, love and joy. But we have no more evidence of the existence of good spirits than of bad. The angels that visited Abraham and the mother of Samson are as unreal as the ghosts and goblins of the Middle Ages. The angel that stopped the donkey of Baalim, the one who walked in the furnace flames with Meshech, Shadrack and Abednego, the one who slew the Assyrians and the one who in a dream removed the suspicions of Joseph, were all created by the imagination of the credulous, by the lovers of the marvelous, and they have been handed down from dotage to infancy, from ignorance to ignorance, through all the years. Except in Catholic countries, no winged citizen of the celestial realm has visited the world for hundreds of years. Only those who are blind to facts can see these beautiful creatures, and only those who reach conclusions without the assistance of evidence can believe in their existence. It is told that the great Angelo, in decorating a church, painted some angels wearing sandals. A cardinal looking at the

picture said to the artist: "Whoever saw angels with sandals?" Angelo answered with another question: "Whoever saw an angel bare-footed?"

The existence of angels has never been established. Of course, we know that millions and millions have believed in seraphim and cherubim; have believed that the angel Gabriel contended with the Devil for the body of Moses; that angels shut the mouths of the lions for the protection of Daniel that angels ministered unto Christ, and that countless angels will accompany the Savior when he comes to take possession of the world. And we know that all these millions believe through blind, unreasoning faith, holding all evidence and all facts in theological contempt.

But the angels come no more. They bring no balm to any wounded heart. Long ago they folded their pinions and faded from the earth and air. These winged guardians no longer protect the innocent; no longer cheer the suffering; no longer whisper words of comfort to the helpless. They have become dreams -- vanished visions.

V

In the dear old religious days the earth was flat -- a little dishing, if anything -- and just above it was Jehovah's house, and just below it was where the Devil lived. God and his angels inhabited the third story, the Devil and his imps the basement, and the human race the second floor.

Then they knew where heaven was. They could almost hear the harps and hallelujahs. They knew where hell was, and they could almost hear the groans and smell the sulphurous fumes. They regarded the volcanoes as chimneys. They were perfectly acquainted with the celestial, the terrestrial and the infernal. They were quite familiar with the New Jerusalem, with its golden streets and gates of pearl. Then the translation of Enoch seemed reasonable enough, and no one doubted that before the flood the sons of God came down and made love to the daughters of men. The theologians thought that the builders of Babel would have succeeded if God had not come down and caused them to forget the meaning of words.

In those blessed days the priests knew all about heaven and hell. They knew that God governed the world by hope and fear, by promise and threat, by reward and punishment. The reward was to be eternal and so was the punishment. It was not God's plan to develop the human brain, so that man would perceive and comprehend

the right and avoid the wrong. He taught ignorance, nothing but obedience, and for obedience he offered eternal joy. He loved the submissive -- the kneelers and crawlers. He hated the doubters, the investigators, the thinkers, the philosophers. For them he created the eternal prison where he could feed forever the hunger of his hate. He loved the credulous -- those who believed without evidence -- and for them he prepared a home in the realm of fadeless light. He delighted in the company of the questionless.

But where is this heaven, and where is this hell? We now know that heaven is not just above the clouds and that hell is not just below the earth. The telescope has done away with the ancient heaven, and the revolving world has quenched the flames of the ancient hell. These theological countries, these imagined worlds, have disappeared. No one knows, and no one pretends to know, where heaven is; and no one knows, and no one pretends to know, the locality of hell. Now the theologians say that hell and heaven are not places, but states of mind-conditions.

The belief in gods and devils has been substantially universal. Back of the good, man placed a god; back of the evil, a devil; back of health, sunshine and harvest was a good deity; back of disease, misfortune and death he placed a malicious fiend.

Is there any evidence that gods and devils exist? The evidence of the existence of a god and of a devil is substantially the same. Both of these deities are inferences; each one is a perhaps. They have not been seen -- they are invisible -- and they have not ventured within the horizon of the senses. The old lady who said there must be a devil, else how could they make pictures that looked exactly like him, reasoned like a trained theologian -- like a doctor of divinity.

Now no intelligent man believes in the existence of a devil -- no longer fears the leering fiend. Most people who think have given up a personal God, a creative deity. They now talk about the "Unknown," the "Infinite Energy," but they put Jehovah with Jupiter. They regard them both as broken dolls from the nursery of the past.

The men or women who ask for evidence -- who desire to know the truth -- care nothing for signs; nothing for what are called wonders; nothing for lucky or unlucky jewels, days or numbers; nothing for charms or amulets; nothing for comets or eclipses. and have no belief in good or evil spirits, in gods or devils. They place no reliance on general or special providence -- on any power that rescues, protects and saves the good or punishes the vile and vicious. They do not believe that in the whole

history of mankind a prayer has been answered. They think that all the sacrifices have been wasted, and that all the incense has ascended in vain. They do not believe that the world was created and prepared for man any more than it was created and prepared for insects. They do not think it probable that whales were invented to supply the Eskimo with blubber, or that flames were created to attract and destroy moths. On every hand there seems to be evidence of design, design for the accomplishment of good, design for the accomplishment of evil. On every side are the benevolent and malicious -- something toiling to preserve, something laboring to destroy. Everything surrounded by friends and enemies -- by the love that protects, by the hate that kills. Design is as apparent in decay, as in growth; in failure, as in success; in grief, as in joy. Nature with one hand building, with one hand tearing down, armed with sword and shield -- slaying and protecting, and protecting but to slay. All life journeying toward death, and all death hastening back to life. Everywhere waste and economy, care and negligence.

We watch the flow and ebb of life and death -- the great drama that forever holds the stage, where players act their parts and disappear; the great drama in which all must act -- ignorant and learned, idiotic and insane -- without rehearsal and without the slightest knowledge of a part, or of any plot or purpose in the play. The scene shifts; some actors disappear and others come, and again the scene shifts; mystery everywhere. We try to explain, and the explanation of one fact contradicts another. Behind each veil removed, another. All things equal in wonder. One drop of water as wonderful as all the seas; one grain of sand as all the world; one moth with painted wings as all the things that live; one egg from which warmth, in darkness, woos to life an organized and breathing form -- a form with sinews, bones and nerves, with blood and brain, with instincts, passions, thoughts and wants -- as all the stars that wheel in space.

The smallest seed that, wrapped in soil, has dreams of April rains and days of June, withholds its secret from the wisest men. The wisdom of the world cannot explain one blade of grass, the faintest motion of the smallest leaf. And yet theologians, popes, priests, parsons, who speechless stand before the wonder of the smallest thing that is, know all about the origin of worlds, know when the beginning was, when the end will be, know all about the God who with a wish created all, know what his plan and purpose was, the means he uses and the end he seeks. To them all

mysteries have been revealed, except the mystery of things that touch the senses of a living man.

But honest men do not pretend to know; they are candid and sincere; they love the truth; they admit their ignorance, and they say, "We do not know."

After all, why should we worship our ignorance why should we kneel to the Unknown, why should we prostrate ourselves before a guess?

If God exists, how do we know that he is good, that he cares for us? The Christians say that their God has existed from eternity; that he forever has been, and forever will be, infinite, wise and good. Could this God have avoided being God? Could he have avoided being good? Was he wise and good without his wish or will?

Being from eternity, he was not produced. He was back of all cause. What he is, he was, and will be, unchanged, unchangeable. He had nothing to do with the making or developing of his character. Nothing to do with the development of his mind. What he was, he is. He has made no progress. What he is, he will be, there can be no change. Why then, I ask, should we praise him? He could not have been different from what he was and is. Why should we pray to him? He cannot change.

And yet Christians implore their God not to do wrong.

The meanest thing charged against the Devil is that he leads the children of men into temptation, and yet, in the Lord's Prayer, God is insultingly asked not to imitate the king of fiends.

"Lead us not into temptation."

Why should God demand praise? He is as he was. He has never learned anything; has never practiced any self-denial; was never tempted, never touched by fear or hope, and never had a want. Why should he demand our praise?

Does anyone know that this God exists; that he ever heard or answered any prayer? Is it known that he governs the world; that he interferes in the affairs of men; that he protects the good or punishes the wicked? Can evidence of this be found in the history of mankind? If God governs the world, why should we credit him for the good and not charge him with the evil? To Justify this God we must say that good is good and that evil is also good. If all is done by this God we should make no

distinction between his actions -- between the actions of the infinitely wise, powerful and good. If we thank him for sunshine and harvest we should also thank him for plague and famine. If we thank him for liberty, the slave should raise his chained hands in worship and thank God that he toils unpaid with the lash upon his naked back. If we thank him for victory we should thank him for defeat.

Only a few days ago our President, by proclamation, thanked God for giving us the victory at Santiago. He did not thank him for sending the yellow fever. To be consistent the President should have thanked him equally for both.

The truth is that good and evil spirits -- gods and devils -- are beyond the realm of experience; beyond the horizon of our senses; beyond the limits of our thoughts; beyond imagination's utmost flight.

Man should think; he should use all his senses; he should examine; he should reason. The man who cannot think is less than man; the man who will not think is traitor to himself; the man who fears to think is superstition's slave.

VI

What harm does superstition do? What harm in believing in fables, in legends?

To believe in signs and wonders, in amulets, charms and miracles, in gods and devils, in heavens and hells, makes the brain an insane ward, the world a madhouse, takes all certainty from the mind, makes experience a snare, destroys the kinship of effect and cause -- the unity of nature -- and makes man a trembling serf and slave. With this belief a knowledge of nature sheds no light upon the path to be pursued. Nature becomes a puppet of the unseen powers. The fairy, called the supernatural, touches with her wand a fact, it disappears. Causes are barren of effects, and effects are independent of all natural causes. Caprice is king. The foundation is gone. The great dome rests on air. There is no constancy in qualities, relations or results. Reason abdicates and superstition wears her crown.

The heart hardens and the brain softens.

The energies of man are wasted in a vain effort to secure the protection of the supernatural. Credulity, ceremony, worship, sacrifice and prayer take the place of honest work, of investigation, of intellectual effort, of observation, of experience. Progress becomes impossible.

Superstition is, always has been, and forever will be, the enemy of liberty.

