



CLARENCE DARROW

ESSAYS

COMPRISING OF:

'FACING LIFE FEARLESSLY'
'ABSURDITIES OF THE BIBLE'
AND
'WHY I AM AN AGNOSTIC'

Clarence Darrow Essays.

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HALDEMAN-JULIUS PUBLICATIONS

GIRARD, KANSAS

(Report of a lecture delivered at the University of Chicago, under the auspices of the Poetry Club, and the Liberal Club; revised by Mr. Darrow.)

I had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of Mr. A.E. Housman in the Summer of 1927. I spent two hours with him, and before that I had been to the home of Thomas Hardy. Mr. Hardy told me how much he thought of Housman, before I visited Housman; and Housman was a frequent visitor at the Hardy home. Their ideas of life were very much alike; they were what the orthodox people and the Rotary Clubs would call pessimistic. They didn't live on pipe dreams; they took the universe as they found it, and man as they found him. They tried to see what beauty there was in each of them, but didn't close their eyes to the misery and maladjustments of either the universe or man, because they were realists, honest, thorough, and fearless.

Hardy himself had received the censure of all the good people of England and the world, who, in spite of that, bought his books. They all condemned him when he wrote his 'Tess;' so he determined not to write any more prose. He thought that people probably were not intelligent enough to appreciate him; certainly not his viewpoint, and he didn't wish to waste his time on them.

Housman's viewpoint is much the same, as all of you know. He has written very little. You can read all he has written in two hours, and less than that; but everything is exquisitely finished. met him he was in his study in Cambridge. He is a professor of Latin. I can't Imagine anything more useless than that -- unless it be Greek! He has been called the greatest Latin scholar in the world, and he seemed to take some pride in his Latin; not so much in his poetry. He said he didn't write poetry except when he felt he had to, it was always hard work for him, although some of the things he wrote very quickly; but as a rule he spent a great deal of time on most of them.

I asked him if it was true that the latest little volume was what it is entitled -- 'Last Poems.' He said he thought it was true; that it had been published as his last poems in 1922 -- five years before -- and he had only written four lines since: so he thought that would probably be the last. Upon my asking him to recite the four lines, he said he had forgotten them.

Both Hardy and Housman, and of course Omar, believed that man is rather small in comparison with the universe, or even with the earth; they didn't believe in human responsibility, in free will, in a purposeful universe, in a Being who watched over and cared for the people of the world. It is evident that if He does, He makes a poor job of It!

Neither Hardy nor Housman had any such delusions. They took the world as they found it and never tried to guess at its origin. They took man as they found him and didn't try

to build castles for him after he was dead. They were essentially realists, both of them; and of course long before them Omar had gone over the same field.

It is hardly fair to call the Rubaiyat the work of Omar Khayyam. I have read a good many different editions and several different versions. I never read it in Persian, in which it was first written, but I have read not only poetical versions but prose ones. Justin McCarthy brought out a translation a number of years ago which was supposed to be a literal translation of Omar's book. There is no resemblance between that book and the classic under his name that was really written by FitzGerald. There is nothing very remarkable about the Omar Khayyam as found in Justin McCarthy's translation. It is probably ten times as expansive as the one we have, and no one would recognize it from the FitzGerald edition.

The beauty of the Rubaiyat is Edward FitzGerald's. He evidently was more or less modest or else he wanted to do great homage to Omar, because no one would ever have suspected that Omar had any more to do with the book than they would have suspected Plato. But, under the magic touch of FitzGerald, it is not only one of the wisest and most profound pieces of literature in the world, but one of the most beautiful productions that the world has ever known.

I remember reading somewhere that when this poem was thrown on the market in London, a long time ago, nobody bought it. They finally put it out in front of the shop in the form in which it was printed and sold it for a penny. One could make more money by buying those books at a penny and selling them now than he could make with a large block of Standard Oil! It took a long while for Omar and FitzGerald to gain recognition, which makes it rather comfortable for the rest of us who write books to give away, and feel happy when somebody asks us for one, although we suspect they will never read them. But we all think we will be discovered sometime. Some of us hope so and some are fearful that they will be. Neither Omar nor FitzGerald believed in human responsibility. That is the rock on which most religions are founded, and all laws -- that everybody is responsible for his conduct; that if he is good he is good because he deliberately chooses to be good, and if he is bad it is pure cussedness on his part -- nobody had anything to do with it excepting himself. If he hasn't free will, why, he isn't anything! The English poet Henley, in one of his poems, probably expressed this about as well as anybody. It looks to me as if he had a case of the rabies or something like that. But people are fond of repeating it. In his brief poem about Fate he says:

I am the master of my fate
I am the captain of my soul.

A fine captain of his soul; and a fine master of his fate! He wasn't master enough of his fate to get himself born, which is rather important, nor to do much of anything else, except brag about it. Instead of being the captain of his soul, as I have sometimes expressed it, man isn't even a deck-hand on a rudderless ship! He is just floating around and trying to hang on, and hanging on as long as he can. But if it does him any good to repeat Henley, or other nonsense, it is all right to give him a chance to do it, because he

hasn't much to look forward to, any way. Free will never was a scientific doctrine; it never can be. It is probably a religious conception, which of course shows that it isn't a scientific one.

Neither one of these eminent men, Hardy or Housman, believed anything in free will. There is eight hundred years between Omar and Housman, and yet their philosophy is wondrously alike. I have no doubt but that Omar's philosophy was very like what we find in the rendering of FitzGerald. It is not a strange and unusual philosophy, except in churches and Rotary Clubs and places like that. It is not strange in places where people think or try to, and where they do not undertake to fool themselves. It is rather a common philosophy; it is a common philosophy where people have any realization of their own importance, or, rather, unimportance. A realization of it almost invariably forces upon a human being his own insignificance and the insignificance of all the other human atoms that come and go.

Men's ideas root pretty far back. Their religious creeds are very old. By means of interest and hope and largely fear, they manage to hang on to the old, even when they know it is not true. The idea of man's importance came in the early history of the human race. He looked out on the earth, and of course he thought it was flat! It looks flat, and he thought it was. He saw the sun, and he formed the conception that somebody moved it out every morning and pulled it back in at night. He saw the moon, and he had the opinion that somebody pulled that out at sundown and took it in in the morning. He saw the stars, and all there was about the stars was, "He made the stars also." They were just "also." They were close by, and they were purely for man to look at, about like diamonds in the shirt bosoms of people who like them.

This was not an unreasonable idea, considering what they had to go on. The people who still believe it have no more to go on. Blind men can't be taught to see or deaf people to hear. The primitive people thought that the stars were right near by and just the size they seemed to be. Of course now we know that some of them are so far away that light traveling at nearly 286,000 miles a second is several million light years getting to the earth, and some of them are so large that our sun, even, would be a fly-speck to them. The larger the telescopes the more of them we see, and the imagination can't compass the end of them. It is just humanly possible that somewhere amongst the infinite number of infinitely larger and more important specks of mud in the universe there might be some organisms of matter that are just as intelligent as our people on the earth. So to have the idea that all of this was made for man gives man a great deal of what Weber and Field used to call "Proud flesh."

Man can't get conceited from what he knows today, and he can't get it from what intellectual people ever knew. You remember, in those days the firmament was put in to divide the water below from the water above. They didn't know exactly what it was made of, but they knew what it was. Heaven was up above the firmament. They knew what it was, because Jacob had seen the angels going up and down on a ladder. Of course, a ladder was the only transportation for such purposes known to Jacob. If he had

been dreaming now, they would have been going up in a flying machine and coming down in the same way.

