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# WHY

I AM

# A SECULARIST.

BY  
CHARLES CATTELL  
(CHRISTOPHER CHARLES.)

With a Letter from George Jacob Holyoake.

“The world exists for the transformation of genius into practical power.”

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*PRICE ONE PENNY.*

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CHARLES CATTELL, “EMERSON,” POKESDOWN.

## A LETTER FROM GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE.

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In a letter, Mr. G. J. Holyoake, the Founder of Secularism, says :—

“The definition of Secularism in Mr. Cattell’s paper is the best given in any competition, and is in itself excellent. It is instructive and praiseworthy, as well as prize-worthy.”

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## WHY I AM A SECULARIST.

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[The Truth Seeker Company have selected the post card sent in by Mr. Charles Cattell, Pokesdown, Bournemouth, as the best in the above competition, and therefore award him the books offered—F. J. Gould's *A Concise History of Religion*, 3 vols., value 11s.]

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1. BECAUSE Secularism, as a guide and policy of life, is based on human considerations, on results of experience and observation, the conclusions of science, and the needs of man.

2. It adopts reason instead of faith, morality instead of religion, and utility as a test of value of the acts and institutions of men as they affect human well-being.

3. It aims to unite men in promoting the good of all, by the cultivation of all the faculties of man, and by the use of material means.

4. It gives supreme attention to the present life, and demands free thought, speech, and writing, as necessities of all possible human progress.

5. It depends on science instead of providence, on work instead of worship, and teaches that humanity instead of divinity should occupy the thoughts and command the service of mankind.

CHARLES CATTELL.

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Taking the above as being of the nature of a definition, I proceed to further illustrate Secular principles.

There is a proverb that "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." Is not this life worth any other two believed to exist—heaven and hell combined? Emerson used to read the text, "What can a man get in exchange for his *own* soul?" The loss of personality, of life, of the pleasures of existence on the earth, cannot be recompensed for by being

made master of hell, or a servant in heaven; although Milton has it, "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven." The Secular view of life bids men aspire to the highest attainable happiness while it is called "to-day"; while by living a life of honour and integrity, and by cultivating our faculties (such as they are), relying on our knowledge (such as it is—the only knowledge we have), we may be prepared for to-morrow, if it comes. Such a course of life is pursuable unaffected by any past or future duration of the life of man, whether measured by millions of years or by the word "eternity." If there is any certainty reliable, it is that to-day is of some reality; to-morrow is only a may-be. Secularism views life as a process, the social state as progressive, the product of genius, skill, and labour. Men of thought and action should therefore be self-reliant, and aim at providing an improving and enduring state, "built with hands." The kingdom of Secularism is of this world. By the service of man and promoting the general good Secularism encourages the hope of realizing some beneficial results in the present life. If there is any "sure and certain hope" for man, this is it. Whatever happens, we must face the facts of life as we find them, as nothing we can say or do will arrest the inevitable operations of nature. The height of unwisdom is to refuse to recognise life's history as it is unfolded to us in the form of an invariable order of phenomena. The careful observer of the habits of creatures to which the present gives neither anxiety nor fear, and to which no future is known, will find them to be the most lively and happy beings on earth. To experience all possible happiness in this world men need unity of purpose and action; the co-operation of every individual is needed to maintain the tranquillity and prosperity of social life.

Only the senseless or careless can fail to see that we are all but limbs of one great body, and that nature has made us social, endowed us with instincts of self-preservation and mutual affection. Our instinctive nature may not be an infallible guide, but it is a guide. Men are born either fit for society or to undergo a series of developments, advancing by degrees. The great truth on which social progress is based is that both body and mind are affected and regulated by *causes*. It is on certain known material conditions that the mental and physical welfare of man depends. Truth is

the active principle ; justice applied to social affairs—it is the lever by which humanity may be elevated to the regions of social felicity.