Superstition created all the gods and angels, all the devils and ghosts, all the witches, demons and goblins, gave us all the augurs, soothsayers and prophets, filled the heavens with signs and wonders, broke the chain of cause and effect, and wrote the history of man in miracles and lies. Superstition made all the popes, cardinals, bishops and priests, all the monks and nuns, the begging friars and the filthy saints, all the preachers and exhorters, all the "called" and "set apart." Superstition made men fall upon their knees before beasts and stones, caused them to worship snakes and trees and insane phantoms of the air, beguiled them of their gold and toil, and made them shed their children's blood and give their babes to flames. Superstition built the cathedrals and temples, all the altars, mosques and churches, filled the world with amulets and charms, with images and idols, with sacred bones and holy hairs, with martyrs' blood and rags, with bits of wood that frighten devils from the breasts of men. Superstition invented and used the instruments of torture, flayed men and women alive, loaded millions with chains and destroyed hundreds of thousands with fire. Superstition mistook insanity for inspiration and the ravings of maniacs for prophesy, for the wisdom of God. Superstition imprisoned the virtuous, tortured the thoughtful, killed the heroic, put chains on the body, manacles on the brain, and utterly destroyed the liberty of speech. Superstition gave us all the prayers and ceremonies; taught all the kneelings, genuflections and prostrations; taught men to hate themselves, to despise pleasure, to scar their flesh, to grovel in the dust, to desert their wives and children, to shun their fellow-men, and to spend their lives in useless pain and prayer. Superstition taught that human love is degrading, low and vile; taught that monks are purer than fathers, that nuns are holier than mothers, that faith is superior to fact, that credulity leads to heaven, that doubt is the road to hell, that belief is better than knowledge, and that to ask for evidence is to insult God. Superstition is, always has been, and forever will be, the foe of progress, the enemy of education and the assassin of freedom. It sacrifices the known to the unknown, the present to the future, this actual world to the shadowy next. It has given us a selfish heaven, and a hell of infinite revenge; it has filled the world with hatred, war and crime, with the malice of meekness and the arrogance of humility. Superstition is the only enemy of science in all the world.

Nations, races, have been destroyed by this monster. For nearly two thousand years the infallible agent of God has lived in Italy. That country has been covered

with nunneries, monasteries, cathedrals and temples -- filled with all varieties of priests and holy men. For centuries Italy was enriched with the gold of the faithful. All roads led to Rome, and these roads were filled with pilgrims bearing gifts, and yet Italy, in spite of all the prayers, steadily pursued the downward path, died and was buried, and would at this moment be in her grave had it not been for Cavour, Mazzini and Garibaldi. For her poverty, her misery, she is indebted to the holy Catholic Church, to the infallible agents of God. For the life she has she is indebted to the enemies of superstition. A few years ago Italy was great enough to build a monument to Giordano Bruno -- Bruno, the victim of the "Triumphant Beast;" -- Bruno, the sublimest of her sons.

Spain was at one time owner of half the earth, and held within her greedy hands the gold and silver of the world. At that time all nations were in the darkness of superstition. At that time the world was governed by priests. Spain clung to her creed. Some nations began to think, but Spain continued to believe. In some counties, priests lost power, but not in Spain. The power behind her throne was the cowed monk. In some countries men began to interest themselves in science, but not in Spain. Spain told her beads and continued to pray to the Virgin. Spain was busy saving her soul. In her zeal she destroyed herself. She relied on the supernatural; not on knowledge, but superstition. Her prayers were never answered. The saints were dead. They could not help, and the Blessed Virgin did not hear. Some countries were in the dawn of a new day, but Spain gladly remained in the night. With fire and sword she exterminated the men who thought. Her greatest festival was the Auto da Fe. Other nations grew great while Spain grew small. Day by day her power waned, but her faith increased. One by one her colonies were lost, but she kept her creed. She gave her gold to superstition, her brain to priests, but she faithfully counted her beads. Only a few days ago, relying on her God and his priests, on charms and amulets, on holy water and pieces of the true cross, she waged war against the great Republic. Bishops blessed her armies and sprinkled holy water on her ships, and yet her armies were defeated and captured, her ships battered, beached and burned, and in her helplessness she sued for peace. But she has her creed; her superstition is not lost. Poor Spain, wrecked by faith, the victim of religion.

Portugal, slowly dying, growing poorer every day still clings to the faith. Her prayers are never answered, but she makes them still. Austria is nearly gone, a victim of superstition. Germany is traveling toward the night. God placed her Kaiser on the

throne. The people must obey. Philosophers and scientists fall upon their knees and become the puppets of the divinely crowned.

VII

The believers in the supernatural, in a power superior to nature, in God, have what they call "inspired books." These books contain the absolute truth. They must be believed. He who denies them will be punished with eternal pain. These books are not addressed to human reason. They are above reason. They care nothing for what a man calls "facts." Facts that do not agree with these books are mistakes. These books are independent of human experience, of human reason.

Our inspired books constitute what we call the "Bible." The man who reads this inspired book, looking for contradictions, mistakes and interpolations, imperils the salvation of his soul. While he reads he has no right to think, no right to reason. To believe is his only duty.

Millions of men have wasted their lives in the study of this book -- in trying to harmonize contradictions and to explain the obscure and seemingly absurd. In doing this they have justified nearly every crime and every cruelty. In its follies they have found the profoundest wisdom. Hundreds of creeds have been constructed from its inspired passages. Probably no two of its readers have agreed as to its meaning. Thousands have studied Hebrew and Greek that they might read the Old and New Testament in the languages in which they were written. The more they studied, the more they differed. By the same book they proved that nearly everybody is to be lost, and that all are to be saved; that slavery is a divine institution, and that all men should be free; that polygamy is right, and that no man should have more than one wife; that the powers that be are ordained of God, and that the people have a right to overturn and destroy the powers that be; that all the actions of men were predestined -- preordained from eternity, and yet that man is free; that all the heathen will be lost; that all the heathen will be saved; that all men who live according to the light of nature will be damned for their pains; that you must be baptized by sprinkling; that you must be baptized by immersion; that there is no salvation without baptism that baptism is useless; that you must believe in the Trinity; that it is sufficient to believe in God. that you must believe that a Hebrew peasant was God that at the same time he was half man, that he was of the blood of David through his supposed father Joseph, who was not his father, and that it is not necessary to believe that Christ was

God; that you must believe that the Holy Ghost proceeded; that it makes no difference whether you do or not; that you must keep the Sabbath holy; that Christ taught nothing of the kind; that Christ established a church; that he established no church; that the dead are to be raised; that there is to be no resurrection; that Christ is coming again; that he has made his last visit; that Christ went to hell and preached to the spirits in prison; that he did nothing of the kind; that all the Jews are going to perdition; that they are all going to heaven; that all the miracles described in the Bible were performed, that some of them were not, because they are foolish, childish and idiotic; that all the Bible is inspired; that some of the books are not inspired; that there is to be a general judgment, when the sheep and goats are to be divided; that there never will be any general judgment; that the sacramental bread and wine are changed into the flesh and blood of God and the Trinity; that they are not changed; that God has no flesh or blood; that there is a place called "purgatory;" that there is no such place; that unbaptized infants will be lost; that they will be saved; that we must believe the Apostles' Creed; that the apostles made no creed; that the Holy Ghost was the father of Christ; that Joseph was his father; that the Holy Ghost had the form of a dove; that there is no Holy Ghost; that heretics should be killed; that you must not resist evil; that you should murder unbelievers that you must love your enemies; that you should take no thought for the morrow, but should be diligent in business; that you should lend to all who ask, and that one who does not provide for his own household is worse than an infidel.

In defence of all these creeds, all these contradictions, thousands of volumes have been written, millions of sermons have been preached, countless swords reddened with blood, and thousands and thousands of nights made lurid with the faggot's flames.

Hundreds and hundreds of commentators have obscured and darkened the meaning of the plainest texts, spiritualized dates, names, numbers and even genealogies. They have degraded the poetic, changed parables to history, and imagery to stupid and impossible facts. They have wrestled with rhapsody and prophecy, with visions and dreams, with illusions and delusions, with myths and miracles, with the blunders of ignorance, the ravings of insanity and the ecstasy of hysterics. Millions of priests and preachers have added to the mysteries of the inspired book by explanation, by showing the wisdom of foolishness, the foolishness of wisdom, the mercy of cruelty and the probability of the impossible.

The theologians made the Bible a master and the people its slaves. With this book they destroyed intellectual veracity, the natural manliness of man. With this book they banished pity from the heart, subverted all ideas of justice and fairness, imprisoned the soul in the dungeon of fear and made honest doubt a crime.

Think of what the world has suffered from fear. Think of the millions who were driven to insanity. Think of the fearful nights -- nights filled with phantoms, with flying, crawling monsters, with hissing serpents that slowly uncoiled, with vague and formless horrors, with burning and malicious eyes.

Think of the fear of death, of infinite wrath, of everlasting revenge in the prisons of fire, of an eternity, of thirst, of endless regret, of the sobs and sighs, the shrieks and groans of eternal pain.

Think of the hearts hardened, of the hearts broken, of the cruelties inflicted, of the agonies endured, of the lives darkened.

The inspired Bible has been and is the greatest curse of Christendom, and will so remain as long as it is held to be inspired.

VIII

Our God was made by men, sculptured by savages who did the best they could. They made our God somewhat like themselves, and gave to him their passions, their ideas of right and wrong.

As man advanced he slowly changed his God -- took a little ferocity from his heart, and put the light of kindness in his eyes. As man progressed he obtained a wider view, extended the intellectual horizon and again he changed his God, making him as nearly perfect as he could, and yet this God was patterned after those who made him. As man became civilized, as he became merciful, he began to love justice, and as his mind expanded his ideal became purer, nobler, and so his God became more merciful, more loving.

In our day Jehovah has been outgrown. He is no longer the perfect. Now theologians talk, not about Jehovah, but about a God of love, call him the Eternal father and the perpetual friend and providence of man. But, while they talk about this God of love, cyclones wreck and rend, the earthquake devours, the flood destroys,

the red bolt leaping from the cloud still crashes the life out of men, and plague and fever still are tireless reapers in the harvest fields of death.

They tell us now that all is good; that evil is but blessing in disguise, that pain makes strong and virtuous men -- makes character -- while pleasure enfeebles and degrades. If this be so, the souls in hell should grow to greatness, while those in heaven should shrink and shrivel.

But we know that good is good. We know that good is not evil, and that evil is not good. We know that light is not darkness, and that darkness is not light. But we do not feel that good and evil were planned and caused by a supernatural God. We regard them both as necessities. We neither thank nor curse. We know that some evil can be avoided and that the good can be increased. We know that this can be done by increasing knowledge, by developing the brain.

As Christians have changed their God, so they have accordingly changed their Bible. The impossible and absurd, the cruel and the infamous, have been mostly thrown aside, and thousands are now engaged in trying to save the inspired word. Of course, the orthodox still cling to every word, and still insist that every line is true. They are literalists. To them the Bible means exactly what it says. They want no explanation. They care nothing for commentators. Contradictions cannot disturb the faith. They deny that any contradictions exist. They loyally stand by the sacred text, and they give it the narrowest possible interpretation. They are like the janitor of an apartment house who refused to rent a flat to a gentleman because he said he had children. "But," said the gentleman, "my children are both married and live in Iowa." "That makes no difference," said the janitor, "I am not allowed to rent a flat to any man who has children."

All the orthodox churches are obstructions on the highway of progress. Every orthodox creed is a chain, a dungeon. Every believer in the "inspired book" is a slave who drives reason from her throne, and in her stead crowns fear.

Reason is the light, the sun of the brain. It is the compass of the mind, the ever-constant Northern Star, the mountain peak that lifts itself above all clouds.

