

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY



PROSE POEMS.

Spoken on Memorable  
Occasions by

ROBT. G. INGERSOLL.



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RIDGEFIELD & DEANS GATE, MANCHESTER  
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*The Destroyer of Weeds, Thistles, and Thorns is a Benefactor, whether he soweth grain or not.*

*Interpolations are the foundation Stones of every orthodox church.*

*Let the Ghosts go. We will worship them no more. Let them cover their eyeless sockets with their fleshless hands, and fade forever from the imaginations of men.*

*Liberty sustains the same relation to Mind that Space does to Matter.*

*To Plough is to Pray, to Plant is to Prophecy, and the Harvest answers and fulfils.*



## The Past rises before me like a Dream.

EXTRACT FROM A SPEECH DELIVERED AT THE  
SOLDIERS' REUNION AT INDIANAPOLIS, 1876.

THE past rises before me like a dream. Again we are in the great struggle for national life. We hear the sounds of preparation—the music of boisterous drums—the silver voices of heroic bugles. We see thousands of assemblages, and hear the appeals of orators ; we see the pale cheeks of women, and the flushed faces of men ; and in those assemblages we see all the dead whose dust we have covered with flowers. We lose sight of them no more. We are with them when they enlist in the great army of freedom. We see them part with those they love. Some are walking for the last time in quiet, woody places, with the maidens they adore. We hear the whisperings and the sweet vows of eternal love as they lingeringly part forever. Others are bending over cradles, kissing babes that are asleep. Some are receiving the blessings of old men. Some are parting with mothers who hold them and press them to their hearts again and again, and say nothing. Kisses and tears, tears and kisses—divine mingling of agony and love ! And

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some are talking with wives, and endeavoring with brave words, spoken in the old tones, to drive from their hearts the awful fear. We see them part. We see the wife standing in the door with the babe in her arms—standing in the sunlight sobbing—at the turn of the road a hand waves—she answers by holding high in her loving arms the child. He is gone, and forever.

We see them all as they march away under the flaunting flags, keeping time to the grand, wild music of war—marching down the streets of the great cities—through the towns and across the prairies—down to the fields of glory, to do and to die for the eternal right.

We go with them, one and all. We are by their side on all the gory fields—in all the hospitals of pain—on all the weary marches. We stand guard with them in the wild storm and under the quiet stars. We are with them in ravines running with blood—in the furrows of old fields. We are with them between contending hosts, unable to move, wild with thirst, the life ebbing slowly away among the withered leaves. We see them pierced by balls and torn with shells, in the trenches, by forts, and in the whirlwind of the charge, where men become iron, with nerves of steel.

We are with them in the prisons of hatred and famine; but human speech can never tell us what they endured.

We are at home when the news comes that they are dead. We see the maiden in the shadow of her first sorrow. We see the silvered head of the old man bowed with the last grief.

The past rises before us, and we see four millions of human beings governed by the lash—we see them bound hand and foot—we hear the strokes of cruel whips—we see the hounds tracking women through

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tangled swamps. We see babes sold from the breasts of mothers. Cruelty unspeakable ! Outrage infinite !

Four million bodies in chains—four million souls in fetters. All the sacred relations of wife, mother, father and child are trampled beneath the brutal feet of might. And all this was done under our own beautiful banner of the free.

The past rises before us. We hear the roar and shriek of the bursting shell. The broken fetters fall. These heroes died. We look. Instead of slaves we see men and women and children. The wand of progress touches the auction-block, the slave-pen, the whipping-post, and we see homes and firesides and school-houses and books, and where all was want and crime and cruelty and fear we see the faces of the free.

These heroes are dead. They died for liberty—they died for us. They are at rest. They sleep in the land they made free, under the flag they made stainless, under the solemn pines, the sad hemlocks, the tearful willows, and the embracing vines. They sleep beneath the shadows of the clouds, careless alike of sunshine or of storm, each in the windowless palace of Rest. Earth may run red with other wars—they are at peace. In the midst of battle, in the roar of conflict, they found the serenity of death. I have one sentiment for soldiers living and dead : Cheers for the living ; tears for the dead.





