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NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

FREETHOUGHT AND MODERN PROGRESS.

A LECTURE

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THE present is a very opportune time to point out the rapid progress which is taking place throughout society, and to endeavour to ascertain the position Freethought occupies in that advancement. Liberalism has recently achieved a victory over a Tory Government, which is sufficiently indicative of the characteristics of the age. In spite of the existence among us of the relics of arbitrary faith and narrow creeds, the Attorney-General found that the period had passed when he would be allowed to fetter the press by successfully prosecuting the *National Reformer*, and thereby prevent the publication of a paper that boldly exposed political corruptions and theological restrictions. The love of inquiry and freedom has such a firm hold upon the minds of the present generation, that unless considerable retrogression takes place, prosecutions for heretical opinions will not be tolerated by a people who have paid so dearly for the liberty which to-day they possess. The year 1868, so far as it has gone, is certainly not perfect. Bigotry still reigns, prompting its adherents to seek to re-enact the barbarous laws of a rude age; religious zeal still urges its devotees to persecute those who do not accept the prevailing faith; fanaticism is still in our midst impelling its victims to denounce the "infidel" as one unworthy the fellowship of general society. The Freethinker is still regarded by the civil power as an outlaw, being deprived of the means of obtaining justice in a court of law unless he submits to a sham, or, what is worse, resorts to hypocrisy and deceit. The Statute Book of England still contains "Acts against blasphemy," and enactments against free speech, which, if they dare be enforced, would imprison every man who writes or speaks against the "Holy Religion." Notwithstanding, however, these remaining blots upon our civilisation, if we take a retrospect of the last two hundred years, and glance at the important changes which have taken place, we shall recognise that the struggles of the pioneers of the past were not in vain. It was necessary for them to till and prepare the soil for the reception of that plant, which the persistent

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toil of subsequent ages has caused to yield such encouraging fruit. True liberty is not the offshoot of a day, but rather the growth of years. "Our Elliots, our Hampdens, and our Cromwells, a couple of centuries ago, hewed with their broad-swords a rough pathway for the people. But it was reserved for the present century to complete the triumph which the Commonwealth began." The foundation of Free-thought has long been laid in England. And although the edifice of progress erected thereon has been slow in its erection, it has now reached such a height of grandeur that it commands the admiration of the world. When in 1662, the 2,000 clergymen resigned their benefices, and gave up the national religion of the time, because they could not submit to the pet doctrine of the church, which was "passive submission," they adopted the very basis of Freethought principles. If their attachment to theology impeded their further advancement, it does not argue one iota against the efficacy of the principles. Truth may be crushed, but it cannot be annihilated; it is as permanent as the earth which contains it. Unfortunately, to secure the general recognition of truth, and the possession of popular right, requires not only time, but also personal sacrifice. The battle of the freedom of the press has been nobly fought, and practically won, but the victory cost Paine, Hone, Wright, Carlile, Williams, Hetherington, Watson, and many others their liberty, and imposed upon them privations which were keen to endure. For selling the *Poor Man's Guardian* only, upwards of 500 persons were thrown into prison. For publishing the "Age of Reason" in 1797, Williams suffered twelve months' imprisonment in Coldbath prison. In 1812, Daniel Isaac Eaton was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment and the pillory, for the same grave offence; and the following year, Mr. Houston was sentenced to be imprisoned for two years in Newgate, and fined £200, for publishing his book called "Ecce Homo." In October, 1819, Carlile was tried for publishing Paine's *Theological Works*, and Palmer's "Principles of Nature," and condemned for the first to Dorchester Gaol, and a fine of £1000; and for the second to one year's imprisonment, and a fine of £500, and had to find security for good behaviour for himself in £1000, and two securities in £100 each. His wife and sister were afterwards convicted of similar acts, and suffered heavy sentences. Upwards of thirty other persons, many of them journeymen of Mr. Carlile, and the rest small

booksellers, have also been subjected to fine and imprisonment in various degrees of severity. After this, Charles Southwell was imprisoned and fined £100, for publishing an article in the *Oracle of Reason*.

