

Such superstition is one of the greatest scourges of the human race. It overthrows the very foundations of morality. In place of the natural sense of right and wrong which is written in men's conscience and hearts, it introduces an artificial standard, by which the order of things is reversed: right is made wrong, and wrong is made right. It makes that a virtue which is not a virtue, and that a crime which is not a crime. Religion consists in a round of observances that have no relation whatever to natural goodness but which rather exclude it by being a substitute for it. Penances and pilgrimages take the place of justice and mercy, benevolence and charity. It is a mortal sin to break caste, but a venial offence to lead a vicious life. One may be very holy, according to the Hindoo idea of holiness, and yet be guilty of every vice and every crime. The Thugs, who were the stranglers of India, made robbery and murder not only a business, but a religion, and always sought the favor of the goddess Kali before setting out on their expeditions. Such a Religion, so far from being a purifier, is the greatest corruptor of morals, so that it is no extravagance to say of the Hindoos, who are a gentle race, that they might be virtuous and good if they were not so religious. But this colossal superstition weighs upon their very existence, crushing out even natural virtue. Such a religion is an immeasurable curse. It is the most terrible of tyrannies, for there is no bondage like the bondage of the soul. Whatever power can destroy it—I care not whether it be a political revolution, or some convulsion of nature—an earthquake, which shall shake the solid earth—whatever the cause, whether moral or material, if only it be radical enough, it will break up the old stagnation, and a purer air from the Indian Ocean will begin to blow over a land that has been dead for thousands of years.

I hope this language is strong enough to satisfy even your own intense hatred of superstition. You cannot loathe it more than I do. So far we agree perfectly. But unfortunately you do not limit your crusade to the Religions of Asia, but turn the same style of argument against the Religion of Europe and America, and indeed against the religious belief and worship of every country and clime. In this matter you make no distinctions: you would sweep them all away; church and

cathedral must go with the temple and the pagoda, as alike manifestations of human credulity, and proofs of the intellectual feebleness and folly of mankind. While under the impression of that memorable evening at your house, I took up some of your public addresses, and experienced a strange revulsion of feeling. I could hardly believe my eyes as I read, so inexpressibly was I shocked. Things which I held sacred you not only rejected with unbelief, but sneered at with contempt. Your words were full of a bitterness so unlike anything I had heard from your lips, that I could not reconcile the two, till I reflected that in Robert Ingersoll (as in the most of us) there were two men, who were not only distinct, but contrary the one to the other—the one gentle and sweet-tempered; the other delighting in war as his native element. Between the two, I have a decided preference for the former. I have no dispute with the quiet and peaceable gentleman, whose kindly spirit makes sunshine in his home; but it is *that other man* over yonder, who comes forward into the arena like a gladiator, defiant and belligerent, that rouses my antagonism. And yet I do not intend to *stand up* even against him; but if he will only *sit down* and listen patiently, and answer in those soft tones of voice which he knows so well how to use, we can have a quiet talk, which will certainly do him no harm, while it relieves my troubled mind.

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD.

What, then, is the basis of this Religion which you despise? At the foundation of every form of religious faith and worship, is the idea of God. Here you take your stand: you do not believe in God. Of course you do not deny absolutely the existence of a Creative power: for that would be to assume a knowledge which no human being can possess. How small is the distance that we can see before us! The candle of our intelligence throws its beams but a little way, beyond which the circle of light is compassed by universal darkness. Upon this no one insists more than yourself. I have heard you discourse upon the insignificance of man in a way to put many preachers to shame. You seem to take a delight in exposing the feebleness of his powers and the limitations of his knowledge. This you do to show what a conceit it is in this poor little manikin, with his thimble-full of brains, to assume