## The Volunteer Soldiers of the Union Army;

*“Whose Valour and Patriotism gave to the world  
a Government of the people, by the people, for  
the people.”*

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RESPONSE TO THE TOAST AT THE GRAND BANQUET  
OF THE RE-UNION OF THE ARMY OF THE TENNESSEE,  
CHICAGO, NOV. 13TH, 1878.

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WHEN the savagery of the lash, the barbarism of the chain, and the insanity of secession confronted the civilisation of our century, the question, “Will the great Republic defend itself?” trembled on the lips of every lover of mankind. The North, filled with intelligence and wealth, products of liberty, marshalled her hosts and asked only for a leader.

From civil life a man, silent, thoughtful, poised, and calm, stepped forth, and with the lips of victory voiced the nation's first and last demand: “Unconditional and immediate surrender.” From that moment the end was known. That utterance was the real declaration of real war, and in accordance with the dramatic unities of mighty events, the great soldier who made it received the final sword of the rebellion. The soldiers of the republic were not seekers after vulgar glory; they were

not animated by the hope of plunder or the love of conquest. They fought to preserve the homestead of liberty, and that their children might have peace. They were the defenders of humanity, the destroyers of prejudice, the breakers of chains, and in the name of the future they saluted the monsters of their time. They finished what the soldiers of the Revolution commenced. They relighted the torch that fell from their august hands, and filled the world again with light. They blotted from the statute-books the laws that had been passed by hypocrites at the instigation of robbers, and tore with indignant hands from the Constitution that infamous clause that made men the catchers of their fellow-men. They made it possible for judges to be just and statesmen to be human. They broke the shackles from the limbs of slaves, from the souls of masters, and from the Northern brain. They kept our country on the map of the world and our flag in heaven. They rolled the stone from the sepulchre of progress, and found therein two angels clad in shining garments—nationality and liberty.

The soldiers were the saviours of the nation. They were the liberators of man. In writing the proclamation of emancipation, Lincoln, greatest of our mighty dead, whose memory is as gentle as the summer air when reapers sing 'mid gathered sheaves, copied with the pen what Grant and his brave comrades wrote with swords.

Grandeur than the Greek, nobler than the Roman, the soldiers of the Republic, with patriotism as shoreless as the air, battled for the rights of others, for the nobility of labour; fought that mothers might own their babes, that arrogant idleness should not scar the back of patient toil, that our country should not be a

many-headed monster, made of warring States, but a nation—sovereign, great and free.

Blood was water, money was leaves, and life was only common air, until one flag floated over the Republic without a master and without a slave. Then was asked the question: Will a free people tax themselves to pay the nation's debt? The soldiers went home to their waiting wives, to their glad children, and to the girls they loved. They went back to the fields, the shops, and mines. They had not been demoralized. They had been ennobled. They were as honest in peace as they were brave in war. Mocking at poverty, laughing at reverses, they made a friend of toil. They said, "We saved the nation's life, and what is life without honour?" They worked and wrought with all of labour's royal sons that every pledge the nation gave might be redeemed. And their great leader, having put a shining band of friendship, a girdle of clasped and happy hands around the globe, comes home and finds that every promise made in war has now the ring and gleam of gold.

And now let us drink to the volunteers. To those who sleep in unknown, sunken graves; whose names are only in the hearts of those they loved and left, of those who often hear in happy dreams the footsteps of return. Let us drink to those who died while lipless famine mocked. One to all the maimed whose scars give modesty a tongue, and all who dared and gave to chance the care, the keeping of their lives; to all the dead; to Sherman, to Sheridan, and to Grant, the foremost soldier of the world; and last, to Lincoln, whose loving life, like a bow of peace, spans and arches all the clouds of war.





1776.

## Declaration of Independence.

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ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO OUR FATHERS RETIRED  
THE GODS FROM POLITICS.