Our conceptions of things root back; and that, of course, is the reason for our crude religions, our crude laws, our crude ideas, and our exalted opinion of the human race.

Omar had it nearer right. He didn't much overestimate the human race. He knew it for what it was, and that wasn't much. He knew about what its power was; he didn't expect much from the human race. He didn't condemn men, because he knew he couldn't do any better. As he puts it.

But helpless Pieces of the Game He plays
Upon this Chequer-Board of Nights and Days:
Hither and thither moves, and checks and slays
And one by one back in the Closet lays.

Compare that conception with Mr. Henley's, with his glorious boast that he is the captain of his soul and the master of his fate. Anyone who didn't catch that idea from the ordinary thought of the community, but carved it out for himself, would be a subject for psychopathic analysis and examination. When you have an idea that everybody else has, of course you are not crazy, but if you have silly ideas that nobody else has, of course you are crazy. That is the only way to settle it.

Most people believe every day many things for which others are sent to the insane asylum. The insane asylums are full of religious exaltants who have just varied a little bit from the standard of foolishness. It isn't the foolishness that places them in the bug-house, it is the slight variations from the other fellows' foolishness -- that is all. If a man says he is living with the spirits today, he is insane. If he says that Jacob did, he is all right. That is the only difference.

Omar says we are simply "impotent pieces in the game He plays" -- of course, he uses a capital letter when he spells, He which is all right enough for the purpose -- "in the game He plays upon this chequer-board of nights and days." And that is what man is. If one could vision somebody playing a game with human pawns, one would think that everyone who is moved around here and there was moved simply at the will of a player and he had nothing whatever to do with the game, any more than any other pawn. And he has nothing more to do with it than any other pawn.

Omar expresses this opinion over and over again. He doesn't blame man; he knows the weakness of man. He knew the cruelty of judging him.

The Moving Finger writes; and having writ,
Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.

Whatever the impulse calls one to do, whatever the baubles or the baits that set in motion many acts, however quickly or emotionally, the consequences of the acts, as far

as he is concerned, never end. All your piety and all your wit cannot wipe out a word of it! Omar pities man; he doesn't exalt God, but he pities man. He sees what man can do; and, more important still, he sees what he cannot do. He condemns the idea that God could or should judge man. The injustice of it, the foolishness of it all, appeals to him and he puts it in this way:

*O Thou who didst with pitfall and with gin
Beset the Road I was to wander in.
Thou wilt not with Predestin'd Evil round
Enmesh, and then impute my Fall to Sin!*

Nothing ever braver and stronger and truer than that! Preachers have wasted their time and their strength and such intelligence and learning as they can command, talking about God forgiving man, as if it was possible for man to hurt God, as if there was anything to be forgiven from man's standpoint. They pray that man be forgiven and urge that man should be forgiven. Nobody knows for what, but still it has been their constant theme. Poets have done it; Omar knew better. Brave and strong and clear and far-seeing, although living and dying eight hundred years ago. This is what he says about forgiveness:

O thou, who Man of baser Earth didst make,
And ev'n with Paradise devised the Snake:
For all the sin wherewith the Face of Man
Is blacken'd -- Man's forgiveness give -- and take!

"Man's forgiveness give -- and take!" If man could afford to forgive God, He ought to be willing to forgive man. Omar knew it. "Ev'n with paradise devised the snake." Taking the orthodox theory, for all the sin with which the earth is blackened, "Man's forgiveness give -- and take!" That is courage; it is science. It is sense, and it isn't the weak, cowardly whining of somebody who is afraid he might be hurt unless he whines and supplicates, which he always does, simply hoping that some great power will have compassion on him. Always cowardice and fear, and nothing else!

Omar was wise enough to know that if there was any agency responsible for it, that agency was responsible. He made us as we are, and as He wished to make us, and to say that a weak, puny, ignorant human being, here today and gone tomorrow, could possibly injure God or be responsible for his own weakness and his ignorance, of course is a travesty upon all logic; and of course it does great credit to all superstition, for it couldn't come any other way.

Housman is equally sure about this. He knows about the responsibility of man. Strange how wonderfully alike runs their philosophy! Housman condemned nobody. No pessimist does -- only good optimists. People who believe in a universe of law never condemn or hate individuals. Only those who enthrone man believe in free will, and make him responsible for the terrible crudities of Nature and the force back of it, if there is such a force. Only they are cruel to the limit.

One can get Housman's idea of the responsibility of the human being from his beautiful little poem, "The Culprit," the plaintive wailing of a boy to be executed the next morning, when he, in his blindness and terror, asked himself the question, "Why is it and what does it all mean?" and thought about the forces that made him, and what a blind path he traveled, as we all do. He says:

The night my father got me
His mind was not on me;
He did not plague his fancy
To muse if I should be
The son you see.

The day my mother bore me
She was a fool and glad,
For all the pain I cost her,
That she had borne the lad
That borne she had.

My mother and my father
Out of the light they lie;
The warrant would not find them,
And here 'tis only I
Shall hang on high.

Oh let no man remember
The soul that God forgot
But fetch the county kerchief
And noose me in the knot,
And I will rot.

For so the game is ended
That should not have begun.
My father and my mother
They have a likely son,
And I have none.

Nobody lives in this world to himself or any part of himself. Nobody fashions his body, and still less is responsible for the size or the fineness of his brain and the sensitiveness of his nervous system. No one has anything to do with the infinite manifestations of the human body that produce the emotions, that force men here and there. And yet religion in its cruelty and its brutality brands them all alike. And the religious teachers are so conscious of their own guilt that they only seek to escape punishment by loading their punishment onto someone else. They say that the responsibility of the individual who in his weakness goes his way is so great and his crimes are so large that there isn't a possibility for him to be saved by his own works.

The law is only the slightest bit more intelligent. No matter who does it, or what it is, the individual is responsible. If he is manifestly and obviously crazy they may make some distinction; but no lawyer is wise enough to look into the human mind and know what it means. The interpretations of the human judges were delivered before we had any science on the subject whatever, and they continue to enforce the old ideas of insanity, in spite of the fact that there isn't an intelligent human being in the world who has studied the question who ever thinks of it in legal terms. Judges instruct the jury that if a man knows the difference between right and wrong he cannot be considered insane. And yet an insane man knows the difference better than an intelligent man, because he has not the intelligence and the learning to know that this is one of the hardest things to determine, and perhaps the most impossible. You can ask the inmates of any insane asylum whether it is right to steal, lie, or kill, and they will all say "No," just as little children will say it, because they have been taught it. It furnishes no test, but still lawyers and Judges persist in it, to give themselves an excuse to wreak vengeance upon unfortunate people.

Housman knew better. He knew that in every human being is the imprint of all that has gone before, especially the imprint of his direct ancestors. And not only that, but that it is the imprint of all the environment in which he has lived, and that human responsibility is utterly unscientific, and besides that, horribly cruel.

Another thing that impressed itself upon all these poets alike was the futility of life. I don't know whether a college succeeds in making pupils think that they are very important in the scheme of the universe. I used to be taught that we were all very important. Most all the boys and girls who were taught it when I was taught it are dead, and the world is going on just the same. I have a sort of feeling that after I am dead it will go on just the same, and there are quite a considerable number of people who think it will go on better. But it won't; I haven't been important enough even to harm it. It will go on just exactly the same.