Liberty of speech was another achievement, to obtain which, imprisonment and death had to be endured. In the early part of the seventeenth century, Legat and Wrightman were burned by English bishops, for avowing heretical opinions. Since that time we have had the Rev. Robert Taylor imprisoned and fined for lecturing against the prevailing religious opinions, and the arrest and imprisonment for six months of Mr. Holyoake, for words spoken in the heat of debate. Society has subsequently undergone great changes, civilisation has advanced. The fact is being acknowledged that opinion is the result of organisation and evidence. And instead of inflicting punishment for the imperfections of the one, or the limitation of the other, the modern Secular policy is to recognise the widest and most diversified thoughts, seeking to correct those which are erroneous by unfettered inquiry and honest criticism.

The terms Freethought, Heretic, and Secularism, will be used on the present occasion synonymously, as conveying the same idea. Those who object to think freely are not likely to become heretical, and until a man dissents from orthodoxy he can never adopt the principles of Secularism, inasmuch, as Secular philosophy suggests that nothing must be accepted as truth merely upon authority, but, on the contrary, all questions should be submitted to the test of reason and careful examination. This course is never adopted by those who believe any creed or principle without investigation. It will be also necessary in this inquiry to regard the term Freethought, in its most comprehensive sense, as not being confined exclusively to religion. While it is too true that theological enslavement has in all ages been productive of the greatest of wrongs, stimulated as it has been by the fiercest passions of human nature, still, political and social fetters are also antagonistic to the happiness and progress of a people. Political liberty is as essential as religious freedom to a nation's welfare. In fact, in many instances, the one is the necessary consequence of the other. A people politically free will not long submit to religious oppression. And, moreover, those who are the least trammelled with dogmas and creeds are the first to welcome political progress. Hence sceptical Germany can

adopt the principle of the full representation of the people, accompanied with the ballot, while Christian England denies such rights and necessities to the wealth-producers of this country. If we take the principal Catholic countries we shall find that religious restrictions are as numerous as political rights are limited. The Queen of Spain can pay her religious devotions to the Virgin Mary, while she gags the press to prevent the corruption of her priestly-arranged system being exposed to her slave-bound subjects. The present ruler of France can sit securely upon his perjured and bloodstained pedestal of power, giving vent to his "religious" emotions, while the freedom of the press is fettered, and the political regenerators banished from their country. The Pope of Rome can prepare pastorals condemning scientific progress, while he issues an allocution against the freedom of the press, the choice of education, improvements in the marriage laws, and the burial ceremonies as contained in the recent liberal policy of Austria. Even in our own land, the foremost opponents to political emancipation, are those who would bind us with the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. At the present time those who are struggling to maintain that scandal of the age, and that impediment to progress—the Irish Church—are clergymen of the Protestant faith. Those obstructionists can muster their clerical forces at St. James's Hall, to condemn the advanced Gladstonian policy, while they preach to their flock, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, for there is no power but of God . . . Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." Equally desirable is it to have Free-thought and free utterance upon social questions. As political liberty and religious freedom are absolute requisites to the vitality of modern society, so are social restrictions detrimental to the permanent happiness and comfort of a nation.

Viewed in this broad and expansive light, it can be readily seen that Freethought cannot co-exist with an absolute belief in the teachings of the New Testament. What stimulant did Christ give to think freely when he said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me; . . . if a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned?" Is there any incentive to

impartial investigation in the gloomy words, "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned?" Once establish among mankind the erroneous notion that truth is confined to one particular channel, and that those who do not go in that direction are to be cast forth as a "withered branch," and then the impossibility of unfettered thought will immediately be apparent. Put a man to examine a subject, and tell him that regardless of evidence, he must arrive at one conclusion or be damned, the pursuit of truth is then made a hypocritical farce rather than a noble and useful reality. It is indeed asserted sometimes that Freethought has been encouraged by Christianity. The encouragement, however, which it received from Christians when they had the power, was that they would not only torture and imprison those who, exercising the right of Freethought, would publicly oppose their faith; but they also committed to the flames those works which demonstrated the fallacy and absurdity of their system. Christian desire to promote free inquiry in its early history is exemplified in the memorable proclamation of the Christian Emperor Theodosius, in which he declared that the whole of the writings of Porphyry, and all others who had written against the Christian religion, should be committed to the fire. This, truly, was a novel mode of promoting Freethought. The writings of Celsus met with an equally *warm* reception, and for a proof that the same desire has existed in modern times, it is necessary not only to read the history of those Freethought pioneers of the last and early part of the present century, but also to remember that now, whenever Christians have the power, they close the halls against us, in order that we may not have the opportunity to promulgate the materials for free enquiry. Still, notwithstanding this display of burning zeal and exclusive action, Freethought has triumphed. Indeed, its very nature is such as to render its ultimate defeat an utter impossibility. Man is a progressive being; having within him an inherent love for freedom, he cannot therefore long tolerate anything which cramps his mind, or fetters his thought. The truth of this has been illustrated within the last few years in our universities. The desire manifested by orthodox students to discourage free inquiry, might have checked its victory, but it cannot destroy it. That which is congenial to modern civilisation must obtain admission sooner or later into the national seats of learning. Mr. Coleridge per-

