

well say that the laws of nature are whatever we imagine them to be. But we do not go far before we find that, instead of being pliant to our will, they are rigid and inexorable, and we dash ourselves against them to our own destruction. So God does not bend to human thought any more than to human will. The more we study Him, the more we find that He is not what we imagined Him to be: that he is far greater than any image of Him that we could frame.

But, after all, you rejoin that the conception of a Supreme Being is merely an abstract idea, of no practical importance, with no bearing upon human life. I answer it is of immeasurable importance. Let go the idea of God, and you have let go the highest moral restraint. There is no Ruler above man, he is a law unto himself—a law which is as impotent to produce order, and to hold society together, as man is with his little hands to hold the stars in their courses.

I know how you reason against the Divine existence from the moral disorder of the world. The argument is one that takes strong hold of the imagination, and may be used with tremendous effect. You set forth in colors none too strong the injustice that prevails in the relations of men to one another—the inequalities of society; the haughtiness of the rich and the misery of the poor; you draw lurid pictures of the vice and crime which run riot in the great capitals which are the centres of civilization; and when you have wound up your audience to the highest pitch, you ask, "How can it be that there is a just God in heaven, who looks down upon the earth and sees all this horrible confusion, and yet does not lift His hand to avenge the innocent or punish the guilty?" To this I will make but one answer: Does it convince yourself? I do not mean to imply that you are conscious of insincerity. But an orator is sometimes carried away by his own eloquence, and states things more strongly than he would in his cooler moments. So I venture to ask: With all your tendency to skepticism, do you really believe that there is no moral government of the world—no Power behind nature "making for righteousness?" Are there no retributions in history? When Lincoln stood on the field of Gettysburg, so lately drenched with blood, and, reviewing the carnage of that terrible day, accepted it as the punishment of our national sins, was

it a mere theatrical flourish that he lifted his hand to heaven, and said, "Just and true are thy ways, Lord God Almighty?"

THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL.

Having settled it to your own satisfaction that there is no God, you proceed in the same easy way to dispose of that other belief which lies at the foundation of all religion—the immortality of the soul. With an air of modesty and diffidence that would carry an audience by storm you confess your ignorance of what perhaps others are better acquainted with, when you say, "This world is all that I know anything about, *so far as I recollect.*" This is very wittily put, and some may suppose it contains an argument; but do you really mean to say that you do not know anything except what you "recollect," or what you have seen with your eyes? Perhaps you never saw your grandparents; but have you any more doubt of their existence than of that of your father and mother whom you did see?

Here, as when you speak of the existence of God, you carefully avoid any positive affirmation: you neither affirm nor deny. You are ready for whatever may "turn up." In your jaunty style, if you find yourself hereafter in some new and unexpected situation, you will accept it and make the best of it, and be "as ready as the next man to enter on any remunerative occupation!"

But while airing this pleasant fancy, you plainly regard the hope of another life as but a beggar's dream—the momentary illusion of one who, stumbling along life's highway, sits him down by the roadside, footsore and weary, cold and hungry, and falls asleep, and dreams of a time when he shall have riches and plenty. Poor creature! let him dream; it helps him to forget his misery, and may give him a little courage for his rude awaking to the hard reality of life. But it is all a dream, which dissolves in thin air, and floats away and disappears. This illustration I do not take from you, but simply choose to set forth what (as I infer from the sentences above quoted and many like expressions) may describe, not unfairly, your state of mind. Your treatment of the subject is one of trifling. You do not speak of it in a serious way, but lightly and flippantly, as if it were all a matter of fancy and conjecture, and not worthy of sober consideration.