There were centuries of darkness when religion had control of Christendom. Superstition was almost universal. Not one in twenty thousand could read or write. During these centuries the people lived with their back to the sunrise, and pursued

their way toward the dens of ignorance and faith. There was no progress, no invention, no discovery. On every hand cruelty and worship, persecution and prayer. The priests were the enemies of thought, of investigation. They were the shepherds, and the people were their sheep and it was their business to guard the flock from the wolves of thought and doubt. This world was of no importance compared with the next. This life was to be spent in preparing for the life to come. The gold and labor of men were wasted in building cathedrals and in supporting the pious and the useless. During these Dark Ages of Christianity, as I said before, nothing was invented, nothing was discovered, calculated to increase the well-being of men. The energies of Christendom were wasted in the vain effort to obtain assistance from the supernatural.

For centuries the business of Christians was to wrest from the followers of Mohammed the empty sepulcher of Christ. Upon the altar of this folly millions of lives were sacrificed, and yet the soldiers of the impostor were victorious, and the wretches who carried the banner of Christ were scattered like leaves before the storm.

There was, I believe, one invention during these ages. It is said that, in the thirteenth century, Roger Bacon, a Franciscan monk, invented gunpowder, but this invention was without a fellow. Yet we cannot give Christianity the credit, because Bacon was an infidel, and was great enough to say that in all things reason must be the standard. He was persecuted and imprisoned, as most sensible men were in those blessed days. The church was triumphant. The scepter and maitre were in her hand and yet her success was the result of force and fraud, and it carried within itself the seeds of its defeat. The church attempted the impossible, it endeavored to make the world of one belief; to force all minds to a common form, and utterly destroy the individuality of man. To accomplish this it employed every art and artifice that cunning could suggest. It inflicted every cruelty by every means that malice could invent.

But, in spite of all, a few men began to think. They became interested in the affairs of this world -- in the great panorama of nature. They began to seek for causes, for the explanations of phenomena. They were not satisfied with the assertions of the church. These thinkers withdrew their gaze from the skies and looked at their own surroundings. They were unspiritual enough to desire comfort here. They became sensible and secular, worldly and wise.

What was the result? They began to invent, to discover, to find the relation between facts, the conditions of happiness and the means that would increase the well-being of their fellow-men.

Movable types were invented, paper was borrowed from the Moors, books appeared, and it became possible to save the intellectual wealth so that each generation could hand it to the next. History began to take the place of legend and rumor. The telescope was invented. The orbits of the stars were traced, and men became citizens of the universe. The steam engine was constructed, and now steam, the great slave, does the work of hundreds of millions of men. The Black Art, the impossible, was abandoned, and chemistry, the useful, took its place. Astrology became astronomy. Kepler discovered the three great laws, one of the greatest triumphs of human genius, and our constellation became a poem, a symphony. Newton gave us the mathematical expression of the attraction of gravitation. Harvey discovered the circulation of the blood. He gave us the fact, and Draper gave us the reason. Steamships conquered the seas and railways covered the land. Houses and streets were lighted with gas. Through the invention of matches fire became the companion of man. The art of photography became known; the sun became an artist. Telegraphs and cables were invented. The lightning became a carrier of thought, and the nations became neighbors. Anaesthetic were discovered and pain was lost in sleep. Surgery became a science. The telephone was invented -- the telephone that carries and deposits in listening ears the waves of words. The phonograph, that catches and retains in marks and dots and gives again the echoes of our speech. Then came electric light that fills the night with day, and all the wonderful machines that use the subtle force -- the same force that leaps from the summer cloud to ravage and destroy.

The Spectrum Analysis that tells us of the substance of the sun; the Roentgen rays that change the opaque to the transparent. The great thinkers demonstrated the indestructibility of force and matter -- demonstrated that the indestructible could not have been created. The geologist, in rocks and deposits and mountains and continents, read a little of the story of the world -- of its changes, of the glacial epoch -- the story of vegetable and animal life.

The biologists, through the fossil forms of life, established the antiquity of man and demonstrated the worthlessness of Holy Writ. Then came evolution, the survival of the fittest and natural selection. Thousands of mysteries were explained and

science wrested the scepter from superstition. The cell theory was advanced, and embryology was studied; the microscope discovered germs of disease and taught us how to stay the plague. These great theories and discoveries, together with countless inventions, are the children of intellectual liberty.

X

After all we know but little. In the darkness of life there are a few gleams of light. Possibly the dropping of a dishcloth prophesies the coming of company, but we have no evidence. Possibly it is dangerous for thirteen to dine together, but we have no evidence. Possibly a maiden's matrimonial chances are determined by the number of seeds in an apple, or by the number of leaves on a flower, but we have no evidence. Possibly certain stones give good luck to the wearer, while the wearing of others brings loss and death. Possibly a glimpse of the new moon over the left shoulder brings misfortune. Possibly there are curative virtues in old bones, in sacred rags and holy hairs, in images and bits of wood, in rusty nails and dried blood, but the trouble is we have no evidence. Possibly comets, eclipses and shooting stars foretell the death of kings, the destruction of nations or the coming of plague. Possibly devils take possession of the bodies and minds of men. Possibly witches, with the Devil's help, control the winds, breed storms on sea and land, fill summer's lap with frosts and snow, and work with charm and spell against the public weal, but of this we have no evidence. It may be that all the miracles described in the Old and New Testament were performed; that the pallid flesh of the dead felt once more the thrill of life; that the corpse arose and felt upon his smiling lips the kiss of wife and child. Possibly water was turned into wine, loaves and fishes increased, and possibly devils were expelled from men and women; possibly fishes were found with money in their mouths; possibly clay and spittle brought back the light to sightless eyes, and possibly words cured disease and made the leper clean, but of this we have no evidence.

Possibly iron floated, rivers divided, waters burst from dry bones, birds carried food to prophets and angels flourished drawn swords, but of this we have no evidence. Possibly Jehovah employed lying spirits to deceive a king, and all the wonders of the savage world may have happened, but the trouble is there is no proof.

So there may be a Devil, almost infinite in cunning and power, and he may have a countless number of imps whose only business is to sow the seeds of evil and to vex, mislead, capture and imprison in eternal flames the souls of men. All this, so far as

we know, is possible. All we know is that we have no evidence except the assertions of ignorant priests.

Possibly there is a place called "hell," where all the devils live -- a hell whose flames are waiting for all the men who think and have the courage to express their thoughts, for all who fail to credit priests and sacred books, for all who walk the path that reason lights, for all the good and brave who lack credulity and faith -- but of this, I am happy to say, there is no proof.

And so there may be a place called "heaven," the home of God, where angels float and fly and play on harps and hear with joy the groans and shrieks of the lost in hell, but of this there is no evidence.

It all rests on dreams and visions of the insane.

There may be a power superior to nature, a power that governs and directs all things, but the existence of this power has not been established.

In the presence of the mysteries of life and thought, of force and substance, of growth and decay, of birth and death, of joy and pain, of the sufferings of the good, the triumphs of wrong, the intelligent honest man is compelled to say: "I do not know."

But we do know how gods and devils, heavens and hells, have been made. We know the history of inspired books -- the origin of religions. We know how the seeds of superstition were planted and what made them grow. We know that all superstitions, all creeds, all follies and mistakes, all crimes and cruelties, all virtues, vices, hopes and fears, all discoveries and inventions, have been naturally produced. By the light of reason we divide the useful from the hurtful, the false from the true.

We know the past -- the paths that man has traveled -- his mistakes, his triumphs. We know a few facts, a few fragments, and the imagination, the artist of the mind, with these facts, these fragments, rebuilds the past, and on the canvas of the future deftly paints the things to be.

We believe in the natural, in the unbroken and unbreakable succession of causes and effects. We deny the existence of the supernatural. We do not believe in any God who can be pleased with incense, with kneeling, with bell-ringing, psalm-singing, bead-counting, fasting or prayer -- in any God who can be flattered by words of

faith or fear. We believe in the natural. We have no fear of devils, ghosts or hells. We believe that Mahatmas, astral bodies, materializations of spirits, crystal gazing, seeing the future, telepathy, mind reading and Christian Science are only cunning frauds, the genuineness of which is established by the testimony of incompetent, honest witnesses. We believe that Cunning plates fraud with the gold of honesty, and veneers vice with virtue.

We know that millions are seeking the impossible -- trying to secure the aid of the supernatural -- to solve the problem of life -- to guess the riddle of destiny, and to pluck from the future its secret. We know that all their efforts are in vain.

We believe in the natural. We believe in home and fireside -- in wife and child and friend -- in the realities of this world. We have faith in facts -- in knowledge -- in the development of the brain. We throw away superstition and welcome science. We banish the phantoms, the mistakes and lies and cling to the truth. We do not enthrone the unknown and crown our ignorance. We do not stand with our backs to the sun and mistake our shadow for God.

We do not create a master and thankfully wear his chains. We do not enslave ourselves. We want no leaders -- no followers. Our desire is that every human being shall be true to himself, to his ideal, unbribed by promises, careless of threats. We want no tyrant on the earth or in the air.

We know that superstition has given us delusions and illusions, dreams and visions, ceremonies and cruelties, faith and fanaticism, beggars and bigots, persecutions and prayers, theology and torture, piety and poverty, saints and slaves, miracles and mummeries, disease and death.

We know that science has given us all we have of value. Science is the only civilizer. It has freed the slave, clothed the naked, fed the hungry, lengthened life, given us homes and hearths, pictures and books, ships and railways, telegraphs and cables, engines that tirelessly turn the countless wheels, and it has destroyed the monsters, the phantoms, the winged horrors that filled the savage brain.

Science is the real redeemer. It will put honesty above hypocrisy; mental veracity above all belief. It will teach the religion of usefulness. It will destroy bigotry in all its forms. It will put thoughtful doubt above thoughtless faith. It will give us philosophers, thinkers and savants, instead of priests, theologians and saints. It will

abolish poverty and crime, and greater, grander, nobler than all else, it will make the whole world free.

Why I Am Agnostic (1896)

I

For the most part we inherit our opinions. We are the heirs of habits and mental customs. Our beliefs, like the fashion of our garments, depend on where we were born. We are molded and fashioned by our surroundings.

Environment is a sculptor -- a painter.

If we had been born in Constantinople, the most of us would have said: "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet." If our parents had lived on the banks of the Ganges, we would have been worshipers of Siva, longing for the heaven of Nirvana.

As a rule, children love their parents, believe what they teach, and take great pride in saying that the religion of mother is good enough for them.

Most people love peace. They do not like to differ with their neighbors. They like company. They are social. They enjoy traveling on the highway with the multitude. They hate to walk alone.

The Scotch are Calvinists because their fathers were. The Irish are Catholics because their fathers were. The English are Episcopalians because their fathers were, and the Americans are divided in a hundred sects because their fathers were. This is the general rule, to which there are many exceptions. Children sometimes are superior to their parents, modify their ideas, change their customs, and arrive at different conclusions. But this is generally so gradual that the departure is scarcely noticed, and those who change usually insist that they are still following the fathers.

