

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

# HELL:

WHERE IS IT?

BEING

*A LETTER TO THE ARCHBISHOP OF YORK.*

BY

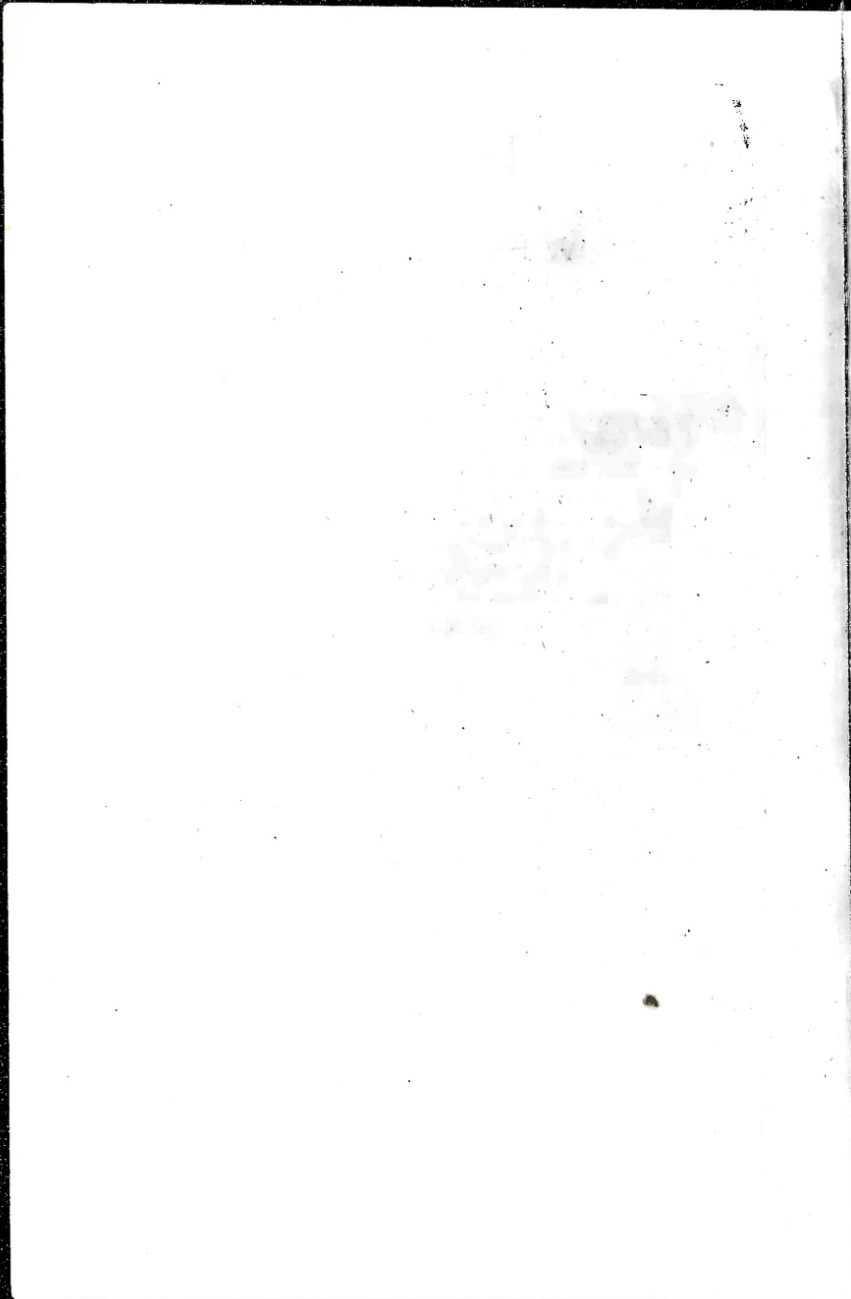
SALADIN.

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LONDON:

W. STEWART & Co., 41, FARRINGDON St., E.C.



## HELL: WHERE IS IT?

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MY LORD ARCHBISHOP,—May it please your Grace, you have not yet replied to my last letter to you on Agnosticism; you have only alluded to it in a letter, and in that tried to raise a false issue in regard to it. I never expected that you *would* answer it—nay, more, I had my conviction from the outset as to whether you *could* answer it. May I assure your Grace that it is a matter of supreme indifference to me whether you answer it or not? I have met with no one who is sanguine enough to expect that your attempted answer to it would throw a single new ray of light upon a problem so difficult and momentous as the one you had the temerity to interfere with, and from which, when challenged to deal with it fairly, you have had the timidity to run away.

