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WHY DO RIGHT?

A SECULARIST'S ANSWER.

BY

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MOST persons can distinguish between right and wrong; but it is not so easy to decide *why* certain actions are right, and others the very reverse. According to orthodox Christianity, the sanction for right-doing is a conviction that our actions should accord with God's will, and that we should abstain from the performance of wrong acts through fear of punishment in some future existence. These are not the Secular reasons for doing the right thing or avoiding the wrong. Apart from the difficulty of ascertaining what the will of God is (for it is nowhere definitely stated), the value of that will would consist in its nature. We should ask, Is it just or reasonable to think that obedience to that will would secure the happiness of the community? Is it not a fact that all that can be known of the supposed will of the Christian God is to be learnt from the Bible? But then it should be remembered that the many representations given of the Divine will in that book are not only contradictory, but they would, if acted upon, prove most dangerous to the well-being of society. For instance, it is there stated that it is God's will that we should take no thought for our lives (Matt. vi. 25); that we should not lay up for ourselves treasures on earth (Matt. vi. 19); that we should resist not evil (Matt. v. 39); that we should set our affections on things above, not on things on the earth (Col. iii. 2); that we should love not the world (1 John ii. 15); that if we offend in one point of the law, we are guilty of all (James ii. 10); that we are to obey not only good, but bad, masters (1 Peter ii. 18); and that it is good morality to say, "What, therefore, God hath joined together, let no man put asunder" (Matt. xix. 6); that we should swear not at all (Matt. v. 34); that we cannot go to Christ except the Father draw us (John vi. 44);

that we are to labor not for the meat which perisheth (John vi. 27) ; that we are to hate our own flesh and blood (Luke xiv. 26) ; that those who leave their families for the "Gospel's sake" shall be rewarded here and hereafter (Mark x. 29, 30) ; that men should believe a lie, that they all might be damned (2 Thess. ii. 11, 12) ; that the world cannot be saved by any name except that of Christ (Acts iv. 12) ; that salvation should be obtained through faith, and *not of works* (Ephes. ii. 8, 9) ; that the sick are to rely upon the "prayer of faith" to save them (James v. 15) ; that if any two Christians agree upon something, and send a supplication to heaven for that something, it shall be granted them (Matt. xviii. 19). Now, according to general experience, if we complied with the will of God, as here stated, society would not pronounce our actions as right, but they would be condemned as being hurtful to the commonwealth.

Secularism is opposed to the orthodox idea that we should do right through fear of hell. This is the lowest and most selfish reason for doing good that can be given. According to the Secular idea, the desire to do right should not be prompted by merely personal considerations, but with the object of enhancing the best interests of others, as well as our own. Besides, the fear of hell has proved inoperative, either as an incentive to right action, or as a deterrent to wrong doing. Even those who profess to be influenced by this motive have a greater dread of a policeman than of a devil, and a more vivid conception of a jail than of a hell. Penalties remote from life do not, by any means, exercise the same powerful influence upon human conduct as do those of the present time. The Secular idea of right and wrong is, that neither is the mere accident of the time, and that these terms do not represent a condition which is the result of "chance"; on the contrary, they denote actions which are the outcome of a law based upon the fitness of things. The primary truths in morals are as axiomatic as those in mathematics. Moreover, there is, in the mind of every properly constituted person, an appreciation of right and a detestation of wrong. We urge that vice should be shunned because it is wrong to individuals, and also to society, to indulge in it ; and that virtue should be practised

because it is the duty of all to assist, both by precept and example, to elevate the human family. A writer in the London *Echo* of August 22 last answers the question why we should do good apart from theological considerations in the following pertinent language: Because "certain actions are followed by more happiness to the actor than other actions, and because those actions which give him the most happiness are such as are helpful to others. The most highly-developed men have discovered this to be true, and the 'average' man will ultimately discover it and act on it. Just in proportion as we become helpful to others we find our own happiness increasing. And as all our actions inevitably spring from the desire of our own happiness, it follows that we must go on becoming more helpful to each other as we develop. Even those foolish persons who now injure others know this to a certain extent. Ask a burglar which gives him the more happiness, to steal or to spend the money he steals with the woman he lives with? He will tell you that his highest happiness is in giving pleasure to his Kate. Ask Andrew Carnegie which gives him the more pleasure, to cut his workmen's wages down or to spend the money in building a public library? He will tell you he finds more pleasure in spending the money for others than in wrenching it from his workmen."