It is claimed by Christian historians that the religion of a nation was sometimes suddenly changed, and that millions of Pagans were made into Christians by the command of a king. Philosophers do not agree with these historians. Names have been changed, altars have been overthrown, but opinions, customs and beliefs

remained the same. A Pagan, beneath the drawn sword of a Christian, would probably change his religious views, and a Christian, with a scimitar above his head, might suddenly become a Mohammedan, but as a matter of fact both would remain exactly as they were before -- except in speech.

Belief is not subject to the will. Men think as they must. Children do not, and cannot, believe exactly as they were taught. They are not exactly like their parents. They differ in temperament, in experience, in capacity, in surroundings. And so there is a continual, though almost imperceptible change. There is development, conscious and unconscious growth, and by comparing long periods of time we find that the old has been almost abandoned, almost lost in the new. Men cannot remain stationary. The mind cannot be securely anchored. If we do not advance, we go backward. If we do not grow, we decay. If we do not develop, we shrink and shrivel.

Like the most of you, I was raised among people who knew -- who were certain. They did not reason or investigate. They had no doubts. They knew that they had the truth. In their creed there was no guess -- no perhaps. They had a revelation from God. They knew the beginning of things. They knew that God commenced to create one Monday morning, four thousand and four years before Christ. They knew that in the eternity -- back of that morning, he had done nothing. They knew that it took him six days to make the earth -- all plants, all animals, all life, and all the globes that wheel in space. They knew exactly what he did each day and when he rested. They knew the origin, the cause of evil, of all crime, of all disease and death.

They not only knew the beginning, but they knew the end. They knew that life had one path and one road. They knew that the path, grass-grown and narrow, filled with thorns and nettles, infested with vipers, wet with tears, stained by bleeding feet, led to heaven, and that the road, broad and smooth, bordered with fruits and flowers, filled with laughter and song and all the happiness of human love, led straight to hell. They knew that God was doing his best to make you take the path and that the Devil used every art to keep you in the road.

They knew that there was a perpetual battle waged between the great Powers of good and evil for the possession of human souls. They knew that many centuries ago God had left his throne and had been born a babe into this poor world -- that he had suffered death for the sake of man -- for the sake of saving a few. They also knew

that the human heart was utterly depraved, so that man by nature was in love with wrong and hated God with all his might.

At the same time they knew that God created man in his own image and was perfectly satisfied with his work. They also knew that he had been thwarted by the Devil, who with wiles and lies had deceived the first of human kind. They knew that in consequence of that, God cursed the man and woman; the man with toil, the woman with slavery and pain, and both with death; and that he cursed the earth itself with briars and thorns, brambles and thistles. All these blessed things they knew. They knew too all that God had done to purify and elevate the race. They knew all about the Flood -- knew that God, with the exception of eight, drowned all his children -- the old and young -- the bowed patriarch and the dimpled babe -- the young man and the merry maiden -- the loving mother and the laughing child -- because his mercy endureth forever. They knew too, that he drowned the beasts and birds -- everything that walked or crawled or flew -- because his loving kindness is over all his works. They knew that God, for the purpose of civilizing his children, had devoured some with earthquakes, destroyed some with storms of fire, killed some with his lightnings, millions with famine, with pestilence, and sacrificed countless thousands upon the fields of war. They knew that it was necessary to believe these things and to love God. They knew that there could be no salvation except by faith, and through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ.

All who doubted or denied would be lost. To live a moral and honest life -- to keep your contracts, to take care of wife and child -- to make a happy home -- to be a good citizen, a patriot, a just and thoughtful man, was simply a respectable way of going to hell.

God did not reward men for being honest, generous and brave, but for the act of faith. Without faith, all the so-called virtues were sins, and the men who practiced these virtues, without faith, deserved to suffer eternal pain.

All of these comforting and reasonable things were taught by the ministers in their pulpits -- by teachers in Sunday schools and by parents at home. The children were victims. They were assaulted in the cradle -- in their mother's arms. Then, the schoolmaster carried on the war against their natural sense, and all the books they read were filled with the same impossible truths. The poor children were helpless.

The atmosphere they breathed was filled with lies -- lies that mingled with their blood.

In those days ministers depended on revivals to save souls and reform the world.

In the winter, navigation having closed, business was mostly suspended. There were no railways and the only means of communication were wagons and boats. Generally the roads were so bad that the wagons were laid up with the boats. There were no operas, no theaters, no amusement except parties and balls. The parties were regarded as worldly and the balls as wicked. For real and virtuous enjoyment the good people depended on revivals.

The sermons were mostly about the pains and agonies of hell, the joys and ecstasies of heaven, salvation by faith, and the efficacy of the atonement. The little churches, in which the services were held, were generally small, badly ventilated, and exceedingly warm. The emotional sermons, the sad singing, the hysterical amens, the hope of heaven, the fear of hell, caused many to lose the little sense they had. They became substantially insane. In this condition they flocked to the "mourner's bench" -- asked for the prayers of the faithful -- had strange feelings, prayed and wept and thought they had been "born again." Then they would tell their experience -- how wicked they had been -- how evil had been their thoughts, their desires, and how good they had suddenly become. They used to tell the story of an old woman who, in telling her experience, said: -- "Before I was converted, before I gave my heart to God, I used to lie and steal, but now, thanks to the grace and blood of Jesus Christ, I have quit 'em both, in a great measure."

Of course all the people were not exactly of one mind. There were some scoffers, and now and then some man had sense enough to laugh at the threats of priests and make a jest of hell. Some would tell of unbelievers who had lived and died in peace.

When I was a boy I heard them tell of an old farmer in Vermont. He was dying. The minister was at his bed-side -- asked him if he was a Christian -- if he was prepared to die. The old man answered that he had made no preparation, that he was not a Christian -- that he had never done anything but work. The preacher said that he could give him no hope unless he had faith in Christ, and that if he had no faith his soul would certainly be lost.

The old man was not frightened. He was perfectly calm. In a weak and broken voice he said: "Mr. Preacher, I suppose you noticed my farm. My wife and I came here more than fifty years ago. We were just married. It was a forest then and the land was covered with stones. I cut down the trees, burned the logs, picked up the stones and laid the walls. My wife spun and wove and worked every moment. We raised and educated our children -- denied ourselves. During all these years my wife never had a good dress, or a decent bonnet. I never had a good suit of clothes. We lived on the plainest food. Our hands, our bodies are deformed by toil. We never had a vacation. We loved each other and the children. That is the only luxury we ever had. Now I am about to die and you ask me if I am prepared. Mr. Preacher, I have no fear of the future, no terror of any other world. There may be such a place as hell -- but if there is, you never can make me believe that it's any worse than old Vermont."

So, they told of a man who compared himself with his dog. "My dog," he said, "just barks and plays -- has all he wants to eat. He never works -- has no trouble about business. In a little while he dies, and that is all. I work with all my strength. I have no time to play. I have trouble every day. In a little while I will die, and then I go to hell. I wish that I had been a dog."

Well, while the cold weather lasted, while the snows fell, the revival went on, but when the winter was over, when the steamboat's whistle was heard, when business started again, most of the converts "backslid" and fell again into their old ways. But the next winter they were on hand, ready to be "born again." They formed a kind of stock company, playing the same parts every winter and backsliding every spring.

The ministers, who preached at these revivals, were in earnest. They were zealous and sincere. They were not philosophers. To them science was the name of a vague dread -- a dangerous enemy. They did not know much, but they believed a great deal. To them hell was a burning reality -- they could see the smoke and flames. The Devil was no myth. He was an actual person, a rival of God, an enemy of mankind. They thought that the important business of this life was to save your soul -- that all should resist and scorn the pleasures of sense, and keep their eyes steadily fixed on the golden gate of the New Jerusalem. They were unbalanced, emotional, hysterical, bigoted, hateful, loving, and insane. They really believed the Bible to be the actual word of God -- a book without mistake or contradiction. They called its cruelties, justice -- its absurdities, mysteries -- its miracles, facts, and the idiotic passages were

regarded as profoundly spiritual. They dwelt on the pangs, the regrets, the infinite agonies of the lost, and showed how easily they could be avoided, and how cheaply heaven could be obtained. They told their hearers to believe, to have faith, to give their hearts to God, their sins to Christ, who would bear their burdens and make their souls as white as snow.

All this the ministers really believed. They were absolutely certain. In their minds the Devil had tried in vain to sow the seeds of doubt.

I heard hundreds of these evangelical sermons -- heard hundreds of the most fearful and vivid descriptions of the tortures inflicted in hell, of the horrible state of the lost. I supposed that what I heard was true and yet I did not believe it. I said: "It is," and then I thought: "It cannot be."

These sermons made but faint impressions on my mind. I was not convinced.

I had no desire to be "converted," did not want a "new heart" and had no wish to be "born again."

But I heard one sermon that touched my heart, that left its mark, like a scar, on my brain.

One Sunday I went with my brother to hear a Free Will Baptist preacher. He was a large man, dressed like a farmer, but he was an orator. He could paint a picture with words.

He took for his text the parable of "the rich man and Lazarus." He described Dives, the rich man -- his manner of life, the excesses in which he indulged, his extravagance, his riotous nights, his purple and fine linen, his feasts, his wines, and his beautiful women.

Then he described Lazarus, his poverty, his rags and wretchedness, his poor body eaten by disease, the crusts and crumbs he devoured, the dogs that pitied him. He pictured his lonely life, his friendless death.

Then, changing his tone of pity to one of triumph -- leaping from tears to the heights of exultation -- from defeat to victory -- he described the glorious company of angels, who with white and outspread wings carried the soul of the despised pauper to Paradise -- to the bosom of Abraham.

Then, changing his voice to one of scorn and loathing, he told of the rich man's death. He was in his palace, on his costly couch, the air heavy with perfume, the room filled with servants and physicians. His gold was worthless then. He could not buy another breath. He died, and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torment.

Then, assuming a dramatic attitude, putting his right hand to his ear, he whispered, "Hark! I hear the rich man's voice. What does he say? Hark! 'Father Abraham! Father Abraham! I pray thee send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my parched tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.'"

"Oh, my hearers, he has been making that request for more than eighteen hundred years. And millions of ages hence that wail will cross the gulf that lies between the saved and lost and still will be heard the cry: 'Father Abraham! Father Abraham! I pray thee send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my parched tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.'"

For the first time I understood the dogma of eternal pain -- appreciated "the glad tidings of great joy." For the first time my imagination grasped the height and depth of the Christian horror. Then I said: "It is a lie, and I hate your religion. If it is true, I hate your God."

From that day I have had no fear, no doubt. For me, on that day, the flames of hell were quenched. From that day I have passionately hated every orthodox creed. That Sermon did some good.