ceived this, hence in moving the second reading of the Abolition Oxford Test Bill, two years ago, he said, "Free inquiry they must have, and he would be bold enough to say they ought to have free inquiry, as the only real foundation of reasonable conviction and intelligent belief. It would break in upon the university from without, and it was far better that it should come on legitimately and openly, than doubtfully and unlawfully, as it did at present, with perhaps some peril to the force of conscientious obligations and solemn undertakings. They could no more bar out free inquiry than they could prevent the sun from shining in the sky, because they might shut their eyes to his light. There had been too much fear of inquiry, and this had too often been accompanied by what had been aptly termed 'murmuring submission,' and they had seen the painful picture of 'blind Authority beating with his staff the child who might have led it.'" Doubtless, Mr. Coleridge had learned an useful lesson from the sceptical writings of the Essayists and Reviewers, and the heretical policy of Bishop Colenso. These men, experiencing the advantages of Freethought themselves, determined to carry it into that church which had so long dreaded and opposed its approach. The result is a Freethought service rendered to civilisation, which cannot be over estimated. The partial cessation of prosecutions for non-religious belief is another proof of the success of Freethought. True, a Tory Government may threaten to prosecute the *Reformer*, and Christians may still endeavour to blacken the character of an unbeliever, and frequently seek to ruin his reputation; but that open and organised persecution for the frank avowal of an honest opinion, which disgraced the history of the last, and portions of the present century, has almost disappeared. At a time not very remote, to impeach the prevailing faith, was a sure precursor of being held up to public scorn, and then to be banished from home and located within the prison walls. Now, however, theological truth can be proclaimed without any apprehension of a successful Government prosecution.

The triumph of Freethought is further illustrated in the conduct of our public men, and the mode in which they conduct the legislation of this country. Such men as J. S. Mill, Gladstone, and Bright, now never attempt to regulate their public conduct by the teachings of the New Testament. They do not openly assail the faith, because to do so is not fashionable. It would impair their utility in a "Christian

country." If they were once to attack Christianity ever so mildly, Christians, with that "charity which thinketh no evil," would at once denounce them, irrespective of their conduct, as enemies to the public good. Taking warning from the treatment Mr. J. S. Mill recently received because he rejected the Bible God and the Christian doctrine of "inherent depravity," our liberal public men pursue a progressive course, regardless of any faith. And if during their march Christianity will help them, then they accept its services; if, however, it opposes their progress, then it shares the fate of all obstructions—it is quietly ignored, the welfare of a nation being more important than the consideration for any religion. In the House of Commons all public measures now introduced are tested by the Freethought standard of utility. Even Thomas Hughes, in bringing his Sabbatarian Bill recently into the House, announced his intention to argue the merits or demerits of the Bill apart from theology altogether. The religious aspect of the question was a subject upon which he cared not to enter. In fact, no measure is now recommended to attention and preference, solely because it is supposed to accord with "God's declared will" and the spirit of religion. This is a positive proof of the decline of Christian influence on modern advancement. When civilisation was paralysed by Christianity, God's will was the standard by which all progressive movements were tested. Now, however, it is different. Before any measure has a chance of being accepted, it must be shown that its provisions are necessary and useful. The stronghold of the successful statesman to-day is the standard of utility. In his reasoning, his whole argument is made to rest upon this, the foundation of permanent progress. This fact is admitted by the liberal press of the country. The *Inquirer* for May 6th, 1865, in speaking of the career of two good men, said, "Both Mr. Cobden and Mr. Lincoln are illustrations of the secularisation of our modern public life. They reveal to us the path by which those must tread whose ambition it is to benefit their age. Had they lived a few hundred years ago, they might have built churches, or founded monasteries, or endowed colleges,—been the Wyckhams or St. Bernards of their time. Their lot was rather to legislate and agitate—to give food to the hungry, to undo heavy burdens, and to set the oppressed free; to remove impediments from the path of national progress, that human development might be left to its own laws, to seek

its welfare in its own way. Life thus became to them mundane, secular, rational, non-theological, spent amid the hard practical conflicts of politics, and aiming at nothing higher than the advancement of justice, righteousness, and liberty in the world."

