

rejoices. She produces man without purpose, and obliterates him without regret. She knows no distinction between the beneficial and the hurtful. Poison and nutrition, pain and joy, life and death, smiles and tears, are alike to her. She is neither merciful nor cruel. She cannot be flattered by worship nor melted by tears. She does not know even the attitude of prayer. She appreciates no difference between poison in the fangs of snakes and mercy in the hearts of men. Only through man does nature take cognizance of the good, the true, and the beautiful; and, so far as we know, man is the highest intelligence.

And yet man continues to believe that there is some power independent of and superior to nature, and still endeavors, by form, ceremony, supplication, hypocrisy and sacrifice, to obtain its aid. His best energies have been wasted in the service of this phantom. The horrors of witchcraft were all born of an ignorant belief in the existence of a totally depraved being superior to Nature, acting in perfect independence of her laws; and all religious superstition has had for its basis a belief in at least two beings, one good and the other bad, both of whom could arbitrarily change the order of the universe. The history of religion is simply the story of man's efforts in all ages to avoid one of these powers and to pacify the other. Both powers have inspired abject fear. The cold, calculating sneer of the devil, and the frown of God, were equally terrible. In any event, man's fate was to be arbitrarily fixed forever by an unknown power superior to all law and to all fact. Until this belief is thrown aside, man must consider himself the slave of phantom masters—neither of whom promise liberty in this world nor in the next.

Man must learn to rely upon himself. Reading bibles will not protect him from the blasts of winter, but houses, fires and clothing will. To prevent famine, one plough is worth a million sermons, and even patent medicines will cure more diseases than all the prayers uttered since the beginning of the world.

Although many eminent men have endeavored to harmonize necessity and free will, the existence of evil, and the infinite power and goodness of God, they have succeeded only in producing learned and ingenious failures. Immense efforts have been made to reconcile ideas utterly inconsistent with the facts by which we are surrounded, and all persons who have failed to perceive the pretended reconciliation have been denounced as infidels, atheists and scoffers. The whole power of the church has been brought to bear against philosophers and scientists in order to compel a denial of the authority of demonstration, and to induce some Judas to betray Reason, one of the saviors of mankind.

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