II

From my childhood I had heard read, and read the Bible myself. Morning and evening the sacred volume was opened and prayers were said. The Bible was my first history, the Jews were the first people, and the events narrated by Moses and the other inspired writers, and those predicted by prophets were the all important things. In other books were found the thoughts and dreams of men, but in the Bible were the sacred truths of God.

Yet in spite of my surroundings, of my education, I had no love for God. He was so saving of mercy, so extravagant in murder, so anxious to kill, so ready to assassinate, that I hated him with all my heart. At his command, babes were butchered, women violated, and the white hair of trembling age stained with blood. This God visited the people with pestilence -- filled the houses and covered the

streets with the dying and the dead -- saw babes starving on the empty breasts of pallid mothers, heard the sobs, saw the tears, the sunken cheeks, the sightless eyes, the new made graves, and remained as pitiless as the pestilence.

This God withheld the rain -- caused the famine, saw the fierce eyes of hunger -- the wasted forms, the white lips, saw mothers eating babes, and remained ferocious as famine.

It seems to me impossible for a civilized man to love or worship, or respect the God of the Old Testament. A really civilized man, a really civilized woman, must hold such a God in abhorrence and contempt. But in the old days the good people justified Jehovah in his treatment of the heathen. The wretches who were murdered were idolaters and therefore unfit to live.

According to the Bible, God had never revealed himself to these people and he knew that without a revelation they could not know that he was the true God. Whose fault was it then that they were heathen?

The Christians said that God had the right to destroy them because he created them. What did he create them for? He knew when he made them that they would be food for the sword. He knew that he would have the pleasure of seeing them murdered.

As a last answer, as a final excuse, the worshipers of Jehovah said that all these horrible things happened under the "old dispensation" of unyielding law, and absolute justice, but that now under the "new dispensation," all had been changed -- the sword of justice had been sheathed and love enthroned. In the Old Testament, they said, God is the judge -- but in the New, Christ is the merciful. As a matter of fact, the New Testament is infinitely worse than the Old. In the Old there is no threat of eternal pain. Jehovah had no eternal prison -- no everlasting fire. His hatred ended at the grave. His revenge was satisfied when his enemy was dead.

In the New Testament, death is not the end, but the beginning of punishment that has no end. In the New Testament the malice of God is infinite and the hunger of his revenge eternal.

The orthodox God, when clothed in human flesh, told his disciples not to resist evil, to love their enemies, and when smitten on one cheek to turn the other, and yet we are told that this same God, with the same loving lips, uttered these heartless,

these fiendish words; "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

These are the words of "eternal love."

No human being has imagination enough to conceive of this infinite horror.

All that the human race has suffered in war and want, in pestilence and famine, in fire and flood, -- all the pangs and pains of every disease and every death -- all this is as nothing compared with the agonies to be endured by one lost soul.

This is the consolation of the Christian religion. This is the justice of God -- the mercy of Christ.

This frightful dogma, this infinite lie, made me the implacable enemy of Christianity. The truth is that this belief in eternal pain has been the real persecutor. It founded the Inquisition, forged the chains, and furnished the fagots. It has darkened the lives of many millions. It made the cradle as terrible as the coffin. It enslaved nations and shed the blood of countless thousands. It sacrificed the wisest, the bravest and the best. It subverted the idea of justice, drove mercy from the heart, changed men to fiends and banished reason from the brain.

Like a venomous serpent it crawls and coils and hisses in every orthodox creed.

It makes man an eternal victim and God an eternal fiend. It is the one infinite horror. Every church in which it is taught is a public curse. Every preacher who teaches it is an enemy of mankind. Below this Christian dogma, savagery cannot go. It is the infinite of malice, hatred, and revenge.

Nothing could add to the horror of hell, except the presence of its creator, God.

While I have life, as long as I draw breath, I shall deny with all my strength, and hate with every drop of my blood, this infinite lie.

Nothing gives me greater joy than to know that this belief in eternal pain is growing weaker every day -- that thousands of ministers are ashamed of it. It gives me joy to know that Christians are becoming merciful, so merciful that the fires of hell are burning low -- flickering, choked with ashes, destined in a few years to die out forever.

For centuries Christendom was a madhouse. Popes, cardinals, bishops, priests, monks and heretics were all insane.

Only a few -- four or five in a century were sound in heart and brain. Only a few, in spite of the roar and din, in spite of the savage cries, heard reason's voice. Only a few in the wild rage of ignorance, fear and zeal preserved the perfect calm that wisdom gives.

We have advanced. In a few years the Christians will become -- let us hope -- humane and sensible enough to deny the dogma that fills the endless years with pain. They ought to know now that this dogma is utterly inconsistent with the wisdom, the justice, the goodness of their God. They ought to know that their belief in hell, gives to the Holy Ghost -- the Dove -- the beak of a vulture, and fills the mouth of the Lamb of God with the fangs of a viper.

III

In my youth I read religious books -- books about God, about the atonement -- about salvation by faith, and about the other worlds. I became familiar with the commentators -- with Adam Clark, who thought that the serpent seduced our mother Eve, and was in fact the father of Cain. He also believed that the animals, while in the ark, had their natures' changed to that degree that they devoured straw together and enjoyed each other's society -- thus prefiguring the blessed millennium. I read Scott, who was such a natural theologian that he really thought the story of Phaeton -- of the wild steeds dashing across the sky -- corroborated the story of Joshua having stopped the sun and moon. So, I read Henry and MacKnight and found that God so loved the world that he made up his mind to damn a large majority of the human race. I read Cruden, who made the great Concordance, and made the miracles as small and probable as he could.

I remember that he explained the miracle of feeding the wandering Jews with quails, by saying that even at this day immense numbers of quails crossed the Red Sea, and that sometimes when tired, they settled on ships that sank beneath their weight. The fact that the explanation was as hard to believe as the miracle made no difference to the devout Cruden.

To while away the time I read Calvin's Institutes, a book calculated to produce, in any natural mind, considerable respect for the Devil.

I read Paley's Evidences and found that the evidence of ingenuity in producing the evil, in contriving the hurtful, was at least equal to the evidence tending to show the use of intelligence in the creation of what we call good.

You know the watch argument was Paley's greatest effort. A man finds a watch and it is so wonderful that he concludes that it must have had a maker. He finds the maker and he is so much more wonderful than the watch that he says he must have had a maker. Then he finds God, the maker of the man, and he is so much more wonderful than the man that he could not have had a maker. This is what the lawyers call a departure in pleading.

According to Paley there can be no design without a designer -- but there can be a designer without a design. The wonder of the watch suggested the watchmaker, and the wonder of the watchmaker, suggested the creator, and the wonder of the creator demonstrated that he was not created -- but was uncaused and eternal.

We had Edwards on The Will, in which the reverend author shows that necessity has no effect on accountability -- and that when God creates a human being, and at the same time determines and decrees exactly what that being shall do and be, the human being is responsible, and God in his justice and mercy has the right to torture the soul of that human being forever. Yet Edwards said that he loved God.

The fact is that if you believe in an infinite God, and also in eternal punishment, then you must admit that Edwards and Calvin were absolutely right. There is no escape from their conclusions if you admit their premises. They were infinitely cruel, their premises infinitely absurd, their God infinitely fiendish, and their logic perfect.

And yet I have kindness and candor enough to say that Calvin and Edwards were both insane.

We had plenty of theological literature. There was Jenkyn on the Atonement, who demonstrated the wisdom of God in devising a way in which the sufferings of innocence could justify the guilty. He tried to show that children could justly be punished for the sins of their ancestors, and that men could, if they had faith, be justly credited with the virtues of others. Nothing could be more devout, orthodox, and idiotic. But all of our theology was not in prose. We had Milton with his celestial militia with his great and blundering God, his proud and cunning Devil -- his wars

between immortals, and all the sublime absurdities that religion wrought within the blind man's brain.

The theology taught by Milton was dear to the Puritan heart. It was accepted by New England and it poisoned the souls and ruined the lives of thousands. The genius of Shakespeare could not make the theology of Milton poetic. In the literature of the world there is nothing, outside of the "sacred books," more perfectly absurd.

We had Young's Night Thoughts, and I supposed that the author was an exceedingly devout and loving follower of the Lord. Yet Young had a great desire to be a bishop, and to accomplish that end he electioneered with the king's mistress. In other words, he was a fine old hypocrite. In the "Night Thoughts" there is scarcely a genuinely honest, natural line. It is pretence from beginning to end. He did not write what he felt, but what he thought he ought to feel.

We had Pollok's Course of Time, with its worm that never dies, its quenchless flames, its endless pangs, its leering devils, and its gloating God. This frightful poem should have been written in a madhouse. In it you find all the cries and groans and shrieks of maniacs, when they tear and rend each other's flesh. It is as heartless, as hideous, as hellish as the thirty-second chapter of Deuteronomy.

We all know the beautiful hymn commencing with the cheerful line: "Hark from the tombs, a doleful sound." Nothing could have been more appropriate for children. It is well to put a coffin where it can be seen from the cradle. When a mother nurses her child, an open grave should be at her feet. This would tend to make the babe serious, reflective, religious and miserable.

God hates laughter and despises mirth. To feel free, untrammelled, irresponsible, joyous, -- to forget care and death -- to be flooded with sunshine without a fear of night -- to forget the past, to have no thought of the future, no dream of God, or heaven, or hell -- to be intoxicated with the present -- to be conscious only of the clasp and kiss of the one you love -- this is the sin against the Holy Ghost.

But we had Cowper's poems. Cowper was sincere. He was the opposite of Young. He had an observing eye, a gentle heart and a sense of the artistic. He sympathized with all who suffered -- with the imprisoned, the enslaved, the outcasts. He loved the beautiful. No wonder that the belief in eternal punishment made this loving soul

insane. No wonder that the "tidings of great Joy" quenched Hope's great star and left his broken heart in the darkness of despair.

We had many volumes of orthodox sermons, filled with wrath and the terrors of the judgment to come -- sermons that had been delivered by savage saints. We had the Book of Martyrs, showing that Christians had for many centuries imitated the God they worshiped.

We had the history of the Waldenses -- of the reformation of the Church. We had Pilgrim's Progress, Baxter's Call and Butler's Analogy.

To use a Western phrase or saying, I found that Bishop Butler dug up more snakes than he killed -- suggested more difficulties than he explained -- more doubts than he dispelled.

Among such books my youth was passed. All the seeds of Christianity -- of superstition, were sown in my mind and cultivated with great diligence and care.

All that time I knew nothing of any science -- nothing about the other side -- nothing of the objections that had been urged against the blessed Scriptures, or against the perfect Congregational creed. Of course I had heard the ministers speak of blasphemers, of infidel wretches, of scoffers who laughed at holy things. They did not answer their arguments, but they tore their characters into shreds and demonstrated by the fury of assertion that they had done the Devil's work. And yet in spite of all I heard -- of all I read. I could not quite believe. My brain and heart said No.

