

The Ghosts

Robert Green Ingersoll

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Let them cover their Eyeless Sockets with their Fleshless Hands and fade forever from the imagination of Men.

There are three theories by which men account for all phenomena, for everything that happens: First, the Supernatural; Second, the Supernatural and Natural; Third, the Natural. Between these theories there has been, from the dawn of civilization, a continual conflict. In this great war, nearly all the soldiers have been in the ranks of the supernatural. The believers in the supernatural insist that matter is controlled and directed entirely by powers from without; while naturalists maintain that Nature acts from within; that Nature is not acted upon; that the universe is all there is; that Nature with infinite arms embraces everything that exists, and that all supposed powers beyond the limits of the material are simply ghosts. You say, "Oh, this is materialism!" What is matter? I take in my hand some earth: in this dust put seeds. Let the arrows of light from the quiver of the sun smite upon it; let the rain fall upon it. The seeds will grow and a plant will bud and blossom. Do you understand this? Can you explain it better than you can the production of thought? Have you the slightest conception of what it really is? And yet you speak of matter as though acquainted with its origin, as though you had torn from the clenched hands of the rocks the secrets of material existence. Do you know what force is? Can you account for molecular action? Are you really familiar with chemistry, and can you account for the loves and hatreds of the atoms? Is there not something in matter that forever eludes? After all, can you get beyond, above or below appearances? Before you cry "materialism!" had you not better ascertain what matter really is? Can you think even of anything without a material basis? Is it possible to imagine the annihilation of a single atom? Is it possible for you to conceive of the creation of an atom? Can you have a thought that was not suggested to you by what you call matter?

Our fathers denounced materialism, and accounted for all phenomena by the caprice of gods and devils.

For thousands of years it was believed that ghosts, good and bad, benevolent and malignant, weak and powerful, in some mysterious way, produced all phenomena; that disease and health, happiness and misery, fortune and misfortune, peace and war, life and death, success and failure, were but arrows from the quivers of these ghosts; that shadowy phantoms rewarded and punished mankind; that they were pleased and displeased by the actions of men; that they sent and withheld the snow, the light, and the rain; that they blessed the earth with harvests or cursed it with famine; that they fed or starved the children of men; that they crowned and uncrowned kings; that they took sides in war; that they controlled the winds; that they gave prosperous voyages, allowing the brave mariner to meet his wife and child inside the harbor bar, or sent the storms, strewing the sad shores with wrecks of ships and the bodies of men.

Formerly, these ghosts were believed to be almost innumerable. Earth, air, and water were filled with these phantom hosts. In modern times they have greatly decreased in number, because the second theory, a mingling of the supernatural and natural, has generally been adopted. The remaining ghosts, however, are supposed to perform the same offices as the hosts of yore.

It has always been believed that these ghosts could in some way be appeased; that they could be flattered by sacrifices, by prayer, by fasting, by the building of temples and cathedrals, by the blood of men and beasts, by

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forms and ceremonies, by chants, by kneeling and prostrations, by flagellations and maiming, by renouncing the joys of home, by living alone in the wide desert, by the practice of celibacy, by inventing instruments of torture, by destroying men, women and children, by covering the earth with dungeons, by burning unbelievers, by putting chains upon the thoughts and manacles upon the limbs of men, by believing things without evidence and against evidence, by disbelieving and denying demonstration, by despising facts, by hating reason, by denouncing liberty, by maligning heretics, by slandering the dead, by subscribing to senseless and cruel creeds, by discouraging investigation, by worshiping a book, by the cultivation of credulity, by observing certain times and days, by counting beads, by gazing at crosses, by hiring others to repeat verses and prayers, by burning candles and ringing bells, by enslaving each other and putting out the eyes of the soul. All this has been done to appease and flatter these monsters of the air.

In the history of our poor world, no horror has been omitted, no infamy has been left undone by the believers in ghosts, by the worshipers of these fleshless phantoms. And yet these shadows were born of cowardice and malignity. They were painted by the pencil of fear upon the canvas of ignorance by that artist called superstition.

From these ghosts, our fathers received information. They were the schoolmasters of our ancestors. They were the scientists and philosophers, the geologists, legislators, astronomers, physicians, metaphysicians and historians of the past. For ages these ghosts were supposed to be the only source of real knowledge. They inspired men to write books, and the books were considered sacred. If facts were found to be inconsistent with these books, so much the worse for the facts, and especially for their discoverers. It was then, and still is, believed that these books are the basis of the idea of immortality; that to give up these volumes, or rather the idea that they are inspired, is to renounce the idea of immortality. This I deny.

The idea of immortality, that like a sea has ebbed and flowed in the human heart, with its countless waves of hope and fear, beating against the shores and rocks of time and fate, was not born of any book, nor of any creed, nor of any religion. It was born of human affection, and it will continue to ebb and flow beneath the mists and clouds of doubt and darkness as long as love kisses the lips of death. It is the rainbow Hope shining upon the tears of grief.

From the books written by the ghosts we have at last ascertained that they knew nothing about the world in which we live. Did they know anything about the next? Upon every point where contradiction is possible, they have been contradicted.

By these ghosts, by these citizens of the air, the affairs of government were administered; all authority to govern came from them. The emperors, kings and potentates all had commissions from these phantoms. Man was not considered as the source of any power whatever. To rebel against the king was to rebel against the ghosts, and nothing less than the blood of the offender could appease the invisible phantom or the visible tyrant. Kneeling was the proper position to be assumed by the multitude. The prostrate were the good. Those who stood erect were infidels and traitors. In the name and by the authority of the ghosts, man was enslaved, crushed, and plundered. The many toiled wearily in the storm and sun that the few favorites of the ghosts might live in idleness. The many lived in huts, and caves, and dens, that the few might dwell in palaces. The many covered themselves with rags, that the few might robe themselves in purple and in gold. The many crept, and cringed, and crawled, that the few might tread upon their flesh with iron feet.

From the ghosts men received, not only authority, but information of every kind. They told us the form of this earth. They informed us that eclipses were caused by the sins of man; that the universe was made in six days; that astronomy, and geology were devices of wicked men, instigated by wicked ghosts; that gazing at the sky with a telescope was a dangerous thing; that digging into the earth was sinful curiosity; that trying to be wise above what they had written was born of a rebellious and irreverent spirit.

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They told us there was no virtue like belief, and no crime like doubt; that investigation was pure impudence, and the punishment therefor, eternal torment. They not only told us all about this world, but about two others; and if their statements about the other worlds are as true as about this, no one can underestimate the value of their information.

For countless ages the world was governed by ghosts, and they spared no pains to change the eagle of the human intellect into a bat of darkness. To accomplish this infamous purpose; to drive the love of truth from the human heart; to prevent the advancement of mankind; to shut out from the world every ray of intellectual light; to pollute every mind with superstition, the power of kings, the cunning and cruelty of priests, and the wealth of nations were exhausted.

