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FREETHINKERS AND FREETHOUGHT.

Bishopgate Institute.

MORALITY OF FREETHOUGHT.

It may comfort some to know that there are amongst us many whom the gladiators of the pulpit would call Atheists and Materialists, whose lives, nevertheless, as tested by any accessible standard of morality, would contrast more than favourably with the lives of those who seek to stamp them with this offensive brand. When I say "offensive" I refer simply to the intention of those who use such terms, and not because Atheism or Materialism, when compared with many of the notions ventilated in the columns of religious newspapers, has any particular offensiveness to me. If I wished to find men who are scrupulous in their adherence to engagements, whose words are their bond, and to whom moral shiftiness of any kind is subjectively unknown; if I wanted a loving father, a faithful husband, an honourable neighbour, and a just citizen, I would seek him among the band of Atheists to which I refer. I have known some of the most pronounced amongst them, not only in life, but in death—seen them approaching with open eyes the inexorable goal, with no dread of a "hangman's whip," with no hope of a heavenly crown, and still as mindful of their duties, and as faithful in the discharge of them, as if their eternal future depended upon their latest deeds.—*Fortnightly Review*, November, 1877.

SCIENCE AND THE BOOK OF GENESIS.

The Book of Genesis has no voice in scientific questions. To the grasp of geology, which it resisted for a time, it at length yielded, like potter's clay; its authority as a system of cosmogony being discredited on all hands by the abandonment of the obvious meaning of its writers. It is a poem, not a scientific treatise. In the former aspect it is for ever beautiful; in the latter aspect it has been, and it will continue to be, purely obstructive and hurtful. To *knowledge* its value has been *negative*, leading, in rougher ages than ours, to physical, and in our "free" age to moral, violence.—*Belfast Address*, 1874; Preface.

ABSURDITY OF BIBLE MIRACLES.

Transferring our thoughts from this little sand-grain of an earth to the immeasurable heavens, where countless worlds, with freights of life, probably revolve unseen, the very suns which warm them being barely visible across the abysmal space; reflecting that, beyond these sparks of solar fire, suns innumerable may burn, whose light can never stir the optic nerve at all; and bringing these reflections face to face with the idea of the Builder and Sustainer of all showing himself in a burning bush, exhibiting his hinder parts, or behaving in other familiar ways ascribed to him in the Jewish Scriptures, the incongruity must appear.—*Fragments of Science*, p. 407.

BIBLE CHRONOLOGY.

Bishop Butler accepted with unwavering trust the chronology of the Old Testament, describing it as "confirmed by the natural and civil history of the world, collected from common historians, from the state of the earth and from the late invention of arts and sciences." These words mark the

gress, and they must seem somewhat hoary to the Bishop's successors of to-day. It is hardly necessary to inform you that since his time the domain of the naturalist has been immensely extended—the whole science of geology, with its astounding revelations regarding the life of the ancient earth, having been created. The rigidity of old conceptions has been relaxed, the public mind being rendered gradually tolerant of the idea that not for six thousand, nor for sixty thousand, nor for six thousand thousand, but for æons embracing untold millions of years, this earth has been the theatre of life and death. The riddle of the rocks has been read by the geologist and the palæontologist, from sub-cambrian depths to the deposits thickening over the sea-bottoms of to-day. And upon the leaves of that stone book are, as you know, stamped the characters, plainer and surer than those formed by the ink of history, which carry the mind back into abysses of time, compared with which the periods which satisfied Bishop Butler cease to have a visual angle.—*Belfast Address.*

MATTER AND MIND.

Let us reverently, but honestly, look the question in the face. Divorced from matter, where is life? Whatever our *faith* may say, our *knowledge* shows them to be indissolubly joined. Every meal we eat, and every cup we drink, illustrates the mysterious control of mind by matter.—*Belfast Address.*

IMPORTANCE OF THE MATERIAL.