According to a recent report in the *Northern Echo*, your Grace abolished Heaven and Hell as localities, and made them mere mental conditions. You and yours allowed the report, which was no doubt correct, to pass unchallenged. It was not till an "Infidel" paper commented on your Grace's allegation that Heaven and Hell were nowhere that you saw fit to take exception to the *Northern Echo* report. One of your own pious satraps pointed out to you, in Christian horror, that you had suppressed Heaven's fearful managerie of beasts, with horns on their hips and eyes in their elbows, and had played havoc with Hell's everlasting teeth-gnashing, and had cut the tail of that curious helminthological specimen, "the worm that never dies."

I will give your Grace a present of your heaven; do what you like with it; "make a kirk and a mill of it;" no one but a beast with eyes in his elbows cares what you do with it. Burns and Shelley and a good many of my

friends, according to your doctrines, are in Hell; therefore, Hell interests me more, and it is upon that I would have a word with your Grace. In the letter to your satrap, the Rev. Henry Macdougall, you do not contradict the *Northern Echo* report. You simply act as a sort of clerical cuttlefish, and raise an obfuscation of words by means of which you attempt to escape from a dilemma. Your Grace knows as well as I do that, with all except the most devoutly ignorant, Hell is now as extinct as Hades or Nifleheim. In all the regions of interstellar space through which the vision of the telescope has ranged no vestige of Hell has been discovered. Where is Hell? Since it is so distant that it is beyond the range of the telescope, it matters not to us where it is, for, even if it did exist, and we were despatched to it, it would take us billions of years to reach it, even if we travelled without ceasing at the rate of a cannon-ball. Much must, necessarily, come and go in such a long journey. Talk of "Cœlebs in search of a wife:" what is that to a sinner in search of Hell?

So much for Hell, if it is a *place*. If it has geographical, or rather astronomical, position, which your Grace would seem to imply by challenging the report in which you were represented as submitting that it was only a mental *condition*, I am justified in dealing with it as if subject to the attributes of time and space. Your Grace is fully aware that your space-Hell is an utter absurdity, and that, even if it were not, its horrible torments are so revolting to the sense of modern civilised man that you dare not preach them for fear of bringing down the whole Christian fabric about your ears. Piteable is your plight. On the one hand you dare not preach the doctrine of eternal torment, and on the other hand you dare not repudiate it.

The cultured Christianity your Grace represents leans, in this its decrepit old age, on the staff of quibble and subterfuge. The most prominent doctrines of the New Testament are ignored if they are out of harmony with modern æsthetics. The doctrines now insisted upon are not those upon which the Holy Ghost laid most stress, but those which Mr. John Smith will pay to hear discussed. John Smith has now got a step beyond Hell



and so the parson finds that Hell will not pay: Mr. Charles Haddon Spurgeon is almost the only man left who can make money out of Hell.

And yet, though you dare not preach it, your Grace well knows that, if there is a single unmistakable teaching in the New Testament, it is that there is a fine, fiery, flaming Hell. Pontifical cowardice may desert, but pontifical ingenuity will never explain away, such passages as Matthew v. 22, 29, 30; x. 28; xxiii. 15-33; xi. 23; xviii. 8, 9; Mark ix. 43-47; Luke x. 15; xvi. 23. The unfortunate thing for your Grace's Church is that Christ himself has expressed himself so unequivocally as regards Hell. Of course, I commiserate a cautious and discreet man like your Grace upon having such a rash and injudicious Saviour, who gives you such incalculable trouble to tone down and explain away his utterances, so as to adapt them to modern acceptance. You complain of the Secularists that they are "vehement." No doubt you feel that Christ, too, erred grievously in this way. He, like the Secularists, was in earnest, and, like them, spoke with the directness that springs from singleness of purpose and the force that is born of conviction. Those who now pose as the ministers of this simple-minded and single-hearted teacher live by garble and quibble and fraud; for his teachings are exploded and obsolete, but they are still associated with rich emolument, and so persons in the position of your Grace dare neither preach them nor admit that they do not.