The word "right" originally meant straightened; hence the common saying, "putting things to rights," is understood as being equivalent to putting them straight or in order. A writ of right is a legal method of recovering land that has been wrongfully withheld from its owner, and to right a ship is to restore it to an upright position. A man whose acts are deemed good and useful is described as being "upright" and "straightforward." The notion that legal enactments determine what is morally right and wrong is as fallacious as the idea that the Bible decides the question. Many of the laws of our country are based upon principles the very opposite of what we regard as morality; while the conflicting teachings of the Bible disqualify it from being a correct guide in ethical conduct. It appears to us that, if there are no other standards of right and wrong but those of the Bible and the law of the land, then such standards by themselves must be arbitrary,

having no universal application to mankind. Possibly some legal and scriptural commands may be right, but when they are so it is not because they have the sanction of Parliament or the Bible, but in consequence of their being in harmony with the taste and requirements of the public. That many of the decrees and teachings emanating from these two sources have been considered wrong is evident from the fact that men have persistently refused to obey the one or to accept the other. Take the case of those Free-thinkers, philosophers, and scientists who have so often been at variance with the Church, and who have refused to obey certain laws of their country which they deemed wrong. These men have not only been censured, but sometimes they have been punished as wrong-doers; and yet, ultimately, it was proved that they were in the right, and that the Church and the law were in the wrong. The standard of the Church and of the law was tradition, custom, or common belief; the standard of those who were censured was knowledge. As this knowledge increased the number of offenders against the stereotyped forms of law, both human and divine, increased also, until the old foundations had to yield in favor of those more in harmony with freedom and justice, and more in accordance with the intellect of the nation.

By the Secular idea of right we mean that conduct which is beneficial both to the individual and to the community—conduct that is in agreement with an enlightened conception of human duty. It may be admitted that the usefulness of an act is not always present in the mind of the actor, but it seems to us impossible to estimate the value of an action the purpose or result of which is not useful. The real worth of all actions depends upon the manner in which they affect our judgment, our feelings, and our general well-being. When we assert that the sense of right-doing exists in nature, it must not be supposed that we mean it can be found in a mountain or in the sea; but our meaning is that it is in that part of nature called human. It is this belief in the natural basis of right-doing that inspires us with the endeavor to improve that nature which is the source of all that is noble. The Secular notion of right and wrong is based upon reason and experience, which are the surest guides known to man.

In considering the question of right and wrong we ought not to ignore any facts, however unpleasant they may be to some of us. Human nature has its dark as well as its bright side. There are men so constituted and so surrounded by depraved conditions that, from their actions, one would suppose they prefer doing wrong rather than right. In many instances men are ferocious, cruel, and brutal. They practise lying and deception, and injure and destroy their fellow creatures. Such persons are too often born in moral corruption and trained in the lowest form of criminality; they grow up destitute of any self-respect, and without any sense of right action. People of this class are the unfortunate victims of a bad environment, which has contaminated their natures both before and after birth. If these "heirs of unrighteousness" were spoken to as to the duty they owe to themselves and to society, probably the replies would be: "As life and society were thrust upon me, why should I respect either? Why should I prefer the straight to the crooked path—the beautiful in nature to the repulsive? What advantage is truth to me when I profit by lying? Why may I not repudiate the tyranny involved in the injunction that I ought to be virtuous? If I am happy in following my present course, why should I bother about the effects of my conduct upon society?" It will be readily seen that the man who raises the foregoing questions has no conception of moral duties and the influence of right action. Moreover, it is well known that vicious and immoral men are the first to object to the same kind of conduct which they practise being directed against themselves. A man may delight in lying, but no liar likes to be deceived, and no brute in human form desires to be injured himself. Those who inflict pain upon others are the first to shudder at the lash being applied to themselves.

Society itself, notwithstanding the boasted influence of the Bible and the loud professions of Christianity, has peculiar ideas of right and wrong. It condemns the killing of one man as a criminal act; but he who kills thousands is made a hero. In the one case detestation is evoked, while in the other honors are bestowed. Hence, the only sense to which the soldier is amenable is that of duty, not of right. The public regard his acts as being performed for a

good purpose—namely, that of destroying those who are looked upon as enemies. Our forefathers, we are told, made this island inhabitable by destroying the wild beasts that once infested it; but it appears to us that a greater work than that remains to be done, which is to subdue the wild passions of man. Christianity has failed to accomplish this desirable result. As the London daily *Times* sometime since remarked: "We still seem, after hard upon nineteen centuries of Christian influence and experience, to be looking out upon a world in which the ideal of Christianity, which we all profess to reverence, is worshipped only with the lips. . . . Throughout Europe we find nations armed to the teeth, devoting their main energies to the perfection of their fighting material and the victualling of their fighting men, and the keenest of their intellectual forces to the problem of scientific destruction. Beneath the surface of society, wherever the pressure becomes so great as to open an occasional rift, we catch ominous glimpses of toiling and groaning thousands, seething in sullen discontent, and yearning after a new heaven and a new earth, to be realised in a wild frenzy of anarchy by the overthrow of all existing institutions, and the letting loose of the fiercest passions of the human animal."