On our dealings with matter depends our weal or woe, physical and moral. The state of mind which rebels against the recognition of the claims of Materialism is not unknown to me. I can remember a time when I regarded my body as a weed, so much more highly did I prize the conscious strength and pleasure derived from moral and religious feeling—which, I may add, was mine *without the intervention of dogma*. The error was not an ignoble one; but this did not save it from the penalty attached to error. Saner knowledge taught me that the body is no weed, and that, if it were treated as such, it would infallibly avenge itself. Am I personally lowered by its change of front? Not so. Give me their health, and there is no initial experience of those earlier years, no resolve of duty, or work of mercy, or act of self-renouncement, no solemnity of thought, no joy in the life and aspects of nature, that would not still be mine; and this *without the least reference or regard to any purely personal reward or punishment looming in the future*.—*Apology for Belfast Address.*

FUTILITY OF PRAYER.

Once upon a time we prayed against the ravages of small-pox—with what effect? You may answer (and rightly answer) that you do not know. But you will, at all events, admit that the prayer, as a preventive or remedial agent, proved no match for vaccination. Would the suppliant voice of a whole nation have atoned for the bad engineering, or caused a suspension of the laws of hydraulic pressure, in the case of the Bradford reservoir? I think not. The great majority of sane persons at the present day believe in the necessary character of natural laws, and it is only when the antecedents of a calamity are vague or disguised that they think of resorting to prayer to avert it.—*Letter to the Pall Mall Gazette, October 11th, 1865.*

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Something to Think About.

FEAR OF HELL.

A PERSON who should labour for the happiness of mankind lest he should be tormented eternally in hell would, with reference to that motive, possess as little claim to the epithet of virtuous as he who should torture, imprison, and burn them alive—a more usual and natural consequence of such principles—for the sake of the enjoyment of heaven.—*Shelley*.

HUMANITY v. THEOLOGY.

The purpose of my writing is to make men *anthropologists*, instead of *theologians*; man-lovers, instead of God-lovers; students of this world, instead of candidates of the next; self-reliant citizens of the earth, instead of subservient and wily ministers of a celestial and terrestrial Monarchy. My object is, therefore, anything but negative, destructive; it is positive: I deny in order to affirm. I deny the illusions of theology and religion in order that I may affirm the substantial being of man.—*Feuerbach*.

EVIL OF PUBLIC PATRONAGE OF CREEDS.

Suppose Government were to offer large rewards to all who believed in witches, or in the personality and marvellous feats of Hercules or Jack the Giant-Killer, and to threaten proportionate punishment to all disbelievers. No one would question that these offers and threats, if they were at all effective, would contribute to produce a general perversion of intellect, and that they would mislead men's judgments in numerous other cases besides that one to which they immediately applied. Error, when once implanted, uniformly and inevitably propagates its species. Precisely the same, in all cases, is the effect of erecting belief into an act of merit, and rendering unbelief punishable. You either produce no result at all, or you bribe and suborn a man into believing what he would not otherwise have believed—that is, what appears to him inadequately authenticated.—*Jeremy Bentham*.

CHRISTIANITY AND MIRACLES.

Upon the whole, we may conclude that the Christian religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day *cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one*. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity; and whoever is moved by faith to assent to it is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience.—*Hume*.

SUPPRESSION OF PAGAN WRITINGS.

The heathen taxed the Jews even with idolatry; the Jews joined with the heathen to render Christianity odious; but the Church, who beat them at their own weapons during these contests, has had this further triumph over them, as well as over the several sects that have arisen within her own pale: *the works of those who have written against her have been destroyed, and whatever she advanced to justify herself and to defame her adversaries is preserved in her annals and the writings of her doctors*.—*Lord Bolingbroke*.

IMMORALITY OF UNREASONABLE FAITH.

If a man, holding a belief which he was taught in childhood, or persuaded of afterwards, keeps down or pushes away any doubts which arise about it in his mind, purposely avoids the reading of books and the company of men that call in question or discuss it, and regards as impious those questions which cannot easily be asked without disturbing it; the life of that man is one long sin against mankind.—*Professor Clifford*.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT.

THE RIGHT FAITH.