During these years of persecution, ignorance, superstition and slavery, nearly all the people, the kings, lawyers, doctors, the learned and the unlearned, believed in that frightful production of ignorance, fear, and faith, called witchcraft. They believed that man was the sport and prey of devils. They really thought that the very air was thick with these enemies of man. With few exceptions, this hideous and infamous belief was universal. Under these conditions, progress was almost impossible.

Fear paralyzes the brain. Progress is born of courage, Fear believes courage doubts. Fear falls upon the earth and prays courage stands erect and thinks. Fear retreats courage advances. Fear is barbarism courage is civilization. Fear believes in witchcraft, in devils and in ghosts. Fear is religion courage is science.

The facts, upon which this terrible belief rested, were proved over and over again in every court of Europe. Thousands confessed themselves guilty admitted that they had sold themselves to the devil. They gave the particulars of the sale; told what they said and what the devil replied. They confessed this, when they knew that confession was death; knew that their property would be confiscated, and their children left to beg their bread. This is one of the miracles of history one of the strangest contradictions of the human mind. Without doubt, they really believed themselves guilty. In the first place, they believed in witchcraft as a fact, and when charged with it, they probably became insane. In their insanity they confessed their guilt. They found themselves abhorred and deserted charged with a crime that they could not disprove. Like a man in quicksand, every effort only sunk them deeper. Caught in this frightful web, at the mercy of the spiders of superstition, hope fled, and nothing remained but the insanity of confession. The whole world appeared to be insane.

In the time of James the First, a man was executed for causing a storm at sea with the intention of drowning one of the royal family. How could he disprove it? How could he show that he did not cause the storm? All storms were at that time generally supposed to be caused by the devil the prince of the power of the air and by those whom he assisted.

I implore you to remember that the believers in such impossible things were the authors of our creeds and confessions of faith.

A woman was tried and convicted before Sir Matthew Hale, one of the great judges and lawyers of England, for having caused children to vomit crooked pins. She was also charged with having nursed devils. The learned Judge charged the intelligent jury that there was no doubt as to the existence of witches; that it was established by all history, and expressly taught by the Bible.

The woman was hanged and her body burned.

Sir Thomas More declared that to give up witchcraft was to throw away the sacred Scriptures. In my judgment, he was right.

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John Wesley was a firm believer in ghosts and witches, and insisted upon it, years after all laws upon the subject had been repealed in England. I beg of you to remember that John Wesley was the founder of the Methodist Church.

In New England, a woman was charged with being a witch, and with having changed herself into a fox. While in that condition she was attacked and bitten by some dogs. A committee of three men, by order of the court, examined this woman. They removed her clothing and searched for "witch spots." That is to say, spots into which needles could be thrust without giving her pain. They reported to the court that such spots were found. She denied, however, that she ever had changed herself into a fox. Upon the report of the committee she was found guilty and actually executed. This was done by our Puritan fathers, by the gentlemen who braved the dangers of the deep for the sake of worshiping God and persecuting their fellow-men.

In those days people believed in what was known as lycanthropy that is, that persons, with the assistance of the devil, could assume the form of wolves. An instance is given where a man was attacked by a wolf. He defended himself, and succeeded in cutting off one of the animal's paws. The wolf ran away. The man picked up the paw, put it in his pocket and carried it home. There he found his wife with one of her hands gone. He took the paw from his pocket. It had changed to a human hand. He charged his wife with being a witch. She was tried. She confessed her guilt, and was burned.

People were burned for causing frosts in summer for destroying crops with hail for causing storms for making cows go dry, and even for souring beer. There was no impossibility for which some one was not tried and convicted. The life of no one was secure. To be charged, was to be convicted. Every man was at the mercy of every other. This infamous belief was so firmly seated in the minds of the people, that to express a doubt as to its truth was to be suspected. Whoever denied the existence of witches and devils was denounced as an infidel.

They believed that animals were often taken possession of by devils, and that the killing of the animal would destroy the devil. They absolutely tried, convicted, and executed dumb beasts.

At Basle, in 1470, a rooster was tried upon the charge of having laid an egg. Rooster eggs were used only in making witch ointment, this everybody knew. The rooster was convicted and with all due solemnity was burned in the public square. So a hog and six pigs were tried for having killed and partially eaten a child. The hog was convicted, but the pigs, on account probably of their extreme youth, were acquitted. As late as 1740, a cow was tried and convicted of being possessed by a devil.

They used to exorcise rats, locusts, snakes and vermin. They used to go through the alleys, streets, and fields, and warn them to leave within a certain number of days. In case they disobeyed, they were threatened with pains and penalties.

But let us be careful how we laugh at these things. Let us not pride ourselves too much on the progress of our age. We must not forget that some of our people are yet in the same intelligent business. Only a little while ago, the governor of Minnesota appointed a day of fasting and prayer, to see if some power could not be induced to kill the grasshoppers, or send them into some other state.

About the close of the fifteenth century, so great was the excitement with regard to the existence of witchcraft that Pope Innocent VIII. issued a bull directing the inquisitors to be vigilant in searching out and punishing all guilty of this crime. Forms for the trial were regularly laid down in a book or a pamphlet called the "Malleus Maleficorum" (Hammer of Witches), which was issued by the Roman See. Popes Alexander, Leo, and Adrian, issued like bulls. For two hundred and fifty years the church was busy in punishing the impossible crime of witchcraft; in burning, hanging and torturing men, women, and children. Protestants were as active as Catholics, and in Geneva five hundred witches were burned at the stake in a period of three months. About one thousand were executed in one year in the diocese of Como. At least one hundred thousand victims suffered in Germany

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alone: the last execution (in Wurtzburg) taking place as late as 1749. Witches were burned in Switzerland as late as 1780.

In England the same frightful scenes were enacted. Statutes were passed from Henry VI. to James I., defining the crime and its punishment. The last act passed by the British parliament was when Lord Bacon was a member of the House of Commons; and this act was not repealed until 1736.

Sir William Blackstone, in his Commentaries on the Laws of England, says: "To deny the possibility, nay, actual existence of witchcraft and sorcery, is at once flatly to contradict the word of God in various passages both of the Old and New Testament; and the thing itself is a truth to which every nation in the world hath in its turn borne testimony, either by examples seemingly well attested, or by prohibitory laws, which at least suppose the possibility of a commerce with evil spirits."

In Brown's Dictionary of the Bible, published at Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1807, it is said that: "A witch is a woman that has dealings with Satan. That such persons are among men is abundantly plain from Scripture, and that they ought to be put to death."

This work was re-published in Albany, New York, in 1816. No wonder the clergy of that city are ignorant and bigoted even unto this day.