It is unfortunate for your Grace that that inconvenient Christ in whose name you have your £10,000 a year, but whose doctrines you have to explain away, not only believed in a material Hell, but placed it at no great distance—in fact, alarmingly too near. Γεεννα του πυρος, says Christ, in Matthew v. 22. Γεεννα is the word of his which has been translated Hell; but once or twice he uses *Hades*, showing that he had not had the originality to construct a Hell of his own, but had knocked together a sort of mongrel one borrowed from Homer and Jeremiah. Γεεννα is only a corruption of γη, *land* and *Hinnon*, the name of a person who once owned land in a valley near Jerusalem. This Valley of Hinnon, referred to in Jeremiah xix., and elsewhere throughout

the Old Testament, is, in Hebrew, called GEHENNA, גֵּהֶנְנָא, the Christian Hell, as every scholar knows. In this *Gehenna*, or Valley of Hinnon, human beings were *burnt alive* to Moloch and Christ's father of the same age as himself, Jehovah.\* *Tophet* was the particular spot in Gehenna where the furnaces were erected for the burning of human flesh. A huge brazen God stood in the fire to receive living human sacrifices into his brazen arms. "They lighted a great fire within the statue and another before it. They put upon its arms the child they intended to sacrifice, which soon fell into the fire at the foot of the statue, putting forth cries, as may easily be imagined. To stifle the noise of these cries and howlings, they made a great rattling of drums and other instruments, that the spectators might not be moved with compassion at the clamours of these miserable victims."†

That horrible Gehenna, your Grace, with a dash of the classical Hades added, is the frame-work of the Christian Hell, as no doubt you very well know. If it had been said to Christ, when in Galilee, "Go to Hell!" and he had obeyed the mandate, he would have given his bridle reins a shake and *Henglered* off to the Valley of Gehenna, "riding on an ass and a colt the foal of an ass"—a foot on the back of each. Your Grace can, any day, for a few pounds, purchase one of Cook's tourist tickets and go to Hell, as Christ understood the term; and perhaps the best thing you could do would be to stay there. The children roasting on the fiery arms of brass was your Christ's basis for "the fire that never shall be quenched;" the wormswiggling in the stercorous and putrid remains of flesh the fire had not consumed were the parents of Christ's "worm that never dies."

I do not know whether Jesus ever seriously reasoned that all the wicked of all the world were to come to be eternally cremated in the small and obscure Valley of Gehenna. One with the limited mental and moral vision of a fanatical Jewish peasant could hardly be expected to devise a Hell large enough for all the damned. He

\* See Isaiah xxx. 27-33.

† Cruden's "Concordance," under *Tophet*.

seems to have been incapable of giving a second thought to anything. The few fishermen, mechanics, Pharisees, and wastrels he had seen in a little obscure part of Syria were, to him, the world. The Valley of Gehenna was big enough for the burning of the whole of them—at least, the few of them who might not find room to be cremated could be provided for in his “father’s house,” in which there were many mansions, which, let us trust, have been duly papered, and have had gas and water laid on.

Last time, your Grace, I wrote with forbearance and deferential courtesy. The letter was a pertinent one. I am an Agnostic who, week by week, drag men out of your Church, and, according to you, send them straight to the Hell anent which you quibble. If you value these men’s “immortal souls,” cannot you show them the error of my teaching? You cannot urge that the issue involved is a trifling one: it is one in which, according to your teaching, the eternal destinies of the thousands who are deluded by me are involved. Up, your Grace, and arm yourself with the “sword of the spirit” and “the whole armour of righteousness,” for to your very teeth I defy you. “Let,” as Milton puts it, “Truth and Error grapple.” Why are you so reluctant to measure swords with me, seeing that you are so sure that Truth is on your side and Error on mine? Pardon me for assuring your Grace that by your conduct you show clearly enough that you know as well as I do where the Truth lies, and where the Error. My challenge to you to prove my Agnosticism erroneous is at your feet, and your exalted rank shall not stand between you and the bitterness of my pen, which is honest and unhired. Still, I must assure your Grace that I have as much respect for you as I have for any august imposture and well-paid poltroonery. I am no sycophant or flunkey, and, standing sturdily in front of you, I refuse to recognise the line that separates you from Norna of Fitful Head who sold prosperous winds and the latest old crone who was sent to prison for palmistically telling the fortunes of a servant-girl. You, outraging the spirit of the age, pray for rain, and that bullets may not hit our soldiers on the battle-field. I have more sympathy with the poor and vulgar than I have with the rich and aristocratic thaumaturgist. You

know well that to be an archbishop you must also be an archhumbug. I am, your Grace, whatever I may be, neither bishop nor humbug, but simply a thoughtful and thoroughly earnest man, whose pen gibes at your heaven and knocks the bottom out of your bottomless pit.