Alas! it is too true that the world, for the most part, has hitherto worshipped force. Poets, from Homer downwards, have thrilled thousands with graphic descriptions of scenes of splendor and of glory. Military renown has been regarded with greater interest than have the triumphs of ethical culture. Such men as Alexander the Great and Napoleon have been exalted to the highest pinnacle of fame, and their deeds have been extolled as if these men had been the real saviors of the people. This is a mistaken adulation and an undue exaltation, which is opposed to the Secular idea of right. What can be more wicked than devastating and depopulating countries in order that one warrior may rival another in what is called military glory. As John Bright said at Birmingham in 1858: "I do not care for military greatness or military renown. I care for the condition of the people among whom I live. . . . Crowns, coronets, mitres, military display, the pomp of war, wide colonies, and a huge empire are, in my view, all trifles,

light as air, and not worth considering, unless with them you can have a fair share of comfort, contentment, and happiness among the great body of the people. Palaces, baronial castles, great halls, stately mansions, do not make a nation. The nation in every country dwells in the cottage." Right cannot advance if brutal force remains in the front.

It may be urged that, if our estimate of men in modern "Christian England" be correct, there is but little chance of establishing any system of right. Happily, although what we have written is unquestionably true in some cases, it is not true of all men. There are other members of the human family who possess dispositions which enable them to act rightly, so that the world will be the better for the part they have played in the great drama of life. These workers for the public good are influenced by higher laws than Bibles or Parliaments can command or enforce. According to the Secular view of right, all persons should be instructed in the duties of citizenship; they should be impressed with the necessity of taking an active interest in all things that pertain to the welfare of life, and to consider political and social rights as well as those that refer merely to ordinary every-day conduct. Of course, as civilised beings, we require some centre of appeal, some test by which we can determine what is right and what is wrong. However defective our standard may be considered, and however varied the results of an appeal thereto may prove, we know of no higher authority to do right than because it accords with the general good of society. We regard it as utterly futile to go back to Bible times, when theology was supreme, to find a test by which modern conduct shall be regulated. Doing right in those times meant obeying the will of the despot, and complying with the wish of the priest. At that period right had no relation to the requirements and independence of the individual. In the evolution of human life the chief business of men is to translate might into right, and to substitute mental freedom for intellectual subjection. Under the influence of the Secular idea of right, it will be found easier to speak the truth than to endeavor to deceive. Candid and fair dealing will be looked upon as the sovereign good of human nature; and the acquirement of, and

adherence to, this commendable habit will be found less difficult than mastering the technicalities of law, the reasonings of metaphysicians, or the verbose quibbles of theologians.

The Secular method of establishing a true conception of right is to continually augment our experiences with the acquirement of additional knowledge. Although instances may be quoted of greater fidelity being found in some of the lower animals than is perceptible in many men, the power of foreseeing events in the case of the most intelligent of "the brute creation" is not very strongly marked. The Secular idea of right is that the best judgment possible should be exercised upon all occasions for the purpose of discovering what is most calculated to promote individual and general happiness. Moralists dilate upon the varying rules of conduct that obtain in different nations and under different governments. Now, while it is quite true that various conflicting ideas of right and wrong exist in different countries, that fact does not exempt people from performing the duty of considering, in every case, what is the right course to adopt to secure the welfare of the nation in which they live. The principle of improvement applies to all conditions and to all races of men. Take the important feature of family life ; on this point opinions are entertained of the most opposite character. In one country men believe in one god and in having many wives, while in another country men believe in three gods and having only one wife. And yet both beliefs are deemed right. The Secular idea is that we should study what is right for *us* to do under the conditions in which we live. In this country there is no doubt that the development of the affections, and of a due regard to the rights and enjoyment of others, points to the conclusion that the union of one man with one woman is the best solution of the marriage problem. True, the Bible sanctions polygamy, but with that we are not now concerned ; monogamy is accepted as the best matrimonial arrangement for us under present conditions.