In 1716, Mrs Hicks and her daughter, nine years of age, were hanged for selling their souls to the devil, and raising a storm by pulling off their stockings and making a lather of soap.

In England it has been estimated that at least thirty thousand were hanged and burned. The last Victim executed in Scotland, perished in 1722. "She was an innocent old woman, who had so little idea of her situation as to rejoice at the sight of the fire which was destined to consume her. She had a daughter, lame both of hands and of feet a circumstance attributed to the witch having been used to transform her daughter into a pony and getting her shod by the devil."

In 1692, nineteen persons were executed and one pressed to death in Salem, Massachusetts, for the crime of witchcraft.

It was thought in those days that men and women made compacts with the devil, orally and in writing. That they abjured God and Jesus Christ, and dedicated themselves wholly to the devil. The contracts were confirmed at a general meeting of witches and ghosts, over which the devil himself presided; and the persons generally signed the articles of agreement with their own blood. These contracts were, in some instances, for a few years; in others, for life. General assemblies of the witches were held at least once a year, at which they appeared entirely naked, besmeared with an ointment made from the bodies of unbaptized infants. "To these meetings they rode from great distances on broomsticks, pokers, goats, hogs, and dogs. Here they did homage to the prince of hell, and offered him sacrifices of young children, and practiced all sorts of license until the break of day."

"As late as 1815, Belgium was disgraced by a witch trial; and guilt was established by the water ordeal." "In 1836, the populace of Hela, near Dantzic, twice plunged into the sea a woman reputed to be a sorceress; and as the miserable creature persisted in rising to the surface, she was pronounced guilty, and beaten to death."

"It was believed that the bodies of devils are not like those of men and animals, cast in an unchangeable mould. It was thought they were like clouds, refined and subtle matter, capable of assuming any form and penetrating into any orifice. The horrible tortures they endured in their place of punishment rendered them extremely sensitive to suffering, and they continually sought a temperate and somewhat moist warmth in order to allay their pangs. It was for this reason they so frequently entered into men and women."

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The devil could transport men, at his will, through the air. He could beget children; and Martin Luther himself had come in contact with one of these children. He recommended the mother to throw the child into the river, in order to free their house from the presence of a devil.

It was believed that the devil could transform people into any shape he pleased.

Whoever denied these things was denounced as an infidel. All the believers in witchcraft confidently appealed to the Bible. Their mouths were filled with passages demonstrating the existence of witches and their power over human beings. By the Bible they proved that innumerable evil spirits were ranging over the world endeavoring to ruin mankind; that these spirits possessed a power and wisdom far transcending the limits of human faculties; that they delighted in every misfortune that could befall the world; that their malice was superhuman. That they caused tempests was proved by the action of the devil toward Job; by the passage in the book of Revelation describing the four angels who held the four winds, and to whom it was given to afflict the earth. They believed the devil could carry persons hundreds of miles, in a few seconds, through the air. They believed this, because they knew that Christ had been carried by the devil in the same manner and placed on a pinnacle of the temple. "The prophet Habakkuk had been transported by a spirit from Judea to Babylon; and Philip, the evangelist, had been the object of a similar miracle; and in the same way Saint Paul had been carried in the body into the third heaven."

"In those pious days, they believed that Incubi and Succubi were forever wandering among mankind, alluring, by more than human charms, the unwary to their destruction, and laying plots, which were too often successful, against the virtue of the saints. Sometimes the witches kindled in the monastic priest a more terrestrial fire. People told, with bated breath, how, under the spell of a vindictive woman, four successive abbots in a German monastery had been wasted away by an unholy flame."

An instance is given in which the devil not only assumed the appearance of a holy man, in order to pay his addresses to a lady, but when discovered, crept under the bed, suffered himself to be dragged out, and was impudent enough to declare that he was the veritable bishop. So perfectly had he assumed the form and features of the prelate that those who knew the bishop best were deceived.

One can hardly imagine the frightful state of the human mind during these long centuries of darkness and superstition. To them, these things were awful and frightful realities. Hovering above them in the air, in their houses, in the bosoms of friends, in their very bodies, in all the darkness of night, everywhere, around, above and below, were innumerable hosts of unclean and malignant devils.

From the malice of those leering and vindictive vampires of the air, the church pretended to defend mankind. Pursued by these phantoms, the frightened multitudes fell upon their faces and implored the aid of robed hypocrisy and sceptered theft.

Take from the orthodox church of to-day the threat and fear of hell, and it becomes an extinct volcano.

Take from the church the miraculous, the supernatural, the incomprehensible, the unreasonable, the impossible, the unknowable, and the absurd, and nothing but a vacuum remains.

Notwithstanding all the infamous things justly laid to the charge of the church, we are told that the civilization of to-day is the child of what we are pleased to call the superstition of the past.

Religion has not civilized man man has civilized religion. God improves as man advances.

Let me call your attention to what we have received from the followers of the ghosts. Let me give you an outline of the sciences as taught by these philosophers of the clouds.

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All diseases were produced, either as a punishment by the good ghosts, or out of pure malignity by the bad ones. There were, properly speaking, no diseases. The sick were possessed by ghosts. The science of medicine consisted in knowing how to persuade these ghosts to vacate the premises. For thousands of years the diseased were treated with incantations, with hideous noises, with drums and gongs. Everything was done to make the visit of the ghost as unpleasant as possible, and they generally succeeded in making things so disagreeable that if the ghost did not leave, the patient did. These ghosts were supposed to be of different rank, power and dignity. Now and then a man pretended to have won the favor of some powerful ghost, and that gave him power over the little ones. Such a man became an eminent physician.

It was found that certain kinds of smoke, such as that produced by burning the liver of a fish, the dried skin of a serpent, the eyes of a toad, or the tongue of an adder, were exceedingly offensive to the nostrils of an ordinary ghost. With this smoke, the sick room would be filled until the ghost vanished or the patient died.

It was also believed that certain words, the names of the most powerful ghosts, when properly pronounced, were very effective weapons. It was for a long time thought that Latin words were the best, Latin being a dead language, and known by the clergy. Others thought that two sticks laid across each other and held before the wicked ghost would cause it instantly to flee in dread away.

For thousands of years, the practice of medicine consisted in driving these evil spirits out of the bodies of men.

In some instances, bargains and compromises were made with the ghosts. One case is given where a multitude of devils traded a man for a herd of swine. In this transaction the devils were the losers, as the swine immediately drowned themselves in the sea. This idea of disease appears to have been almost universal, and is by no means yet extinct.

The contortions of the epileptic, the strange twitchings of those afflicted with chorea, the shakings of palsy, dreams, trances, and the numberless frightful phenomena produced by diseases of the nerves, were all seized upon as so many proofs that the bodies of men were filled with unclean and malignant ghosts.