I ask you, and I want an answer—Where did you get Hell? Your Grace is a Protestant, and your doctrines must necessarily find their basis in the Scriptures. Then, where in the Scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation, do you find your *Christian Hell*? Point me out in the entire Scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation, any word which, when correctly translated, means a place of torment for the souls of the dead. The word שְׁאוֹל, often translated Hell in the English and Hades in the Greek version of the Old Testament, signifies only the *grave, a great depth, or a cavern or cave*, such as in which the dead were wont to be buried. The Saxon word *hellon*, to be concealed, from which come *hole* and *hollow*, corresponds pretty closely to the Hebrew *shaol*, or *sheol*. So where in Scripture does your Grace get your Christian Hell, or your Christian Heaven either, for that part of it? Come, your Grace; since I and those who follow my teachings are to be burnt in it, we should, naturally enough, like to know where you get it. We should like to be made aware of your authority for assuring us that somebody is to be at such expense for brimstone on our account; that our incisors and molars are so sound that they will stand an everlasting gnashing; and where you get the vermicular swirls of the red-hot worm that never dies. When you archbishops and your Church had the power, you could make such a Hell upon earth, and you made it, that your ignorant and intimidated dupes could easily enough believe there was also another hell somewhere else. But alas! poor Prelate, you have fallen upon times when I, the defiant and aggressive "Infidel," dare to extinguish your Hell with my ink-pot, and challenge you to show me where you get it before I will consent to go to it. From Scripture you don't get it—that you know as well as I do, although you dare not say so straight out as I do. Your Hell, your



Grace, is stolen from Paganry, and your Heaven also, and made horrible with Christian vulgarity. Your Hell is a poor, unpoetic affair, compared with the awful regions through which Æneas wandered after the soul of Anchises, not to mention the frozen terrors of the realm where Odin and Thor drank blood out of the skulls of the dead, their toast and revel and wassail illumed by the yellow flash of the hair of the Norse maidens and the blue gleam of the Norland steel. The poor, brutal faith of which your Grace is an archbishop, having neither art nor poetry, nor flight of dream nor range of vision, *spoilt Hell when it stole it*. Get a better Hell, your Grace, before you presume to think it is good enough for a heretic, although that heretic may be your match in honesty, and far more than your match in intellectual power.

Your Grace may reply that that which was good enough for your Jesus Christ is good enough for me; but I claim the right of private judgment, and demur. Since you Christians have partly stolen and partly invented a Hell, you can, of course, put your Jesus Christ into it if you like; it matters not to me. I know that, now-a-days, you find it necessary to refine away the teaching that he was ever there. But this shilly-shallying comes too late. The most learned and devout of the Christian fathers have taught that Christ spent three days in the charming company of the never-dying worm. As you and yours, your Grace, are usually not so well versed in the records of your own Church as we Freethinkers might expect, I will cite you my authorities, in case you might lay small account upon the mere *ipse dixit* of an avowed and aggressive heretic. "St. Thomas, pp. 3, 9, 52, art. ii., teaches that Christ, by his real presence, descended but to *limbus patrum*, and in effect only to the other places of Hell. Secondly, St. Thomas seems to say that it was some punishment to Christ to be in Hell, according to his soul. CAJETAN saith that the sorrows of Christ's death continued on him till his resurrection, in regard of three penalties, whereof the second is that THE SOUL REMAINED IN HELL, a place not convenient for it. But Bonaventure saith that Christ's soul, WHILE IT WAS IN HELL, was

in the place of punishment indeed, but without punishment; which seems to me more agreeable to the fathers."\* Cardinal Cajetan and Thomas Aquinas—no mean pillars in the Christian Church, your Grace—are on the side of Bonaventure in alleging that Christ went from Calvary to Hell.