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IT has been a favourite idea with me that our forefathers were educated by Nature; that they grew grand as the continent upon which they landed; that the great rivers—the wide plains—the splendid lakes—the lonely forests—the sublime mountains—that all these things stole into and became a part of their being, and they grew great as the country in which they lived. • They began to hate the narrow, contracted views of Europe. They were educated by their surroundings, and every little colony had to be, to a certain extent, a republic. The kings of the old world endeavoured to parcel out this land to their favourites. But there were too many Indians. There was too much courage required for them to take and keep it, and so men had to come here who were dissatisfied with the old country—who were dissatisfied with England, dissatisfied with France, with Germany, with Ireland, and Holland. The king's favourites stayed at home. Men came here for liberty, and on account of certain principles they entertained and held dearer than life. And they were willing to work, willing to fell the forests, to fight the savages, willing to go through all

the hardships, perils and dangers of a new country, of a new land; and the consequence was that our country was settled by brave and adventurous spirits, by men who had opinions of their own and were willing to live in the wild forests for the sake of expressing those opinions, even if they expressed them only to trees, rocks, and savage men. The best blood of the old world came to the new.

These grand men were enthusiasts; and the world has only been raised by enthusiasts. In every country there have been a few who have given a national aspiration to the people. The enthusiasts of 1776 were the builders and framers of this great and splendid government; and they were the men who saw, although others did not, the golden fringe of the mantle of glory that will finally cover this world. They knew, they felt, they believed that they would give a new constellation to the political heavens—that they would make the Americans a grand people—grand as the continent on which they lived.

Only a few days ago I stood in Independence Hall—in that little room where was signed the immortal paper. A little room, like any other; and it did not seem possible that from that room went forth ideas, like cherubim and seraphim, spreading their wings over a continent, and touching as with holy fire, the hearts of men.

In a few minutes I was in the park, where are gathered the accomplishments of a century. Our fathers never dreamed of the things I saw. There were hundreds of locomotives, with their nerves of steel and breath of flame—every kind of machine, with whirling wheels and curious cogs and cranks, and the myriad thoughts of men that have been wrought in iron, brass

and steel. And going out from one little building were wires in the air, stretching to every civilized nation, and they could send a shining messenger in a moment to any part of the world, and it would go sweeping under the waves of the sea with thoughts and words within its glowing heart. I saw all that had been achieved by this nation, and I wished that the signers of the Declaration—the soldiers of the revolution—could see what a century of freedom has produced. I wished they could see the fields we cultivate—the rivers we navigate—the railroads running over the Alleghanies, far into what was then the unknown forest—on over the broad prairies—on over the vast plains—away over the mountains of the West, to the Golden Gate of the Pacific.

What has made this country? I say again, liberty and labour. What would we be without labour? I want every farmer, when ploughing the rustling corn of June—while mowing in the perfumed fields—to feel that he is adding to the wealth and glory of the United States. I want every mechanic—every man of toil, to know and feel that he is keeping the cars running, the telegraph wires in the air; that he is making the statues and painting the pictures; that he is writing and printing the books; that he is helping to fill the world with honour, with happiness, with love and law.

Our country is founded upon the dignity of labour—upon the equality of man. Ours is the first real republic in the history of the world. Beneath our flag the people are free. We have retired the gods from politics. We have found that man is the only source of political power, and that the governed should govern. We have disfranchised the aristocrats of the air, and have given one country to mankind.



## At a Brother's Grave.

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HON. EBON C. INGERSOLL, DIED AT WASHINGTON,  
JUNE 2ND, 1879.

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**M**Y FRIENDS : I am going to do that which the dead often promised he would do for me. The loved and loving brother, husband, father, friend, died where manhood's morning almost touches noon, and while the shadows still were falling toward the West. He had not passed on life's highway the stone that marks the highest point, but being weary for a moment he laid down by the wayside, and, using his burden for a pillow, fell into that dreamless sleep that kisses down his eyelids still. While yet in love with life and raptured with the world, he passed to silence and pathetic dust. Yet, after all, it may be best ; just in the happiest, sunniest hour of all the voyage, while eager winds are kissing every sail, to dash against the unseen rock, and in an instant hear the billows roar—a sunken ship. For, whether in mid-sea or among the breakers of the farther shore, a wreck must mark at last the end of each and all. And every life, no matter if its every hour is rich with love, and every moment jewelled with a joy, will, at its close, become a tragedy, as sad, and deep, and dark as can be woven of the warp and woof of mystery and death. This brave and tender man in every storm of life was oak and rock, but in the sunshine he was vine and flower.

