



Why I Am An Agnostic

Robert Green Ingersoll

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“A succinct, clear, and interesting account of Ingersoll’s literary and philosophical evolution. It is a charming and fascinating story of his intellectual voyage, from the shifting sands and changeful mists of boyhood’s mental shore, across life’s perilous ocean, to the rock-like convictions that lie in the calm and silvered harbor of age. Never did a group of simple folk around a returned navigator of the Middle Ages listen with more enthralled attention to tales of adventure among the strange inhabitants of mysterious lands in far-off seas than did the most enlightened audiences at the close of the nineteenth century to this story of Ingersoll’s mental voyage.” -Herman E. Kittredge, Ingersoll, A Biographical Appreciation, 1911

“When I became convinced that the universe is natural, that all the ghosts and gods are myths, there entered into my brain, into my soul, into every drop of my blood the sense, the feeling, the joy of freedom. The walls of my prison crumbled and fell. The dungeon was flooded with light and all the bolts and bars and manacles became dust.”

"For while I am opposed to all orthodox creeds, I have a creed myself, and my creed is this: Happiness is the only good. The time to be happy is now. The place to be happy is here. The way to be happy is to make others so. This creed is somewhat short, but is long enough for this life; long enough for this world. If there is another world, when we get there we can make another creed. But this creed certainly will do for this life."

Freethought flowered in the United States in the latter half of the 19th century, and its best known advocate was Robert Green Ingersoll, a lawyer and Civil War officer, who travelled the continent for 30 years, speaking to capacity audiences. Although his repertoire included lectures on Shakespeare, Voltaire and Burns, the largest crowds turned out to hear him denounce the bible, and religion. As outspoken in his day as Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens are today,

ROBERT GREEN INGERSOLL (1833-1899) was a notorious radical whose uncompromising views on religion and slavery, women's suffrage, and other contentious matters of his era made him a wildly popular forward thinking orator and critic of American culture and public life. Legendary as a speaker - he memorized his speeches and could talk for hours without notes - and as a proponent of freethought, Ingersoll is an American original whose words still ring with truth and power today.

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