The right faith of man is not intended to give him repose, but to enable him to do his work. It is not that he should look away from the place he lives in now, and cheer himself with thoughts of the place he is to live in next, but that he should look stoutly into the world, in faith that, if he does his work thoroughly here, some good to others or himself—with which, however, he is not at present concerned—will come of it hereafter. And this kind of brave, if not very hopeful or cheerful, faith, I perceive to be always rewarded by clear, practical success and splendid intellectual power; while the faith which dwells on the future fades away into rosy mist and emptiness of musical air.—*John Ruskin.*

THOMAS PAINE'S CREED.

All the world is my country, and to do good my religion.—*Thomas Paine.*

DIFFERENCES AMONG BELIEVERS.

I find Armenian Christians who say that it is a sin to eat a hare; Greeks who affirm that the Holy Ghost does not proceed from the Son; Nestorians who deny that Mary is the mother of God; Latins who boast that in the extreme West the Christians of Europe think quite contrary to those of Asia and Africa. I know that ten or twelve sects in Europe anathematise each other; the Mussulmen disdain the Christians, whom they nevertheless tolerate; the Jews hold in equal execration the Christians and the Mussulmen; the Fire-worshippers despise them all; the remnant of the Sabeans will not eat with either of the other sects; and the Brahmin cannot suffer either Sabeans, or Fire-worshippers, or Christians, or Mussulmen, or Jews. I have a hundred times wished that Jesus Christ, in coming to be incarnated in Judea, had united all the sects under his laws. I have asked myself why, being God, he did not use the rights of his divinity; why, in coming to deliver us from sin, he has left us in sin; why, in coming to enlighten all men, he has left almost all men in darkness. I know I am nothing; I know that from the depth of my nothingness I have no right to interrogate the Being of Beings; but I may, like Job, raise a voice of respectful sorrow from the bosom of my misery.—*Voltaire.*

WHY DO JEWS DISBELIEVE IN CHRIST?

But, all the Jews in Jerusalem were apparently converted on seeing the miracles of Jesus Christ? Not at all. Far from believing in him, they crucified him. It must be admitted that the Jews were the strangest of men: everywhere we see peoples led away by a single false miracle, and Jesus Christ could not influence the Jews with a multitude of true ones! The miracle to be accounted for is the incredulity of the Jews, not the Resurrection.—*Diderot.*

CHRISTIAN MORALITY NOT ORIGINAL.

To assert that Christianity communicated to man moral truths previously unknown argues, on the part of the assertor, either gross ignorance, or else wilful fraud.—*Buckle.*

MORALITY INDEPENDENT OF THEOLOGY.

Self-delusion, if not wicked, insidious design, is at the root of all efforts to establish morality, right, on theology. Where we are in earnest about the right we need no incitement from above. We need no Christian rule of political right; we need only one which is rational, just, human. The right, the true, the good, has always its ground of sacredness in itself, in its quality. Where man is in earnest about ethics they have in themselves the validity of a divine power.—*Feuerbach.*

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What Great Writers Say about the Bible.

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THE fourth and last possible theory is that this mass of religious Scripture contains merely the best efforts which we hitherto know to have been made by any of the race of men towards the discovery of some relations with the spiritual world; that they are no more trustworthy than as expressions of the enthusiastic visions or beliefs of earnest men oppressed by the world's darkness; and have no more authoritative claim on our faith than the religious speculations and histories of the Egyptians, Greeks, Persians, and Indians; but are, in common with all these, to be reverently studied as containing the best wisdom which the human intellect, earnestly seeking for help from God, has hitherto been able to gather between birth and death. This has been for the last half century the theory of the leading scholars and thinkers of Europe.—*John Ruskin*. Letter to a Friend in the *Manchester Examiner*, March 16th, 1867.

The history of Christ is contained in records which exhibit contradictions that cannot be reconciled, imperfections that would greatly detract from even admitted human compositions, and erroneous principles of morality that would hardly have found a place in the most incomplete systems of the philosophers of Greece and Rome.—*Rev. Dr. Giles*.