He was the friend of all heroic souls. He climbed the heights and left all superstitions far below, while on his forehead fell the golden dawning of a grander day. He loved the beautiful, and was with colour, form and music touched to tears. He sided with the weak, and with a willing hand gave alms; with loyal heart and with the purest mind he faithfully discharged all public trusts. He was a worshipper of liberty and a friend of the oppressed. A thousand times I have heard him quote the words: "For justice all place a temple, and all season summer." He believed that happiness was the only good, reason the only torch, justice the only worshipper, humanity the only religion, and love the priest.

He added to the sum of human joy; and were every one for whom he did some loving service to bring a blossom to his grave, he would sleep to-night beneath a wilderness of flowers. Life is a narrow vale between the cold and barren peaks of two eternities. We strive in vain to look beyond the heights. We cry aloud, and the only answer is the echo of our wailing cry. From the voiceless lips of the unreplying dead there comes no word; but in the night of death hope sees a star, and listening love hears the rustle of a wing. He who sleeps here, when dying, mistaking the approach of death for the return of health, whispered, with his latest breath, "I am better now." Let us believe, in spite of doubts and dogmas and fears and tears, that these dear words are true of all the countless dead. And now, to you, who have been chosen from among the many men he loved to do the last sad office for the dead, we give his sacred dust. Speech cannot contain our love. There was—there is—no gentler, stronger, manlier man.



## Whence and Whither.

—  
SPOKEN AT THE GRAVE OF A CHILD. JAN. 1882.  
—

MY FRIENDS: I know how vain it is to gild a grief with words, and yet I wish to take from every grave its fear. Here, in this world, where life and death are equal kings, all should be brave enough to meet what all the dead have met. The future has been filled with fear, stained and polluted by the heartless past. From the wondrous tree of life the buds fall with ripened fruit, and in the common bed of earth the patriarchs and babes sleep side by side. Why should we fear that which will come to all that is? We cannot tell; we do not know which is the greater blessing—life or death. We cannot say that death is not a good. We do not know whether the grave is the end of this life or the door of another, or whether the night here is not somewhere else a dawn. Neither can we tell which is the more fortunate—the child dying in its mother's arms, before its lips have learned to form a word, or he who journeys all the length of life's uneven road, painfully taking the last slow steps with staff and crutch.

Every cradle asks us, "Whence?" and every coffin, "Whither?" The poor barbarian, weeping above his dead, can answer these questions as intelligently and

satisfactorily as the robed priest of the most authentic creed. The tearful ignorance of the one is just as consoling as the learned and unmeaning words of the other. No man, standing where the horizon of life has touched a grave, has any right to prophesy a future filled with pain and tears. It may be that death gives all there is of worth to life. If those we press and strain against our hearts could never die, perhaps that love would wither from the earth. May be this common fate treads from out the paths between our hearts the weeds of selfishness and hate, and I had rather live and love where death is king than have eternal life where love is not. Another life is naught unless we know and love again the ones who love us here.

They who stand here with breaking hearts around this little grave need have no fear. The larger and nobler faith in all that is and is to be, tells us that death, even at its worst, is only perfect rest. We know that through the common wants of life—the needs and duties of each hour—their grief will lessen day by day, until this grave will be to them a place of rest and peace—almost of joy. There is for them this consolation: the dead do not suffer. If they live again, their lives will surely be as good as ours.

We have no fear. We are all children of the same mother, and the same fate awaits us all. We, too; have our religion, and it is this: Help for the living—Hope for the dead.



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