

Secular Mann

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"I am the village atheist," he told me shortly after we met. But evidently the voters of Summers County, West Virginia, didn't mind. They twice elected him prosecuting attorney and to the West Virginia legislature. His daughter has also been twice elected prosecuting attorney. To Hinton in Summers County, I had made a pilgrimage to meet a man whose every op-ed in the Charleston Gazette caught and held my attention. I might say his idealism appealed to me, but Perry Mann isn't an idealist--he lived and appreciated an ideal life and based his essays on his life experience. Perry Mann has been recognized in Robert Shetterly's Americans Who Tell the Truth. On the back cover of Mann and Nature: A Collection of Essays, compiled by Ann Farrell Bowers, Shetterly wrote these words of praise: "Working and living with nature have taught Perry Mann to respect the great web of life, which he believes is much stronger than any human activity. By abusing the earth and not realizing what we need to support the health of this web, he believes we are in danger of destroying ourselves and much of the earth's life forms with us. Not well known outside of his community in West Virginia, Perry Mann presents the importance of thousands of unheralded and critically important voices across our country." Chris Chanlett honored his friend Perry Mann in the Charleston Gazette: "His sheer eloquence gives comfort to his faithful and challenge to his antagonists. He loves the arena of intellectual disputation and maintains a genial demeanor as he skewers fundamentalists. In over 1,500 columns he has sustained a radical critique of modern trends with a synthesis of liberal and conservative beliefs." In her introduction to Mann and Nature, Ann Farrell Bowers paid this tribute to Perry Mann: "He was my high school English teacher, and his effect on me was profound. It has been said that it takes only a few good teachers to change a life forever, and he was mine." You will find here Perry Mann's understanding of and expansion on thoughts, from among others, of Diogenes, Spinoza, Andre Sakharov, Tolstoy, Elie Wiesel, Jefferson, Henry George, Marx, Jesus, Toynbee, William Blake, Richard Dawkins, Copernicas, Darwin, Twain, A. E. Housman, Descarte, E. L. Doctorow, William James, and Pagans. You will also find praise for famous composers and thoughts on such topics as free will and determinism, Christian fundamentalism, Moslem terrorism, hope without a heaven, homosexuality, World War II, George Bush, Iraq, Robert E. Lee, Washington and Lee University, socialism and capitalism. These essays are from hundreds that Perry Mann wrote between 1999 and 2014. They were originally published in the Charleston Gazette and the Nicholas Chronicle, both West Virginia newspapers.



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