Whoever endeavored to account for these things by natural causes, whoever attempted to cure diseases by natural means, was denounced by the church as an infidel. To explain anything was a crime. It was to the interest of the priest that all phenomena should be accounted for by the will and power of gods and devils. The moment it is admitted that all phenomena are within the domain of the natural, the necessity for a priest has disappeared. Religion breathes the air of the supernatural. Take from the mind of man the idea of the supernatural, and religion ceases to exist. For this reason, the church has always despised the man who explained the wonderful. Upon this principle, nothing was left undone to stay the science of medicine. As long as plagues and pestilences could be stopped by prayer, the priest was useful. The moment the physician found a cure, the priest became an extravagance. The moment it began to be apparent that prayer could do nothing for the body, the priest shifted his ground and began praying for the soul.

Long after the devil idea was substantially abandoned in the practice of medicine, and when it was admitted that God had nothing to do with ordinary coughs and colds, it was still believed that all the frightful diseases were sent by him as punishments for the wickedness of the people. It was thought to be a kind of blasphemy to even try, by any natural means, to stay the ravages of pestilence. Formerly during the prevalence of plague and epidemics, the arrogance of the priest was boundless. He told the people that they had slighted the clergy, that they had refused to pay tithes, that they had doubted some of the doctrines of the church, and that God was now taking his revenge. The people for the most part, believed this infamous tissue of priestcraft. They hastened to fall upon their knees; they poured out their wealth upon the altars of hypocrisy; they abased and debased themselves; from their minds they banished all doubts, and made haste to crawl in the very dust of humility.

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The church never wanted disease to be under the control of man. Timothy Dewight, president of Yale College, preached a sermon against vaccination. His idea was, that if God had decreed from all eternity that a certain man should die with the small-pox, it was a frightful sin to avoid and annul that decree by the trick of vaccination. Small-pox being regarded as one of the heaviest guns in the arsenal of heaven, to spike it was the height of presumption. Plagues and pestilences were instrumentalities in the hands of God with which to gain the love and worship of mankind. To find a cure for disease was to take a weapon from the church. No one tries to cure the ague with prayer. Quinine has been found altogether more reliable. Just as soon as a specific is found for a disease that disease will be left out of the list of prayer. The number of diseases with which God from time to time afflicts mankind, is continually decreasing. In a few years all of them will be under the control of man, the gods will be left unarmed, and the threats of their priests will excite only a smile.

The science of medicine has had but one enemy religion. Man was afraid to save his body for fear he might lose his soul.

Is it any wonder that the people in those days believed in and taught the infamous doctrine of eternal punishment a doctrine that makes God a heartless monster and man a slimy hypocrite and slave?

The ghosts were historians, and their histories were the grossest absurdities. "Tales told by idiots, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." In those days the histories were written by the monks, who, as a rule, were almost as superstitious as they were dishonest. They wrote as though they had been witnesses of every occurrence they related. They wrote the history of every country of importance. They told all the past and predicted all the future with an impudence that amounted to sublimity. "They traced the order of St. Michael, in France, to the archangel himself, and alleged that he was the founder of a chivalric order in heaven itself. They said that Tartars originally came from hell, and that they were called Tartars because Tartarus was one of the names of perdition. They declared that Scotland was so named after Scota, a daughter of Pharaoh, who landed in Ireland, invaded Scotland, and took it by force of arms. This statement was made in a letter addressed to the Pope in the fourteenth century, and was alluded to as a well-known fact. The letter was written by some of the highest dignitaries, and by the direction of the King himself."

These gentlemen accounted for the red on the breasts of robins, from the fact that these birds carried water to unbaptized infants in hell.

Matthew, of Paris, an eminent historian of the fourteenth century, gave the world the following piece of information: "It is well known that Mohammed was once a cardinal, and became a heretic because he failed in his effort to be elected pope;" and that having drunk to excess, he fell by the roadside, and in this condition was killed by swine. "And for that reason, his followers abhor pork even unto this day."

Another eminent historian informs us that Nero was in the habit of vomiting frogs. When I read this, I said to myself: Some of the croakers of the present day against Progress would be the better for such a vomit.

The history of Charlemagne was written by Turpin, of Rheims. He was a bishop. He assures us that the walls of a city fell down in answer to prayer. That there were giants in those days who could take fifty ordinary men under their arms and walk away with them. "With the greatest of these, a direct descendant of Goliath, one Orlando had a theological discussion, and that in the heat of the debate, when the giant was overwhelmed with the argument, Orlando rushed forward and inflicted a fatal stab."

The history of Britain, written by the archdeacons of Monmouth and Oxford, was wonderfully popular. According to them, Brutus conquered England and built the city of London. During his time, it rained pure blood for three days. At another time, a monster came from the sea, and, after having devoured great multitudes of people, swallowed the king and disappeared. They tell us that King Arthur was not born like other mortals, but was the result of a magical contrivance; that he had great luck in killing giants; that he killed one in France that had the

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cheerful habit of eating some thirty men a day. That this giant had clothes woven of the beards of the kings he had devoured. To cap the climax, one of the authors of this book was promoted for having written the only reliable history of his country.

In all the histories of those days there is hardly a single truth. Facts were considered unworthy of preservation. Anything that really happened was not of sufficient interest or importance to be recorded. The great religious historian, Eusebius, ingenuously remarks that in his history he carefully omitted whatever tended to discredit the church, and that he piously magnified all that conduced to her glory.

The same glorious principle was scrupulously adhered to by all the historians of that time.

Pharoah's chariots were still visible on the sands of the Red Sea, and that they had been miraculously preserved from the winds and waves as perpetual witnesses of the great miracle there performed.

It is safe to say that every truth in the histories of those times is the result of accident or mistake.

They accounted for everything as the work of good and evil spirits. With cause and effect they had nothing to do. Facts were in no way related to each other. God, governed by infinite caprice, filled the world with miracles and disconnected events. From the quiver of his hatred came the arrows of famine, pestilence, and death.

The moment that the idea is abandoned that all is natural; that all phenomena are the necessary links in the endless chain of being, the conception of history becomes impossible. With the ghosts, the present is not the child of the past, nor the mother of the future. In the domain of religion all is chance, accident, and caprice.

Do not forget, I pray you, that our creeds were written by the contemporaries of these historians.

The same idea was applied to law. It was believed by our intelligent ancestors that all law derived its sacredness and its binding force from the fact that it had been communicated to man by the ghosts. Of course it was not pretended that the ghosts told everybody the law; but they told it to a few, and the few told it to the people, and the people, as a rule, paid them exceedingly well for their trouble. It was thousands of ages before the people commenced making laws for themselves, and strange as it may appear, most of these laws were vastly superior to the ghost article. Through the web and woof of human legislation began to run and shine and glitter the golden thread of justice.