I think I hear your Grace repudiate such authorities with the pious scorn with which Protestantism regards her venerable mother, the Scarlet Lady. Do you allege that, in support of Christ going to Hell, I have relied upon a Roman Catholic heresy which your reformed Church repudiates? Not so fast, your Grace. Hugh Latimer, your glorious Protestant martyr, taught the same doctrine, and not only roasted your Christ in plain brimstone, but also treated him to a "scalding house," where, in all seriousness, we may conclude that the second person of the Trinity had poured over him successive kettles of boiling water. I refer your Grace to Bishop Latimer's seventh Sermon, where you will find his own words as follows: "But now I will say a word; and here I protest, first of all, not arrogantly to determine and define it. I will contend with no man for it; but I offer it unto you to consider and weigh it. There be some great clerks that take my part; and I perceive not what evil can come of it, in saying that our Saviour, Christ, not only descended into Hell, *but also that he suffered in Hell such pains as the damned spirits did suffer there.* Surely, I believe, verily, for my part, that he suffered the pains of Hell proportionably as it corresponded and answered to the whole sin of the world. He would not suffer only bodily in the garden and upon the Cross, but also in his soul when it was from the body, which was a pain due for our sin.....Some write so, and I can believe it, that he suffered in the very place (and I cannot tell what it is; call it what you will—*even in the scalding-house, in the ugsomeness of the place,* in the presence of the place) such pain as our capacity cannot attain unto. It is somewhat declared unto us when we utter

\* Bellarmine, "De Christo," lib. iv., cap. 16, pp. 396, 397.



it by these *effects*—viz., by *fire*, by *gnashing of teeth*, by *the worm that gnaweth on the conscience*.”

So, your Grace, the venerable Latimer, a luminary and master-spirit of the Christian Church, and of your own section of it, not only introduces your Christ to the interesting companionship of the never-dying worm, but to the delicate attentions of the ever-scalding kettle. This is the teaching of your Church, as you will see ; and I have quoted the *ipsissima verba* of one of your greatest men—one who was concerned in the compilation of your Book of Common Prayer and the drawing up of your formularies. And yet you would seek in your Northallerton sermon to explain away this Hell altogether ; and even when challenged on the point, in your letter of extenuation you go crawling round the subject in a labyrinth of verbal mists as only a Churchman can ; but you never once venture to assert that Hell, as an objective reality, exists. If your Lord had such a tough time of it for three days with the worm and the kettle, he will not thank your Grace for explaining the whole thing away. With him it will be just the one thing that cannot be explained away, even if he should forget Gethsemane and Judas Iscariot, and even your Grace.

I recognise your difficulty, my Lord Archbishop, and I sympathise with you. Some eighteen hundred years ago you had the misfortune to have a dead god—a god killed with a hammer and four tenpenny nails, and your Church has been in a terrible quandary as to where to put his “soul” during the three days he managed to get along without it in the Arimathean’s tomb. You could not send him to Heaven, because, to produce the proper effect, he had subsequently to fly from Olivet to that elevated region. So you had to send him to Hell ; and now, since you explain away Hell, will you be good enough to say where the *sheol* he went to ? As I have said, I really sympathise with your Grace in this, literally, *infernal* dilemma, and I hasten to relieve you from impalement on its horns. Explain away Christ as well as Hell, and then you will not be perplexed as to what to do with his “soul” during the three awkward days that he remained “in

the heart of the earth," even as Jonah had remained three days "in the whale's belly," that the Scripture might be fulfilled. I admit, your Grace, that I write with irreverence. I should have no reverence for the human race, no reverence for my own manhood, if I had reverence for a learned and sane man who, in the last quarter of this nineteenth century, accepts of £10,000 per annum for the task of attempting to reconcile the fabulous rubbish of 2,000 years ago with the light and reason of to-day.

There are Christians and Christians, your Grace ; and it would, perhaps, be as unfair to make you responsible for the wild theological teachings of Mr. Spurgeon as it would be to hold me responsible for the feculent sociological doctrines of Mr. Bradlaugh. According to the luminary of the Newington Tabernacle, the damned may devote thousands of years to examining the wounds which were inflicted on Christ at the crucifixion. From this I infer that Mr. Spurgeon not only believes that Christ went to Hell, but that he stayed there. If he is not in Hell, how can the denizens of that torrid realm examine his wounds? Does he "sit at the right hand of God," but send his wounds down to Hell in a brown paper parcel that they may be inspected? After having examined wounds for thousands of years, "the Lost" should have a considerable knowledge of morbid anatomy. Your Grace, a Protestant Archbishop, would explain away Hell altogether ; but another Protestant, Bishop Latimer, thinks it good enough for Christ, and puts him into the "scalding house," while yet another Protestant, Pastor Spurgeon, also deems it good enough for Christ, and makes him reside there permanently as a "subject" in a Hospital for Incurables. In me, an outsider, what profound respect is inspired for the three of you—for Latimer and Spurgeon's realistic crudities, and for your Grace's disingenuous shuffling!