It is difficult to assign a shorter date for the last glaciation of Europe than a quarter of million of years, and human existence antedates that. But not only is it this grand fact that confronts us, we have to admit also a primitive animalised state, and a slow, a gradual, development. But this forlorn, this savage, condition of humanity is in strong contrast to the paradisiacal happiness of the Garden of Eden, and, what is far more serious, it is inconsistent with the theory of the Fall.—*Professor Draper*.

The search after the Philosopher's Stone, or after Perpetual Motion, was a less pitiful imbecility than this modern notion, that fallible man can, by selecting his own Bible or his own Church, or by demonstrating the infallibility of the system in which he was educated, get rid of his natural fallibility. It obviously cleaves to him like his own personality, and infects every decision at which he arrives. Those, therefore, use words of wild boasting who, with superior pity, look down on another as "without chart and without compass on the deep," because he does not admit the infallibility of the Bible.—*Prof. F. W. Newman*.

The time has come when the minds of men no longer put as a matter of course the Bible miracles in a class by themselves. Now, from the moment this time commences, from the moment that the comparative history of all miracles is a conception entertained, and a study admitted, the conclusion is certain, the reign of the Bible miracles is doomed.—*Matthew Arnold*.

The author of *Supernatural Religion*, who has evidently a turn for inquiries of this kind, has pursued the thing much further. He seems to have looked out and brought together, to the best of his powers,

every extant passage in which, between the year 70 and the year 170 of our era, a writer might be supposed to be quoting one of our Four Gospels. And it turns out that there is constantly the some sort of variation from our Gospels, a variation inexplicable in men quoting from a real Canon, and quite unlike what is found in men quoting from our Four Gospels later. It may be said that the Old Testament, too, is often quoted loosely. True; but it is also quoted exactly; and long passages of it are thus quoted. It would be nothing that our Canonical Gospels were often quoted loosely, if long passages from them, or if passages, say, of even two or three verses, were sometimes quoted exactly. But from writers before Irenæus [A.D. 170] not one such passage of our Canonical Gospels can be produced so quoted. And the author of *Supernatural Religion*, by bringing all the alleged quotations forward, *has proved it*..... This, which it is the main object of his book to show: that there is no evidence of the establishment of our Four Gospels as a Gospel-Canon, or even of their existence as they now finally stand at all, before the last quarter of the second century—nay, that the great weight of evidence is against it—he has shown, and in the most minute and exhaustive detail.—*Matthew Arnold*.

There are many more vital points of contact between the New Testament and the Talmud than divines seem yet fully to realise; for such terms as Redemption, Baptism, Grace, Faith, Salvation, Regeneration, Son of Man, Son of God, Kingdom of Heaven, were not, as we are apt to think, invented by Christianity, but were household words of Talmudic Judaism..... The fundamental mysteries of the new Faith are matters totally apart, but the ethics in both are in their broad outlines identical. The grand dictum, "Do unto others as thou wouldst be done by," is quoted by Hillel, the president, *at whose death Jesus was ten years of age*, not as anything new, but as an old and well-known dictum, "that compriseth the whole law."—*Emanuel Deutsch, Quarterly Review*, October, 1867.

These Gospels, so important to the Church, have not come to us in one undisputed form. We have no authorised copy of them in their original language, so that we may know in what precise words they were originally written. The authorities from which we derive their sacred text are various ancient copies, written by hand on parchment. Of the Gospels there are more than five hundred of these manuscripts of various ages, from the fourth century after Christ to the fifteenth, when printing superseded manual writing for publication of books. Of these five hundred and more, *no two* are in all points alike: probably in no two of the more ancient can *even a few consecutive verses* be found in which all the words agree.—*Dean Alford, "How to Study the New Testament."*

SOME EXTRACTS

FROM

THOMAS CARLYLE.

OUR KNOWLEDGE RELATIVE.

To the minnow every cranny and pebble, and quality and accident, of its little native Creek may have become familiar : but does the minnow understand the Ocean-tides and periodic currents, the Trade-winds, and Monsoons, and Moon's Eclipses, by all which the condition of its little creek is regulated, and may, from time to time (*unmiraculously* enough), be quite over-set and reversed? Such a minnow is Man ; his creek this Planet Earth ; his Ocean the immeasurable All.—*Sartor Resartus*.