It is supposed by some persons that it is too late to discover anything new in morality. This, however, is a mistake, because the acquirements of modern life impose upon us duties that were unknown to the ancients, and

which require, upon our part, an intelligent apprehension to enable us to perform them with credit to ourselves and for the benefit of others. Science and learning are valuable in proportion as they tend to make better men and women, and inspire within them a desire to promote general happiness. The endeavor to advance human felicity is the best evidence of the existence of a living, active morality, and of a proper sense of right. Let us, then,

Rest not ! life is passing by,
Do and dare before you die.
Something mighty and sublime
Leave behind to conquer time.
Glorious 'tis to live for aye
When these forms have passed away.

Why should we be good ? Theologians would have us believe that the only satisfactory reply to such a query must come from Christianity. But, as we have already shown, the Christian's reasons for being good are both selfish and ineffectual. We hope to show that there are better reasons for goodness than the desire to please God and to secure everlasting happiness in "realms beyond." The theological delusion, that religion alone supplies the motive for personal excellence, has arisen through people entertaining the erroneous idea that natural means are impotent to cure the evils that dominate society. It has, however, been discovered that vice must be dealt with like all else that is human. A supernatural remedy for moral disease appears to the student of nature no more reasonable than a supernatural cure for any of the physical diseases which "flesh is heir to." When a man feels the pangs of some physical malady, he knows that there is some derangement in the organ in which it occurs ; in addition to applying a remedy, if he be wise, he will endeavor to discover the cause, so as to avoid the malady in future. Now, Secularists consider that the same course should be taken with moral diseases, which often arise from a morbid condition of the brain, produced sometimes by the bad arrangements of society, or through not acting up to the proper duties of life. Virtue and vice are not mere accidents of the time, but are as much the consequence of the operation of natural laws as the falling of

a stone or the growth of a flower. The causes of crime should be investigated as carefully as the causes of cholera and other epidemics have been. The physical and the moral are more closely connected than is generally supposed, and the influence of the one upon the other is beyond all doubt very great. Man's mental and moral natures both depend upon material organs, and are therefore influenced by physical forces; and it is not unusual for the same causes that generate disease to produce crime. So little, however, do people study the relation of mind to brain that vice prevails where, with a little judicious thought and action, virtue might be found. The Secularist acknowledges these important facts, and, expecting no supernatural help, he goes earnestly to work himself. Holding that whatever happens occurs in accordance with some law, he deems it his business to endeavor to ascertain what that law is, that he may turn it to some practical account.

We think that with the extensive knowledge which now exists, allied with intellectual culture, it is not difficult to demonstrate that man ought to do his duty for reasons which belong alone to this life. By the word "duty" we here mean an obligation to perform actions that have a tendency to promote the personal and general welfare of the community. This obligation is imposed upon us by the requirements of society. For instance, the Secular obligation to speak the truth is obtained from experience, which teaches that lying and deceit tend to destroy that confidence between man and man which has been found to be necessary to maintain the stability of mutual societarian intercourse.

Again, our obligation to live good lives is derived from the fact that, as we are here and are recipients of certain advantages from society, we therefore deem it a duty to repay, by life service, the benefits thus received. To avoid this obligation, either by self-destruction or by any other means, except we are driven to such a course by what have been termed "irresistible forces," would be, in our opinion, cowardly and unjustifiable. As to the word "ought," the only explanation orthodox Christianity gives to this term is a thoroughly selfish one. It says you "ought" to do so and so for "Christ's sake," that through

him you may avoid eternal perdition. On the other hand, Secularism finds the meaning of "ought" in the very nature of things, as involving duty, and implying that something is due to others. As the Rev. Minot J. Savage, in his *Morals of Evolution*, aptly puts it: "Man ought—what?—ought to fulfil the highest possibility of his being; ought to be a man; ought to be all and the highest that being a man implies. Why? That is his nature. He ought to fulfil the highest possibilities of his being; ought not simply to be an animal. Why? Because there is something in him more than an animal. He ought not simply to be a brain, a thinking machine, although he ought to be that. Why? Because that does not exhaust the possibilities of his nature: he is capable of being something more, something higher than a brain. We say he ought to be a moral being. Why? Because it is living out his nature to be a moral being. He ought to live as high, grand, and complete a life as it is possible for him to live, and he ought to stand in such relation to his fellow men that he shall aid them in doing the same. Why? Just the same as in all these other cases: because this, and this only, is developing the full and complete stature of a man, and he is not a man in the highest, truest, deepest sense of the word until he is that and does that; he is only a fragment of a man so long as he is less and lower."