We are always told of the importance of the human being and the importance of everything he does; the importance of his not enjoying life, because if he is happy here of course he can't be happy hereafter, and if he is miserable here he must be happy hereafter. Omar made short work of that, of those promises which are not underwritten, at least not by any responsible people. He did not believe in foregoing what little there is of life in the hope of having a better time hereafter.

He says, "Ah, take the Cash and let the Credit go." Good advice that: "Ah, take the Cash and let the Credit go." If you take the "Credit," likely as not you will miss your fun both here and hereafter. Omar knew better.

It is strange how the religious creeds have hammered that idea into the human mind. They have always felt there was a kinship between pleasure and sin. A smile on the face is complete evidence of wickedness. A solemn, uninteresting countenance is a stamp of virtue and goodness, of self-denial, that will surely be rewarded. Of course, the religious people are strangely hedonistic without knowing it! There are some of us who think

that the goodness or badness of an act in this world can be determined only by pain and pleasure units. The thing that brings pleasure is good, and the thing that brings pain is bad. There is no other way to determine the difference between good and bad. Some of us think so: I think so.

Of coarse, the other class roll their eyes and declaim against this heathen philosophy, the idea that pain and pleasure have anything to do with the worth-whileness of existence. It isn't important for you to be happy here. But why not? You are too miserable here so you will be happy hereafter; and the hereafter is long and the here is short. They promise a much bigger prize than the pagan for the reward of conduct. They simply want you to trust them. They take the pain and pleasure theory with a vengeance, but they do business purely on credit. They are dealers in futures! I could never understand, if it was admissible to have joy in heaven, why you couldn't have it here, too. And if joy is admissible at all, the quicker you get at it the better, and the surer you are of the result. Omar thought that: "Ah, take the Cash, and let the Credit go!" Take the Cash and let the other fellow have the Credit! That was his philosophy, and I insist it is much better, and more intelligent philosophy than the other.

But Omar had no delusions about how important this human being is. He had no delusions about the mind, about man's greatness. He knew something about philosophy or metaphysics, whatever it is. He knew the uncertainty of human calculations, no matter who arrived at them. He knew the round-about way that people try to find out something, and he knew the results. He knew the futility of all of it.

Myself When young did eagerly frequent
 Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument
 About it and about: but evermore
 Came out by the same door where in I went.

That is what Omar thought. Man evermore came out by the same door where in he went. Therefore, "take the Cash and let the Credit go!" He put it even stronger than this. He knew exactly what these values were worth, if anything. He knew what a little bit there is to the whole bag of tricks. What's the difference whether you were born 75 years ago, or fifty or twenty-five? what's the difference whether you are going to live ten years, or twenty or thirty, or whether you are already dead? In that case you escape something! This magnifying the importance of the human being is one of the chief sins of man and results in all kinds of cruelty.

If we took the human race for what it is worth, we could not be so cruel. Omar Khayyam knew what it was, this life, that we talk so much about:

'Tis but a Tent where takes his one day's rest
 A Sultan to the realm of Death addrest;
 The Sultan rises, and the dark Forrash
 Strikes, and prepares it for another Guest.

"Tis but a Tent where takes his one day's rest" -- is there anything else, if one could just make a survey of the human being, passing across the stage of life? I suppose man has been upon the earth for over a million years. A million years, and perhaps his generations may be thirty to thirty-five years long. Think of the generations in a thousand years, in 5,000 years, in a hundred thousand, in a million years! There are a billion and a half of these important organisms on the earth at any one time. All of them, all important -- kings, priests and professors, and doctors and lawyers and presidents, and 100 per cent Americans, and everything on earth you could think of -- Ku Kluxers, W.C.T.U.'s, Knights of Columbus and Masons, everything. All of them important in this scheme of things! All of them seeking to attract attention to themselves, and not even satisfied when they get it!

What is it all about? it is strange what little things will interest the human mind -- baseball games, fluctuations of the stock market, revivals, foot races, hangings, Anything will interest them. And the wonderful importance of the human being!

Housman knew the importance just as well as Omar. He has something to say about it, too. He knew it was just practically nothing. Strangely like him! The little affairs of life, the little foolishnesses of life, the things that consume our lives without any result whatever; he knew them and knew what they were worth. He knew they were worth practically nothing. But we do them; the urge of living keeps us doing them, even when we know how useless and foolish they are. Housman understood them:

Yonder see the morning blink:

The sun is up, and up must I.

To wash and dress and eat and drink

And look at things and talk and think

And work, and God knows why.

Oh often have I washed and dressed

And what's to show for all my pain?

Let me lie abed and rest:

Ten thousand times I've done my best

And all's to do again.

That is what life is, rising in the morning and washing and dressing and going to recitations and studying and forgetting it, and then going to bed at night, to get up the next morning and wash and dress and go to recitation, and so on, world without end.

One might get a focus on it from the flies. They are very busy buzzing round. You don't exactly know what they are saying, because we can't understand fly language.

Professors can't teach you fly language! We can't tell what they are saying, but they are probably talking about the importance of being good, about what's going to happen to their souls and, when. And when they are stiff in the morning in the Autumn and can hardly move round, the housewife gets up and builds the fire, and the heat limbers them up. She sets out the bread and butter on the table. The flies come down and get into it, and they think the housewife is working for them. Why not?

Is there any difference? Only in the length of the agony. What other? Apparently they have a good time while the sun is shining, and apparently they die when they get cold. It is a proposition of life and death, forms of matter clothed with what seems to be consciousness, and then going back again into inert matter, and that is all. There isn't any manifestation that we humans make that we do not see in flies and in other forms of matter.

Housman understands it; they have all understood it. Read any of the great authors of the world -- any of them; their hopes and their fears and their queries and their doubt, are, about the same. There is only one man I know of that can answer everything, and that is Dr Cadman.

Housman saw it. He knew a little of the difference between age and youth -- and there is some. The trouble is, the old men always write the books; they write them not in the way they felt when they were young, but in the way they feel now. And they preach to the young, and condemn them for doing what they themselves did when they had the emotion to do it. Great teachers, when they grow old! Perhaps it is partly envy and the desire that no one shall have anything they can't have. Likely it is, but they don't know it. Housman says something about this:

When first my way to fair I took
Few pence in purse hid I,
And long I used to stand and look
At things I could not buy.

Now times are altered: if I care
To bay a thing I can;
The pence are here and here's the fair,
But where's the lost young man?

The world is somewhat different. The lost young man was once looking at the fair. He couldn't go in, and he liked it more for that; but now he is tired of the fair and tired of the baubles that once amused him and the riddles he once tried to guess, and he can't understand that the young man still likes to go to the fair.

We hear a great deal said by the ignorant about the wickedness of the youth of today. Well, I don't know: some of us were wicked when we were young. I don't know what is the matter with the youth of today having their fling. I don't know that they are any wickeder today. First, I don't know what the word wicked means. Oh, I do know what it means: It means unconventional conduct. But I don't know whether unconventional conduct is wicked in the sense they mean it is wicked, or whether conventional conduct is good in the sense they mean it is good. Nobody else knows!

