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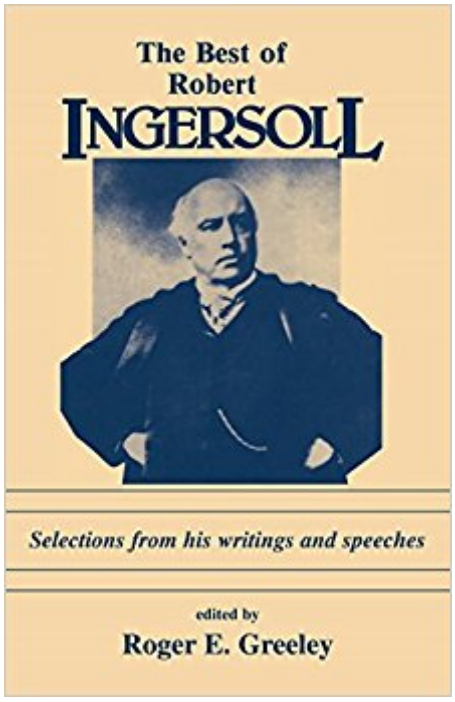
The Best Of Robert Ingersoll: Selections From His Writings And Speeches



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Synopsis

Robert Ingersoll was America’s finest orator and foremost leader of freethinkers. Mark Twain, Thomas Edison, Eugene V. Debs, and Elizabeth Cady used to gather to hear the speeches of "the great agnostic."Roger E. Greeley has selected the best from speeches and essays of this iconoclastic orator who labored to destroy the superstition and hypocrisy of fundamentalism in America and who answered the Moral Majority in the last century.One hundred years after he advanced into the national spotlight, Ingersoll’s commentaries still retain their fresh, penetrating, and witty character. His pleas for civil rights, the rights of women and children, responsible and responsive government, and individual freedom of conscience and religious belief have placed him in the vanguard of enlightened thinkers.Today the legacy of Robert Ingersoll, prophet and pioneer, merits the attention of anyone who espouses humane, liberal, rational, or agnostic opinions.

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Customer Reviews

Roger E. GreeleyÂ is Minister Emeritus of People’s Church, a Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Kalamazoo, MI. He is the editor ofÂ The Best of Robert Ingersoll,Â The Best of Humanism, andÂ Thomas Jefferson’s Freethought Legacy.

Robert Ingersoll is the great American atheist or an unapologetic agnostic, as those intent in saving his soul claimed. Ingersoll was a man ahead of his time in charging AmericaÃ¢Â Â™s religious hypocrisy and, most importantly, the encroachment of religion in politics. He castigated those that hid behind the veil of religious sanctity while at the same time actively working against those that did

not share their faith.Robert Ingersoll was the person that funded the legal defense of the teacher accused of heresy in the Scopes Monkey Trial. As such, he warned the respect of the public as a person that practiced what he preached.I believe that to learn more about IngersollÃ¢Â Â™s work, reading Susan JacobyÃ¢Â Â™s books is the best way to learn about this great man that could have been a US president had not been for the republican partyÃ¢Â Â™s fear of his ideas.

I had not realized this, but this is not a "selection" of writings but an anthology of quotes, some short, some about the length of a paragraph, arranged by topic. I had hoped for more material, and in context. Good for quote mining, and for a sample of Ingersoll's thought, but not as satisfying as some other works.

Mark Twain expressed it best when he wrote the following lines to his wife in 1879:"I've just come to my room, Livy darling, I guess this was the memorable night of my life. By George, I never was so stirred since I was born. I heard [a speech] by that splendid old soul, Col. Bob Ingersoll,--oh, it was just the supremest combination of English words that was ever put together since the world began."Mark Twain embodied the hearts and minds of many American's with these words, for indeed, Robert Ingersoll was very well known and was a mangificent orator and politician. People travelled for miles to hear his speeches, where attendance was standing room only. Quite often, Col. Ingersoll's speeches ran for three hours or more (which he committed to memory and recited without use of notes), yet people would stay for the entire presentation, totally enthralled and hanging on his words. The time was the late 1800's and it was the pinnacle of the Golden Age of Freethought in America.Now, it isn't surprising, really, why the name Robert Ingersoll has slipped quietly into the history books with most people today having never heard of his name. Robert Ingersoll was an agnostic and quite often spoke on the subjects of religion and God. His views were considered offensive and heretic by many, but to many others his words rang with clear reason and logic and commanded the attention of all who heard his words. Quite often, the press would ridicule him and paint him in an unfavorable light, often citing the religious ire and condemnation of those who could not answer the questions he presented, but wished his voice to be silenced nonetheless. But Robert Ingersoll was also a rationalist, a free thinker, and he advocated and preached the doctrine of reason, logic and science. He implored that all men should think for themselves and not fall victim to the mindless banter of tradition or religious dogma. Clearly, he was offensive to some, but to many he was the voice of reason and clear thought.Ingersoll was a visionary and was ahead of his time on many subjects. He was an abolitionist who was opposed to all forms of human slavery

