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Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged.

SECULARISM:

DESTRUCTIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE.

—BY—

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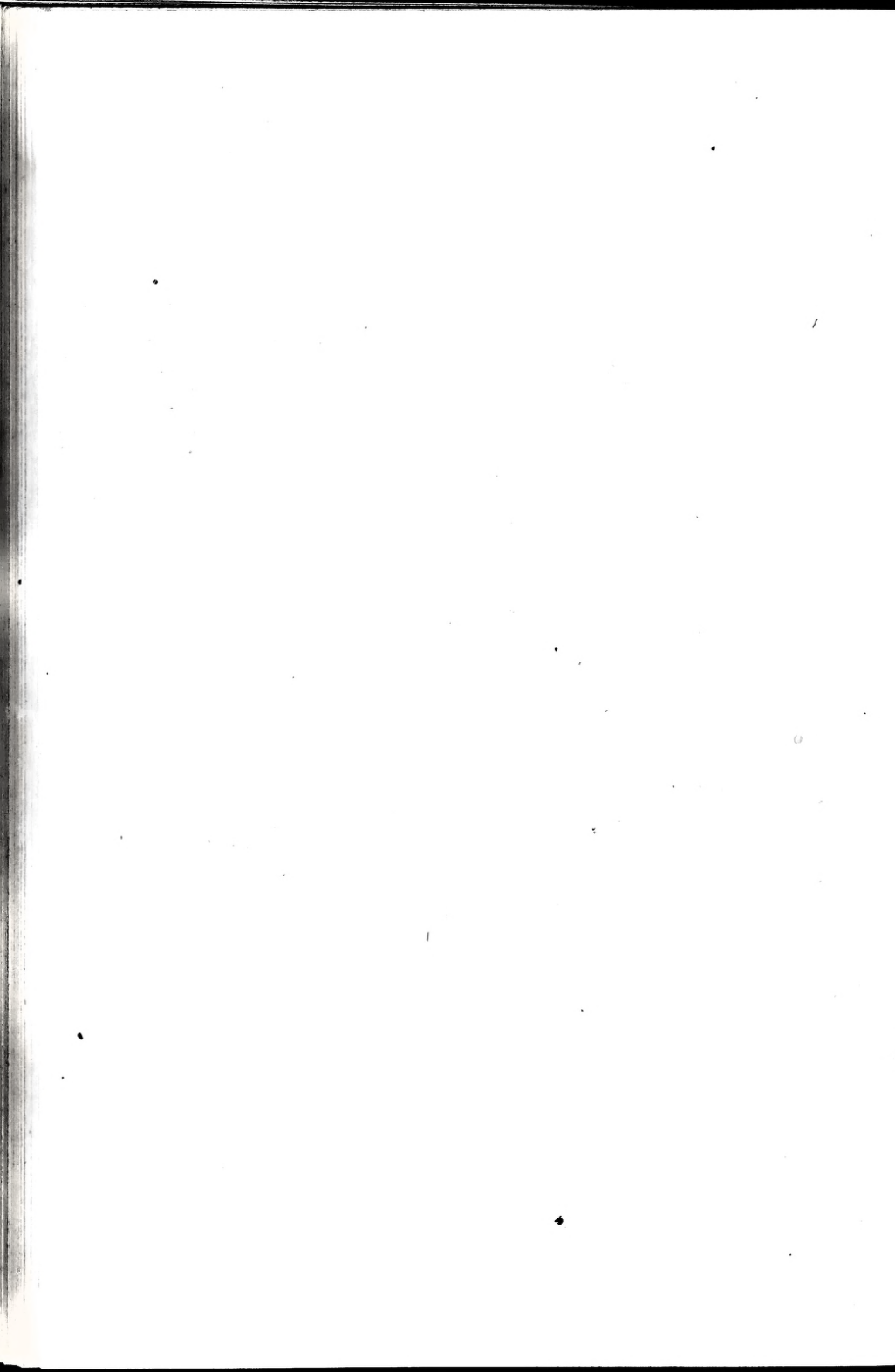
What is Secularism? Biblical Idolatry—The Secularist's Bible. Natural Depravity. Theological Supremacy. The alleged Fall of Man and his supposed Redemption through Christ. Reason and experience the true guide in human actions. Why supreme attention should be given to the duties of this life. Science more trustworthy than reliance upon any supposed Supernatural power. Morality is of natural growth, having no necessary connection with Theology. The consistent carrying out of Secular teaching in every-day life the best preparation for any future existence.

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SECULARISM :

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It is an unfortunate fact in connection with the development of human thought that new truths are frequently shunned, and theological opinions are, as a rule, estimated more by their popularity than by their intrinsic value. This probably may be explained to some extent by the lamentable circumstance that for centuries there has been too much mental indolence existing among the masses, who, in too many instances, have put their thinking out to be done for them, instead of exercising their own intellectual faculties. The result has been the perpetuation of old ideas, creeds, and dogmas, rather than the perception and fostering of the discoveries of modern thought.

From time immemorial evils, errors, and immorality have impeded ethical culture and marred the progress of the human race. And it is urged that about two thousand years ago the Religion of the Cross was introduced into the world for the express purpose of correcting these wrongs and establishing purity, love, and peace among mankind. That this desirable object has not been achieved must be patent to the most superficial observer. It has been very truly said that "two thousand years have passed, during which entire nations have knelt before a gibbet, adoring in the sufferer who gave himself up to death—the Saviour of mankind. And yet what slavery still! What lepers in our moral world! What unfortunate beings in the visible and feeling world! What triumphant iniquity, what tyranny enjoying at its ease the scandal of its own impunity! The Saviour has come—whence comes salvation?" The Bible has been read, sermons have been preached, and prayers have been freely indulged in, but still moral disease, crime, injustice, wrongs and bitterness of feeling abound on every side. Bigotry still poisons the social life,

fanaticism fans the fire of persecution, and theological exclusiveness mars the brotherhood of man.