But I remember when I was a boy -- it was a long time ago -- I used to hear my mother complain. My mother would have been pretty nearly 125 years old if she had kept on living, but luckily for her she didn't! I used to hear her complain of how much worse the girls were that she knew than the girls were when she was a girl. Of course, she didn't

furnish any bill of particulars; she didn't specify, except not hanging up their clothes, and gadding, and things like that. But at any rate, they were worse. And my father used to tell about it, and I have an idea that Adam and Eve used to talk the same fool way.

The truth is, the world doesn't change, or the generations of men or the human emotions. But the individual changes as he grows old. You hear about the Revolt of Youth. Some people are pleased at it and some displeased. Some see fine reasons for hope in what they call the youth movement. They can put it over on the old people, but not on the youth! There is a Revolt of Youth.

Well, youth has always been in revolt. The greatest trouble with youth is that it gets old. Age changes it. It doesn't bring wisdom, though most old people think because they are old they have wisdom. But you can't get wisdom by simply growing old. You can even forget it that way! Age means that the blood runs slow, that the emotions are not as strong, that you play safer, that you stay closer to the hearth. You don't try to find new continents or even explore old ones. You don't travel into unbeaten wilderness and lay out new roads. You stick to the old roads when you go out at all.

The world can't go on with old people. It takes young ones that are daring, with courage and faith.

The difference between youth and old age is the same in every generation. The viewpoint is in growing old, that is all. But the old never seem wise enough to know it, and forever the old have been preaching to the young. Luckily, however, the young pay very little attention to it. They sometimes pretend to, but they never do pay much attention to it. Otherwise, life could not exist.

Both of these poets saw the futility of life: the little things of which it is made, scarcely worth the while. It is all right to talk about futility. We all know it, if we know much of anything. We know life is futile. A man who considers that his life is of very wonderful importance is awfully close to a padded cell. Let anybody study the ordinary, everyday details of life; see how closely he is bound and fettered; see how little it all amounts to.

There are a billion and a half people in the world, all of them trying to shout loud enough to be heard all at once, so as to attract the attention of the public, so they may be happy. A billion and a half of them, and if they all attracted attention none of them would have attention! Of course, attention is only valuable if the particular individual attracts it and nobody, else can get it. That is what makes presidents and kings -- they get it and nobody else.

Then when you consider that it is all made up of little things, what is life all about, anyway? We do keep on living. It is easy enough to demonstrate to people who think that life is not worth while. We could do it easier if we could only settle what worth while means. But if we settle it and convince ourselves that it is not worth while, we still keep on living. life does not come from willing; rather it does not come from thought and reason. I don't live because I think it is worth while; I live because I am a going concern, and every going concern tries to keep on going, I don't care whether it is a tree,

or a plant, or what we call a lower animal, or man, or the Socialist party. Anything that is going tries to go on by its own momentum, and it does just keep on going -- it is what Schopenhauer called the 'will to live.' So we must assume that we will live anyhow as long as we can. When the machine runs down we don't have to worry about it any longer.

Hotisman asked himself this question, and Omar asked himself this question. Life is of little value. What are we going to do while we live? In other words, what is the purpose, if we can use the word purpose in this way, which is an incorrect way? What purpose are we going to put into it? Why should we live; and if we must live, then what? Omar tells us what. He knew there was just one thing important; he knew what most thinkers know today. He put it differently -- he and FitzGerald together. It is a balance between painful and pleasurable emotions. Every organized being looks for pleasurable emotions and tries to avoid painful ones. The seed planted in the ground seeks the light. The instinct of everything is to move away from pain and toward pleasure. Human beings are just like all the rest. The earth and all its manifestations are simply that. Omar figured it out, and after philosophizing and finding that he ever came out the same door where in he went, he said:

You know, my Friends, with what a brave Carouse
I made a Second Marriage in my house;
Divorced old barren Reason from my Bed,
And took the Daughter of the Vine to Spouse.

That is one way of forgetting life -- one way of seeking pleasurable emotions: "I took the Daughter of the Vine to Spouse." A way that has been fairly popular down through the ages! Even in spite of the worst that all the fanatics could possibly do, it has been a fairly universal remedy for the ills of man. It would be perfect If it were not for the day after!

He says in his wild exuberance:

Come, fill the Cup, and in the fire of Spring
Your Winter-Garment of Repentance fling;
The Bird of Time has but a little way
To flutter -- and the Bird is on the Wing.

There isn't much of it; but while it is fluttering, help it. It has but a little way to flutter, and it is on the wing!

To those who are not quite so strenuous, there is an appeal more to beauty, a somewhat more permanent although not much more, but a more beautiful conception of pleasure, which is all he could get:

A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread -- and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness --
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise now!

Well, if you get the right jug and the right book and the rest of the paraphernalia, it isn't so bad!

It is strange that two so different human beings have sought about the same thing. This physical emotional life that we hear so much about is the only life we know anything about. They sought their exaltation there, and Omar Khayyam pictured it very well. Housman again does as well. What does he say about the way to spend life and about life?

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
Is hung with bloom along the bough,
And stands about the woodland ride
Wearing white for Eastertide.

Now, of my threescore, years and ten,
Twenty will not come again,
And take from seventy springs a score,
It only leaves me fifty more.

And since to look at things in bloom
Fifty springs are little room,
About the woodlands I will go
To see the cherry hung with snow.

What else is there? So while the light is still on and while I can still go, and when the cherry is in bloom -- I will go to see the cherries hung with snow.

That is the whole philosophy of life for those who think; that is all there is to it, and it is what everybody is trying to do, without fully realizing it. Many are taking the Credit and letting the Cash go. Housman is right about that.

Since to look at things in bloom
Fifty springs are little room,
About the woodlands I will go
To see the cherry hung with snow.

That is why I have so little patience with the old preaching to the young. If youth, with its quick-flowing blood, its strong imagination, its virile feeling; if youth, with its dreams and its hopes and ambitions, can go about the woodland to see the cherry hung with snow, why not? Who are the croakers, who have run their race and lived their time, who are they to keep back expression and hope and youth and joy from a world that is almost barren at the best?

It has been youth that has kept the world alive; it will be, because from the others emotion has fled; and with the fleeing of emotion, through the ossification of the brain, all there is left for them to do is to preach. I hope they have a good time doing that, and I am so glad the young pay no attention to it!

Of course, Housman and Omar and the rest of us are called pessimist's. It is a horrible name. What is a pessimist, anyway? It is a man or a woman who looks at life as life is. If you could, you might take your choice, perhaps, as to being a pessimist or a pipe dreamer. But you can't have it, because you look at the world according to the way you are made. Those are the two extremes. The pessimist takes life for what life is: not all sorrow, not all pain, not all beauty, not all good. Life is not black; life is not orange, red, or green, or all the colors of the rainbow. Life is no one shade or hue.

It is well enough to understand it. If pessimism could come as the result of thought, I would think a pessimist was a wise man. What is an optimist, anyway? He reminds "Me of a little boy running through the woods and looking up at the sky and not paying any attention to the brambles or thorns he is scrambling through. There is a stone in front of him and he trips over the stone. Browning said, "God's in his heaven and all's right with the world." Others say, "God is love, love is God," and so on. A man who thinks that is bound to be an optimist. He believes that things are good.

The pessimist doesn't necessarily think that everything is bad, but he looks for the worst. He knows it will come sooner or later. When an optimist falls, he falls a long way; when a pessimist falls it is a very short fall. When an optimist is disappointed he is very, very sad, because he believed it was the best of all possible worlds, and God's in his heaven and all's well with the world. When a pessimist is disappointed he is happy, for he wasn't looking for anything.