For a time I left the dreams, the insanities, the illusions and delusions, the nightmares of theology. I studied astronomy, just a little -- I examined maps of the heavens -- learned the names of some of the constellations -- of some of the stars -- found something of their size and the velocity with which they wheeled in their orbits -- obtained a faint conception of astronomical spaces -- found that some of the known stars were so far away in the depths of space that their light, traveling at the rate of nearly two hundred thousand miles a second, required many years to reach this little world -- found that, compared with the great stars, our earth was but a grain of sand -- an atom -- found that the old belief that all the hosts of heaven had been created for the benefit of man, was infinitely absurd.

I compared what was really known about the stars with the account of creation as told in Genesis. I found that the writer of the inspired book had no knowledge of astronomy -- that he was as ignorant as a Choctaw chief -- as an Eskimo driver of dogs. Does any one imagine that the author of Genesis knew anything about the sun -- its size? that he was acquainted with Sirius, the North Star, with Capella, or that he knew anything of the clusters of stars so far away that their light, now visiting our eyes, has been traveling for two million years?

If he had known these facts would he have said that Jehovah worked nearly six days to make this world, and only a part of the afternoon of the fourth day to make the sun and moon and all the stars?

Yet millions of people insist that the writer of Genesis was inspired by the Creator of all worlds. Now, intelligent men, who are not frightened, whose brains have not been paralyzed by fear, know that the sacred story of creation was written by an ignorant savage. The story is inconsistent with all known facts, and every star shining in the heavens testifies that its author was an uninspired barbarian.

I admit that this unknown writer was sincere, that he wrote what he believed to be true -- that he did the best he could. He did not claim to be inspired -- did not pretend that the story had been told to him by Jehovah. He simply stated the "facts" as he understood them.

After I had learned a little about the stars I concluded that this writer, this "inspired" scribe, had been misled by myth and legend, and that he knew no more about creation than the average theologian of my day. In other words, that he knew absolutely nothing.

And here, allow me to say that the ministers who are answering me are turning their guns in the wrong direction. These reverend gentlemen should attack the astronomers. They should malign and vilify Kepler, Copernicus, Newton, Herschel and Laplace. These men were the real destroyers of the sacred story. Then, after having disposed of them, they can wage a war against the stars, and against Jehovah himself for having furnished evidence against the truthfulness of his book.

Then I studied geology -- not much, just a little -- Just enough to find in a general way the principal facts that had been discovered, and some of the conclusions that had been reached. I learned something of the action of fire -- of water -- of the

formation of islands and continents -- of the sedimentary and igneous rocks -- of the coal measures -- of the chalk cliffs, something about coral reefs -- about the deposits made by rivers, the effect of volcanoes, of glaciers, and of the all surrounding sea -- just enough to know that the Laurentian rocks were millions of years older than the grass beneath my feet -- just enough to feel certain that this world had been pursuing its flight about the sun, wheeling in light and shade, for hundreds of millions of years -- just enough to know that the "inspired" writer knew nothing of the history of the earth -- nothing of the great forces of nature -- of wind and wave and fire -- forces that have destroyed and built, wrecked and wrought through all the countless years.

And let me tell the ministers again that they should not waste their time in answering me. They should attack the geologists. They should deny the facts that have been discovered. They should launch their curses at the blaspheming seas, and dash their heads against the infidel rocks.

Then I studied biology -- not much -- just enough to know something of animal forms, enough to know that life existed when the Laurentian rocks were made -- just enough to know that implements of stone, implements that had been formed by human hands, had been found mingled with the bones of extinct animals, bones that had been split with these implements, and that these animals had ceased to exist hundreds of thousands of years before the manufacture of Adam and Eve. Then I felt sure that the "inspired" record was false -- that many millions of people had been deceived and that all I had been taught about the origin of worlds and men was utterly untrue. I felt that I knew that the Old Testament was the work of ignorant men -- that it was a mingling of truth and mistake, of wisdom and foolishness, of cruelty and kindness, of philosophy and absurdity -- that it contained some elevated thoughts, some poetry, -- a good deal of the solemn and commonplace, -- some hysterical, some tender, some wicked prayers, some insane predictions, some delusions, and some chaotic dreams.

Of course the theologians fought the facts found by the geologists, the scientists, and sought to sustain the sacred Scriptures. They mistook the bones of the mastodon for those of human beings, and by them proudly proved that "there were giants in those days." They accounted for the fossils by saying that God had made them to try our faith, or that the Devil had imitated the works of the Creator.

They answered the geologists by saying that the "days" in Genesis were long periods of time, and that after all the flood might have been local. They told the astronomers that the sun and moon were not actually, but only apparently, stopped. And that the appearance was produced by the reflection and refraction of light.

They excused the slavery and polygamy, the robbery and murder upheld in the Old Testament by saying that the people were so degraded that Jehovah was compelled to pander to their ignorance and prejudice.

In every way the clergy sought to evade the facts, to dodge the truth, to preserve the creed.

At first they flatly denied the facts -- then they belittled them -- then they harmonized them -- then they denied that they had denied them. Then they changed the meaning of the "inspired" book to fit the facts. At first they said that if the facts, as claimed, were true, the Bible was false and Christianity itself a superstition. Afterward they said the facts, as claimed, were true and that they established beyond all doubt the inspiration of the Bible and the divine origin of orthodox religion.

Anything they could not dodge, they swallowed and anything they could not swallow, they dodged.

I gave up the Old Testament on account of its mistakes, its absurdities, its ignorance and its cruelty. I gave up the New because it vouched for the truth of the Old. I gave it up on account of its miracles, its contradictions, because Christ and his disciples believe in the existence of devils -- talked and made bargains with them. expelled them from people and animals.

This, of itself, is enough. We know, if we know anything, that devils do not exist - that Christ never cast them out, and that if he pretended to, he was either ignorant, dishonest or insane. These stories about devils demonstrate the human, the ignorant origin of the New Testament. I gave up the New Testament because it rewards credulity, and curses brave and honest men, and because it teaches the infinite horror of eternal pain.

V

Having spent my youth in reading books about religion -- about the "new birth" -- the disobedience of our first parents, the atonement, salvation by faith, the

wickedness of pleasure, the degrading consequences of love, and the impossibility of getting to heaven by being honest and generous, and having become somewhat weary of the frayed and raveled thoughts, you can imagine my surprise, my delight when I read the poems of Robert Burns.

I was familiar with the writings of the devout and insincere, the pious and petrified, the pure and heartless. Here was a natural honest man. I knew the works of those who regarded all nature as depraved, and looked upon love as the legacy and perpetual witness of original sin. Here was a man who plucked joy from the mire, made goddesses of peasant girls, and enthroned the honest man. One whose sympathy, with loving arms, embraced all forms of suffering life, who hated slavery of every kind, who was as natural as heaven's blue, with humor kindly as an autumn day, with wit as sharp as Ithuriel's spear, and scorn that blasted like the simoon's breath. A man who loved this world, this life, the things of every day, and placed above all else the thrilling ecstasies of human love.

I read and read again with rapture, tears and smiles, feeling that a great heart was throbbing in the lines.

The religious, the lugubrious, the artificial, the spiritual poets were forgotten or remained only as the fragments, the half remembered horrors of monstrous and distorted dreams.

I had found at last a natural man, one who despised his country's cruel creed, and was brave and sensible enough to say: "All religions are auld wives' fables, but an honest man has nothing to fear, either in this world or the world to come."

One who had the genius to write Holy Willie's Prayer -- a poem that crucified Calvinism and through its bloodless heart thrust the spear of common sense -- a poem that made every orthodox creed the food of scorn -- of inextinguishable laughter.

Burns had his faults, his frailties. He was intensely human. Still, I would rather appear at the "Judgment Seat" drunk, and be able to say that I was the author of "A man's a man for 'a that," than to be perfectly sober and admit that I had lived and died a Scotch Presbyterian.

I read Byron -- read his Cain, in which, as in Paradise Lost, the Devil seems to be the better god -- read his beautiful, sublime and bitter lines -- read his prisoner of

Chillon -- his best -- a poem that filled my heart with tenderness, with pity, and with an eternal hatred of tyranny. I read Shelley's Queen Mab -- a poem filled with beauty, courage, thought, sympathy, tears and scorn, in which a brave soul tears down the prison walls and floods the cells with light. I read his Skylark -- a winged flame -- passionate as blood -- tender as tears -- pure as light.

I read Keats, "whose name was writ in water" -- read St. Agnes Eve, a story told with such an artless art that this poor common world is changed to fairy land -- the Grecian Urn, that fills the soul with ever eager love, with all the rapture of imagined song -- the Nightingale -- a melody in which there is the memory of morn -- a melody that dies away in dusk and tears, paining the senses with its perfectness.

And then I read Shakespeare, the plays, the sonnets, the poems -- read all. I beheld a new heaven and a new earth; Shakespeare, who knew the brain and heart of man -- the hopes and fears, the loves and hatreds, the vices and the virtues of the human race: whose imagination read the tear-blurred records, the blood-stained pages of all the past, and saw falling athwart the outspread scroll the light of hope and love; Shakespeare, who sounded every depth -- while on the loftiest peak there fell the shadow of his wings.

I compared the Plays with the "inspired" books -- Romeo and Juliet with the Song of Solomon, Lear with Job, and the Sonnets with the Psalms, and I found that Jehovah did not understand the art of speech. I compared Shakespeare's women -- his perfect women -- with the women of the Bible. I found that Jehovah was not a sculptor, not a painter -- not an artist -- that he lacked the power that changes clay to flesh -- the art, the plastic touch, that molds the perfect form -- the breath that gives it free and joyous life -- the genius that creates the faultless.

The sacred books of all the world are worthless dross and common stones compared with Shakespeare's glittering gold and gleaming gems.

VI

Up to this time I had read nothing against our blessed religion except what I had found in Burns, Byron and Shelley. By some accident I read Volney, who shows that all religions are, and have been, established in the same way -- that all had their Christs, their apostles, miracles and sacred books, and then asked how it is possible to decide which is the true one. A question that is still waiting for an answer.

I read Gibbon, the greatest of historians, who marshaled his facts as skillfully as Caesar did his legions, and I learned that Christianity is only a name for Paganism -- for the old religion, shorn of its beauty -- that some absurdities had been exchanged for others -- that some gods had been killed -- a vast multitude of devils created, and that hell had been enlarged.

And then I read the *Age of Reason*, by Thomas Paine. Let me tell you something about this sublime and slandered man. He came to this country just before the Revolution. He brought a letter of introduction from Benjamin Franklin, at that time the greatest American. In Philadelphia, Paine was employed to write for the *Pennsylvania Magazine*. We know that he wrote at least five articles. The first was against slavery, the second against duelling, the third on the treatment of prisoners -- showing that the object should be to reform, not to punish and degrade -- the fourth on the rights of woman, and the fifth in favor of forming societies for the prevention of cruelty to children and animals.

From this you see that he suggested the great reforms of our century.

The truth is that he labored all his life for the good of his fellow-men, and did as much to found the Great Republic as any man who ever stood beneath our flag.