OUR SPHERE.

Yes, here, in this poor, miserable, hampered, despicable Actual, wherein thou even now standest—here or nowhere is thy ideal : work it out therefrom ; and, working, believe, live, be free.—*Sartor Resartus*.

WORK IS WORSHIP.

Properly speaking, all true work is religion ; and whatsoever religion is not work may go and dwell among the Brahmins, the Antinomians, Spinning Dervishes, or where it will. Admirable was that of the old monks—" *Laborare est orare* " (Work is worship).—*Past and Present*.

CANT OF OUR TIME.

Inanity well tailored and upholstered, mild-spoken Ambiguity, decorous Hypocrisy, which is astonished you should think it hypocritical, taking their room and drawing their wages : from zenith to nadir you have Cant, Cant—a universe of incredibilities which are not even credited, which each man at best only tries to persuade himself that he credits.—*Latter-Day Pamphlets*.

TESTING OUR GODS.

A poor man, in our day, has many gods foisted on him ; and big voices bid him " Worship or be ——— " in a menacing and confusing manner. What shall he do ? By far the greater part of said gods, current in the public, whether canonised by Pope or Populus, are mere dumb apises and beatified prize-oxen—nay, some of them, who have articulate faculty, are devils instead of gods. A poor man that would save his soul alive is reduced to the sad necessity of *sharply trying his gods*, whether they are divine or not, which is a terrible pass for mankind, and lays an awful problem upon each man.—*Latter-Day Pamphlets*.

INSPIRATION.

Is there no " inspiration," then, but an ancient Jewish, Greekish, Roman one, with big revenues, loud liturgies, and red stockings?—*Latter-Day Pamphlets*.

ORTHODOX COWARDICE.

" Be careful how you believe truth," cries the good man everywhere. " Composure and a whole skin are very valuable. Truth—who knows ?

SOME EXTRACTS FROM THOMAS CARLYLE.

—many things are not true ; most things are uncertainties—very prosperous things are even open falsities that have been agreed upon. There is little certain truth going. If it isn't orthodox truth, it will play the very devil with you !"—*Latter-Day Pamphlets*.

TRUTH RELIGIOUS.

Simple souls still clamour occasionally for what they call "a new religion." My friends, you will not get this new religion of yours ; I perceive you already have it, have always had it ! All that is *true* is your "religion"—is it not ?—*Latter-Day Pamphlets*.

THE GREAT CHRISTIAN TREE DEAD ?

The event at Bethlehem was of the Year One ; but all years since that—eighteen hundred of them now—have been contributing new growth to it, and see, there it stands—the Church ! Touching the earth with one small point ; springing out of one small seed-grain ; rising out therefrom, ever higher, ever broader—high as the heaven itself, broad till it overshadow the whole visible heaven and earth—and no star can be seen but through *it*.....The world-tree of the nations for so long ! Alas ! if its roots are now dead, and it have lost hold of the firm earth, or clear belief of mankind—what, great as it is, can by possibility become of it ? Shaken to and fro in the storms of inevitable Fate, it must sway hither and thither ; nod ever farther from the perpendicular ; nod at last too far ; and, sweeping the eternal heavens clear of its old brown foliage and multitudinous rooks' nests, come to the ground with much confused crashing, and *disclose* the diurnal and nocturnal Upper Lights again ! The dead world-tree will have declared itself dead.—*Latter-Day Pamphlets*.

THE CLERGY OF TO-DAY.

Legions of them, in their black or other gowns, I still meet in every country ; masquerading in strange costume of body, and still stranger of soul ; mumming, primming, grimacing—poor devils ; shamming, and endeavouring not to sham : that is the sad fact. Brave men many of them, after their sort, and in a position which we may admit to be wonderful and dreadful ! On the outside of their heads some singular headgear, tulip mitre, felt coalscuttle, purple hat ; and in the inside—I must say, such a Theory of God Almighty's universe as I, for my share, am right thankful to have no concern with at all. I think, on the whole, as broken-winged, self-strangled, monstrous a mass of incoherent incredibilities as ever dwelt in the human brain before.—*Latter-Day Pamphlets*.

