

true, for right action ; and surely it is better, far better for the world that men should do right from wrong motives than that they should do wrong with the best intentions. What concerns society is conduct, not opinion : if only our actions are just and good, it matters not a straw to others whether our opinions be mistaken. The danger of false opinion, and it is a most serious one, is that it commonly leads to wrong action ; hence it is unquestionably a great evil and every effort should be made to correct it. But of the two evils wrong action is in itself infinitely worse than false opinion ; and all systems of religion or philosophy which lay more stress on right opinion than on right action, which exalt orthodoxy above virtue, are so far immoral and prejudicial to the best interests of mankind : they invert the true relative importance, the real ethical value, of thought and action, for it is by what we do, not by what we think, that we are useful or useless, beneficent or maleficent to our fellows. As a body of false opinions, therefore, superstition is indeed a most dangerous guide in practice, and the evils which it has wrought are incalculable. But vast as are these evils, they ought not to blind us to the benefit which superstition has conferred on society by furnishing the ignorant, the weak, and the foolish with a motive, bad though it be, for good conduct. It is a reed, a broken reed, which has yet supported the steps of many a poor erring brother, who but for it might have stumbled and fallen. It is a light, a dim and wavering light, which, if it has lured many a mariner on the breakers, has yet guided some wanderers on life's troubled sea into a haven of rest and peace. Once the harbour lights are passed and the ship is in port, it matters little whether the pilot steered by a Jack-o'-lantern or by the stars.

That, ladies and gentlemen, is my plea for Superstition. Perhaps it might be urged in mitigation of the sentence which will be passed on the hoary-headed offender when he stands at the judgment bar. Yet the sentence, do not doubt it, is death. But it will not be executed in our time. There will be a long, long reprieve. It is as his advocate, not as his executioner, that I have appeared before you