During these years of darkness it was believed that rather than see an act of injustice done; rather than see the innocent suffer; rather than see the guilty triumph, some ghost would interfere. This belief, as a rule, gave great satisfaction to the victorious party, and as the other man was dead, no complaint was heard from him.

This doctrine was the sanctification of brute force and chance. They had trials by battle, by fire, by water, and by lot. Persons were made to grasp hot iron, and if it burned them their guilt was established. Others, with tied hands and feet, were cast into the sea, and if they sank, the verdict of guilty was unanimous, if they did not sink, they were in league with devils.

So in England, persons charged with crime could appeal to the corsned. The corsned was a piece of the sacramental bread. If the defendant could swallow this piece he went acquit. Godwin, Earl of Kent, in the time of Edward the Confessor, appealed to the corsned. He failed to swallow it and was choked to death.

The ghosts and their followers always took delight in torture, in cruel and unusual punishments. For the infraction of most of their laws, death was the penalty death produced by stoning and by fire. Sometimes, when man committed only murder, he was allowed to flee to some city of refuge. Murder was a crime against man. But for saying certain words, or denying certain doctrines, or for picking up sticks on certain days, or for worshipping the

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wrong ghost, or for failing to pray to the right one, or for laughing at a priest, or for saying that wine was not blood, or that bread was not flesh, or for failing to regard ram's horns as artillery, for insisting that a dry bone was scarcely sufficient to take the place of water works, or that a raven, as a rule, made a poor landlord: death, produced by all the ways that the ingenuity of hatred could devise, was the penalty.

Law is a growth it is a science. Right and wrong exist in the nature of things. Things are not right because they are commanded, nor wrong because they are prohibited. There are real crimes enough without creating artificial ones. All progress in legislation has for centuries consisted in repealing the laws of the ghosts.

The idea of right and wrong is born of man's capacity to enjoy and suffer. If man could not suffer, if he could not inflict injury upon his fellow, if he could neither feel nor inflict pain, the idea of right and wrong never would have entered his brain. But for this, the word conscience never would have passed the lips of man.

There is one good happiness. There is but one sin selfishness. All law should be for the preservation of the one and the destruction of the other.

Under the regime of the ghosts, laws were not supposed to exist in the nature of things. They were supposed to be simply the irresponsible command of a ghost. These commands were not supposed to rest upon reason, they were the product of arbitrary will.

The penalties for the violation of these laws were as cruel as the laws were senseless and absurd. Working on the Sabbath and murder were both punished with death. The tendency of such laws is to blot from the human heart the sense of justice.

To show you how perfectly every department of knowledge, or ignorance rather, was saturated with superstition, I will for a moment refer to the science of language.

It was thought by our fathers, that Hebrew was the original language; that it was taught to Adam in the Garden of Eden by the Almighty, and that consequently all languages came from, and could be traced to, the Hebrew. Every fact inconsistent with that idea was discarded. According to the ghosts, the trouble at the tower of Babel accounted for the fact that all people did not speak Hebrew. The Babel business settled all questions in the science of language.

After a time, so many facts were found to be inconsistent with the Hebrew idea that it began to fall into disrepute, and other languages began to compete for the honor of being the original.

Andre Kempe, in 1569, published a work on the language of Paradise, in which he maintained that God spoke to Adam in Swedish; that Adam answered in Danish; and that the serpent which appears to me quite probable spoke to Eve in French. Erro, in a work published at Madrid, took the ground that Basque was the language spoken in the Garden of Eden; but in 1580 Goropius published his celebrated work at Antwerp, in which he put the whole matter at rest by showing, beyond all doubt, that the language spoken in Paradise was neither more nor less than plain Holland Dutch.

The real founder of the science of language was Liebnitz, a contemporary of Sir Isaac Newton. He discarded the idea that all languages could be traced to one language. He maintained that language was a natural growth. Experience teaches us that this must be so. Words are continually dying and continually being born. Words are naturally and necessarily produced. Words are the garments of thought, the robes of ideas. Some are as rude as the skins of wild beasts, and others glisten and glitter like silk and gold. They have been born of hatred and revenge; of love and self-sacrifice; of hope and fear, of agony and joy. These words are born of the terror and beauty of nature. The stars have fashioned them. In them mingle the darkness and the dawn. From everything they have taken something. Words are the crystalizations of human history, of all that man has enjoyed and suffered his

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victories and defeats all that he has lost and won. Words are the shadows of all that has been the mirrors of all that is.

The ghosts also enlightened our fathers in astronomy and geology. According to them the earth was made out of nothing, and a little more nothing having been taken than was used in the construction of this world, the stars were made out of what was left over. Cosmas, in the sixth century, taught that the stars were impelled by angels, who either carried them on their shoulders, rolled them in front of them, or drew them after. He also taught that each angel that pushed a star took great pains to observe what the other angels were doing, so that the relative distances between the stars might always remain the same. He also gave his idea as to the form of the world.

He stated that the world was a vast parallelogram; that on the outside was a strip of land, like the frame of a common slate; that then there was a strip of water, and in the middle a great piece of land; that Adam and Eve lived on the outer strip; that their descendants, with the exception of the Noah family, were drowned by a flood on this outer strip; that the ark finally rested on the middle piece of land where we now are. He accounted for night and day by saying that on the outside strip of land there was a high mountain, around which the sun and moon revolved, and that when the sun was on the other side of the mountain, it was night; and when on this side, it was day.

He also declared that the earth was flat. This he proved by many passages from the Bible. Among other reasons for believing the earth to be flat, he brought forward the following: We are told in the New Testament that Christ shall come again in glory and power. and all the world shall see him. Now, if the world is round how are the people on the other side going to see Christ when he comes? That settled the question, and the church not only endorsed the book, but declared that whoever believed less or more than stated by Cosmas, was a heretic.

In those blessed days, Ignorance was a king and Science an outcast.

They knew the moment this earth ceased to be the center of the universe, and became a mere speck in the starry heaven of existence, that their religion would become a childish fable of the past.

In the name and by the authority of the ghosts, men enslaved their fellow-men; they trampled upon the rights of women and children. In the name and by the authority of ghosts, they bought and sold and destroyed each other; they filled heaven with tyrants and earth with slaves, the present with despair and the future with horror. In the name and by the authority of the ghosts, they imprisoned the human mind, polluted the conscience, hardened the heart, subverted justice, crowned robbery, sainted hypocrisy, and extinguished for a thousand years the torch of reason.

I have endeavored, in some faint degree, to show you what has happened, and what always will happen when men are governed by superstition and fear; when they desert the sublime standard of reason; when they take the words of others and do not investigate for themselves.