Recognizing this impotency of the Cross as a factor in promoting the Secular welfare of society, a new gospel, termed Secularism, has been proclaimed, which we believe to be more in harmony with the requirements and genius of modern life. This gospel is a philosophy of existence and a science of life, apart from all necessary associations with theology and separate from all forms of ecclesiasticism. According to its teachings nothing should be accepted as truth merely upon external authority, but all questions should be submitted to the test of reason aided by experience. A Secularist is one who prefers a knowledge of the natural to a forced faith in the alleged supernatural—who relies upon “those principles having reference to finite determined time, as opposed to the undetermined infinite” believed by Christians. Secularism, in its etymological sense, means the age, limited, finite, belonging to the world. To give it a more amplified definition, Secularism may be considered as the application of the sciences to life, as in a smaller degree astronomy is the application of science to the planetary bodies, and botany the application of science to plants. Secularism, according to its founder, is distinguished from Atheism by its independent course of action in reference to the question of the existence of a God. An Atheist, believing that the evils of theology are to be traced to the assumptions of Theism, boldly goes to what he considers the “root of the evil,” and examines the reasons for such assumptions. Secularism does not profess to grapple with this alleged fundamental error of the religions of the world, but contents itself with a more matter-of-fact field of action. The question of the existence of a God being one of conjecture, Secularism leaves it for persons to decide, if possible, for themselves. Being unable to inform, it refuses to dogmatise upon a subject of which it can impart no information. The Secular platform is sufficiently broad to admit the fellowship of Atheists, Theists, Deists, or Pantheists. Secularism fetters man with no creeds, it only requires moral conduct, allied with the desire to pursue a progressive career independent of all speculative theology. Man's duty from a Secular standpoint is to learn the facts of existence; to acquire the power of doing right; to progress in virtue and intelligence; to seek to promote the happiness of others; in a word to

endeavour to remove from society the present inequalities, and to secure the greatest happiness for the greatest number. The philosophy of Secularism exhibits the science of life and indicates the path of duty, and how we are to pursue it. It adopts the eclectic method of selecting from systems, both past and present, whatever is good and true, and amalgamating such selections with the discoveries of more recent thought, and the advantages revealed through scientific and philosophic researches.

Secularism is two-fold in its nature, constructive and destructive. As a constructive system, it prescribes definite rules to regulate human conduct, and supplies the means to sufficiently satisfy all the real needs of humanity. For this purpose it proclaims the necessity of truth, temperance, industry, justice, fortitude, magnanimity, benevolence, honour, wisdom, and love. Furthermore, to meet the requirements of our nature, Secularism teaches that it is imperative to possess a knowledge of the laws upon which health depends, and to apply that knowledge in order that we may have sound bodies, upon which a healthy mind so largely depends; that the intellectual faculties should be properly developed, as mental training induces lofty and ennobling conceptions of the duties of existence; that, as differences of opinion are sure to obtain, and more particularly upon speculative questions, therefore social harmony and friendship should never be disturbed and severed in consequence of such non-agreement; that our emotions and passions should be controlled by reason and regulated by judgment; and, finally, that as morality is a more important factor in life's concerns than theology, it should be studied and accepted unfettered with the figments of the various churches. This is the constructive aspect of our philosophy.

In its destructive character Secularism seeks to remove as far as possible from our midst all fancies, creeds, and dogmas that obstruct the carrying out of our constructive work. While shams are regarded as realities, and falsehood worshipped as truth, this phase of our advocacy will be necessary. Old systems that have lost all vitality, except for evil, need to be broken up; and theologies, which have hitherto usurped judgment and reason, require to be refuted. The theologians claim to have "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," and unless we walk in their paths, unless we accept their authority, unless we believe implicitly in all their teachings,

we are at once condemned as rebels against their God, as outcasts from society, and as enemies of our fellow-men. While this cruel injustice exists, destructive work will be necessary. So long as a mind-degrading theology seeks to rob man of his freedom of thought and individuality of mind, so long as it threatens him with the curse of God for striving to realize the nobility of man, so long will it be our duty to labour earnestly to remove those obstacles which for ages have stifled human thought, stultified the intellect of man, and impeded the progress of the world. Thus it will be seen that, while Secularism enunciates positive principles and duties, it is compelled, at times, through a domineering theology, to engage in a determined warfare; not indeed in one of steel and lead, and fire and blood, but demanding from its soldiers the moral courage and endurance which are so much nobler and rarer than the mere physical; demanding the zealous loyalty to an Idea, which is so much more easy to render to a Man; demanding a constant devotion to Justice, while it is so much more natural to yield to selfish Injustice; demanding the sacred fire of Love, which it is so much harder to kindle, so much easier to quench, than the unholy fire of Hate.