This is the safest and by all odds it is the wisest outlook. Housman has put it in a little poem. It is about the last thing I shall give you. Housman is the only man I know of who has written a poem about pessimism. Nearly all the people who are talking about pessimism talk in prose; it is very prosy. Poems are generally written about optimism:

I am the master of my fate;
I am the captain of my soul.

Those are the sort of poems. Of course there have been poems written about pessimism. Poetry is really, to my way of thinking, good only if it is beauty and if it is music.

I don't mean tonight to discuss the question of free verse and poetry, or the comparative merits of the two styles, or of prose, but I do think that poetry is an exaltation and that you can't hold it for long. Poetry ought to have beauty and it ought to have music. It should have both. You can be the poet of sadness; sadness lends itself to poetry as much as gladness, although few poets know how to use it. Listen to this from Housman:

With rue my heart is laden;
For golden friends I had,
For many a rose-lipt maiden
And many a lightfoot lad.

By brooks too broad for leading
The lightfoot boys are laid,

The rose-lipt girls are sleeping
In fields where raises fade.

That is sad, isn't it? But it is beautiful.

I remember once, years and years ago, reading Olive Schreiner's Story of an African farm, in which she describes the simple Boers of South Africa, with their sorrows and their pleasures. She used this expression: which it took me some time to understand, in describing pain and pleasure: "There is a depth of emotion so broad and deep that pain and pleasure are the same." They are the same, and I think they find their meeting in beauty. The beauty, even if it is painful, is still beauty. You find the meeting of pain and pleasure, and you can hardly distinguish between the two emotions.

Housman knew it; he knew how to do it. Here is his idea of the young lad who dies: not passes on -- passes off. He dies:

Now hollow fires burn out to black
And lights are guttering low:
Square your shoulders, lift your pack,
And leave your friends and go.

Oh never fear man, nought's to dread,
Look not left or right:
In all the endless road you tread
There's nothing but the night.

Does it bring you painful or pleasurable emotions? It is beautiful; it is profound; it is deep. To me the painful and pleasurable are blended in the beauty, and I think the two may be one.

Housman, as I have said, is the only one I know who wrote a poem of pessimism; and this, like all of his, is very short, and I will read it. Somebody else may have written one; but Housman carries the philosophy of pessimism into poetry, perhaps the philosophy that I have given you. This poem is supposed to be introduced by somebody who complains of Housman's dark, almost tragical verses. For in every line that he ever wrote there is no let down. He is like Hardy; he never hauled down the flag. Life to him was what he saw; what the world saw meant nothing. This was the view in all of Housman's work. In all of his work there is not one false note; and when I say a false note I mean one that is not in tune with the rest. This is his idea of pessimism in poetry:

"Terence this is stupid stuff:
You eat your victuals fast enough;
There can't be much amiss, 'tis clear,
To see the rate you drink your beer.
But oh, good Lord, the verse you make,
It gives a chap the belly-ache.

We poor lads, 'tis our turn now
To hear such tunes as killed the cow.
Pretty friendship 'tis to rhyme
Your friends to death before their time
Moping melancholy mad:
Come, pipe a tune to dance to, lad."

Why, if 'tis dancing you would be,
There's brisker pipes than poetry.
Say, for what were hop-yards meant,
Or why was Burton built on Trent?
Oh many a peer of England brews
Livelier liquor than the Muse,
And malt does more than Milton can
To justify God's ways to man.
Ale, man, ale's the stuff to drink
For fellows whom it hurts to think:
Look into the pewter pot
To see the world as the world's not.
And faith, 'tis pleasant till 'tis past:
The mischief is that 'twill not last.

Oh I have been to Ludlow fair
And left my necktie God knows where,
And carried half way home, or near.
Pints and quarts of Ludlow beer:
Then the world seemed none so bad,
And I myself a sterling lad;
And down in lovely muck I've lain,
Happy till I woke again.
Then I saw the morning sky:
Heigho, the tale was all a lie;
The world it was the old world yet,
I was I, my things were wet.
And nothing now, remained to do
But begin the game anew.

Therefore, since the world has still
Much good, but much less good than Ill,
And while the sun and moon endure
Luck's a chance, but trouble's sure.
I'd face it as a wise man would,
And train for ill and not for good.
'Tis true the stuff I bring for sale
Is not so brisk a brew as ale:

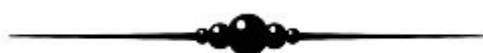
Out of a stem that scored the hand
I wrung it in a weary land.
But take it: if the smack is sour,
The better for the embittered hour;
It should do good to heart and head
When your soul" is in my soul's stead;
And I will friend you, if I may,
In the dark and cloudy day.

"Luck's a chance but trouble's sure." The moral of it is to "train for ill and not for good."

If I had my choice, I would not like to be an optimist, even assuming that people did not know that I was an idiot. I wouldn't want to be an optimist because when I fell I would fall such a terribly long way. The wise man trains for ill and not for good. He is sure he will need that training, and the other will take care of itself as it comes along.

Of course, life is not all pleasant: it is filled with tragedy. Housman has told us of it, and Omar Khayyam tells us of it. No man and no woman can live and forget death. However much they try, it is there, and it probably should be faced like anything else. Measured time is very short. Life, amongst other things, is full of futility.

Omar Khayyam understood, and Housman understood. There are other poets that have felt the same way. Omar Khayyam looked on the shortness of life and understood it. He pictured himself as here for a brief moment. He loved his friends; he loved companionship; he loved wine. I don't know how much of it he drank. He talked about it a lot. It might have symbolized more than it really meant to him. It has been a solace, all down through the ages. Not only that, but it has been the symbol of other things that mean as much -- the wine of life, the joy of living.



ABSURDITIES OF THE BIBLE

Little Blue Book No. 1637

Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

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Why am I an agnostic? Because I don't believe some of the things that other people say they believe. Where do you get your religion, anyway? I won't bother to discuss just what religion is, but I think a fair definition of religion could take account of two things, at least, immortality and God, and that both of them are based on some book, so practically all of it is a book.

As I have neither the time nor the learning to discuss every religious book on earth, and as I live in Chicago, I am interested in the Christian religion. So I will discuss the book that deals with the Christian religion. Is the Bible the work of anything but man? Of course, there is no such book as the Bible. The Bible to made up of 66 books, some of them written by various authors at various times, covering a period of about 1,000 years -- all the literature that they could find over a period longer than the time that has elapsed since the discovery of America down to the present time.

Is the Bible anything but a human book? Of course those who are believers take both sides of it. If there is anything that troubles them, "We don't believe this." Anything that doesn't trouble them they do believe.

What about its accounts of the origin of the world? What about its account of the first man and the first woman? Adam was the first, made about less than 6,000 years ago. Well, of course, every scientist knows that human beings have been on the earth at least a half-million years, probably more. Adam got lonesome and they made a companion for him. That was a good day's work -- or a day's work, anyhow.

From Rib to Woman

They took a simple way to take one of Adam's ribs and cut it out and make it into a woman, Now, is that story a fact or a myth? How many preachers would say it was a myth? None! There are some people who still occupy Christian pulpits who say it is, but they used to send them to the stake for that.

If it isn't true then, what is? How much did they know about science in those days, how much did they know about the heavens and the earth? The earth was flat, or did God write that down, or did the old Hebrew write it down because he didn't know any better and nobody else then knew any better?