and who was a very ardent supporter of women’s rights and the right for women to vote. And although he held no belief in the supernatural or in God, he was very moral and upstanding and would serve as a fine example today to the politicians who make a mockery of our Constitution and our civil liberties. Ingersoll was a republican and the Attorney General of Illinois and his popularity was so high and his name so well known, he was repeatedly asked to run for Governor of Illinois. Unfortunately, there was one problem. Even though the Constitution states that no man shall be required to profess a belief in any religion to be eligible to hold positions within the government, the church and the influence of religious dogma in this country had grown to a point that any man who would dare say that he was agnostic or atheist would never receive the support of any political party to run for high office. He was asked to publicly recant his beliefs so that he could run for office, to which he adamantly refused by stating:"Good-by, gentlemen! I am not asking to be Governor of Illinois ... I have in my composition that which I have declared to the world as my views upon religion. My position I would not, under any circumstances, not even for my life, seem to renounce. I would rather refuse to be President of the United States than to do so. My religious belief is my own. It belongs to me, not to the State of Illinois. I would not smother one sentiment of my heart to be the Emperor of the round world."Many of Ingersoll’s views and opinions will be seen as harsh by those who hold dear to a religious faith. But that is not reason enough to silence the words and thoughts of this man. He presents many interesting arguments and reasons worthy of discussion and ponderation. It is sad that just because a man who holds a view outside the norm of the mainstream that he should be forgotten and silenced as an infidel or a heretic. Sadly, even to this very day, any man who openly professes to have no religion or no belief in God is still ostracized and cannot hope to serve in any high political office in the land of the free. Ingersoll quite often pointed out that unless a man uses his mind to think for himself, he will always be a slave to those who tell him what to think and what to believe.This book provides an interesting insight to our history about a man and an era in history that was born not out of superstition, but out of reason and logic and the desire to think. Certainly, this book will not be for everyone, but whether you agree with Ingersoll’s opinions or not is irrelevant. The fact remains that this is a page out of our American history books that should be dusted off and looked at again. Ingersoll made some amazing predictions that came true and still offers today some thoughts and ideals that are worthy of discussion that are relevant to our current world and society. This book is but merely a collection of speeches from Ingersoll and will serve as a good introduction to the body of his work.

What a guy! Bob Ingersoll.In my growing-up days, there was a dark cloud around "Ingersoll." Where

I got the bad vibes from I don’t remember. Not from my parents. Probably from the couple of churches I attended.Mom was not a reader, except for reading me sad passages about Jesus. She meant well, having no knowledge of secular thinking.In Endicott, New York, I remember walking quite a few blocks to the Episcopal church. I think Mom did attend some Sundays. A young Father there had some proclivities. Some older guy from church came to our back-of-the-property single-floor rented apartment. I think he had eyes on my mother. I remember Dad almost threw him down the five or six steps next to the outside coal bin.Once we had moved to Michigan, me at 11 being the oldest of four (later five), she took us by bus to a Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod (the strictest).Dad read crime magazines. I remember him with a few books, probably from the public library, about explorers. Another, in particular, was "The Egyptian Book of the Dead." As I recall, Dad never entered a church.Except for the "dark cloud," I never knew Ingersoll. What a pity.I was too beclouded by weekly rote mantras, sermons, and two years of catechismal lessons, which for me never reached home. For example, in covering the 7th Commandment--adultery--the pastor advised us to ask our parents. What a missed opportunity to discuss consequences, maturity, and commitment, which were never brought to life, though they could have been life changing.The Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), despite having such a terrible, clumsy name for such a great body, came up with perhaps the most preeminent and concise statement of secular belief. I have to repeat it here: "There are no gods, no devils, no angels, no heaven or hell. There is only our natural world. Religion is but myth and superstition that hardens hearts and enslaves minds."A few years ago, the FFRF did bring out a 2nd edition (January 1, 1993) of Orvin Larson’s "American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll" (see my review). More has to be done.Robert Green Ingersoll was a great man. Roger E. Greeley’s "The Best of Robert Ingersoll: Selections from his writings and speeches" is a step. Greeley’s brief Preface and about 10-page Introductory Biography are excellent. The Ingersoll quotations run to a little over 100 pages, arranged alphabetically. At first, I didn’t like, that for the most part, no citations are given. Not scholarly, I thought. My reservations disappeared, as I realized that in over 30 years of public life, Ingersoll would have repeated himself and his ideas many times, modifying them most likely to meet specific occasions. Ingersoll’s complete works appear in 12 volumes. They can be accessed at no cost at Project Gutenberg EBook, and elsewhere. The quotations are inspiring and endearing.Greeley includes a few pages of pictures. Many many more can be obtained and enjoyed through Google Images.Greeley’s Chapter Two includes a few, very few, of Ingersoll’s speeches. I find that reading them is almost Shakespearean. They roll, they rumble. What he must have been like to hear! What clarity, what simplicity! What beauty. What a wonderful man. I am smitten. So were all the luminaries quoted by

Greeley in his Appendix IV on Encomiums. I will not list them here. They are too numerous and outstanding.

Good sample of Ingersoll's thoughts. However all are short portions of longer items.

A good anthology of Ingersoll's opus.

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