



On the Gods and Other Essays

Robert G. Ingersoll

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Robert G. Ingersoll (1833-1899) was perhaps the most famous American of his day. As an enlightened freethinker and pioneer of humane, rational, and agnostic views, Ingersoll was a tireless advocate of rational thought, who battled superstition and hypocrisy wherever he found it. This dedicated popularizer would regularly address huge audiences, opening their minds to ideas that often provoked guarded whispers in private. Ingersoll was a man far ahead of his time, advocating such progressive causes as agnosticism, birth control, voting rights for women, the advancement of science, civil rights, and freedom of speech. His advocacy of such iconoclastic ideals made a lasting impression on his own and later generations. Although Robert Ingersoll lived before the development of the Secular Humanist Movement, there is no doubt that he qualifies as one of the great heroes of the Humanist Pantheon.

The five essays, long out of print, that have been selected for this volume capture Robert Ingersoll at his eloquent best. They express his anti-clericalism and his defense of agnosticism and rationalism. "The Gods" examines religion and its relationship to the happiness - or despair - of humankind; "Thomas Paine" amplifies the contributions of that great advocate of liberty and free will; "Individuality" probes the importance of reason and rationality over blind faith; "Heretics and Heresies" examines the church, the Bible, and religious persecution; and "The Ghosts" surveys the relationship of supernatural belief to intellectual fear and ignorance.

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