Indeed, this ignoring Christian principles as a guide is not confined to public men. Christians themselves have long since ceased to be influenced in their every-day actions by the teachings of their Master. In his work upon "Liberty," John Stuart Mill says, "that not one Christian in a thousand guides or tests his individual conduct by reference to those [New Testament] laws." The reason why those laws cannot be obeyed in the nineteenth century is given in the words of Mill, that "the morality of Christ is in many important points incomplete and onesided, and that unless ideas and feelings not sanctioned by it, had contributed to the formation of European life and character, human affairs would have been in a worse condition than they now are." The same writer tells us that, "other ethics than any which can be evolved from exclusively Christian sources, must exist side by side with Christian ethics to produce the moral regeneration of mankind." The avowal of these truths by such an eminent authority as Mr. Mill, is a decided proof of the prominent position Freethought holds in the minds of those who are contributing to modern progress. Within the last fifty years there are but few of our public men who in their legislative duties have acted up to the advice either of Christ or St. Paul. If they had done so we should have been deprived of the advantages of the commercial treaty with France, the Government Annuities Bill, the Divorce Act, and the Post Office Savings' Bank Bill. If the House of Commons had adopted the advice of St. Paul, the Jews would still be excluded from Parliament, and the emancipation of the Catholics would never have been granted. During the cattle plague of last year the Christians applied to Government to appoint a "fast day," in order that by prayer and supplication the calamity might be averted. The time however for "fast days" is gone. The Government refused. The advantages of science were preferred to the delusions of prayer. The uniform vote of Allegiance Bill had for its object the breaking down of those religious restrictions which were erected when Christianity was paramount. The climax of anti-Christian legislation has just been brought about by the secular policy of Mr. Gladstone

in reference to the Irish Church. It is not difficult to foresee that the downfall of this monstrous injustice in Ireland is only a precursor to the cessation of Church power in England. In spite of his theological training, Mr. Gladstone is impelled on to the performance of Secularistic work. The watchwords of modern progress are, religious liberty, political freedom, and social advancement. These rights have never been recognised in Christian times or by Christian Governments, and they have only been obtained in England in proportion as Freethought has prevailed in the House of Commons, and among the masses of the people. If this fact be questioned, I may refer, in corroboration of my statement—that Secular knowledge has been the precursor of modern improvements—to Buckle, who (after showing that until doubt began, civilisation was impossible, and that the religious tolerance we now have has been forced from the clergy by the secular classes) states “that the act of doubting is the originator, or at all events, the necessary antecedent of all progress. Here we have that scepticism, the very name of which is an abomination to the ignorant, because it disturbs their lazy and complacent minds; because it troubles their cherished superstitions; because it imposes on them the fatigue of inquiry; and because it rouses even sluggish understandings to ask if things are as they are commonly supposed, and if all is really true which they from their childhood have been taught to believe. The more we examine this great principle of scepticism, the more distinctly shall we see the immense part it has played in the progress of European civilisation. To state in general terms what in this introduction will be fully proved, it may be said, that to scepticism we owe that spirit of inquiry, which, during the last two centuries, has gradually encroached on every possible subject; has reformed every department of practical and speculative knowledge; has weakened the authority of the privileged classes, and thus placed liberty on a surer foundation; has chastised the despotism of princes; has restrained the arrogance of the nobles, and has even diminished the prejudices of the clergy. In a word, it is this which has remedied the three fundamental errors of the olden time: errors which made the people, in politics too confiding; in science too credulous; in religion too intolerant.” After this important admission by one of the greatest of modern historians, who can fail to see the mighty difference between sceptical and Christian times?