In our destructive work we make no attack upon the truth either in Christianity or the Bible, neither do we condemn the useful in religion. We seek only to destroy the errors, and impediments, and the false conceptions which have become associated with Christian theology. For instance, we object to:—

(1) *Biblical Idolatry*.—All books, to be really valuable, should be regarded as our servants, and not as our masters. To prostrate human reason at the shrine of alleged Biblical infallibility is to sacrifice modern truth to ancient error, and to yield the discriminating power of man's intellect to the arbitrary decrees of ecclesiastical counsels. We should use the Bible as we do any other book, estimating its worth by its merits, and not by its supposed "inspired" authority. Surely it will not be contended that the whole of the Bible can be reasonably endorsed as a record of facts. Taken after the old orthodox fashion—namely, that all its statements are to be accepted as literally correct—the Bible contains the greatest of conceivable absurdities. What could be more absurd than the idea that Cain went into a country that did not exist, and selected a wife who was not then born (Gen. 4: 16, 17);

that beasts were killed three times, and yet remained as lively as ever (Ex. 9: 6-25; 12: 29; 13: 15); that a talking ass saw an angel (Num. 22: 23-28); that a thousand men were slain by one individual with a jaw-bone of an ass (Judges 15: 15, 16); that certain persons arose one morning and found themselves all dead (2 Kings 19: 35); that the sun and moon stood still at a special command (Joshua 10: 12-14); that the sun moved back ten degrees, as a sign to a sick king (Isaiah 38: 8); that a child can be two years older than his father (2 Chron. 21: 5-20; 22: 1, 2); that an iron axe could float on the surface of the water (2 Kings 6); that a whale could swallow Jonah and retain him, on praying ground, for three days, and then send him by express to dry land again; that a child could be born without a human father; that a man could be alone while his friends were with him (Luke 9: 18)? Of course, these errors and follies are too palpable to be believed as verities; but, in sober truth, they are not more ridiculous than many of the Bible allegations in the domain of science, history, philosophy, and morality. What could be more foolish and fallacious than the stories of the Creation, the Flood, the Egyptian plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, the exploits of Sampson, the asceticisms of Christ, the adventures of St. Paul, and, finally, the night mare of St. John the Divine? Secularism does not deny that the Bible contains some true and valuable teachings; but the fact cannot be ignored that in its pages there is also very much that is false, useless, and injurious; and in order that its better parts shall not be marred by inferior portions, we think it is necessary that the entire book should be subjected to the eclectic process, which is the separation of the good from the bad, the wisdom from the folly, the chaste from the obscene, and that that only should be retained which harmonizes with truth, decency, and the requirements of mankind. The Bible that should have the highest claim on our allegiance to-day should be composed of the truest philosophy, the noblest thoughts, and the grandest ethics that can be selected from the works of the greatest men and women in all ages and in all countries. Is it asked, where is the Secularist's Bible? We answer, that portions of it are to be found in every book and in all nations where a useful lesson is enjoined and a noble truth inculcated. Chapters of our Bible should be composed of records of the ethical glory of Greece and

the heroism and sense of duty which adorned the character of ancient Rome in her palmy days. From the study of the vast universe we would learn a lesson of humility, and with the aid of geology we would master truths written on nature's stony pages. These lessons and truths should be illuminated by modern thought, enriched by the accumulated wisdom of all ages, and augmented by experience gathered as time rolls on. Thus we would have a Bible fettered by no traditions, limited by no counsel, marred by no theology, and cramped by the authority of no church. It should be as free as mental growth, as wide as human intelligence, and as pure and lofty as cultivated thought.

(2) *Natural Depravity*.—This priestly-begotten dogma we regard to be as false as it is degrading; it is a libel on human nature, robbing it of its noblest qualities and its loftiest achievements. That depravity exists is, alas! too true, and so long as priestcraft and kingcraft hold their sway it is to be feared that depravity more or less will remain in our midst, depriving man of much of that grandeur and nobility which in all probability would otherwise adorn his character and ennoble his conduct. Secularism, however, denies that the human-kind are by nature necessarily depraved; their history, with its records of self-sacrifice, its benevolence, its disinterested virtue and its sublime purity, denies the degrading assumption. When we contemplate the fidelity of the husband, the devotion of the wife, the affection of the mother, and the love of the child, we cannot think that the fountain from which these natural virtues flow is corrupt. As we look upon the babe in the cradle who could believe that that emblem of innocence is a new husk of depravity? Is it not more dignified and true to regard it as a fresh stock of human goodness, capable of being developed into a grand flower of truth, which in after years shall bud forth into blossoms of usefulness and beauty, whose foliage of noble deeds shall charm, and whose fragrance of purity of thought shall regale, those by whom it is surrounded? Parents and guardians cannot be too particular in protecting the infant mind from the machinations of theology at the very time when it is too young to protect itself. For it is in the sunny days of childhood when the heart knows no care, when sweet innocence beams upon the cheek and hope sparkles in the eye, when the mind in its purest simplicity is unable to detect the snare; it is then the seeds are

sown which in after years bear such disastrous fruit. The Church knows this, hence its solicitude to secure the control of the rising generation in the very morning of life. The birthplace of the notion of "inherent depravity" is the Church; its parents are ignorance and credulity, and its nurses are the priests. Let a child be born in the domain of Secular freedom; let it be properly trained from infancy, receiving lessons of truth, duty, and self-respect; let it have an example placed before it worthy of emulation, and then there is but little doubt that a character will be formed contradicting the false assumptions of the Church that mankind are naturally depraved. Rather than endorse the melancholy opinion of Jeremiah, that the heart of man is deceitful and above all things desperately wicked, we would echo the philosophy, if not the words, of Shakespeare, when he makes the Prince of Denmark exclaim: "What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason, how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god—the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals." This represents the Secular idea of man's capability, and in our opinion is more true to nature than all the grovelling teachings of theology as to the alleged inherent depravity of the human race.

