

## A WORD TO CRUSOE.

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My thoughts often go out to the men and women who live on islands. Yesterday I met a man who dwells hard by a cathedral city. The church bells ring incessantly, but they make no response in his heart. A while ago he bowed the knee to Christ. But now he has caught the music of a finer hymn than that which sings praise to the Son of Mary. He pledges himself to serve the new order of science and reason. All about him his Christian neighbors troop to the worship of the ancient Yahoo of the Jews. He stands alone; he lives on an island.

I can think, also, of a man who lives under my feet. Out in the far Antipodes he has his little cottage, which overlooks the vast Southern Sea. By day he diligently chops wood; by the evening lamp he cons books that breathe of the Coming Day and prophesy the fall of the Church that now is. His neighbors scout him as a heretic; they give him to understand that a special allotment of sulphur is reserved for him in the grim territory of hell. He smiles; he reads; he argues; he stands steadfast; he lives on an island.

I know a woman who has passed years in a tiny village, and, amid a hundred social pressures, has resisted the insolence of orthodoxy, refrained from church-going, and quietly and persistently propagated better views of life and history. Brave soul! she has lived on an island.

I know another woman, young, alert, quick of imagination and broad in sympathies, who is a prisoner in a Calvinistic home. Deacons flutter in and out like bats in the gloaming, and the psalms keep up their monotonous wail. And she longs to go out into the open world; she yearns for a more wholesome environment; she lives on an island.

These four men and women are but types of a great multitude. They are to-day our noblest nonconformists. There was an age when Christians themselves faced such difficulties, and bore them with manful loyalty to the Ideal. The times are changed. The Christians loll easily at the banquet of convention and nod their heads to the music of the mode. It is the turn of the Freethinker to play the part of the proscribed. These men and women can smirk over the prospect of no promised land. Angels minister not to them in their temptation. No re-assuring dove cleaves the sky, to bring celestial blessings upon their heads. In silence they persist. Faithfully they bear witness. They ask for no reward. Their fidelity is their glory. I think of them in their splendid exile, and I contrast them with the crowd. I do not despise the crowd; but I remember, with a feeling of triumph, that this crowd will sooner or later follow the Freethought nonconformists. To these Crusoes, these spiritually-isolated sisters and brothers