Another triumph of Freethought, is the fact, that the highest ecclesiastical tribunals have virtually sanctioned the preaching of "heresy" in State pulpits. Every Sunday, clergymen give utterance to Secular truths from their pulpits, the promulgation of which, a few years ago, would have cost them their position, if not their liberty. The same liberal and progressive spirit pervades the high class literature of modern times. In fact, our newspapers, with but few exceptions, are compelled to adopt in practice the very principle which in theory they deny. Three years ago, the Rev. W. Binns, of Birkenhead, in a speech reported in the *Inquirer* of Oct. 7th, 1865, bears testimony to the prevailing tendency of Freethought in modern literature. The rev. gentleman said: "Scientific men pursue their studies and proclaim their discoveries, as if the old theology were non-existent. Owen extolled the serpent as perfectly formed, notwithstanding the curse pronounced; Lyall said there were men before Adam; ethnologists found races distinct in spite of original sin and the federal headship; philologists spoke of varieties of language long before the supposed time of Babel; and science everywhere asserted the universality and unfaillingness of law, spite of traditional miracles. General literature breathed the same healthy spirit, at once free, reverent, and inquiring. What natural depravity was taught in the muscular Christianity of Kingsley's novels? Dickens condemned cant, Sabbatarianism, and narrowness wherever found; and Thackeray, in the 'Newcomes,' looked for the salvation of honest James Binnie, though James was a disciple of that extremest of heretics, David Hume. As to poetry, it could only flourish where genius was unfettered by creeds. It needed to live in freedom, and when freedom was lost, it sunk into Spurgeonite doggerel and nursery imbecilities. It was objected that much modern literature was destructive, but if so, it still had many compensating advantages. It had in theological matters a fairness of spirit and a thoroughness of treatment far in advance of old times. The lives of Jesus by Rénan and Strauss threw new light on familiar subjects, and though many might dissent from some of their theories, yet still the world could not afford to spare them as a whole. It was a remarkable fact that we were indebted to heterodoxy for the best Biblical criticism, and the most learned and philosophical biographies of Christ. Indeed, it seemed as if the taint of heresy were needed in theology to make books either readable or precious."

This, certainly, is a high testimony to the power of Free-thought in the field of Literature. But the rev. gentleman's statements were confirmed by Archdeacon Sinclair, when recently in his charge to the clergy of Middlesex, he said: "During the last half century, however, anti-Christian writers had condescended to popularise their so-called philosophy, and to disseminate the poison of eternal death among the masses of the community. The ability they had shown in this work of destruction was as unquestionable as their design was abominable. They had contrived to make themselves not only intelligible but interesting to the artisan, the petty trader, the shopman, the clerk, and other similar classes for whom they write." As a writer in the *Reformer* some time ago observed, one of the most signal proofs that Free-thought is widely diffused throughout our literature was found in the conduct of the organs of public opinion in England during the prosecution of two of the Essayists and Reviewers. When these two writers, Dr. Williams and the Rev. Mr. Wilson, were prosecuted for alleged heretical views contained in the above work, the ablest daily papers, as the *Times*, *Daily News*, *Morning Star*, and *Daily Telegraph*, with the ablest weekly organs, as the *Spectator*, *Saturday Review*, *Examiner*, *Dispatch*, and others, all defended these men against the prosecutions of the bishops and clergy. When the same party in the Church prosecuted Bishop Colenso for his work on the Pentateuch, the same organs of public opinion expressed their sympathy with, and boldly defended, the brave Bishop in his efforts to spread the truth, against his bigoted persecutors. The same progressive principle has been manifested in the literature of Germany, where, during the last hundred years, more thinkers and more eminent writers have been produced than in any other country in the same period. And according to Buckle, this literature is the result of the scepticism which so extensively existed among the Germans. "The German philosophers," says the above author, "possess a learning and a reach of thought, which place them at the head of the civilised world."

In order that our statements of Secular progress shall not be considered hypothetical, it may be as well to produce the testimony of literary and Christian authority in support of our position. In speaking of the increase of heretical opinions in the Universities, the *Westminster Review* of October 1860, says, "Indeed, no one that knows the reli-