What was the heavens? The sun was made to light the day and the moon to light the night. The sun was pulled out in the day time and taken in at night and the moon was pulled across after the sun was taken out. I don't know what they did in the dark of the moon. They must have done something.

The stars, all there is about the stars, "the stars he made also." They were just "also." Did the person who wrote that know anything whatever about astronomy? Not a thing. They believed they were just little things up in the heavens, in the firmament, just a little way above the earth, about the size of a diamond in an alderman's shirt stud. They always believed it until astronomers came along and told them something different.

Adam and Eve were put in a garden where everything was lovely and there were no weeds to hoe down. They were allowed to stay there on one condition, and that is that they didn't eat of the tree of knowledge. That has been the condition of the Christian church from then until now. They haven't eaten as yet, as a rule they do not.

They were expelled from the garden, Eve was tempted by the snake who presumably spoke to her in Hebrew. And she fell for it and of course Adam fell for it, and then they were driven out. How many believe that story today?

If the Christian church doesn't believe it why doesn't it say so? You do not find them saying that. If they do not believe it here and there, someone says it. That is, he says it at great danger to his immortal soul, to say nothing of his good standing in his church.

The snake was cursed to go on his belly after that. How he went before, the story doesn't say. And Adam was cursed to work. That is why we have to work. That is, some of us -- not I.

And Eve and all of her daughters to the end of time were condemned to bring forth children in pain and agony. Lovely God, isn't it? Lovely?

Can't Believe Story

If that story was necessary to keep me out of hell and put me in heaven -- necessary for my life -- I wouldn't believe it because I couldn't believe it.

I do not think any God could have done it and I wouldn't worship a God who would. It is contrary to every sense of justice that we know anything about.

God had a great deal of trouble with the earth after he made it. People were building a tower -- the Tower of Babylon -- so that they could go up and peek over.

God didn't want them to do that and so confounded their tongues. A man would call up for a pall of mortar and they would send him up a tub of suds, or something like that. They couldn't understand each other.

Is that true? How did they happen to right it? They found there were various languages; and that is the origin of the languages. Everybody knows better today.

Is that story true? Did God write it? He must have known; he must have been all-knowing then as he is all-knowing now.

I do not need to mention them. You remember that joyride that Balaam was taking on the ass. That was the only means of locomotion they had besides walking. It is the only one pretty near that they have now. Balaam wanted to get along too fast and he was

beating the ass and the ass turned around and asked him what he was doing it for. In Hebrew, of course. It must have been in Hebrew for Balaam was a Jew.

And Joshua Said to the Sun, "Stand Still."

Is that true or is it a story?

And Joshua; you remember about Joshua.

He was a great general. Very righteous and he was killing a lot of people and he hadn't quite finished the job and so he turned to the mountain top and said to the sun, "Stand still till I finish this job," and it stood still.

Is that one of the true ones or one of the foolish ones?

There are several things that that does. It shows how little they knew about the earth and day and night. Of course, they thought that if the sun stood still it wouldn't be pulled along any further and the night wouldn't come on. We know that if it had stood still from that day to this it wouldn't have affected the day or night; that is affected by the revolution of the earth on its axis.

Is it true? Am I wicked because I know it cannot possibly be true? Have you got to get rid of all your knowledge and all your common sense to save your soul?

Wait until I am a little older; maybe I can then. But my friend says that he doesn't believe those stories. They are figurative.

Are they figurative? Then what about the New Testament? Why does he believe these stories?

Here was a child born of a virgin. What evidence is there?

'Twas the Fashion

What evidence? Do you suppose you could get any positive evidence that would make anyone believe that story today or anybody, no matter who it was?

Child, born of a virgin! There were at least four miraculous births recorded in the Testament. There was Sarah's child, there was Samson, there was John the Baptist, and there was Jesus. Miraculous births were rather a fashionable thing in those days, especially in Rome, where most of the theology was laid out.

Caesar had a miraculous birth, Cicero, Alexander from Macedonia -- nobody was in style or great unless he had a miraculous birth. It was a land of miracles.

What evidence is there of it? How much evidence would it require for intelligent people to believe such a story? It wouldn't be possible to bring evidence anywhere in this civilized land today, right under your own noses. Nobody would believe it anyway, and yet some people say that you must believe that without a scintilla of evidence of any sort.

Jesus had brothers and sisters older than Himself. His genealogy by Matthew is traced to his father, Joseph, in the first chapter of Matthew. Read that. What did he do?

Well, now, probably some of his teachings were good. We have heard about the Sermon on the Mount. There isn't a single word contained in the Sermon on the Mount that isn't contained in what is called the Sacred Book of the Jews, long before He lived -- not one single thing.

Jesus was an excellent student of Jewish theology, as anybody can tell by reading the Gospels; every bit of it was taken from their books of authority, and He simply said what He had heard of for years and years.

But let's look at some things charged to Him. He walked on the water. Now how does that sound? Do you suppose Jesus walked on the water? Joe Smith tried it when he established the Mormon religion. What evidence have you of that?

He found some of His disciples fishing and they hadn't gotten a bite all day. Jesus said, "Cast your nets down there," and they drew them in full of fish. The East Indians couldn't do better than that. What evidence is there of it?

He was at a performance where there were 5,000 people and they were out of food, and He asked them how much they had; five loaves and three fishes, or three fishes and five loaves, or something like that, and He made the five loaves and three fishes feed all the multitude and they picked up I don't know how many barrels afterward. Think of that.

How does that commend itself to intelligent people, coming from a land of myth and fable as all Asia was, a land of myth and fable and ignorance in the main, and before anybody knew anything about science? And yet that must be believed -- and is -- to save us from our sins.

What are these sins? What has the human race done that was so bad, except to eat of the tree of knowledge? Does anybody need to save man from his sins in a miraculous way? It is an absurd piece of theology which they themselves say that you must accept on faith because your reason won't lead you to it. You can't do it that way.

We Must Develop Reason

I know the weakness of human reason, other people's reason. I know the weakness of it, but it is all we have, and the only safety of man is to cultivate it and extend his knowledge so that he will be sure to understand life and as many of the mysteries of the universe as he can possibly solve.

Jesus practiced medicine without medicine. Now think of this one. He was traveling along the road and somebody came and told Him there was a sick man in the house and he wanted Him to cure him. How did He do it? Well, there were a lot of hogs out in the front yard and He drove the devils out of a man and cured him, but He drove them into the hogs and they jumped into the sea. Is that a myth or is it true?

If that is true, if you have got to believe that story in order to have your soul saved, you are bound to get rid of your intelligence to save the soul that perhaps doesn't exist at all. You can't believe a thing just because you want to believe it and you can't believe it on

very poor evidence, You may believe it because your grandfather told you it was true, but you have got to have some such details.

Did He raise a dead man to life? Why, tens of thousands of dead men and women have been raised to life according to all the stories and all the traditions. Was this the only case? All Europe is filled with miracles of that sort, the Catholic church performing miracles almost to the present time. Does anybody believe it if they use their senses? I say, No. It is impossible to believe it if you use your senses.

Now take the soul. People in this world instinctively like to keep on living. They want to meet their friends again, and all of that. They cling to life. Schopenhauer called it the will to live. I call it the momentum of a going machine. Anything that is going keeps on going for a certain length of time. It is all momentum. What evidence is there that we are alive after we are dead?