He gave his thoughts about religion -- about the blessed Scriptures, about the superstitions of his time. He was perfectly sincere and what he said was kind and fair.

The *Age of Reason* filled with hatred the hearts of those who loved their enemies, and the occupant of every orthodox pulpit became, and still is, a passionate malinger of Thomas Paine.

No one has answered -- no one will answer, his argument against the dogma of inspiration -- his objections to the Bible.

He did not rise above all the superstitions of his day. While he hated Jehovah, he praised the God of Nature, the creator and preserver of all. In this he was wrong, because, as Watson said in his Reply to Paine, the God of Nature is as heartless, as cruel as the God of the Bible.

But Paine was one of the pioneers -- one of the Titans, one of the heroes, who gladly gave his life, his every thought and act, to free and civilize mankind.

I read Voltaire -- Voltaire, the greatest man of his century, and who did more for liberty of thought and speech than any other being, human or "divine." Voltaire, who tore the mask from hypocrisy and found behind the painted smile the fangs of hate. Voltaire, who attacked the savagery of the law, the cruel decisions of venal courts, and rescued victims from the wheel and rack. Voltaire, who waged war against the tyranny of thrones, the greed and heartlessness of power. Voltaire, who filled the flesh of priests with the barbed and poisoned arrows of his wit and made the pious jugglers, who cursed him in public, laugh at themselves in private. Voltaire, who sided with the oppressed, rescued the unfortunate, championed the obscure and weak, civilized judges, repealed laws and abolished torture in his native land.

In every direction this tireless man fought the absurd, the miraculous, the supernatural, the idiotic, the unjust. He had no reverence for the ancient. He was not awed by pageantry and pomp, by crowned Crime or mitered Pretence. Beneath the crown he saw the criminal, under the miter, the hypocrite. To the bar of his conscience, his reason, he summoned the barbarism and the barbarians of his time. He pronounced judgment against them all, and that judgment has been affirmed by the intelligent world. Voltaire lighted a torch and gave to others the sacred flame. The light still shines and will as long as man loves liberty and seeks for truth.

I read Zeno, the man who said, centuries before our Christ was born, that man could not own his fellow-man.

"No matter whether you claim a slave by purchase or capture, the title is bad. They who claim to own their fellow-men, look down into the pit and forget the justice that should rule the world."

I became acquainted with Epicurus, who taught the religion of usefulness, of temperance, of courage and wisdom, and who said: "Why should I fear death? If I am, death is not. If death is. I am not. Why should I fear that which cannot exist when I do?"

I read about Socrates, who when on trial for his life, said, among other things, to his judges, these wondrous words: "I have not sought during my life to amass wealth and to adorn my body, but I have sought to adorn my soul with the jewels of wisdom, patience, and above all with a love of liberty."

So, I read about Diogenes, the philosopher who hated the superfluous -- the enemy of waste and greed, and who one day entered the temple, reverently approached the altar, crushed a louse between the nails of his thumbs, and solemnly said: "The sacrifice of Diogenes to all the gods." This parodied the worship of the world -- satirized all creeds, and in one act put the essence of religion.

Diogenes must have know of this "inspired" passage -- "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins."

I compared Zeno, Epicures and Socrates, three heathen wretches who had never heard of the Old Testament or the Ten Commandments, with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, three favorites of Jehovah, and I was depraved enough to think that the Pagans were superior to the Patriarchs -- and to Jehovah himself.

VII

My attention was turned to other religions, to the sacred books, the creeds and ceremonies of other lands -- of India, Egypt, Assyria, Persia, of the dead and dying nations.

I concluded that all religions had the same foundation -- a belief in the supernatural -- a power above nature that man could influence by worship -- by sacrifice and prayer.

I found that all religions rested on a mistaken conception of nature -- that the religion of a people was the science of that people, that is to say, their explanation of the world -- of life and death -- of origin and destiny. I concluded that all religions had substantially the same origin, and that in fact there has never been but one religion in the world. The twigs and leaves may differ, but the trunk is the same.

The poor African that pours out his heart to deity of stone is on an exact religious level with the robed priest who supplicates his God. The same mistake, the same superstition, bends the knees and shuts the eyes of both. Both ask for supernatural aid, and neither has the slightest thought of the absolute uniformity of nature.

It seems probable to me that the first organized ceremonial religion was the worship of the sun. The sun was the "Sky Father," the "All Seeing," the source of life -- the fireside of the world. The sun was regarded as a god who fought the darkness, the power of evil, the enemy of man.

There have been many sun-gods, and they seem to have been the chief deities in the ancient religions. They have been worshiped in many lands, by many nations that have passed to death and dust.

Apollo was a sun-god and he fought and conquered the serpent of night. Baldur was a sun-god. He was in love with the Dawn -- a maiden. Krishna was a sun-god. At his birth the Ganges was thrilled from its source to the sea, and all the trees, the dead as well as the living, burst into leaf and bud and flower. Hercules was a sun-god and so was Samson, whose strength was in his hair -- that is to say, in his beams. He was shorn of his strength by Delilah, the shadow -- the darkness. Osiris, Bacchus, and Mithra, Hermes, Buddha, and Quetzalcoatl, Prometheus, Zoroaster, and Perseus, Cadom, Lao-tsze, Fo-hi, Horus and Rameses, were all sun-gods.

All of these gods had gods for fathers and their mothers were virgins. The births of nearly all were announced by stars, celebrated by celestial music, and voices declared that a blessing had come to the poor world. All of these gods were born in humble places -- in caves, under trees, in common inns, and tyrants sought to kill them all when they were babes. All of these sun-gods were born at the winter solstice -- on Christmas. Nearly all were worshiped by "wise men." All of them fasted for forty days -- all of them taught in parables -- all of them wrought miracles -- all met with a violent death, and all rose from the dead.

The history of these gods is the exact history of our Christ.

This is not a coincidence -- an accident. Christ was a sun-god. Christ was a new name for an old biography -- a survival -- the last of the sun-gods. Christ was not a man, but a myth -- not a life, but a legend.

I found that we had not only borrowed our Christ -- but that all our sacraments, symbols and ceremonies were legacies that we received from the buried past. There is nothing original in Christianity. The cross was a symbol thousands of years before our era. It was a symbol of life, of immortality -- of the god Agni, and it was chiseled upon tombs many ages before a line of our Bible was written.

Baptism is far older than Christianity -- than Judaism. The Hindus, Egyptians, Greeks and Romans had Holy Water long before a Catholic lived. The eucharist was borrowed from the Pagans. Ceres was the goddess of the fields -- Bacchus of the

vine. At the harvest festival they made cakes of wheat and said: "This is the flesh of the goddess." They drank wine and cried: "This is the blood of our god."

The Egyptians had a Trinity. They worshiped Osiris, Isis and Horus, thousands of years before the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost were known.

The Tree of Life grew in India, in China, and among the Aztecs, long before the Garden of Eden was planted.

Long before our Bible was known, other nations had their sacred books.

The dogmas of the Fall of Man, the Atonement and Salvation by Faith, are far older than our religion.

In our blessed gospel, -- in our "divine scheme," -- there is nothing new -- nothing original. All old -- all borrowed, pieced and patched.

Then I concluded that all religions had been naturally produced, and that all were variation, modifications of one, -- then I felt that I knew that all were the work of man.

VIII

THE theologians had always insisted that their God was the creator of all living things -- that the forms, parts, functions, colors and varieties of animals were the expressions of his fancy, taste and wisdom -- that he made them all precisely as they are to-day -- that he invented fins and legs and wings -- that he furnished them with the weapons of attack, the shields of defence -- that he formed them with reference to food and climate, taking into consideration all facts affecting life.

They insisted that man was a special creation, not related in any way to the animals below him. They also asserted that all the forms of vegetation, from mosses to forests, were just the same to-day as the moment they were made.

Men of genius, who were for the most part free from religious prejudice, were examining these things -- were looking for facts. They were examining the fossils of animals and plants -- studying the forms of animals -- their bones and muscles -- the effect of climate and food -- the strange modifications through which they had passed. Humboldt had published his lectures -- filled with great thoughts -- with splendid generalizations -- with suggestions that stimulated the spirit of investigation,

and with conclusions that satisfied the mind. He demonstrated the uniformity of Nature -- the kinship of all that lives and grows -- that breathes and thinks.

Darwin, with his Origin of Species, his theories about Natural Selection, the Survival of the Fittest, and the influence of environment, shed a flood of light upon the great problems of plant and animal life.

These things had been guessed, prophesied, asserted, hinted by many others, but Darwin, with infinite patience, with perfect care and candor, found the facts, fulfilled the prophecies, and demonstrated the truth of the guesses, hints and assertions. He was, in my judgment, the keenest observer, the best judge of the meaning and value of a fact, the greatest Naturalist the world has produced.

The theological view began to look small and mean.

Spencer gave his theory of evolution and sustained it by countless facts. He stood at a great height, and with the eyes of a philosopher, a profound thinker, surveyed the world. He has influenced the thought of the wisest.

Theology looked more absurd than ever.

Huxley entered the lists for Darwin. No man ever had a sharper sword -- a better shield. He challenged the world. The great theologians and the small scientists -- those who had more courage than sense, accepted the challenge. Their poor bodies were carried away by their friends.

Huxley had intelligence, industry, genius, and the courage to express his thought. He was absolutely loyal to what he thought was truth. Without prejudice and without fear, he followed the footsteps of life from the lowest to the highest forms.

Theology looked smaller still.

Haeckel began at the simplest cell, went from change to change -- from form to form -- followed the line of development, the path of life, until he reached the human race. It was all natural. There had been no interference from without.

I read the works of these great men -- of many others -- and became convinced that they were right, and that all the theologians -- all the believers in "special creation" were absolutely wrong.

The Garden of Eden faded away, Adam and Eve fell back to dust, the snake crawled into the grass, and Jehovah became a miserable myth.

IX

I took another step. What is matter -- substance? Can it be destroyed -- annihilated? Is it possible to conceive of the destruction of the smallest atom of substance? It can be ground to powder -- changed from a solid to a liquid -- from a liquid to a gas -- but it all remains. Nothing is lost -- nothing destroyed.

Let an infinite God, if there be one, attack a grain of sand -- attack it with infinite power. It cannot be destroyed. It cannot surrender. It defies all force. Substance cannot be destroyed.

Then I took another step.

If matter cannot be destroyed, cannot be annihilated, it could not have been created.

The indestructible must be uncreateable.

And then I asked myself: What is force?

We cannot conceive of the creation of force, or of its destruction. Force may be changed from one form to another -- from motion to heat -- but it cannot be destroyed -- annihilated.

If force cannot be destroyed it could not have been created. It is eternal.

Another thing -- matter cannot exist apart from force. Force cannot exist apart from matter. Matter could not have existed before force. Force could not have existed before matter. Matter and force can only be conceived of together. This has been shown by several scientists, but most clearly, most forcibly by Buchner.