gious state of the Universities could doubt that such a book [the "Essays and Reviews"] would be eagerly welcomed, but welcomed only as a partial instalment. Few, perhaps, are aware how far the decay of belief extends beneath those walls. . . . 'Smouldering scepticism,' indeed! When they are honeycombed with disbelief, running through every phase, from mystical interpretation to utter atheism. Professors, tutors, fellows, and pupils are conscious of this widespread doubt." "It must be a profound evil," continues the writer, "that all thinking men should reject the national religion." . . . "The newspaper, the review, the tale by every fireside, is written almost exclusively by men who have long ceased to believe. So also the school-book, the text-book, the manuals for study of youth and manhood, the whole mental food of the day; science, history, morals, and politics, poetry, fiction, and essay; the very lesson of the school, the very sermon from the pulpit." In February, 1864, *Fraser's Magazine*, noticing that Freethought principles were extending, remarked that it is "true that for the last one hundred and fifty years at least, such opinions have been steadily increasing, not only in popularity, but in what may be called respectability. They were once confined to a small number of persons, who had very little weight with the world at large, and who perhaps neither sought nor deserved more influence than they possessed; they were afterwards professed by furious enthusiasts, whose violence, fruitful both of good and evil, prevented the mass of mankind from judging calmly of the merits of their views; they are now spreading widely and quietly through all classes of the community, and derive great weight from the demonstration supplied by history, science, and criticism of the fact, that whatever else we may or may not possess, there is in the world no such thing as an infallible Church or an infallible book." In 1865, the Rev. D. Moore, M.A., published a book entitled, "The Age and the Gospel," on pages 10 and 11 of which he says—"The tendencies to scepticism in the present day show themselves more or less in every direction. Much especially have we to apprehend from the prevalence of these tendencies among our poorer classes. No doubt, among the eight-and-twenty millions of infidel and vicious tracts computed to be annually circulated among our English poor, many are but reproductions of the coarse accusations of Richard Carlile, and Taylor, and Paine. But, mixed up with them, are attacks upon

our Christianity of a more dangerous kind—made up from the infidel philosophy of America, or the admissions of the writers in the 'Essays and Reviews,' or, in some instances, of translated extracts from the subtle scepticism of the Continent—so that in the case of large bodies of persons working together, as in shops or factories, men who never heard the names of Hegel, or Schelling, or Strauss, can retail, with flip-pant tongue, their mischievous theories of unbelief. But not by the agency of tracts only, do the promoters of popular infidelity carry on their work. They have their Sunday meetings for holding discussional or deistical services. Weekly or monthly periodicals are open to receive and deal out the freshest contributions of infidel thought. Associations are formed, ostensibly with a scientific purpose, but really to place the conclusions of science and the statements of Revelation in array against each other; all being so many painful proofs how much the recent advances of the national mind have been unaccompanied with a healthy religious influence, and showing what a tendency there is in all unsanctified knowledge to foster an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God." On page 29 of the same work, the rev. gentleman further remarks—"Never has the infidelity of the lower orders presented itself in such systematised and scientific forms as it exhibits now. It is a negation no longer—an obliteration of old faiths no longer. In outward form and pretension, at least, it is a science, a philosophy, an articulate creed." These words were penned three years ago. If any additional evidence were required to substantiate their truth, it is given by Dr. Herbert Vaughan in his pamphlet on "Popular Education in England," written in March 1868. On page 53 the rev. gentleman says—"The most thorough, the most logical, and the most distinct school opposed to us is that of the Secularists. It would be vain to close our eyes to the fact that their numbers are large and rapidly increasing." Alluding to the circulation of Freethought works, the doctor observes, on page 67—"Our alarm and our sorrow have a deeper reference, and can only be appreciated after an examination of the rationalistic and infidel literature which is circulated among the masses, and which shapes their plans and politics. Without speaking of larger and more expensive works of infidelity and rationalism, of which Messrs. Longman could furnish an ample list, we have actually before us a quantity of smaller publications and tracts, which are sold, and sometimes distributed gratis among the artizan and lower

classes. . . A large number of infidel works are in constant sale and circulation among the lower classes. The demand for them has increased so largely, that it has now become customary among their authors to stereotype all they publish." Dr. Vaughan having devoted some time to acquire facts as to the spread of Secularism, gives his readers the following information. From his "own personal knowledge" "there are three or four establishments in London alone where printing presses are exclusively engaged" on Secular publications. The Doctor knows of thirteen Freethought halls in London, "and there are many more." "The average Sunday attendance at the Secular or Freethought meetings, in London alone, is set down by the best authority on this subject at about 1,200. There are at least thirty such meetings held every week throughout the country. Wherever such lectures are given by Mr. Bradlaugh, the leader of the Atheist school, the audiences are said to be crowded, and the large majorities evidently favourable. The greatest extension of Secularist views appears to be in Lancashire and Yorkshire, where large numbers may be found in every town; next, probably, in London; then in Newcastle and its neighbourhood; then in Glasgow; next in Northampton, where the great popularity of extreme Freethinking views is of recent date." From these references to philosophical and Christian writers, it will be seen that to assert that Freethought principles are making rapid strides throughout society is no "empty boast." Added to this testimony must be recognised the vast amount of latent Secularism which exists among all classes. We have then the Rationalistic believers, who are fast increasing in number. The names of Colenso, Professor Jowitt, the Essayists and Reviewers, and the Rev. Charles Voysey, represent phases of Freethought which are rapidly supplanting the orthodoxy of the churches.

