

AN OPEN LETTER TO ROBERT G. INGERSOLL.

BY HENRY M. FIELD, D. D. OF THE NEW YORK "EVANGELIST."

DEAR SIR: I am glad that I know you, even though some of my brethren look upon you as a monster because of your unbelief. Nothing is so terrible as the unknown. Fear ends where knowledge begins; and so if I am in danger of being panic-struck by an apparition, I walk straight up to it and speak to it, as Horatio speaks to the ghost in Hamlet, and lay hold of it, when straightway it disappears at the touch of a fleshly hand, or comes down to the proportions of ordinary humanity. The spectre of which we are afraid is but human. Thus I have found you human, yes, very human, a man with whom I could converse frankly, but kindly, without the least reserve, as I propose to do now.

You have taken me at a disadvantage in permitting me to see you in your own home. There is nothing which disarms one like a domestic scene, a peep into an interior, seeing a man in the midst of his family, surrounded by his wife and children, where he who is used to combat has laid aside his weapons of war, and appears in the gentlest mood, as if he had never fought a battle in the world. I shall never forget the long evening I spent at your house in Washington; and in what I have to say, however it may fail to convince you, I trust you will feel that I have not shown myself unworthy of your courtesy or confidence.

Your conversation then and at other times interested me greatly. I recognized at once the elements of your power over large audiences, in your wit and dramatic talent—personating character and imitating tones of voice and expressions of countenance—and your remarkable use of language, which even in familiar talk often rose to a high degree of eloquence. All this was a keen intellectual stimulus. I was for the most part a listener, but as we talked freely of religious matters, I protested against your unbelief as utterly without reason. Yet there was no offence given or taken, and we parted, I trust, with a feeling of mutual respect.

Still further, we found many points of sympathy. I do not hesitate to say that there are many things in which I agree with you, in which I love what you love

and hate what you hate. A man's hatreds are not the least important part of him: they are among the best indications of his character. you love truth, and hate lying and hypocrisy—all the petty arts and deceits of the world by which men represent themselves to be other than they are—as well as the pride and arrogance in which they assume superiority over their fellow-beings. Above all, you hate every form of injustice and oppression. Nothing moves your indignation so much as "man's inhumanity to man," and you mutter "curses not loud but deep" on the whole race of tyrants and oppressors, whom you would sweep from the face of the earth. And yet you do not hate oppression more than I, nor love liberty, more. Nor will I admit that you have any stronger desire for that intellectual liberty, to the attainment of which you look forward as the last and greatest emancipation of mankind.

THE CURSE OF SUPERSTITION.

Nor have you a greater horror of superstition. Indeed I might say that you cannot have so great, for the best of all reasons, that you have not seen so much of it: you have not stood on the banks of the Ganges, and seen the Hindoos by tens of thousands rushing wadly to throw themselves into the sacred river. It seems but yesterday that I was sitting on the back of an elephant; looking on this horrible scene of human degradation. Around me were fifty (perhaps a hundred) thousand dusky creatures in a delirium of fanaticism. What wretched objects they were, their limbs wasted and shrunken by their long pilgrimage! Some had measured the ground with their bodies and reached the river only to die; others brought the ashes of their dead to cast them on the bosom of the all-cleansing stream. There were the *jalkins*, the priests of Hindooism—squalid wretches, with matted hair and smeared bodies, making a sanctity out of their very filthiness. One could but shrink from contact with such loathsome specimens of humanity. Och, the beasts! If some power had but given me the mastery of these precious creatures, I would have made them bathe in the Ganges to some purpose, till their bodies were cleansed of the encrusted filth of years; and then have marched them off to some Indian rice-field, where they could have been put to hard work to earn an honest living.