But that wasn't the theory of theology. The theory of theology -- and it is a part of a creed of practically every Christian church today -- is that you die and go down into the earth and you are dead, and when Gabriel comes back to blow his horn, the dust is gathered together and, lo and behold, you appear the same old fellow again and live here on earth!

How many believe it? And yet that is the only idea of immortality that there is, and it is in every creed today, I believe.

Matter Indestructible

And everything that is in the body and in the man goes into something else, turns into the crucible of nature, goes to make trees and grass and weeds and fruit, and is eaten by all kinds of life, and in that way goes on and on.

Of course, in a sense, nobody dies. The matter that is in me will exist in another form when I am dead. The force that is in me will live in some other kind of force when I am dead. But I will be gone.

That isn't the kind of immortality people want. They want to know that they can recognize Mary Jane in heaven. Don't they? They want to see their brothers and their sisters and their friends in heaven. It isn't possible. We know where our life began; we know where it ends.

We know where every individual life on earth began. It began in a single cell, in the body of our mother, who had some 10,000 of those cells. It was fertilized by a spermatozoon from the body of our father, who had a million of them, any one of which, under certain circumstances, would fertilize a cell.

They multiplied and divided until a child was born. And in old age or accident or disease, they fall apart and the man is done.

Agnostic Because I Must Reason

Can you imagine an eternity with one end cut off? Something that began but never ended? We began our immortality at a certain time, when the cell and the spermatozoon conspired to form a human being. We began then. If I am not the product of a spermatozoon and a cell, and if those cells which are unfertilized produce life, and those spermatozoa that fertilized no life were still alive, then I must have 10,000 brothers and sisters on my mother's side and a million on my father's. It is utterly absurd.

Now I am not a revivalist. In fact, I am not interested. I am asked to say why I am an agnostic. I am an agnostic because I trust my reason. It may not be the greatest that ever existed. I am inclined to admit that it isn't. But it is the best I have. That is a mighty sight better than some other people's at that. I am an agnostic because no man living can form any picture of any God, and you can't believe in an object unless you can form a picture of it. You may believe in the force, but not in the object.

If there is any God in the universe I don't know it. Some people say they know it instinctively. Well, the errors and foolish things that men have known instinctively are so many we can't talk about them.

As a rule, the less a person knows, the surer he is, and he gets it by instinct, and it can't be disputed, for I don't know what is going on in another man's mind. I have no such instinct.

Let me give you just one more idea of a miracle of this Jesus story which has run down through the ages and is not at all the sole property of the Christian.

You remember, when Jesus was born in a manger according to the story, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem. And they were led by a star.

Now the closest star to the earth is more than a billion miles away. Think of the star leading three moth-eaten camels to a manger! Can you imagine a star standing over any house?

Can you imagine a star standing over the earth even? What will they say, if they had time? That was a miracle. It came down to the earth.

Well, if any star came that near the earth or anywhere near the earth, it would immediately disarrange the whole solar system. Anybody who can believe those old myths and fables isn't governed by reason.



WHY I AM AN AGNOSTIC

An agnostic is a doubter. The word is generally applied to those who doubt the verity of accepted religious creeds of faiths. Everyone is an agnostic as to the beliefs or creeds they do not accept. Catholics are agnostic to the Protestant creeds, and the Protestants are agnostic to the Catholic creed. Any one who thinks is an agnostic about something, otherwise he must believe that he is possessed of all knowledge. And the proper place for such a person is in the madhouse or the home for the feeble-minded. In a popular way, in the western world, an agnostic is one who doubts or disbelieves the main tenets of the Christian faith.

I would say that belief in at least three tenets is necessary to the faith of a Christian: a belief in God, a belief in immortality, and a belief in a supernatural book. Various Christian sects require much more, but it is difficult to imagine that one could be a Christian, under any intelligent meaning of the word, with less. Yet there are some people who claim to be Christians who do not accept the literal interpretation of all the Bible, and who give more credence to some portions of the book than to others.

I am an agnostic as to the question of God. I think that it is impossible for the human mind to believe in an object or thing unless it can form a mental picture of such object or thing. Since man ceased to worship openly an anthropomorphic God and talked vaguely and not intelligently about some force in the universe, higher than man, that is responsible for the existence of man and the universe, he cannot be said to believe in God. One cannot believe in a force excepting as a force that pervades matter and is not an individual entity. To believe in a thing, an image of the thing must be stamped on the mind. If one is asked if he believes in such an animal as a camel, there immediately arises in his mind an image of the camel. This image has come from experience or knowledge of the animal gathered in some way or other. No such image comes, or can come, with the idea of a God who is described as a force.

Man has always speculated upon the origin of the universe, including himself. I feel, with Herbert Spencer, that whether the universe had an origin-- and if it had-- what the origin is will never be known by man. The Christian says that the universe could not make itself; that there must have been some higher power to call it into being. Christians have been obsessed for many years by Paley's argument that if a person passing through a desert should find a watch and examine its spring, its hands, its case and its crystal, he would at once be satisfied that some intelligent being capable of design had made the watch. No doubt this is true. No civilized man would question that someone made the watch. The reason he would not doubt it is because he is familiar with watches and other appliances made by man. The savage was once unfamiliar with a watch and would have had no idea upon the subject. There are plenty of crystals and rocks of natural formation that are as intricate as a watch, but even to intelligent man they carry no implication that some intelligent power must have made them. They carry no such implication because no one has any knowledge or experience of someone having made these natural objects which everywhere abound.

To say that God made the universe gives us no explanation of the beginnings of things. If we are told that God made the universe, the question immediately arises: Who made God? Did he always exist, or was there some power back of that? Did he create matter out of nothing, or is his existence coextensive with matter? The problem is still there. What is the origin of it all? If, on the other hand, one says that the universe was not made by God, that it always existed, he has the same difficulty to confront. To say that the universe was here last year, or millions of years ago, does not explain its origin. This is still a mystery. As to the question of the origin of things, man can only wonder and doubt and guess.

As to the existence of the soul, all people may either believe or disbelieve. Everyone knows the origin of the human being. They know that it came from a single cell in the body of the mother, and that the cell was one out of ten thousand in the mother's body. Before gestation the cell must have been fertilized by a spermatozoon from the body of the father. This was one out of perhaps a billion spermatozoa that was the capacity of the father. When the cell is fertilized a chemical process begins. The cell divides and multiplies and increases into millions of cells, and finally a child is born. Cells die and are born during the life of the individual until they finally drop apart, and this is death.

If there is a soul, what is it, and where did it come from, and where does it go? Can anyone who is guided by his reason possibly imagine a soul independent of a body, or the place of its residence, or the character of it, or anything concerning it? If man is justified in any belief or disbelief on any subject, he is warranted in the disbelief in a soul. Not one scrap of evidence exists to prove any such impossible thing.

Many Christians base the belief of a soul and God upon the Bible. Strictly speaking, there is no such book. To make the Bible, sixty-six books are bound into one volume. These books are written by many people at different times, and no one knows the time or the identity of any author. Some of the books were written by several authors at various times. These books contain all sorts of contradictory concepts of life and morals and the origin of things. Between the first and the last nearly a thousand years intervened, a longer time than has passed since the discovery of America by Columbus.