In speaking of the triumphs of Freethought, the name of Robert Owen must not be omitted. The principles to the promulgation of which he devoted his life, are now forming the basis of the constitution of this country. Infant schools, which are now so much applauded, were founded by this much misrepresented philanthropist. Had it not been for the doctrines of circumstances and utility as taught by Owen, we should doubtless have heard but little of Christians going to Social Science Congresses, and considering such questions as co-operation, prison discipline, sanitary amelioration, and the general amendment of the relation

between capital and labour. When Christians were consistent and obeyed the command to "take no thought for the morrow," to "love not the world or the things of the world," these questions were never publicly heard of. Their consideration now is the result of the operation of agencies the very antithesis of Christianity. And this doctrine of circumstances it is cheering to know is recognised in modern legislation. The vengeful character of our penal system is gradually disappearing from our statute book. We are beginning, through our laws, to look upon the criminal more and more as unfortunate and less and less guilty. Accordingly is our system of the treatment of those who offend against our laws becoming more preventive and less punitive. What is this but the partial destruction of the religious tenets of responsibility and sin, and the enthronement upon their ruins of the doctrine of circumstances? In the field of social reform what was the pet topic at the recent Social Science Congresses? Was it not the great question of the Co-operative Stores? And what are Co-operative Stores but a careful and cautious step in the direction of that true democracy, that thorough principle of social equality, that blow struck in favour of the rights of labour and against the monopoly of property, which, when uttered by that great modern apostle of New Lanark, produced against him the epithets of atheist, leveller, revolutionist, and rebel?

In claiming these Freethought triumphs, it is not intended to credit any particular class of Freethinkers with the achievement thus obtained; neither is it desired to rob the religious reformers, the Nonconformists, a Knox, a Luther, and a Wickliffe, of the laurels they won in resisting the power which was arrayed against them. Doubtless, in fighting for freedom they gave an impetus to thought. But unfortunately, dauntless as they were, they lacked consistency. Having reached the pinnacle of freedom, they forgot the rugged path up which they climbed. Having overcome the tyranny of their oppressors, they themselves persecuted those who desired to travel further on the road of progress. Hence, civilisation was deprived of valuable service through the influence of theology on the minds of men who commenced fighting the battle of freedom, but who had to yield to the dictates of a limited and exclusive faith. The progress of modern time has been stimulated by men who cared little or nothing for popular religion at a time when orthodoxy was at its lowest ebb. The last century, the years from

1700 to 1800, was the least religious, the least Christian century of the Christian era. It was the era of philosophy, of science, and of Freethought; of Voltaire, of Rousseau, and of Hume; of Black with his discovery of the true principles of heat, of Dalton with his discoveries in chemistry, of Watt with his perfection of the steam engine, of Hume with his demonstrations of the absurdity of religion, and of Thomas Paine with his clear exposition of the great fundamental principles of government. These are the men who have really assisted in the progress of the world. Their principles have sown the seeds of happiness and progress among mankind. To their efforts we are indebted for much of the prosperity of the 19th century. As Theodore Parker once said, the progressive philosophers of Christendom to-day are not Christians. The leaders of science and philanthropy in modern times, are men who have the love of truth and the love of justice, who possess large and benevolent hearts, but who have no practical faith in Christianity. This assertion has since been confirmed by J. S. Mill, who frankly states that it "can do truth no service to blink the fact, known to all who have the most ordinary acquaintance with literary history, that a large portion of the noblest and most valuable moral teaching has been the work not only of men who did not know, but of men who knew and rejected the Christian faith." These truths place Freethought in a prominent position in Modern progress.

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