Even the great men of those days were nearly as weak in this matter as the most ignorant. Kepler, one of the greatest men of the world, an astronomer second to none, although he plucked from the stars the secrets of the universe, was an astrologer, and really believed that he could predict the career of a man by finding what star was in the ascendant at his birth. This great man breathed, so to speak, the atmosphere of his time. He believed in the music of the spheres, and assigned alto, bass, tenor, and treble to certain stars.

Tycho Brahe, another astronomer, kept an idiot, whose disconnected and meaningless words he carefully set down, and then put them together in such manner as to make prophecies, and then waited patiently to see them fulfilled. Luther believed that he had actually seen the devil, and had discussed points of theology with him. The human mind was in chains. Every idea almost was a monster. Thought was deformed. Facts were looked upon as worthless. Only the wonderful was worth preserving. Things that actually happened were not considered worth

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recording; real occurrences were too common. Everybody expected the miraculous.

The ghosts were supposed to be busy; devils were thought to be the most industrious things in the universe, and with these imps, every occurrence of an unusual character was in some way connected. There was no order, no serenity, no certainty in anything. Everything depended upon ghosts and phantoms. Man was, for the most part, at the mercy of malevolent spirits. He protected himself as best he could with holy water and tapers and wafers and cathedrals. He made noises and rung bells to frighten the ghosts, and he made music to charm them. He used smoke to choke them, and incense to please them. He wore beads and crosses. He said prayers, and hired others to say them. He fasted when he was hungry, and feasted when he was not. He believed everything that seemed unreasonable, just to appease the ghosts. He humbled himself. He crawled in the dust. He shut the doors and windows, and excluded every ray of light from the temple of the soul. He debauched and polluted his own mind, and toiled night and day to repair the walls of his own prison. From the garden of his heart he plucked and trampled upon the holy flowers of pity.

The priests reveled in horrible descriptions of hell. Concerning the wrath of God, they grew eloquent. They denounced man as totally depraved. They made reason blasphemy, and pity a crime. Nothing so delighted them as painting the torments and sufferings of the lost. Over the worm that never dies they grew poetic; and the second death filled them with a kind of holy delight. According to them, the smoke and cries ascending from hell were the perfume and music of heaven.

At the risk of being tiresome, I have said what I have to show you the productions of the human mind, when enslaved; the effects of wide-spread ignorance the results of fear. I want to convince you that every form of slavery is a viper, that sooner or later, will strike its poison fangs into the bosoms of men.

The first great step towards progress, is, for man to cease to be the slave of man; the second, to cease to be the slave of the monsters of his own creation of the ghosts and phantoms of the air.

For ages the human race was imprisoned. Through the bars and grates came a few struggling rays of light. Against these grates and bars Science pressed its pale and thoughtful face, wooed by the holy dawn of human advancement.

Men found that the real was the useful; that what a man knows is better than what a ghost says; that an event is more valuable than a prophecy. They found that diseases were not produced by spirits, and could not be cured by frightening them away. They found that death was as natural as life. They began to study the anatomy and chemistry of the human body, and found that all was natural and within the domain of law.

The conjurer and sorcerer were discarded, and the physician and surgeon employed. They found that the earth was not flat; that the stars were not mere specks. They found that being born under a particular planet had nothing to do with the fortunes of men.

The astrologer was discharged and the astronomer took his place.

They found that the earth had swept through the constellations for millions of ages. They found that good and evil were produced by natural causes, and not by ghosts; that man could not be good enough or bad enough to stop or cause a rain; that diseases were produced as naturally as grass, and were not sent as punishments upon man for failing to believe a certain creed. They found that man, through intelligence, could take advantage of the forces of nature that he could make the waves, the winds, the flames, and the lightnings of heaven do his bidding and minister to his wants. They found that the ghosts knew nothing of benefit to man; that they were utterly ignorant of geology of astronomy of geography; that they knew nothing of history; that they were poor doctors and worse surgeons; that they knew nothing of law and less of justice; that they were without brains. and utterly destitute of hearts; that they knew nothing of the rights of men; that they were despisers of women, the haters of

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progress, the enemies of science, and the destroyers of liberty.

The condition of the world during the Dark Ages shows exactly the result of enslaving the bodies and souls of men. In those days there was no freedom. Labor was despised, and a laborer was considered but little above a beast. Ignorance, like a vast cowl, covered the brain of the world, and superstition ran riot with the imagination of man. The air was filled with angels, with demons and monsters. Credulity sat upon the throne of the soul, and Reason was an exiled king. A man to be distinguished must be a soldier or a monk. War and theology, that is to say, murder and hypocrisy, were the principal employments of man. Industry was a slave, theft was commerce; murder was war, hypocrisy was religion.

Every Christian country maintained that it was no robbery to take the property of Mohammedans by force, and no murder to kill the owners. Lord Bacon was the first man of note who maintained that a Christian country was bound to keep its plighted faith with an infidel nation. Reading and writing were considered dangerous arts. Every layman who could read and write was suspected of being a heretic. All thought was discouraged. They forged chains of superstition for the minds, and manacles of iron for the bodies of men. The earth was ruled by the cowl and sword, by the maitre and scepter, by the altar and throne, by Fear and Force, by Ignorance and Faith, by ghouls and ghosts.

In the fifteenth century the following law was in force in England:

"That whosoever reads the Scriptures in the mother tongue, shall forfeit land, cattle, life, and goods from their heirs forever, and so be condemned for heretics to God, enemies to the crown, and most arrant traitors to the land."

During the first year this law was in force thirty–nine were hanged for its violation and their bodies burned.

In the sixteenth century men were burned because they failed to kneel to a procession of monks.

The slightest word uttered against the superstition of the time was punished with death.

Even the reformers, so–called, of those days, had no idea of intellectual liberty no idea even of toleration. Luther, Knox, Calvin, believed in religious liberty only when they were in the minority. The moment they were clothed with power they began to exterminate with fire and sword.

Castalio was the first minister who advocated the liberty of the soul. He was regarded by the reformers as a criminal, and treated as though he had committed the crime of crimes.

Bodinus, a lawyer of France, about the same time, wrote a few words in favor of the freedom of conscience, but public opinion was overwhelmingly against him. The people were ready, anxious, and willing, with whip, and chain, and fire, to drive from the mind of man the heresy that he had a right to think.

Montaigne, a man blest with so much common sense that he was the most uncommon man of his time, was the first to raise a voice against torture in France. But what was the voice of one man against the terrible cry of ignorant, infatuated, superstitious and malevolent millions? It was the cry of a drowning man in the wild roar of the cruel sea.

In spite of the efforts of the brave few the infamous war against the freedom of the soul was waged until at least one hundred millions of human beings fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters with hopes, loves, and aspirations like ourselves, were sacrificed upon the cruel altar of an ignorant faith. They perished in every way by which death can be produced. Every nerve of pain was sought out and touched by the believers in ghosts.