FREEDOM.

Understand that well—it is the deep commandment, dimmer or clearer, of our whole being to be *free*. Freedom is the one purport, wisely aimed at, or unwisely, of all man's struggles, toilings, and sufferings in this earth.—*French Revolution*.

SECULARISM : ITS TRUTH AND WORTH.

operation, like feet, like hands, like eyelids, like the rows of the upper and lower teeth." All for each and each for all is the rule of social health—a grand reciprocity of duties and rights. Beyond each social unit is the domestic circle, beyond that the State, and beyond that humanity, including all. The individual, besides seeking his own welfare, must participate in the general life of society ; and, in return, society must do its utmost to improve the condition of the individual, and afford free scope for the fruitful exercise of his activities. The grand object of Secularism is, then, the promotion of our individual and of the general well-being, which it declares to be at once our highest wisdom and duty.

For the achievement of this object Secularism relies on human effort based upon knowledge and experience. In this world, at least, salvation cometh not by prayer, nor by faith in the unseen, but by practical work under guidance of wisdom and the inspiration of love. Secularism believes that science is man's only providence. Ignorant of Nature's laws, we are torn to pieces and ground to dust ; knowing them, we build up an empire enduring civilisation within her borders.

In morality Secularism is utilitarian. Conduct which conduces to the general well-being in this world is right ; conduct which has the opposite tendency is wrong. Whatever may be theoretically urged against this standard, it is certain that no other is universally respected in practice. Jurisprudence is not required to adapt itself to revelation, and he would be thought a strange legislator who should insist on judging a Parliamentary Bill by its conformity or disagreement with Scripture.

Religionists assert that men will not do right, and refrain from wrong, unless they have the hope of heaven and the fear of hell before them. But this is a great mistake, and a libel upon humanity. Great writers like Darwin, Spencer, and Tylor, have conclusively shown that morality is a human growth, not a divine gift. Man has advanced from barbarism to civilisation by natural steps, and the agencies which have caused progress in the past assure its continuance in the future. Besides our love of self, we all have more or less sympathy with others, and that sympathy may be cultivated quite as well as any of our physical or intellectual powers. A man loves his wife, his children, his parents, his kindred, his friends, without reference to his posthumous hopes and fears ; and the continued cultivation of his moral nature will ultimately lead him to regard all his fellow men and women as brothers and sisters of one great family.

Secularism is often called "irreligious," which indeed it is if religion and theology are the same. But if religion means devotion to an ideal, and not mere belief in creeds and dogmas, then Secularism is religious in the fullest sense of the word. Love, Reverence, and Service are the three great sentiments which all religions have claimed to satisfy. Secularism amply provides for their exercise and satisfaction. It bids us love our fellow men, instead of dissipating our affection on imaginary beings ; it demands our reverence for the noble heroes and martyrs of truth in all ages and lands, whose struggles and sufferings have lightened our burdens and smoothed our path ; and it enjoins service, not to omnipotence, which cannot need it, but to humanity, which does. The legacy of good we inherited from our forefathers cost them labour and anguish ; let us, as wise stewards, transmit it to posterity improved by our use.

SECULARISM ; ITS TRUTH AND WORTH.

SECULARISM is too frequently thought to be a denial of the existence of God and of a future life. This opinion, however, is quite erroneous. Secularism neither affirms nor denies these metaphysical beliefs, nor does it concern itself with them unless they are employed to obstruct its path and hinder its progress. There is no Secular Society existing which requires its members to believe or disbelieve in God and Immortality. The province of Secularism lies outside natural theology ; it includes all the moral, intellectual, and material agencies of improvement, which are available to all men in every land, whether they accept or reject belief in supernatural powers.