The careful and impartial student of nature will discover that therein continuous law is to be found, but no accidents or contingencies. And what we call the moral state is one wherein man is enabled to recognise the wisdom of compliance with this law. It is quite true that men may refuse to obey the moral law, but, if they do, they must suffer in consequence. This is one reason why men should be good, inasmuch as the fact of being so brings its own reward. It not only secures immunity from suffering, and adds to the healthfulness of society, but it exalts those who obey the moral law in the estimation of the real noblemen of nature. A man of honor—one whose word is his bond, who practises virtue in his daily life—wins the respect and confidence of all who know him, and he thereby sets an example that will be useful to emulate; and he at the same time acquires for himself a tranquility of mind known only to the consistent devotee of human goodness. What is called Christian

morality has no sanction in merely natural sentiments and associations. Nobility of action is supposed by orthodox believers to be the result of a "fire kindled in the soul by the Holy Ghost." St. Paul is reported to have entertained the grovelling notion that, if this life is "the be-all and end-all," then "we are of all men the most miserable"; "therefore," says he, "let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Here the problematical happiness in a problematical future is put forth as a higher incentive to goodness than the wish to so regulate our conduct that it will produce certain beneficial results in our present existence. Persons who share the views of St. Paul, as set forth in 1 Cor. xv., will derive but little pleasure from the virtue of this world. The satisfaction which should be felt in benefiting mankind independently of theology falls unheeded on orthodox believers. They fail to experience happiness simply by the performance of good works. Virtue, to them, has no charms if not prompted by the "love of God." Nobility, heroism, generosity, devotion, are all ignored unless stimulated by the hope of future bliss. Christians deny the possibility of virtue receiving its full reward on earth. If they think their faith will conduct them safely to the "next world," they appear to have no trouble about its effects in this. A man who is good only because he is commanded to be so, or through fear of punishment after death, is not in touch with the philosophy of modern ethics. The true moral person is one who does his duty, regardless of personal reward or punishment in any other world. The Secular motive for being good is that this world shall be the better for the lives we have led, and for the deeds we have performed.

Regard for the moral law is not based upon a negation, neither is it a mere question of expediency, but rather a positive acting principle, working for practical goodness. A really moral man is one who is interested in the well-being of others—one who has discovered that he belongs to the family of men, the social advancement of which is dependent, more or less, upon each other. Unsocial beings are those who care for nobody but themselves, and whose sense of right-doing consists in studying their own interests without concerning themselves about the welfare of others. Emerson said: "I once knew a philosopher of this kidney. His theory was, 'Mankind is a damned rascal.

All the world lives by humbug; so will I.'” Fortunately, individuals of this type are becoming fewer and fewer, and are being replaced by men and women in whom are to be found aspirations for the true, the useful, and the elevating functions of life. To such members of the human family as these it can be made evident that truth and honor are essential to their well-being, and that doing good is an absolute necessity to the formation and the perpetuation of a society based on confidence and trust. The virtue of veracity is the foundation of the true social fabric. Law, commerce, friendship, and all the embellishments of life rest upon the great principle of veracity. It is this which gives the surest stability to all moral obligation. While being faithful to ourselves, we should never fail to manifest fidelity in our associations with all members of the community. Our aim ought always to be to so serve others that we may help ourselves, and to so serve ourselves as to be helpful to others. As Pope puts it:—

“Self-love and social is the same.”

Emerson has said: “The mind of this age has fallen away from theology to morals. I conceive it to be an advance.” Undoubtedly this is true, for the intellect of the age is more than ever finding its justification for being good in the results of action, rather than in the commands of creeds and dogmas. The inspiration to goodness is now recognised as coming from earth, not heaven; from man, not God. As a recent writer well puts the fact: “It is not a belief in an arbitrary personal God which ennobles a life. Most of the burglars and murderers, most of the unjust monopolists and cruel sweaters, believe in ‘God.’ It is goodness that ennobles a life, and goodness is not necessarily associated with godliness. It is not a hope of heaven that makes a life beautiful. Many who believe in heaven are very hard to live with here. It is gentleness, kindness, considerateness, friendliness, love, that make a life beautiful; and these qualities are not necessarily associated with a hope of heaven. It is not piety that wins esteem. There are many pious persons whom you would not trust with a five pound note. It is fair dealing, honesty, and fidelity that win esteem; and they are not associated with piety.”