*Truth is the nature of things*, and the explanation of things is its discovery—the true philosophy, the revelation suited for all men and all time. Social truth arises out of the conditions of existence ; social obligations arise naturally in all our experiences. It is obvious to all that confidence and trust are essential to social life, to social order—essential for the tranquillity of individual and family existence. These constitute social truth, without which no community can permanently exist. Out of this conception of truth, life, and duty many important considerations arise, one being that our neighbours should be as well instructed and as well placed as ourselves. Equality of opportunity in life is necessary to develop the best among us. Not only the peace and prosperity of society need the co-operation of all its members, but even the conditions of health, for on the whole community depends the supply of pure air, pure food, and good sanitation. Institutions are needed by which the mind and body may be duly cultivated, improved, and strengthened by constant exercise. Refinement of taste and conduct is the result of causes ; and, unless these causes surround the individual, social life will not benefit. The perpetual, suggestive question as to mind, life, and property, their development and application, is : What is it that the general good of society requires ? This will invariably reveal the nature of the want ; and, if the supply is not immediately available, it will point to the direction in which the supply may be sought for. As to necessary institutions above referred to, there was once a time when, in the Northern part of the British Empire, there was only one institution held in high esteem—the kirk was deemed the most interesting, solid, and beautiful thing on this fleeting earth. Under the reign of Secularism, as the enlightened voters become more numerous, far nobler and more useful institutions will be established in all the large centres of intelligence and industry. Galleries of art, libraries of the literature of all ages and nations, halls for music and intelligent and entertaining discourse, these will form the Cathedrals of the future. The age of mumbling priests, vain repetitions, and unmeaning words will cease. The actual evils of life

are enough to tax man's power of endurance without adding artificial ones—such as Adam's fall in the past, and the possible eternal penal fires of a future. Rectitude in thought and act, enlightenment and courage, are the only assurances we need set up against all rumours of wrath, past or to come. When ignorance disappears, fear follows after.

In order to better fight the battle of life and overcome its vicissitudes, the new generation requires, not only instruction, but education, the teaching and training of men in what they need to know and in what they should be able to do. These are the immediate wants of the present hour, the demands of the age we live in. Instead of "the prayer of faith," we need a knowledge of the preventives of sickness, of the best means to prolong life and alleviate pain. Instead of reliance on heavenly favours, the old reliance of man, we require preparation, enabling us to mitigate the ills of life, to meet all possible misfortunes, and provide for the contingencies that may arise in pursuing the industrial and commercial callings of English life. We live in a complex industrial system of society, having jarring and conflicting interests. To meet these conditions of life we require, not only self-help, but also mutual help. Where every man is expected to maintain himself, and not to be dependent on any particular person or corporation, mutual aid, combination, and co-operation furnish a means of deliverance, of comfort and independence.

The test of a rational and just system of society is its capability to maintain its members in a state of blessedness—that is, in the tranquil possession of all good things. The results of the efforts of those who seek only their own good, and the results of those having the general good in view, constitute the difference between a pandemonium and a paradise on earth. At the same time, it is possible, under the mutual system already named, for the individual to seek, on his own merits, his own good in that of all. As industrial pursuits increase in variety and extent, the individual must be inevitably swallowed up in the multitude; but his own interests may be protected all the same under just and equitable arrangements. It is quite practical in such fashion for man to serve himself—that is, to so serve himself as to be helpful to others. The man who looks only on himself looks on one of the least of nature's works. A

man's own peace and comfort are only possible when his neighbours take delight in the same conditions of life. It is therefore obvious that every man is personally interested in the well-being of others. Indeed, it is the most prominent feature in the character of those whom mankind most delight to honour that they were distinguished in the service of others.

Having thus explained how man's requirements—intellectual, moral, and physical—may be secured in the present life, I only say of the future, as Emerson did: "He who would be a great soul in the future must be a great soul now." These views are to-day being adopted by Christians; and it is better they should be thus inconsistent with their own profession than be so unwise as to neglect our better way.

Believing that this exposition of principles contains some useful truth, I offer it to Syncretists, as well as to Secularists, who may think alike with myself. We live in an age of free inquiry and free discussion, hence—

"He who has a truth and keeps it,  
Keeps not what to him belongs;  
But performs a selfish action,  
And his fellow mortal wrongs."

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