But while Secularism does not affirm or deny the *existence* of God, it finds itself opposed to many ideas of his relationship to man current in popular theology. It does not, for instance, admit that he inspired the various writers of the Bible ; it denies the myths of Genesis which contradict science ; it rejects the story of the Fall, which is untrue in fact and vicious in principle ; it repudiates all the miracles of the Old and New Testaments as unsupported by evidence, and repugnant to reason and natural law ; it declines to believe that Jesus was God, or that his words carry any greater authority than naturally attaches to them ; it recognises no objective efficacy in prayer. Believing that these statements and conceptions are false and hurtful, Secularism is obliged to oppose them when, as is too frequently the case, they stand in the way of human happiness and improvement. Such opposition, however, is not a denial of God's existence. Upon that subject every Secularist is free to hold what opinion he pleases. Having no certain *knowledge* of Deity, Secularism does not impose upon its adherents any profession of belief concerning him. It merely stipulates that speculation as to the origin of the universe shall not interfere with the cultivation of that small province of it in which our lot is cast.

Similarly with the doctrine of a future life. Secularism does not deny its truth ; it neither forbids nor recommends the hope of reunion with dear ones loved and lost. But, in the absence of any *knowledge* of a life beyond the grave, it censures the moulding of our present life by considerations of futurity, which at the best are supposititious ; and it maintains that veracity, honour, and heroism, all the virtues that ennoble life and the graces that adorn it, are possible without belief in its prolongation through eternity.

Holding that this life is the only one of which we have certain knowledge, Secularism maintains that its concerns claim our primary attention. The teachers of theology are engaged in making men fit candidates for heaven ; Secularism would make them fit citizens of earth. If one tithe of the means, the time, the energy, the ability, the enthusiasm, which have been devoted to preparing men for the future, had been applied to their improvement and elevation in the present, most of the evils that afflict the world would now be unknown ; poverty would be extirpated, ignorance removed, reason triumphant, morality universal, and a fair prospect of happiness the certain heritage of all. The Secular rule of concentrating attention on the present life is not a mere theory ; it is fraught with practical consequences of the highest moment.

The greatest moralists of all ages have asserted the solidarity of our race. Beneath all differences of nationality, race, or creed, throbs the same human heart. In the words of the great Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, the wisest and purest spirit that ever sat on a throne, "We are made for co-

world's inhabitants, except Noah's family, at one fell swoop, for being what he himself had made them. He loves supple villains like Jacob, and hates magnanimous men like Esau. He declares David, a murderer and an adulterer, to be a man after his own heart. He commands his chosen people to commit atrocities which make us shudder; such as, in some cities they make war against, to slay all the *males*, and keep the *females* for themselves; and, in other cities, to *slay all*—men, women, and children—and *leave alive nothing that breatheth*. Men who believe in a God blaspheme his name in ascribing to him such atrocities as these.

You, as a Christian, believe that Jesus was born without a father. A similar story is told of Buddha, and hundreds of millions of people believe it. Why do you not believe it also? You rely on the testimony of the four Evangelists—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Doubtless you will be surprised to hear that there is no evidence that they wrote the Gospels bearing their names, and very strong evidence that they did not. Every scholar admits that our Four Gospels were not in existence until more than a hundred years after the death of Jesus. Nobody knows when, where, or by whom they were written. They existed side by side with dozens of other Gospels, all of which were thought to be inspired. The authority of the Church made them canonical, and the rest apocryphal. Our Gospels are merely the voice of tradition a century after Jesus's death. And what is tradition? News passed from mouth to mouth. Surely stronger evidence is required to warrant our believing that a virgin brought forth a son, and a child was born without a father.

Tradition, too, is the only evidence of the Resurrection. The first Gospel says that at the Crucifixion darkness covered the land for three hours, the veil of the temple was rent, the earth opened, and dead saints arose from their graves, and went into the city. Profane history does not mention these startling wonders. Is not this strange? The Jews, amongst whom these miracles are said to have happened, remained as sceptical about Jesus as before. Is not this stranger still?

What need was there for the Son of God to come on earth simply to teach what is preserved in the Four Gospels? They contain nothing new. As Buckle says in his "History of Civilisation," "To assert that Christianity communicated to man moral truths previously unknown argues, on the part of the assertor, either gross ignorance, or else wilful fraud."