(3) *Theological Supremacy*.—It is the duty of every Secularist to endeavour to destroy the evil influence of theology, inasmuch as it retards intellectual development and national progress. It is the nightmare of the human mind, conjuring up phantoms which destroy the healthy vision of man's mentality. Theology was dominant and despotic in the Middle Ages, which are selected out of all bad times to be branded as most emphatically the Dark Ages—ages of ignorance, fetishism, oppression, and slavery; ages gloomy, brutal, and horrible. In their universal darkness theology was enthroned supreme and triumphant; every ray of light which came to pierce it pierced the heart of the Church like an arrow, and rent some of her kingdom from her; and, if we are now in twilight instead of black darkness, it is because the dawn of Secularism is kindling more and more, and the night of theology more and more receding and vanishing away.

(4) *The notion that man is a fallen being, and that he can only be redeemed through the merits of Christ*.—To believe this teaching to be true is to subvert the lesson of all history, and to lack faith in

the power of man's self-reliance, which is one of the most useful and ennobling characteristics of his nature. The career of the human race has been one of progression, not of retrogression, and so far as man has been redeemed from the errors and imperfections of the past that redemption has been the result of personal and societarian effort, and not in consequence of the life and death of any one man, or of the origination of any supposed and supernatural religion. The popular orthodox theory teaches that nearly six thousand years ago an all-wise and all-powerful God created the world, and then set man in the midst of a scene, surrounded by temptations it was impossible for him to withstand ; God implanted in man's breast certain desires which, as God, he must have known would produce man's ruin. A tree is then placed by God near Adam, bearing the very fruit which God must have been aware would meet those desires which he had just planted in the minds of his children. God, all good, then makes a serpent of the worst kind, in order that it might be successful in tempting Eve to eat. After this, God commands Adam not to eat of the fruit under the penalty of death, knowing at the same time that Adam would eat of it and not die. God allows the serpent to succeed in his plan, and then curses the very ground for yielding the tree which he (God) had caused to grow. Not content with this, the Almighty dooms both man and woman to a life of pain and sorrow ; further, he assures them that their posterity shall feel the terrible effects of their doing what it was impossible for them to avoid. At length the unchangeable God changes his mind ; he will no longer commit wholesale injustice. He determines to send his son, who is as old as himself, and therefore not his son, to die, but who is invested with immortality, and therefore cannot die, to atone for wrongs which had never been committed, by people who had never been born, and who consequently could not very conveniently have committed any error. As a conclusion to the whole, this all-merciful Being has prepared a material fire of brimstone, to burn the immaterial souls of those who fail to see the necessity and justice of this jumble of cruelty and absurdity.

The folly and cruelty of this scheme are still more apparent upon closer investigation. Here we have a Being of unlimited knowledge, of unlimited power, resolving to make man out of a material of his own selecting ; it is only reasonable, therefore, to

suppose that he secured the very best material which could be had. Having made man, he at once pronounced the work to be good. A short time after, however, a mistake was discovered, the work turned out to be very bad, and God was grieved at his heart that he had made man at all. Most mechanics can improve upon their work when they discover it to be faulty; but not so with the Bible God: his only resource apparently was to introduce the cold-water cure and wash the human race, one family excepted, from the face of the earth. This was an absurdity with a vengeance; but it was also cruel and unjust in the extreme. Does the Christian ever ask himself the question, What object could Deity have had in creating men, if he knew that the thoughts of their hearts would be evil continually, and that he would have so soon to destroy them? As God, he knew what would happen, what must happen. He knew that the serpent would tempt, and that Adam and Eve would become victims to the temptation, and that an awful catastrophe must ensue. Can we reconcile it with our reason and our idea of justice, that a Being of perfect holiness and goodness, with unlimited power, a Being spoken of as "our heavenly Father," would have created man at all under such circumstances? Realize, if you can, for one moment, the awful spectacle the Flood must have presented. Families banded together, witnessing the gradual rising of the waters; husband and wife, brother and sister, friends and lovers, clinging to each other as the tide of destruction approached. In a short time the husband is separated from the wife, the child from the mother, and sister and brother, and friend and lover, and husband and wife—all, all, are floating to destruction. One by one disappears from the sight of those who remain, until at last the agony of all is over, the shrieks of all are hushed, and the only visible remains of creation are an ark floating towards Mount Ararat. Presently it finds its resting-place, the waters gradually subside, and when the land again is seen what a sight to behold! The earth, before so beautiful and lovely, with children playing in their innocence on the greensward, and flowers blooming with their fragrance, now presents the aspect of one huge slaughter-house; and "our Father who art in heaven" is said to have caused and witnessed a scene that no human being can think of without horror, nor contemplate without dismay. A Being that would pre-determine such an

awful calamity as this cannot be worthy of our veneration and love.

To destroy the belief in, and allegiance to, the figments of theology is the object of our destructive policy. But let it be distinctly understood that, in the place of these dogmas, we inculcate, among others, the following positive principles:—