Darwin, in his *Descent of Man*, gives potent reasons why we should live good lives. He points out that the possession of moral qualities is a great aid in the struggle for existence ; that people with strong moral feelings are more likely to win in the race of life than persons who are destitute of such feelings. Goodness has in itself its own recommendation, inasmuch as it secures for its recipients peace of mind, temperance in their habits, and a sense of justice in their dealings with others. Men of honor, whose lives are regulated by the principle of integrity, furnish the best of all reasons for being good. They are happy in the consciousness of the nobility of their own nature, and they derive consolation from the knowledge that they render valuable service to others by the dignified example they set, and the exalted lives they live. Those who can see the worth of virtue and of truth in human character are imbued with a spirit of emulation ; they desire to be associated with a superior order of society. Such members of the community can readily see that without "confidence and trust" the commercial world would collapse. The same principle applies to the whole of human life, for it is not simply that "honesty is the best policy," but that it is the only policy which will secure a tranquil state of existence. Rectitude is the source of self-reliance in life and at death. Men who are able to distinguish the good from the bad are attracted by honor and refinement. They shun malignity and vulgarity, and are repelled by what is vicious and demoralising. Men should be good because goodness qualifies them for friendship, and wins for them the esteem of the best of their kind. Further, it awakens within them a sense of what is most fitted to enable them to adopt an elevated mode of living. They become practical believers in that which is just and useful, and they are thereby inspired to strive to realise their ideal born of newer and higher perceptions of truth. Let the lover of goodness once be admitted into the presence of the intellectually gifted and morally heroic, and life will present to him a new aspect. When we read of Plutarch's heroes ; of Greece with her art and her literature ; of Rome with her Cicero and her Antoninus ; and of the muster-roll of men and women whose memories are surrounded with a halo of intellectual brilliancy and ethical glory, we no

longer regard the world as the habitation only of moral invalids and of mental imbeciles. On the contrary, a higher faith in the potency and grandeur of human goodness is evoked, exalted thoughts are inspired within us, and we are induced to believe that goodness will be more than ever appreciated for its own sake, and that virtue will be honored and revered for its intrinsic merits.

While admitting that the moral brightness of life is somewhat tarnished by the base, the brutal, the suicidal, and the insane characters that are still found in our midst, we believe in the law of progress and the work of reform. We recognise a powerful motive for being good in the belief that such conditions may be produced that shall tend to remove depravity and to establish righteousness. Such disasters as the cholera, and numerous other epidemics that once made uncontrolled havoc upon society, have been checked by the application of suitable scientific remedies; why, then, should not moral evils be made to yield to judicious treatment? When men understand that moral law is as certain as physical law, and as necessary to be obeyed if we are to have a healthy state in human ethics, the reformation of the community will be capable of achievement. Whether we regard man as the creature or the creator of circumstances, or as both, it is certain that his organism and its environment act and re-act upon each other. While intelligence indicates the best way to pursue in life, it is obvious that circumstances must be such as to permit of our pursuing that way. From what we know of human nature, it appears to us necessary that it should be surrounded with inducements that have the power to draw out the best that is in it. It has been well said that man is a bundle of habits; therefore moral forces become strong as they become a part of the habit of life. We cannot reasonably expect the State to be ruled by right and love unless these virtues exist in the citizens. No nation has ever attempted to live like a society of friends—without gaols, policemen, etc.—because the idea of moral duty has been only partially realised. In proportion as we properly understand the nature of goodness, and regulate our lives by its genius, so shall we be governed by ideas instead of by force. The misfortune of our present societarian condition is the difficulty attending its improvement. Although, like

trees, we grow and expand from within, there seems, as it were, an iron band around us, that prevents our free expansion and our full growth. The quality of our acts may be good in a certain degree, but it is not of the required strength. The quality has been impoverished through neglect and theological adulteration; and what is now required is persistent and intelligent conduct, that shall purify life, and rid it of the legacy of the ignorance, the folly, and the superstition of the dark past. Our hope is in purification; we want earnestness and candor to take the place of the apathy and hypocrisy which have so long held sway. Then real goodness will illuminate the hearts of men, and virtue will shed its lustre upon the emancipated humanity of the world.

Why should we be good? The answer, from a Secular standpoint, is: Because goodness, in itself, is the basis of all true happiness; it is the progenitor of peace, order, and progress. To be good is a duty we owe to society as well as to ourselves. In virtue alone are to be found those elements that ennoble character and exalt a nation. The unselfish love of goodness, and the desire to acquire a practical knowledge of the obligations of life, have hitherto been too much confined to the few, while the many have neglected to strive to realise the highest advantages of existence. The cause of this misfortune is not difficult to discover. It is apparent in the radical evil underlying the whole of the theological creeds of Christendom—namely, an objection to concentrate attention on the present life, apart from considerations of any existence “hereafter.” The mistake in the theological world is that its members regulate their conduct and control their actions almost exclusively by the records of the past or the conjectures of a future. Their rules of morality, their systems of theology, and their modes of thought are too much a reflex of an imperfect antiquity. Those who cannot derive sufficient inspiration from this source fly into the fancied boundaries of another world—a world which is enveloped in obscurity, and upon which experience can throw no light. History has been subverted by this theological error from its proper purpose. Instead of being the interpreter of ages, it has become the dictator of nations; instead of being a guide to the future, it is really the master of the present.