When I was a boy the theologians used to assert that the proof of the divine inspiration of the Bible rested on miracles and prophecies. But a miracle means a violation of a natural law, and there can be no proof imagined that could be sufficient to show the violation of a natural law; even though proof seemed to show violation, it would only show that we were not acquainted with all natural laws. One believes in the truthfulness of a man because of his long experience with the man, and because the man has always told a consistent story. But no man has told so consistent a story as nature.

If one should say that the sun did not rise, to use the ordinary expression, on the day before, his hearer would not believe it, even though he had slept all day and knew that his informant was a man of the strictest veracity. He would not believe it because the story is inconsistent with the conduct of the sun in all the ages past.

Primitive and even civilized people have grown so accustomed to believing in miracles that they often attribute the simplest manifestations of nature to agencies of which they know nothing. They do this when the belief is utterly inconsistent with knowledge and logic. They believe in old miracles and new ones. Preachers pray for rain, knowing full well that no such prayer was ever answered. When a politician is sick, they pray for God to cure him, and the politician almost invariably dies. The modern clergyman who prays for rain and for the health of the politician is no more intelligent in this matter than the primitive man who saw a separate miracle in the rising and setting of the sun, in the birth of an individual, in the growth of a plant, in the stroke of lightning, in the flood, in every manifestation of nature and life.

As to prophecies, intelligent writers gave them up long ago. In all prophecies facts are made to suit the prophecy, or the prophecy was made after the facts, or the events have no relation to the prophecy. Weird and strange and unreasonable interpretations are used to explain simple statements, that a prophecy may be claimed.

Can any rational person believe that the Bible is anything but a human document? We now know pretty well where the various books came from, and about when they were written. We know that they were written by human beings who had no knowledge of science, little knowledge of life, and were influenced by the barbarous morality of primitive times, and were grossly ignorant of most things that men know today. For instance, Genesis says that God made the earth, and he made the sun to light the day and the moon to light the night, and in one clause disposes of the stars by saying that "he made the stars also." This was plainly written by someone who had no conception of the stars. Man, by the aid of his telescope, has looked out into the heavens and found stars whose diameter is as great as the distance between the earth and the sun. We know that the universe is filled with stars and suns and planets and systems. Every new telescope looking further into the heavens only discovers more and more worlds and suns and systems in the endless reaches of space. The men who wrote Genesis believed, of course, that this tiny speck of mud that we call the earth was the center of the universe, the only world in space, and made for man, who was the only being worth considering. These men believed that the stars were only a little way above the earth, and were set in the firmament for man to look at, and for nothing else. Everyone today knows that this conception is not true.

The origin of the human race is not as blind a subject as it once was. Let alone God creating Adam out of hand, from the dust of the earth, does anyone believe that Eve was made from Adam's rib--that the snake walked and spoke in the Garden of Eden--that he tempted Eve to persuade Adam to eat an apple, and that it is on that account that the whole human race was doomed to hell--that for four thousand years there was no chance for any human to be saved, though none of them had anything whatever to do with the temptation; and that finally men were saved only through God's son dying for them, and that unless human beings believed this silly, impossible and wicked story they were doomed to hell? Can anyone with intelligence really believe that a child born

today should be doomed because the snake tempted Eve and Eve tempted Adam? To believe that is not God-worship; it is devil-worship.

Can anyone call this scheme of creation and damnation moral? It defies every principle of morality, as man conceives morality. Can anyone believe today that the whole world was destroyed by flood, save only Noah and his family and a male and female of each species of animal that entered the Ark? There are almost a million species of insects alone. How did Noah match these up and make sure of getting male and female to reproduce life in the world after the flood had spent its force? And why should all the lower animals have been destroyed? Were they included in the sinning of man? This is a story which could not beguile a fairly bright child of five years of age today.

Do intelligent people believe that the various languages spoken by man on earth came from the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel, some four thousand years ago? Human languages were dispersed all over the face of the earth long before that time. Evidences of civilizations are in existence now that were old long before the date that romancers fix for the building of the Tower, and even before the date claimed for the flood.

Do Christians believe that Joshua made the sun stand still, so that the day could be lengthened, that a battle might be finished? What kind of person wrote that story, and what did he know about astronomy? It is perfectly plain that the author thought that the earth was the center of the universe and stood still in the heavens, and that the sun either went around it or was pulled across its path each day, and that the stopping of the sun would lengthen the day. We know now that had the sun stopped when Joshua commanded it, and had it stood still until now, it would not have lengthened the day. We know that the day is determined by the rotation of the earth upon its axis, and not by the movement of the sun. Everyone knows that this story simply is not true, and not many even pretend to believe the childish fable.

What of the tale of Balaam's ass speaking to him, probably in Hebrew? Is it true, or is it a fable? Many asses have spoken, and doubtless some in Hebrew, but they have not been that breed of asses. Is salvation to depend on a belief in a monstrosity like this?

Above all the rest, would any human being today believe that a child was born without a father? Yet this story was not at all unreasonable in the ancient world; at least three or four miraculous births are recorded in the Bible, including John the Baptist and Samson. Immaculate conceptions were common in the Roman world at the time and at the place where Christianity really had its nativity. Women were taken to the temples to be inoculated of God so that their sons might be heroes, which meant, generally, wholesale butchers. Julius Caesar was a miraculous conception--indeed, they were common all over the world. How many miraculous-birth stories is a Christian now expected to believe?

In the days of the formation of the Christian religion, disease meant the possession of human beings by devils. Christ cured a sick man by casting out the devils, who ran into the swine, and the swine ran into the sea. Is there any question but what that was

simply the attitude and belief of a primitive people? Does anyone believe that sickness means the possession of the body by devils, and that the devils must be cast out of the human being that he may be cured? Does anyone believe that a dead person can come to life? The miracles recorded in the Bible are not the only instances of dead men coming to life. All over the world one finds testimony of such miracles: miracles which no person is expected to believe, unless it is his kind of a miracle. Still at Lourdes today, and all over the present world, from New York to Los Angeles and up and down the lands, people believe in miraculous occurrences, and even in the return of the dead. Superstition is everywhere prevalent in the world. It has been so from the beginning, and most likely will be so unto the end.

The reasons for agnosticism are abundant and compelling. Fantastic and foolish and impossible consequences are freely claimed for the belief in religion. All the civilization of any period is put down as a result of religion. All the cruelty and error and ignorance of the period has no relation to religion.

The truth is that the origin of what we call civilization is not due to religion but to skepticism. So long as men accepted miracles without question, so long as they believed in original sin and the road to salvation, so long as they believed in a hell where man would be kept for eternity on account of Eve, there was no reason whatever for civilization: life was short, and eternity was long, and the business of life was preparation for eternity.

When every event was a miracle, when there was no order or system or law, there was no occasion for studying any subject, or being interested in anything excepting a religion which took care of the soul. As man doubted the primitive conceptions about religion, and no longer accepted the literal, miraculous teachings of ancient books, he set himself to understand nature. We no longer cure disease by casting out devils. Since that time, men have studied the human body, have built hospitals and treated illness in a scientific way. Science is responsible for the building of railroads and bridges, of steamships, of telegraph lines, of cities, towns, large buildings and small, plumbing and sanitation, of the food supply, and the countless thousands of useful things that we now deem necessary to life. Without skepticism and doubt, none of these things could have been given to the world.

The fear of God is not the beginning of wisdom. The fear of God is the death of wisdom. Skepticism and doubt lead to study and investigation, and investigation is the beginning of wisdom.

The modern world is the child of doubt and inquiry, as the ancient world was the child of fear and faith.