(1) *That the true guide in human actions is reason, assisted by experience.*—We do not allege that reason is a perfect guide, but we do allege that it is superior to any other of which at present we have any knowledge. By reason is meant the totality of man's intellectual powers, the ability to separate truth from error, and to premise future probabilities from past experience. In order that the fullest advantages of reason may be realized, it is necessary that it should be cultivated and developed as much as possible. The ordinary house lamp is used for the purpose of giving light; but to secure an illumination for any length of time it is necessary to supply the lamp with oil and to carefully trim it. If this be not done, the light given will first become dim, and then ultimately expire. So it is with the great lamp of human reason, which requires to be supplied with the oil of wisdom, and to be trimmed with intellectual discipline, and then it will reflect a light indicating the right path of human duty. It is objected by some persons that reason is inadequate as a monitor, because it ignores too much the emotional part of our nature. This, however, is not so. Secularists do not neglect the emotions; they only endeavour to control and regulate them. Secularism teaches that the intellectual should predominate over the emotional, not the emotional over the intellectual. Where this rule is not observed religion frequently degenerates into wild fanaticism, and pleasure into licentiousness. The distinction between the two methods, the reasonable and the emotional, is illustrated by the mode adopted respectively by the Christian and the Secularist in their efforts to win converts. The one seeks to reach the head through the heart, the other endeavours to gain the heart through the head. The Christian aims to captivate by appealing to feeling, fear, and wonder; the Secularist desires to convince by submitting his claims to reason, judgment, and experience. The question is often asked, "What does Secularism propose to give Christians for the loss of their faith?" Now, it is not our wish that Christians should give up their faith

while they think that doing so would be a loss to them. These sudden and partial conversions are the cause of much of the hypocrisy and nothingarianism that we find in the world. So long as a Christian considers that his faith is better than Secularism it is his duty to adhere faithfully to it. But if, in consequence of a calm and argumentative appeal to his reason, he be convinced that Secular principles are superior to Christian teachings, then to give up what he sees to be the inferior for the superior would be no loss, but a gain.

Further, it is urged that in relying so much upon reason we deprive ourselves of the highest advantages derived from emotional gratification, and that we limit the scope for the exercise of the power of veneration. We are also charged with neglecting music, painting and sculpture; with caring nothing for the glories and grandeurs of the world; with having no part in the treasures of the imagination. Those, however, who know Secularists and their principles will see at once how groundless such charges are. The truth is, we recognize that in the proper gratification of our emotions some of the finest chords in human nature are touched, filling us with rapture and delight. Surely we have ample scope for the exercise of our admiration and veneration in the temple of reality without roaming in the barren wilderness of speculation and conjecture. Have we no truth, no honour, no heroism, no devotion in the world? Does not the mighty universe with its countless varieties, its charming beauties, and its transcendent wonders, present to our view the loftiest and most fascinating objects for veneration? Contemplate the enchanting marvels of the animal and vegetable kingdoms, the numberless objects of the profoundest interest in the starry heavens, the expanded earth, and the spacious seas. Gaze with intensity upon the untold wonders revealed by modern science. Take botany with its variety of foliage, zoology with its innumerable number of animal organisms, geology with its fossil wonders, bringing to view facts hidden through the ages of the past, astronomy with its worlds upon worlds revolving around their central suns; are not these enough to venerate? If not, take the great science of man, with its profound intellectuality, its depth of philosophy, and its richness of poetry, and those who fail to discover amidst these fascinating realities scope for their emotional gratification may depend upon it that their mentality is in an

abnormal condition, and the sooner an improvement takes place the better.

“ They tell us that we worship not,
 Nor sing sweet songs of praise ;
 That love divine is not our lot
 In these cold modern days ;
 That piety's calm, peaceful state
 We banish from the earth ;
 They know not what we venerate
 Whate'er we see of worth :

We venerate great Nature's plan,
 And worship at her shrine ;
 While goodness, truth, and love in man,
 We hold to be divine.”

(2) *That supreme attention should be given to the facts and duties of existence, regardless of any considerations of a life beyond the present.*—This life is a fact ; but whether or not there be another existence beyond the grave is a question that personally I refuse to dogmatise upon. Secularists need not deny a future life, inasmuch as it would be unreasonable to deny that of which many of us admit we have no knowledge. Of the duties of earth we know much ; of the alleged requirements of heaven we know nothing. If we are to exist in some future life, and there be called upon to perform certain duties, we can have no knowledge of their nature and requirements until we participate in the supposed new existence. It may be urged that the duties said to pertain to another world are supposed to be of a particular kind, and that, acting upon such a supposition, a preparation for their performance is made. But it is, at least, possible that the said supposition may prove to be erroneous, and in that case what has been done ? Why, society has been deprived of time and services to which it was justly entitled. We are all indebted to the general commonwealth for advantages received. No one can live successfully in a state of isolation ; we are dependent on others for numerous benefits, and in return we are in duty bound to render back to society what services we can to add to its usefulness and stability. If it be true that our bodies contain immortal souls, they ought to be benefited by being allied with well-trained physical, mental, and moral organizations. If, on the other hand, man has no soul,

then his body will be none the worse for good training and necessary discipline. In any way, therefore, the Secularist is safe, and fully justified in acting up to the dictum, "One world at a time."

(3) *That Science and its application is a more trustworthy provider for man than relying for help from any supernatural power.*— That a radical change for the better has taken place in the physical and general condition of the people within the last few hundred years no one will deny. When the Church, with its supernatural pretensions, was at its noon, the state of society was horrible beyond modern imagination. The peasantry and labourers were mere serfs, crushed in hopeless misery beneath feudal exactions and despotism. As no laws of nature were acknowledged, no sanitary measures were thought of, though from the general filth and want dreadful plagues and famines were frequent. Before the ravages of epidemics thousands of the noblest and fairest of the sons and daughters of earth fled from their miserable homes only to be caught within the jaws of agonizing death. The Church existed, prayers were despatched to heaven, the aid of God was invoked; but no help came, desolation walked the earth. By-and-bye science dawned, and with its magic natural powers accomplished what faith, with its supernatural belief, had proved itself impotent to achieve. The benefits that accrued to the world through the advent of science cannot be over-estimated. Science has been the lever that has transformed society from the pestilential past to the improvement of the present, from the age of faith in heaven to the period of human effort on earth. The Copernican system, perfected mathematically by Newton, in the words of Leibnitz, "robbed the Deity of some of his best attributes, and sapped the foundation of natural religion." While astronomy and geology dissolved heaven and hell, the progress of all the sciences has impressed upon us the universality and immutability of law, the invariable sequences of events, thus slaying miracle, despatching Special Providence, and rendering prayer for celestial help a childish folly. Roger Bacon, with his discoveries in chemistry and physics, did more to enable us to cure disease and prolong human life, than Christ and all his co-workers. And Darwin, Tyndall, Huxley, and Clifford have given us more practical information as to man, his nature, position and potency than the whole of the theologians in the world. Science, therefore, is our provi-