By-the-bye, your Grace, the Bottomless Pit is not so deep after all. The word\* is *αβυσσος, βυσσος, deep*, intensified by the prefix *α*. It is only the word Homer† uses to signify the bottom of the sea. In the Septuagint

\* Rev. xi. 15.

† "Iliad," bk. xxiv., line 80.

it answers generally to the Hebrew תְּהוֹמוֹת, *deep waters*. It is, moreover, only the word used\* to show where the pigs of the Gadarenes ran to. Accordingly, Why, in "the Authorized Version," is it not stated that the pigs ran down a steep place into the *bottomless pit* and were choked? Why is the same word in Revelation translated the "bottomless pit" and in Luke "the sea"? Only one of the tricks of parson-craft, your Grace. The translators of 1611 apparently did not like the idea of the swine running down a steep place into Hell. So, accordingly, although they had the same word to deal with, they made it into a *bottomless pit* to put the dragon into, and a *sea* into which to put the pigs. From this sort of fact an Agnostic like myself infers that those who translate the works of their Maker require gumption, in the exercise of which they need not be over-scrupulous.

Again, if it does not trouble your Grace, I should like to know how the Devil is confined in a pit without a bottom. An angel "shut him up and set a seal upon him;" but was the angel a lunatic? If you put a cat into a bag without a bottom, you may tie up the neck of the bag, and even "set a seal on it;" but the cat will set small value upon all your precautions. Your Bottomless Pit, my Lord Archbishop, is worthy of your Bottomless Creed.

Your Grace will remember that many years ago it was decided by the Court of Arches that a disbelief in the Devil did not invalidate a man's right to be a communicant of the Church of England. Further, Lord Westbury, in the matter of "Essays and Reviews," in addressing the jury, uttered the pithy and memorable words: "Gentlemen, your verdict kills the Devil, and puts out Hell-fire." The verdict of the jury of the entire civilised and educated world is now dead against the existence of Satan and his flaming throne. This is a verdict that brings relief and delectation to all, except to that burglar the priest, who used the Devil and his fearful pyrotechnics as a jemmy with which to force open the doors, that he might pilfer the belongings of mankind.

\* Luke viii. 31.

One very plain question, your Grace: If there be no Hell, what use is there for you? Your sole business upon earth is to keep people out of Hell; but to what honest calling do you think of turning your attention now that there is no Hell to keep them out of? You have admitted there is no such place as Hell; but, when pushed into a corner, you, in a sort of obscure way, eat your own words. In short, your Grace, the exigencies of your office make it incumbent upon you to put out Hell with the one hand and kindle it with the other. If there be no Hell, not only what is the use of you, but what is the use of your Christ? It must be mortifying for him to discover that, after all his redeeming escapade, and the bother the Ghost had in begetting him with a virgin, the human race he came to "redeem" were not in the slightest danger of Hell—in fact, that there was no Hell for them to go to. He surely must have been taught a salutary lesson. Surely, when he comes down from Heaven again, he will take more pains to discover why he is coming, and not go on such a wild-goose chase as that which taxed his energies eighteen centuries ago. Of course, your Grace's whole *raison d'être* is based upon the assumption that mankind are unthinking and credulous simpletons, and I am sorry to admit that this is almost the only warrantable assumption your Church has ever made. But, at last, after centuries of pious stupor, the world is rubbing its eyes and beginning to awake: you are beginning to be found out, my Lord Archbishop. How long do you calculate you will still be paid for blowing hot and cold—for putting out Hell with the one hand and kindling it with the other? The wheels of Progress are like the proverbial mills of God—they move exceeding slow; but on they move, from the darkness into the penumbra, from the penumbra into the light; and those who drive her triumphal car through the shining fields of the world's to-morrow shall look back over the plains they have left behind, and, far away in the rear, see your Christian faith crushed to death under the wheels, disembowelled and rotten—the ugliest and slimiest of the snakes that had to be strangled before the Herakles of Humanity could rise from its cradle and realise the



thought, the action, the glory, and the triumph which all lie in the arena of life for those who can win and wear them.

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# THE SECULAR REVIEW :

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**AGNOSTICISM AND NEO-SECULARISM.**

EDITED BY

**SALADIN.**

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