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For my part I glory in the fact, that here in the New World, in the United States, liberty of conscience was first guaranteed to man, and that the Constitution of the United States was the first great decree entered in the high court of human equity forever divorcing church and state, the first injunction granted against the interference of the ghosts. This was one of the grandest steps ever taken by the human race in the direction of Progress.

You will ask what has caused this wonderful change in three hundred years. And I answer the inventions and discoveries of the few; the brave thoughts, the heroic utterances of the few; the acquisition of a few facts.

Besides, you must remember that every wrong in some way tends to abolish itself. It is hard to make a lie stand always. A lie will not fit a fact. It will only fit another lie made for the purpose. The life of a lie is simply a question of time. Nothing but truth is immortal. The nobles and kings quarreled; the priests began to dispute; the ideas of government began to change.

In 1441 printing was discovered. At that time the past was a vast cemetery with hardly an epitaph. The ideas of men had mostly perished in the brain that produced them. The lips of the human race had been sealed. Printing gave pinions to thought. It preserved ideas. It made it possible for man to bequeath to the future the riches of his brain, the wealth of his soul. At first, it was used to flood the world with the mistakes of the ancients, but since that time it has been flooding the world with light.

When people read they begin to reason, and when they reason they progress. This was another grand step in the direction of Progress.

The discovery of powder, that put the peasant almost upon a par with the prince; that put an end to the so-called age of chivalry; that released a vast number of men from the armies; that gave pluck and nerve a chance with brute strength.

The discovery of America, whose shores were trod by the restless feet of adventure; that brought people holding every shade of superstition together; that gave the world an opportunity to compare notes, and to laugh at the follies of each other. Out of this strange mingling of all creeds, and superstitions, and facts, and theories, and countless opinions, came the Great Republic.

Every fact has pushed a superstition from the brain and a ghost from the clouds. Every mechanical art is an educator. Every loom, every reaper and mower, every steamboat, every locomotive, every engine, every press, every telegraph, is a missionary of Science and an apostle of Progress. Every mill, every furnace, every building with its wheels and levers, in which something is made for the convenience, for the use, and for the comfort and elevation of man, is a church, and every schoolhouse is a temple.

Education is the most radical thing in the world.

To teach the alphabet is to inaugurate a revolution.

To build a schoolhouse is to construct a fort.

Every library is an arsenal filled with the weapons and ammunition of Progress, and every fact is a monitor with sides of iron and a turret of steel.

I thank the inventors, the discoverers, the thinkers. I thank Columbus and Magellan. I thank Galileo, and Copernicus, and Kepler, and Descartes, and Newton, and Laplace. I thank Locke, and Hume, and Bacon, and Shakespeare, and Kant, and Fichte, and Leibnitz, and Goethe. I thank Fulton, and Watts, and Volta, and Galvani, and Franklin, and Morse, who made lightning the messenger of man. I thank Humboldt, the Shakespeare of science. I thank Crompton and Arkwright, from whose brains leaped the looms and spindles that clothe the world.

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I thank Luther for protesting against the abuses of the church, and I denounce him because he was the enemy of liberty. I thank Calvin for writing a book in favor of religious freedom, and I abhor him because he burned Servetus. I thank Knox for resisting Episcopal persecution, and I hate him because he persecuted in his turn. I thank the Puritans for saying "Resistance to tyrants is obedience to God," and yet I am compelled to say that they were tyrants themselves. I thank Thomas Paine because he was a believer in liberty, and because he did as much to make my country free as any other human being. I thank Voltaire, that great man who, for half a century, was the intellectual emperor of Europe, and who, from his throne at the foot of the Alps, pointed the finger of scorn at every hypocrite in Christendom. I thank Darwin, Haeckel and Buchner, Spencer, Tyndall and Huxley, Draper, Lecky and Buckle.

I thank the inventors, the discoverers, the thinkers, the scientists, the explorers. I thank the honest millions who have toiled.

I thank the brave men and women with brave thoughts. They are the Atlases upon whose broad and mighty shoulders rests the grand fabric of civilization. They are the men who have broken, and are still breaking, the chains of Superstition. They are the Titans who carried Olympus by assault, and who will soon stand victors upon Sinai's crags.

We are beginning to learn that to exchange a mistake for the truth a superstition for a fact to ascertain the real is to progress.

Happiness is the only possible good, and all that tends to the happiness of man is right, and is of value. All that tends to develop the bodies and minds of men; all that gives us better houses, better clothes, better food, better pictures, grander music, better heads, better hearts; all that renders us more intellectual and more loving, nearer just; that makes us better husbands and wives, better children, better citizens all these things combined produce what I call Progress.

Man advances only as he overcomes the obstructions of Nature, and this can be done only by labor and by thought. Labor is the foundation of all. Without labor, and without great labor, progress is impossible. The progress of the world depends upon the men who walk in the fresh furrows and through the rustling corn; upon those who sow and reap; upon those whose faces are radiant with the glare of furnace fires; upon the delvers in the mines, and the workers in shops; upon those who give to the winter air the ringing music of the axe; upon those who battle with the boisterous billows of the sea; upon the inventors and discoverers; upon the brave thinkers.

From the surplus produced by labor, schools and universities are built and fostered. From this surplus the painter is paid for the productions of the pencil; the sculptor for chiseling shapeless rock into forms divinely beautiful, and the poet for singing the hopes, the loves, the memories, and the aspirations of the world. This surplus has given us the books in which we converse with the dead and living intellectual kings and queens of the human race. It has given us all there is of beauty, of elegance, and of refined happiness.

I am aware that there is a vast difference of opinion as to what progress really is; that many denounce the ideas of to-day as destructive of all happiness of all good. I know that there are many worshipers of the past. They venerate the ancient because it is ancient. They see no beauty in anything from which they do not blow the dust of ages with the breath of praise. They say, no masters like the old; no religion, no governments like the ancient; no orators, no poets, no statesmen like those who have been dust for two thousand years. Others love the modern simply because it is modern.

We should have gratitude enough to acknowledge the obligations we are under to the great and heroic of antiquity, and independence enough not to believe what they said simply because they said it.

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With the idea that labor is the basis of progress goes the truth that labor must be free. The laborer must be a free man or woman.

The free man, working for wife and child, gets his head and hands in partnership.

To do the greatest amount of work in the shortest space of time, is the problem of free labor.

Slavery does the least work in the longest space of time.

Free labor will give us wealth. Free thought will give us truth.

Slowly but surely man is freeing his imagination of these sexless phantoms, of these cruel ghosts. Slowly but surely he is rising above the superstitions of the past. He is learning to rely upon himself. He is beginning to find that labor is the only prayer that ought to be answered, and that hoping, toiling, aspiring, suffering men and women are of more importance than all the ghosts that ever wandered through the fenceless fields of space.