dence ; on it we rely in the hour of danger ; and, as a matter of fact, so do the Christians, although, to be consistent, orthodox believers should do otherwise. When the storm is raging, the thunder is roaring, the lightning is flashing, upon what do Christians rely ? Have they not more real faith in the lightning-conductors upon the top of the steeples of their churches than they have in all the prayers of Christendom ?

(4) *That morality is of natural growth, and has no necessary connection with any of the theologies of the world.*—Much confusion of thought exists as to the true nature of ethical philosophy. Morality is not an existence *per se*—that is, of itself. It is a term used to indicate that condition of society wherein truth, justice, honour, sobriety, industry and other virtues obtain. Where the opposites of these are found immorality predominates. Our object, therefore, should be to select a rule of life which encourages virtue and discourages vice ; and, moreover, which indicates what is to be done, and also when and how it should be done, in order that not only the individual, but society at large, may be the better for the life we lead and the action we perform. The orthodox basis of human conduct is God's will ; but, inasmuch as it is difficult, to say the very least, to ascertain what that will is, Secularism cannot accept it as the foundation of moral deeds. Where are we to look for a concise and legitimate record of such a will ? Not in the Bible, for therein many representations of a most conflicting character are given of what is supposed to be God's will. Thus it can be shown from the Old Testament that its God condemns murder, adultery, robbery, lying, etc. ; while it can be as readily demonstrated from the same book that he approves, and, in some cases, really recommends these vices. A standard so contradictory as this cannot surely be accepted as a moral test.

Neither is conscience a trustworthy guide in this matter. Practically, conscience is mental condition resulting from one's organization, training, and general surroundings, varying with time and differing in individuals. It is not the function of conscience to determine right from wrong. It is reason and judgment which do this, and the province of conscience is to urge fidelity to the decree of this intellectual monitor. Secularism, of course, recognizes the necessity of heeding the "voice of conscience," knowing full well that, if it were faithfully obeyed, there

would be less hypocrisy in the world than we have to deplore at the present time. Intellectual insincerity is the curse of the world and the bane of the Church. People are too prone to sacrifice their honest convictions at the shrine of public prejudice and to the exactions of a fashionable theology. The consequence is that an air of artificiality pervades modern life, converting the temple of mental reality into an abode of mental moral dishonesty. Secularism seeks to impress upon mankind the duty of saying what they mean and meaning what they say.

The basis of morality which commends itself to the Secularist as being the safest, and most in accordance with the genius of the age, is the usefulness of an action, those acts being moral which produce the greatest amount of happiness to the greatest number. This view of morality is justified by a knowledge of the doctrine of, circumstances, indicating how they affect and are affected by each other. The scientific definition of any particular object of our contemplation is that it is the sum of all the causes which produced it. If one of the causes which tended to produce that particular phenomenon had been deducted, or if additional influence had been added, the result then produced would have differed from the result as it now stands in precise proportion to the efficacy of the cause which had been added or withdrawn. Now, Secularism views human nature in this harmonious light. Man is as much the consequence of all the causes and circumstances which have affected him and his development previous to and since his birth as any one tree or mountain.

The influence of circumstances on human conduct is forcibly illustrated by a reference to the science of botany. In England the myrtle is a small shrub or plant; but in the north of Africa it is an immense tree. The lily in England is remarkably fine and delicate; but within a few miles of Madrid it is a huge tree of from ten to fifteen feet in its dimensions. Botanists inform us that this difference is in consequence of the different circumstances by which each shrub or plant is surrounded. The influences in Africa and Spain are more favourable to the extensive development of those plants than they are in this country. The same principle is shown in the various productions of English or American soil. We take a wild flower from the woods for the purpose of improving its appearance and value. It has grown up under what are termed natural cir-

cumstances ; we transplant it to a garden, and endeavour to modify its condition. According to the end we have in view, so are, to use technical language, the "artificial causes" we bring to act upon its particular condition. We begin with an examination into its constitution and character. If it has faults and blemishes, we immediately remove those chemical causes, or protect it from those climatic influences which produced such faults. If it be its half-developed beauties which we wish to foster into full maturity, we multiply and stimulate those conditions which we have discovered by experience to have a positive influence on the better part of its nature. The change in its condition and appearance has been produced by the modification and encouragement here, the discouragement there, depression in one quarter, elevation in another—of causes all of which were in existence and operation as much when the flower grew in its wild state as now when it adorns the house garden with its breadth of foliage. Now, to apply this to the argument under consideration. Secularism may be designated as the science of human cultivation. The problem that it sets to itself with reference to man in his moral relations to society is to bring him from the condition of the wild flower to that of the garden flower. For, as with the wild flower, so it is in many respects with the wild, undisciplined man. The flower is what it is, and the wild, uneducated man is what he is, in consequence of the aggregate of causes which have made them both what they are. Secularism recognizes these influences of circumstances, not forgetting, however, that man has a certain amount of self-reforming power. But this power is frequently rendered comparatively useless to him through his being surrounded by inferior conditions, through neglect of correct training, and a want of a proper understanding of his moral and intellectual nature.