The proceedings of bygone times are thus made the standard of appeal in these. The wisdom of the first century is regarded as the infallible rule of the nineteenth. The watchword of the Church is "As you were," rather than "As you are." Christian theology hesitates to recognise active progressive principles, but holds that faith was stereotyped eighteen hundred years ago, and that all subsequent actions and duties must be shaped in its mould. Secularism prefers the healthy and progressive sentiments thus expressed by J. R. Lowell:—

New occasions teach new duties,
Time makes ancient good uncouth ;
They must upward still, and onward,
Who would keep abreast of truth.

Orthodox Christianity appeals to the desires and fears of mankind. It is presented to the world under the two aspects of hope and dread. Some persons regard it as a system of love, offering them a pleasant future, stimulating within them hopes delightful to indulge, and supplying their imagination with splendors enchanting to contemplate. On the other hand, many reject Christianity because it contains gloomy forebodings, presenting to them a being who is represented as constantly sowing the seeds of discord and unhappiness among society, who has nothing but frowns for the smiles of life, and whose chief business it is to crush and awe the minds of men with fear and apprehension. If Christianity furnishes its believers with hopes of heaven to buoy them up, it also gives them the dread of hell to cast them down. The one is as certain as the other. As soon as a child begins to lisp at its mother's knee, its young mind is impressed with the notion that there is "a Heaven to gain, and a Hell to avoid." As the child grows to maturity, this notion is strengthened by false education and religious discipline, until at last the opinion is formed which frequently culminates in making the victim an abject slave to a fancy-created heaven and an inhumanly-pictured hell. Christians sometimes assert that to deprive them of their hope in heaven would be to rob them of their principal consolation. If this be correct, so much the worse for their faith. Better have no consolation than to derive it from a creed which condemns to eternal perdition the great majority of the human kind.

The true object of rewards and punishments should be to encourage virtue and to deter vice. Most, if not all, of the religions of the world have employed these agencies in the promulgation of their tenets, not, however, as a rule, in the correct form. Theologians have connected their systems of rewards and punishments with the profession of arbitrary creeds and dogmas that have little or no bearing on the promotion of virtue or the prevention of vice. The final reward offered by Christianity is made dependent on beliefs more than on actions. This is unjust, inasmuch as many persons are unable to accept the belief that is supposed to secure the reward. Moreover, according to the Christian system, the same kind of encouragement is held out to the criminal who, after a life of crime, repents and acknowledges his faith in Christ, as to the philanthropist whose career has been one of excellence and goodness.

Equally defective and objectionable is the system of punishment as taught by Christians, making, as it does, correction to proceed from a motive of revenge rather than from a desire to reform. Through life we should never cherish revenge, nor harbor malice. To forgive is a virtue all should endeavor to practise. Governments who desire to win national confidence do not seek to make the chief feature of their punitive laws of a retaliative spirit; they aim rather to enact measures that tend to the reformation of the criminal. Now, the drawback to the threatened punishment of Christianity is, that it offers no incentive to reformation, for, when once in hell, the victim must for ever remain, and there no opportunity is afforded for improvement, and no facility offered for repentance. It cannot be said that the sufferings of those in the bottomless pit exercise any beneficial influence upon those on earth, inasmuch as we cannot witness their torture, and, if we could, instead of inspiring within us love and obedience, doubtless it would excite detestation towards the being who, possessing the power, refused to exercise it to prevent mankind enduring such barbarous cruelty. The rejected of heaven are here represented as being the victims of unutterable anguish; as having to endure tortures which no mind can fully conceive, no pen can adequately portray.

This Christian doctrine of punishment is based upon a principle opposed to all good government. It allows no grades in virtue or vice. It divides the world into two classes—the sheep and the goats, leaving no intermediate course. Now, mankind are not either all good or all bad ; there are degrees of innocence and guilt in each. Horace recognised this ; hence he said :—

Let rules be fixed that may our rage contain,
And punish faults with a proportioned pain.

Punishment is valuable only so far as it tends to the reformation and the protection of society. It has been shown that hell fire must fail in the former, and experience proves that it is quite as impotent for the latter. Our law courts are constantly revealing the fact that those who profess the strongest faith in future retribution have frequently been remarkable for savage brutality and uncontrolled cruelty.