The believers in ghosts claim still, that they are the only wise and virtuous people upon the earth; claim still, that there is a difference between them and unbelievers so vast, that they will be infinitely rewarded, and the others infinitely punished.

I ask you to-night, do the theories and doctrines of the theologians satisfy the heart or brain of the nineteenth century?

Have the churches the confidence of mankind?

Does the merchant give credit to a man because he belongs to a church?

Does the banker loan money to a man because he is a Methodist or Baptist?

Will a certificate of good standing in any church be taken as collateral security for one dollar?

Will you take the word of a church member, or his note, or his oath, simply because he is a church member?

Are the clergy, as a class, better, kinder and more generous to their families to their fellow-men than doctors, lawyers, merchants and farmers?

Does a belief in ghosts and unreasonable things necessarily make people honest?

When a man loses confidence in Moses, must the people lose confidence in him?

Does not the credit system in morals breed extravagance in sin?

Why send missionaries to other lands while every penitentiary in ours is filled with criminals?

Is it philosophical to say that they who do right carry a cross?

Is it a source of joy to think that perdition is the destination of nearly all of the children of men?

Is it worth while to quarrel about original sin when there is so much copy?

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Does it pay to dispute about baptism, and the Trinity, and predestination, and apostolic succession and the infallibility of churches, of popes and of books? Does all this do any good?

Are the theologians welcomers of new truths? Are they noted for their candor? Do they treat an opponent with common fairness? Are they investigators? Do they pull forward, or do they hold back?

Is science indebted to the church for a solitary fact?

What church is an asylum for a persecuted truth?

What great reform has been inaugurated by the church?

Did the church abolish slavery?

Has the church raised its voice against war?

I used to think that there was in religion no real restraining force. Upon this point my mind has changed. Religion will prevent man from committing artificial crimes and offenses.

A man committed murder. The evidence was so conclusive that he confessed his guilt.

He was asked why he killed his fellow-man.

He replied: "For money."

"Did you get any?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"Fifteen cents."

"What did you do with this money?"

"Spent it."

"What for?"

"Liquor."

"What else did you find upon the dead man?"

"He had his dinner in a bucket some meat and bread."

"What did you do with that?"

"I ate the bread."

"What did you do with the meat?"

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"I threw it away."

"Why?"

"It was Friday."

Just to the extent that man has freed himself from the dominion of ghosts he has advanced. Just to the extent that he has freed himself from the tyrants of his own creation he has progressed. Just to the extent that he has investigated for himself he has lost confidence in superstition.

With knowledge obedience becomes intelligent acquiescence it is no longer degrading. Acquiescence in the understood in the known is the act of a sovereign, not of a slave. It ennobles, it does not degrade.

Man has found that he must give liberty to others in order to have it himself. He has found that a master is also a slave; that a tyrant is himself a serf. He has found that governments should be founded and administered by man and for man; that the rights of all are equal; that the powers that be are not ordained by God; that woman is at least the equal of man; that men existed before books; that religion is one of the phases of thought through which the world is passing; that all creeds were made by man; that everything is natural; that a miracle is an impossibility; that we know nothing of origin and destiny; that concerning the unknown we are all equally ignorant; that the pew has the right to contradict what the pulpit asserts; that man is responsible only to himself and those he injures, and that all have a right to think.

True religion must be free. Without perfect liberty of the mind there can be no true religion. Without liberty the brain is a dungeon the mind a convict. The slave may bow and cringe and crawl. but he cannot adore he cannot love.

True religion is the perfume of a free and grateful heart. True religion is a subordination of the passions to the perceptions of the intellect. True religion is not a theory it is a practice. It is not a creed it is a life.

A theory that is afraid of investigation is undeserving a place in the human mind.

I do not pretend to tell what all the truth is. I do not pretend to have fathomed the abyss, nor to have floated on outstretched wings level with the dim heights of thought. I simply plead for freedom. I denounce the cruelties and horrors of slavery. I ask for light and air for the souls of men. I say, take off those chains break those manacles free those limbs release that brain! I plead for the right to think to reason to investigate. I ask that the future may be enriched with the honest thoughts of men. I implore every human being to be a soldier in the army of progress.

I will not invade the rights of others. You have no right to erect your toll-gate upon the highways of thought. You have no right to leap from the hedges of superstition and strike down the pioneers of the human race. You have no right to sacrifice the liberties of man upon the altars of ghosts. Believe what you may; preach what you desire; have all the forms and ceremonies you please; exercise your liberty in your own way but extend to all others the same right.

I will not attack your doctrines nor your creeds if they accord liberty to me. If they hold thought to be dangerous if they aver that doubt is a crime, then I attack them one and all, because they enslave the minds of men.

I attack the monsters, the phantoms of imagination that have ruled the world. I attack slavery. I ask for room room for the human mind.

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Why should we sacrifice a real world that we have, for one we know not of? Why should we enslave ourselves? Why should we forge fetters for our own hands? Why should we be the slaves of phantoms. The darkness of barbarism was the womb of these shadows. In the light of science they cannot cloud the sky forever. They have reddened the hands of man with innocent blood. They made the cradle a curse, and the grave a place of torment.

They blinded the eyes and stopped the ears of the human race. They subverted all ideas of justice by promising infinite rewards for finite virtues, and threatening infinite punishment for finite offenses.

They filled the future with heavens and with hells, with the shining peaks of selfish joy and the lurid abysses of flame. For ages they kept the world in ignorance and awe, in want and misery, in fear and chains.

I plead for light, for air, for opportunity. I plead for individual independence. I plead for the rights of labor and of thought. I plead for a chainless future. Let the ghosts go justice remains. Let them disappear men and women and children are left. Let the monsters fade away the world is here with its hills and seas and plains, with its seasons of smiles and frowns, its spring of leaf and bud, its summer of shade and flower and murmuring stream; its autumn with the laden boughs, when the withered banners of the corn are still, and gathered fields are growing strangely wan; while death, poetic death, with hands that color what they touch, weaves in the Autumn wood her tapestries of gold and brown.

The world remains with its winters and homes and firesides, where grow and bloom the virtues of our race. All these are left; and music, with its sad and thrilling voice, and all there is of art and song and hope and love and aspiration high. All these remain. Let the ghosts go we will worship them no more.

Man is greater than these phantoms. Humanity is grander than all the creeds, than all the books. Humanity is the great sea, and these creeds, and books, and religions, are but the waves of a day. Humanity is the sky, and these religions and dogmas and theories are but the mists and clouds changing continually, destined finally to melt away.

That which is founded upon slavery, and fear and ignorance, cannot endure. In the religion of the future there will be men and women and children, all the aspirations of the soul, and all the tender humanities of the heart.

Let the ghosts go. We will worship them no more. Let them cover their eyeless sockets with their fleshless hands and fade forever from the imaginations of men.