It is not claimed that the principle of utility is perfect, but only that it is the best ethical foundation known to us. Should a better basis for morality be presented, we shall be ready to accept it in lieu of the one we now have, for we are chained to the decrees of no councils and bound by the dictates of no Church. Having no devil to frighten us and no hell to appal us, we are ever ready to accept the revelations of truth, however much they may clash with preconceived ideas. Herein consists one of the many advantages of Secular progress over theological stagnation. If it be asked

why, from the utilitarian standpoint, we should do right, the answer is, because the welfare of society demands it and the individual is himself the better through doing right. Utility offers as an incentive for well doing the promotion of the happiness of the people in general. By happiness is here meant the knowledge—so far as it can be acquired—that our actions do no harm to others and leave no injurious effects upon ourselves. Those persons who reflect ere they retire to rest at night, if they can honestly experience such happiness, can sleep the sleep of peace born of the consciousness that during the day they have striven to do their duty honestly and justly.

Fortunately for the exercise of such morality, we are not dependent upon the theologies or religions of either the past or the present. The sources of all ethical culture are found in human nature, and its sanctions in personal and societarian requirements. Morality was born of thoughtful experience, fostered by the highest aspirations of the human mind, and is now being developed by the exigencies of modern life. It needs no supernatural power to determine its nature, and no Bible to manifest its force. While humanity lasts its results will be felt and its service appreciated. The obligations of truth, the essence of all moral conduct, are of earth, not of heaven. Truth should be observed, not through fear of God, but because we know from human experience that telling falsehoods tends to destroy that confidence between man and man which is so necessary to the honour and stability of society. As the Bishop of Hereford remarks in his Bampton lectures: "The principles of morality are founded in our nature independently of any system of religious belief, and are in fact obligatory, even on the Atheist."

(5) *That the best preparation for a life superior to this is the wisest and noblest use of the existence we now have.*—Knowing only of the present life, Secularists content themselves with its demands, feeling assured that the best credentials to secure any possible immortality is the wisest and most intellectual use of the life we now have. The man who has lived well has made the best preparation to die well, and he will find that the principles which supported him in health can sustain him in sickness. When the last grand scene arrives the Secularist, having done his duty, lies down quietly to rest. What has he to fear? He knows that death is

the consequence of life, that nothing possesses immortality. The bird that flutters in the summer sun, the bee that flies from flower to flower, the colossal elephant, the tiny animacule, the intelligent ape, and the almost unconscious zoophyte, all pass into a state of unconsciousness when their part is played and their work is done. Why should man be an exception to the universal law? His body is built up on the same principle, and his mental faculties differ in degree, but not in character, from theirs. He is subject to the same law as the rest of existence, and to repine at death is as absurd as to weep because he did not live in some other planet or at some other time. Nature is imperative in her decrees and must be obeyed. Death is the common lot of all. The atoms of matter of which one organism is made up are required for the constructing of another, so they must be given up for that purpose, and to repine at it argues an ill-tutored mind. The work is done, and, if it has been done well, there is nothing to fear when "life's fitful dream is o'er."

The orthodox believers assure us that Christianity is necessary to enable a person to die happily. Is not this the height of folly and a reflection upon the alleged goodness of God? Are all the other religions in the world impotent in this particular? If we estimate the various religions of the world which conflict with each other, more or less, at one hundred—a very moderate calculation—there can only be one that is true, so that the Christian has only one chance out of a hundred, while there are ninety-nine chances against him. What, then, is the difference between the Christian and the Secularist? The one rejects ninety-nine, and the other goes "one better" and rejects the whole hundred. But the Secular position does not rest even upon this. If God be just, he can never punish a man for not believing that which his reason and judgment tell him is wrong. If we have to appear before a heavenly tribunal, is it to be supposed that questions will be asked, "To what church did you belong? What creed or dogma did you accept?" Is it not more rational to believe that if any inquiries are made, they will be, "Were you true to yourselves and just to others?" "Did you strive to make the best of existence in doing all the good you could?" "Were you true morally and intellectually?" If the answers are given honestly in the affirmative, then no one need fear the result. It is degrading to the character

of any God even to think that he would punish one to whom, on earth, he did not think fit to vouchsafe the faculty of discerning his existence, for honestly avowing that he did not discern it, for not professing to see clearly when the eyes he saw fit to give saw nothing. Would he not be apt, if at all, to punish those (and they are very numerous) who, not seeing, confidently assert distinct vision? If we act honestly and manfully according to the best light we can attain, if we love our fellow-men, whom we know, and try to be just in all our dealings, surely we are making the best preparation for any future life, the best preparation for the higher knowledge, the clearer vision, the eternal heavenly beatitudes. Though we are execrated and condemned by the tender mercies of human bigots, we may, if we have lived as true Secularists, commit ourselves without dread to an infinitely good and wise God, if he be the loving father of all his children. We can die without fear, as we have lived without hypocrisy.