Christianity holds out the hope of heaven and the fear of hell as motives to virtue. These motives are purely selfish. We should do right for right's sake. He who refrains from wrong through fear of hell is no more virtuous than the burglar who refrains from breaking into a house through fear of the policeman. The doctrine of eternal punishment is an awful blasphemy. A parent who held his child's little finger in the flame of a candle for a minute would be hooted and put in prison. Yet the Christian religion says that God, the universal father, will plunge our whole bodies in fire for ever and ever. A being who could do that would not be a God, but a Devil.

Your creed says also that only those who have faith can go to heaven. But faith is no virtue. Belief does not depend on the will. Men are good or bad because of their actions, not their opinions. A heaven not catholic enough to receive all honest men is not worth going to.

Christian reader, men of science and philosophy are outside your Church, instead of inside, and many of them actively oppose its teachings. The more we know of the great Book of Nature the less we believe in the Christian Bible. Is not this a fatal sign? Ponder these things. Seriously examine your creed. If, having done so, you find it true, you will believe it more earnestly and vitally; if you find it false, discard it, for nothing is profitable to any man but truth.

A FEW WORDS TO A CHRISTIAN.

WHY are you a Christian? Probably you were never asked this question before, and scarcely know what answer to give. Nevertheless, you ought to find an answer. There is intellectual as well as moral honesty, and a man should be able to give as good an account of his opinions as of his property. Why, then, are you a Christian? If you reflect, you will most likely be compelled to answer that you can give no other reason except that you were born in a Christian country, educated by Christian teachers, and always surrounded by Christian influences. This, however, while a very good explanation of *how* you became a Christian, is no satisfactory reason *why* you are one. The Turk has as good a reason for being a Mohammedan. You should be able to make a better reply than this when asked to "give a reason for the faith that is in you."

A great number of intelligent people cannot accept Christianity; many eminent philosophers have publicly expressed disbelief in it; and some men of great intellectual power, who were brought up as Christians, after examining their creed have found it repugnant to reason and morality, and been obliged to discard it, not with joy, but with more or less pain. These men are by the priests called "Infidels;" but they are no more *unfaithful* (for that is what the word "Infidel" means) than the most pious believers. They are faithful to truth, which is the noblest rectitude. You will, therefore, not refuse to hear why they think the Christian religion untrue, and unfit for your acceptance as they think.

You, as a Christian, believe the Bible to be God's word. But Sceptics who have studied it cannot so regard it, although they know it contains many beautiful and true things. Why? you will ask. There are many reasons.

The Bible contradicts Science. It gives an account of creation which scientific men smile at. It says that light existed, and evening and morning, three days before the creation of the sun, without which those phenomena could not occur. It says that fish and fowl were created on the same day, or in the same epoch; but geology shows us that marine animals existed countless ages before fowl. It gives an account of man's origin which no living biologist believes. It says that the human race is less than 6,000 years old, while Science proves it to be far more ancient. It says that the whole earth was deluged about 4,500 years ago, while geology flatly denies that any such devastation as an universal flood has visited the earth since man's appearance on it. We must disbelieve either Science or the Bible; we cannot believe both.

The Bible outrages reason. It is full of marvellous stories, which no sane man would ever believe if he had not been taught in his childhood to regard the book which contains them as God's word. Dead people come to life again; iron floats in water; an ass speaks; the walls of a city are blown down by trumpeters; the sea opens to let people pass through; men are thrown into fire without being burnt, and into the den of hungry lions without being eaten; and, last, though not least, a whale, whose gullet is not large enough for the passage of a fish bigger than a herring, swallows a man, keeps him alive in its belly for three days, and finally vomits him up safe and sound on dry land. Such marvels do not happen now; but all other ancient literature, as well as the Bible, is full of them. If the Bible miracles really happened, why not all the others also? What reason is there for believing some and disbelieving others? Besides, it seems an insult to Deity to imagine for a moment that he could condescend to such puerilities. It degrades God to the level of a showman, working wonders for a gaping crowd.

The Bible outrages our moral sense. It depicts a savage, cruel, and vengeful God. The God of the Bible curses the whole human race for the offence of their first parents, which is as right and reasonable as hanging a man because his grandfather committed a murder. He drowns all the