Thought is a form of force, consequently it could not have caused or created matter. Intelligence is a form of force and could not have existed without or apart from matter. Without substance there could have been no mind, no will, no force in any form, and there could have been no substance without force.

Matter and force were not created. They have existed from eternity. They cannot be destroyed.

There was, there is, no creator. Then came the question; Is there a God? Is there a being of infinite intelligence, power and goodness, who governs the world?

There can be goodness without much intelligence -- but it seems to me that perfect intelligence and perfect goodness must go together.

In nature I see, or seem to see, good and evil -- intelligence and ignorance -- goodness and cruelty -- care and carelessness -- economy and waste. I see means that do not accomplish the ends -- designs that seem to fail.

To me it seems infinitely cruel for life to feed on life -- to create animals that devour others. The teeth and beaks, the claws and fangs, that tear and rend, fill me with horror. What can be more frightful than a world at war? Every leaf a battlefield -- every flower a Golgotha -- in every drop of water pursuit, capture and death. Under every piece of bark, life lying in wait for life. On every blade of grass, something that kills, -- something that suffers. Everywhere the strong living on the weak -- the superior on the inferior. Everywhere the weak, the insignificant, living on the strong -- the inferior on the superior -- the highest food for the lowest -- man sacrificed for the sake of microbes.

Murder universal. Everywhere pain, disease and death -- death that does not wait for bent forms and gray hairs, but clutches babes and happy youths. Death that takes the mother from her helpless, dimpled child -- death that fills the world with grief and tears.

How can the orthodox Christian explain these things?

I know that life is good. I remember the sunshine and rain. Then I think of the earthquake and flood. I do not forget health and harvest, home and love -- but what of pestilence and famine? I cannot harmonize all these contradictions -- these blessings and agonies -- with the existence of an infinitely good, wise and powerful God.

The theologian says that what we call evil is for our benefit -- that we are placed in this world of sin and sorrow to develop character. If this is true I ask why the infant dies? Millions and millions draw a few breaths and fade away in the arms of their mothers. They are not allowed to develop character.

The theologian says that serpents were given fangs to protect themselves from their enemies. Why did the God who made them, make enemies? Why is it that many species of serpents have no fangs?

The theologian says that God armored the hippopotamus, covered his body, except the under part, with scales and plates, that other animals could not pierce with tooth or tusk. But the same God made the rhinoceros and supplied him with a horn on his nose, with which he disembowels the hippopotamus.

The same God made the eagle, the vulture, the hawk, and their helpless prey.

On every hand there seems to be design to defeat design.

If God created man -- if he is the father of us all, why did he make the criminals, the insane, the deformed and idiotic?

Should the inferior man thank God? Should the mother, who clasps to her breast an idiot child, thank God? Should the slave thank God?

The theologian says that God governs the wind, the rain, the lightning. How then can we account for the cyclone, the flood, the drought, the glittering bolt that kills? Suppose we had a man in this country who could control the wind, the rain and lightning, and suppose we elected him to govern these things, and suppose that he allowed whole States to dry and wither, and at the same time wasted the rain in the sea. Suppose that he allowed the winds to destroy cities and to crush to shapelessness thousands of men and women, and allowed the lightnings to strike the life out of mothers and babes. What would we say? What would we think of such a savage?

And yet, according to the theologians, this is exactly the course pursued by God.

What do we think of a man, who will not, when he has the power, protect his friends? Yet the Christian's God allowed his enemies to torture and burn his friends, his worshipers.

Who has ingenuity enough to explain this?

What good man, having the power to prevent it, would allow the innocent to be imprisoned, chained in dungeons, and sigh against the dripping walls their weary lives away?

If God governs the world, why is innocence not a perfect shield? Why does injustice triumph?

Who can answer these questions?

In answer, the intelligent, honest man must say: I do not know.

X

This God must be, if he exists, a person -- a conscious being. Who can imagine an infinite personality? This God must have force, and we cannot conceive of force apart from matter. This God must be material. He must have the means by which he changes force to what we call thought. When he thinks he uses force, force that must be replaced. Yet we are told that he is infinitely wise. If he is, he does not think. Thought is a ladder -- a process by which we reach a conclusion. He who knows all conclusions cannot think. He cannot hope or fear. When knowledge is perfect there can be no passion, no emotion. If God is infinite he does not want. He has all. He who does not want does not act. The infinite must dwell in eternal calm.

It is as impossible to conceive of such a being as to imagine a square triangle, or to think of a circle without a diameter.

Yet we are told that it is our duty to love this God. Can we love the unknown, the inconceivable? Can it be our duty to love anybody? It is our duty to act justly, honestly, but it cannot be our duty to love. We cannot be under obligation to admire a painting -- to be charmed with a poem -- or thrilled with music. Admiration cannot be controlled. Taste and love are not the servants of the will. Love is, and must be free. It rises from the heart like perfume from a flower. For thousands of ages men and women have been trying to love the gods -- trying to soften their hearts -- trying to get their aid.

I see them all. The panorama passes before me. I see them with outstretched hands -- with reverently closed eyes -- worshipping the sun. I see them bowing, in their fear and need, to meteoric stones -- imploring serpents, beasts and sacred trees -- praying to idols wrought of wood and stone. I see them building altars to the unseen powers, staining them with blood of child and beast. I see the countless priests and hear their solemn chants. I see the dying victims, the smoking altars, the swinging censers, and the rising clouds. I see the half-god men -- the mournful Christs, in many lands. I see the common things of life change to miracles as they speed from

mouth to mouth. I see the insane prophets reading the secret book of fate by signs and dreams. I see them all -- the Assyrians chanting the praises of Asshur and Ishtar -- the Hindus worshiping Brahma, Vishnu and Draupadi, the whitearmed -- the Chaldeans sacrificing to Bel and Hea -- the Egyptians bowing to Ptah and Fta, Osiris and Isis -- the Medes placating the storm, worshiping the fire -- the Babylonians supplicating Bel and Murodach -- I see them all by the Euphrates, the Tigris, the Ganges and the Nile. I see the Greeks building temples for Zeus, Neptune and Venus. I see the Romans kneeling to a hundred gods. I see others spurning idols and pouring out their hopes and fears to a vague image in the mind. I see the multitudes, with open mouths, receive as truths the myths and fables of the vanished years. I see them give their toil, their wealth to robe the priests, to build the vaulted roofs, the spacious aisles, the glittering domes. I see them clad in rags, huddled in dens and huts, devouring crusts and scraps, that they may give the more to ghosts and gods. I see them make their cruel creeds and fill the world with hatred, war, and death. I see them with their faces in the dust in the dark days of plague and sudden death, when cheeks are wan and lips are white for lack of bread. I hear their prayers, their sighs, their sobs. I see them kiss the unconscious lips as their hot tears fall on the pallid faces of the dead. I see the nations as they fade and fail. I see them captured and enslaved. I see their altars mingle with the common earth, their temples crumble slowly back to dust. I see their gods grow old and weak, infirm and faint. I see them fall from vague and misty thrones, helpless and dead. The worshipers receive no help. Injustice triumphs. Toilers are paid with the lash, -- babes are sold, -- the innocent stand on scaffolds, and the heroic perish in flames. I see the earthquakes devour, the volcanoes overwhelm, the cyclones wreck, the floods destroy, and the lightnings kill.

The nations perished. The gods died. The toil and wealth were lost. The temples were built in vain, and all the prayers died unanswered in the heedless air.

Then I asked myself the question: Is there a supernatural power -- an arbitrary mind -- an enthroned God -- a supreme will that sways the tides and currents of the world -- to which all causes bow? I do not deny. I do not know -- but I do not believe. I believe that the natural is supreme -- that from the infinite chain no link can be lost or broken -- that there is no supernatural power that can answer prayer -- no power that worship can persuade or change -- no power that cares for man.

I believe that with infinite arms Nature embraces the all -- that there is no interference -- no chance -- that behind every event are the necessary and countless causes, and that beyond every event will be and must be the necessary and countless effects.

Man must protect himself. He cannot depend upon the supernatural -- upon an imaginary father in the skies. He must protect himself by finding the facts in Nature, by developing his brain, to the end that he may overcome the obstructions and take advantage of the forces of Nature.

Is there a God?

I do not know.

Is man immortal?

I do not know.

One thing I do know, and that is, that neither hope, nor fear, belief, nor denial, can change the fact. It is as it is, and it will be as it must be.

We wait and hope.

XI

When I became convinced that the Universe is natural -- that all the ghosts and gods are myths, there entered into my brain, into my soul, into every drop of my blood, the sense, the feeling, the joy of freedom. The walls of my prison crumbled and fell, the dungeon was flooded with light and all the bolts, and bars, and manacles became dust. I was no longer a servant, a serf or a slave. There was for me no master in all the wide world -- not even in infinite space. I was free -- free to think, to express my thoughts -- free to live to my own ideal -- free to live for myself and those I loved -- free to use all my faculties, all my senses -- free to spread imagination's wings -- free to investigate, to guess and dream and hope -- free to judge and determine for myself -- free to reject all ignorant and cruel creeds, all the "inspired" books that savages have produced, and all the barbarous legends of the past -- free from popes and priests -- free from all the "called" and "set apart" -- free from sanctified mistakes and holy lies -- free from the fear of eternal pain -- free from the winged monsters of the night -- free from devils, ghosts and gods. For the first

time I was free. There were no prohibited places in all the realms of thought -- no air, no space, where fancy could not spread her painted wings -- no chains for my limbs - - no lashes for my back -- no fires for my flesh -- no master's frown or threat -- no following another's steps -- no need to bow, or cringe, or crawl, or utter lying words. I was free. I stood erect and fearlessly, joyously, faced all worlds. And then my heart was filled with gratitude, with thankfulness, and went out in love to all the heroes, the thinkers who gave their lives for the liberty of hand and brain -- for the freedom of labor and thought -- to those who fell on the fierce fields of war, to those who died in dungeons bound with chains -- to those who proudly mounted scaffold's stairs -- to those whose bones were crushed, whose flesh was scarred and torn -- to those by fire consumed -- to all the wise, the good, the brave of every land, whose thoughts and deeds have given freedom to the sons of men. And then I vowed to grasp the torch that they had held, and hold it high, that light might conquer darkness still.

Let us be true to ourselves -- true to the facts we know, and let us, above all things, preserve the veracity of our souls.

If there be gods we cannot help them, but we can assist our fellow-men. We cannot love the inconceivable, but we can love wife and child and friend.

We can be as honest as we are ignorant. If we are, when asked what is beyond the horizon of the known, we must say that we do not know. We can tell the truth, and we can enjoy the blessed freedom that the brave have won. We can destroy the monsters of superstition, the hissing snakes of ignorance and fear. We can drive from our minds the frightful things that tear and wound with beak and fang. We can civilize our fellow-men. We can fill our lives with generous deeds, with loving words, with art and song, and all the ecstasies of love. We can flood our years with sunshine -- with the divine climate of kindness, and we can drain to the last drop the golden cup of joy.