“ What if there be a God above,
 A God of truth, of light, and love,
 Will he condemn us ? It was he
 Who gave the sight that failed to see.
 If he be just who reigns on high,
 Why should the Secularist fear to die ? ”

Such is the twofold nature of Secularism, with a few of its leading features. Thus it will be seen that it is negative to error, but positive to truth ; that it only seeks to destroy whatever interferes with mental freedom and the honest expression of individual opinion : that its desire is to assist in making life a noble reality, instead of merely an artificial existence. As Secularists, we wish each and all so to live that when we are no more the world shall have no just cause to reproach our memories. We counsel all so to act that when life's mission is accomplished those who were bound to us by the natural ties of affection shall delight in the recollection of their association with us. If this be done, then, even if our present state be “ the be-all and end-all,” we shall not have lived in vain, but the world shall be the better for the part we have played therein. This is an immortality not of faith, but of works. True, this Secularistic idea of practical usefulness may be slow in its realization, as imperceptible in its realization as is

the construction of a coral reef. Still, if we are true and earnest, it shall be as certain in its development. And, although at present we have to encounter the obstacles of superstition and the spite of intolerance, the work of progress still goes on. This inspires us with hope for the future. We believe the time will arrive when fancy will give place to reality, and imagination will yield to the facts of life. Then, instead of the evils of priestcraft, the reign of bigotry, and the strife of theology, we trust to have manifestations of sincere love of man to man; an awe-inspiring happiness in the majestic presence of universal nature, and "man, the great master of all," shall live a life of enduring service to the cause of individual and national redemption. Assuming for the moment that we are in error and partial darkness, and that we should strive to obtain new light, we adopt the prayer of one who was recently with us, and say:—

"God of Nature! give us light!
 We are struggling through the night;
 Through the cloud of crimes and creeds,
 Lofty words and guilty deeds,
 Honoured not, nor understood,
 Workers for the general good.
 Father, by the public scorn,
 By the ties in anguish torn,
 By the sad and ceaseless strife,
 By the cross we bear through life,
 Do us justice! be our view
 Truth or falsehood, *we are true!*
 True to manhood's mission grave,
 To the task that Nature gave.
 Ours the free and fearless thought,
 Ours the honest, earnest doubt;
 Not the cringing of the knee,
 Not the impious mockery
 Of the prayers that rise to Thee
 Through a life of blasphemy.
 Though our hearts be racked and riven,
 Though the clouds enwrap Thy heaven,
 We are battling for the right—
 God of Nature! give us light!"

SECULARISM: PAST AND PRESENT.

SECULARISTS, deeming "the wise use of the present to be the just profit of the past and the most reasonable preparation for the future," would do well to consider from time to time the progress of their principles and the different requirements of their movement at the various stages of its development. The mode of advocacy necessary at one period is frequently not desirable at another. As time rolls on the natural law of change manifests itself in all phases of thought and every field of action. The intellectual scope of fifty years ago is evidently too limited for to-day, when active thought is awakening new ideas and imparting to the human mind additional vigour.

Secularism in the past manifested itself principally in its militant aspect, having to contend with strong opposing forces. To obtain a position in the public mind it had to fight its way against misrepresentation and theological prejudice; and to maintain that position many severe battles have been fought, calling forth heroism, sacrifice, and devotion from brave Freethinkers whose dauntless labours have made positive Secularism possible at the present time. Although the victories gained are unmistakable and most encouraging, it must not be inferred that our final triumph has yet been reached. Misconceptions of our views still exist; and obstacles to the consolidation of our principles abound on every hand. These drawbacks are, no doubt, to some extent the result of the difficulties encountered in conducting past conflicts. Having to meet an overwhelming opposition, backed by power, wealth, and theological fanaticism; being often compelled to fight under the weight of a bitter persecution and the deprivation of liberty of speech and the freedom of the press, it is no marvel that errors of advocacy were committed and that apparent confusion of principles obtained. We have now, however, gained important vantage ground: our present duty, therefore, should be to correct past errors by stating plainly our principles and future policy.

The public cannot be too frequently reminded that Atheism and Freethought are not always allied with Secularism. Of course, Freethought is essential to Secular Philosophy; but it is only a part of it and, unfortunately, the former very frequently is to

be found without the latter. The same with Atheism : many of its adherents do not subscribe to any constructive Secular programme whatever. Our opponents have confounded these three principles, and thereby have been prevented from comprehending accurately the real nature of Secularism, which they have erroneously supposed to be but the negation of prevailing Theistic notions and the discarding of theological dogmas. So far as methodically regulating daily conduct upon an ethical basis is concerned, a mere Negationist may simply be a Nothingarian, who in no way represents Secularism, which is something more than rejection of orthodox Christianity, being the embodiment of positive principles sufficiently potent for the right regulation of human conduct.

The time has now arrived when Secularists should do something beyond the old work of destroying theological dogmas. The ground is sufficiently clear to admit of the erection of an edifice of thought untrammelled by orthodox restrictions. The Secular teacher will, if he is observant, find paths of usefulness open to him free from the bigotry of the past. A characteristic of the present time is that the public are inclined to hear an exposition of Secularism if it be put before them in a proper manner. Sobriety of speech is as desirable as sobriety of appetite. There is no necessity of indulging in the folly of urging that the Bible and Christianity are both destitute of goodness and utility ; better far to urge the truth that the value in each is at the command of the Secularist, who accepts the useful wherever it can be found. Furthermore, it is important to point out that any material advantage offered by religion we can secure by a faithful adherence to the positive principles of Secularism.

Secular propagandism has now become an active vital force in our midst ; hence the greater necessity for judicious care being observed by our advocates. Whenever orthodox absurdity and theological error impede our Secular work the course to pursue is clear : destroy them if possible ; but we should be prepared to supply their places with sound principles of daily life, possessing as recommendations reason and utility. What is required now more than ever is the thorough carrying out of these principles in our conduct : union of action and an efficient organization.