If it be asked, Why is Secularism regarded by its adherents as being superior to theological and other speculative theories of the day ? the answer is, (1) Because Secularists believe its moral basis to be more definite and practical than other existing ethical codes ; and (2) because Secular teachings appear to them to be more reasonable and of greater advantage to general society than the various theologies of the world, and that of orthodox Christianity in particular. That Secular teachings are superior to those of orthodox Christianity the following brief contrast will show. Christian conduct is controlled by the ancient, and supposed infallible, rules of the Bible ; Secular action is regulated by modern requirements and the scientific and philosophical discoveries of the practical age in which we live. Christianity enjoins as an essential duty of life to prepare to die ; Secularism says, learn how to live truthfully, honestly, and usefully, and you need not concern yourself with the “how” to die. Christianity proclaims that the world's redemption can be achieved only through the teachings of one person ; Secularism avows that such teachings are too impracticable and limited in their influence for the attainment of the object claimed, and that improvement, general and individual, is the result of the brain power and physical exertions of the brave toilers of

every country and every age who have labored for human advancement. Christianity threatens punishment in another world for the rejection of speculative views in this; Secularism teaches that no penalty should follow the holding of sincere opinions, as uniformity of belief is impossible. According to Christianity, as taught in the churches and chapels, the approval of God and the rewards of heaven are to be secured only through faith in Jesus of Nazareth; whereas the philosophy of Secularism enunciates that no merit should be attached to such faith, but that fidelity to principle and good service to man should win the right to participate in any advantages either in this or any other world.

The ethical science of the nineteenth century derives little or no assistance from orthodox Christianity. Notwithstanding the fact that Broad Churchism or Latitudinarianism has begun to make some concessions to reason and scientific progress, and however strongly apparent may be the desire for compromise on the part of the theologians, there are still many of the most distinctive doctrines of orthodoxy which are most decidedly opposed to the standard of modern ethics and influence. Such, for example, is the doctrine of vicarious atonement, where paternal affection is ignored, and where the innocent is made to suffer for the guilty; that right faith is superior to right conduct apart from such belief; and, most especially, that unjust and equity-defying dogma of eternal condemnation. It is really beyond the scope of such a system as the orthodox one to promote the moral development of humanity. This can only be effectually done by the action of those social, political, and intellectual forces to which we are indebted, as it were, for the building up of man from the very first institution of society. These have been, are, and ever must be, the moral edifiers of the human race. Without them true progress is impossible, since it is by them that we are what we are. It is: (1) the *social activities* that have led to the formation, maintenance, and improvement of human society; (2) the *political activities* that have led to the formation, maintenance, and improvement of the general government, to the establishment of States or nations, and to the recognition of the mutual rights and duties of such States; and (3) the *intellectual*

activities that have led to the interchange of human thoughts, to the formation of literature, to the pursuits of science and art, to the banishment of ignorance and the decay of superstition, to the diffusion of knowledge, and, finally, to all mental progress.

It is said that, without a fixed rule for conduct, all guarantees to virtue would be absent. Not so; Secularism recognises a safe and never-erring basis for moral action, which is taken, not from Revelation, but from the Roman law of the Twelve Tables, which laid down the broad general maxim that "the well-being of the people is the supreme law." This may be taken as a fundamental principle for all time and all nations. The kind of action which will produce such well-being depends, of course, upon individual and national circumstances, varied in their character and diversified in their influence. This progressive morality is the principle of the Utilitarian ethics which now govern the civilised world. It is not merely the individual, but society at large, that is considered. To use an analogy from nature, societarian existence may be compared to a beehive. What does the apiarian discover in his studies? Not that every individual bee labors only for individual necessities. No; but that all is subordinated to the general welfare of the hive. If the drones increase, they are expelled or restricted, and well would it be for our human society if all drones who resisted improvement were banished from among us. In the moral world, as in religious societies, there are too many Nothingarians—individuals who thrive through the good conduct of others, while they themselves do nothing to contribute to the store of the ethical hive. The morality of men, their love, their benevolence, their kindly charity, their mutual tolerance and long-suffering—all these spring directly from their long-acquired and developed experience. As the poet of Buddhism sings:—

Pray not, the Darkness will not brighten ! ask
 Nought from the Silence, for it cannot speak !
 Vex not your mournful minds with pious pains :—
 Ah, brothers, sisters ! seek
 Nought from the helpless gods by gift and hymn,
 Nor bribe with blood, nor feed with fruit and cakes ;
Within yourselves deliverance must be sought ;
 Each man his prison makes !

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