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# The Teachings of Secularism

COMPARED WITH  
ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY

—BY—

CHARLES WATTS

*Editor of Secular Thought*

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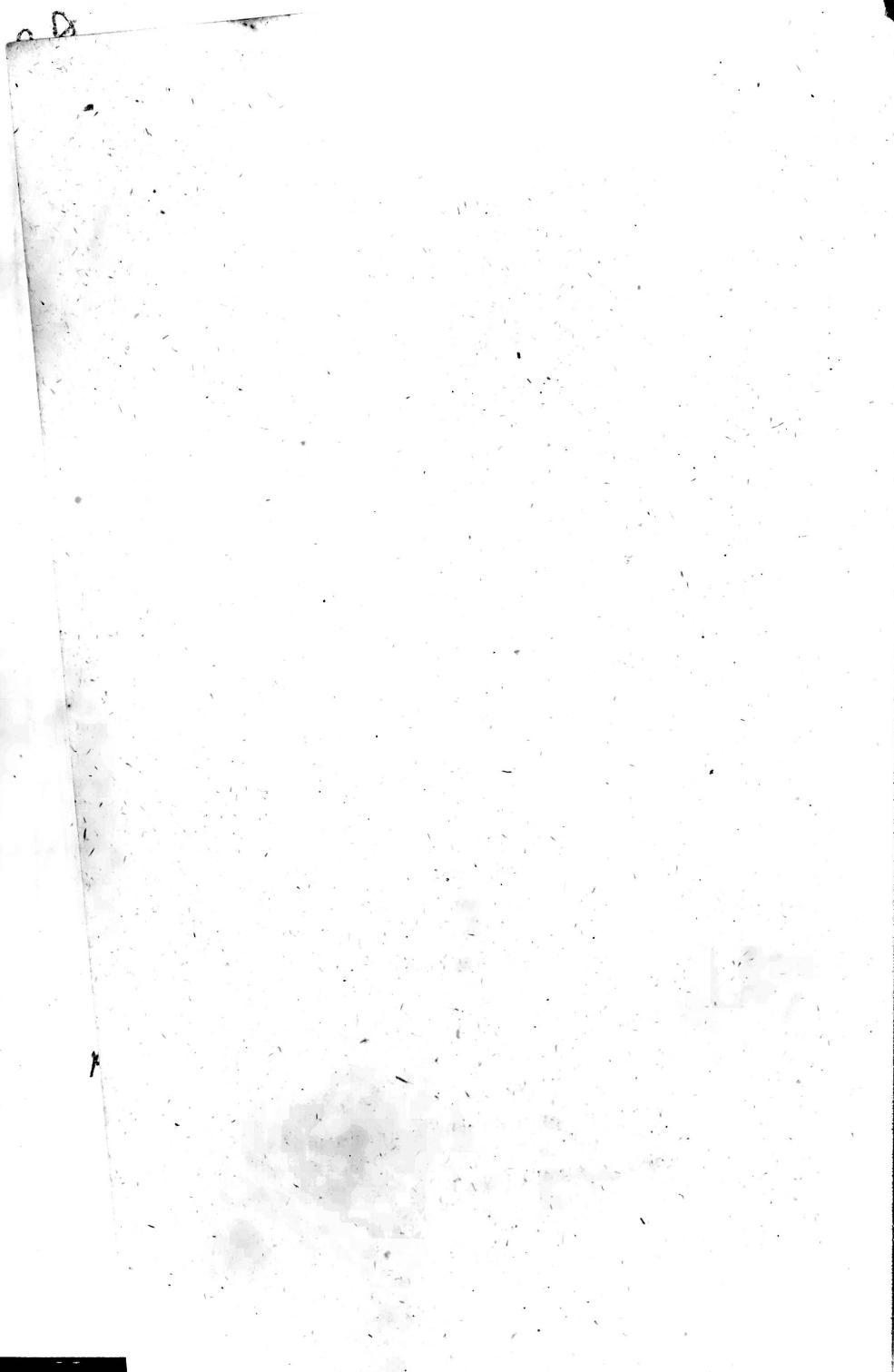
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TWENTY-FIVE CENTS



# SECULAR TEACHINGS.

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## I. PHYSICAL.

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As Secularism has been so thoroughly misrepresented of late in the press and pulpits of Toronto, we purpose in the following pages to explain to our readers what true Secular principles really are. We commence at the very foundation of our philosophy. The first subject of importance to man is his physical health. His bodily organization, from any point of view, demands special concern. With an abnormal condition of body a normal state of mind is hardly possible; and certain it is that there must be an entire absence of comfort and pleasure where the physical frame is subject to the ailments of disease. Of all the branches of knowledge that civilized man has engaged in that which relates to his own health is of supreme importance.

Man is related to everything that surrounds him. The sun influences his daily life, and the moon and stars light him to his couch of repose. The earth furnishes him with the ten thousand needs of his bodily frame, and the very winds are his servants. Electricity, and the other mighty forces of nature, he makes subservient to his will, while the lower animals and plants he employs for his daily food. Wherever he looks, and with whatever object he comes into contact, he finds materials ready made to his hands, to be moulded into new forms for new uses all subservient to his life and happiness. It is of the highest importance, however, how he uses those agents. For while they are all adapted to supply health and comfort, they are also calculated to spread abroad disease and death. The most beneficial object with which he is called upon to deal frequently becomes the vehicle of some fatal malady. Great care,

therefore, is requisite in dealing with these. That which is, under ordinary circumstances, the most productive of good, may become the deadliest of poisons. The water we drink may contain the seeds of death, and the very atmosphere become the means of disseminating contagion. What is called physical education is, therefore, deemed by Secularism of paramount importance.

It has been said that self-preservation is the first law of nature, yet in respect to health it is frequently most terribly neglected. In this age, when enlightenment has become so wide-spread, and education so general, it is lamentable to see how coldly indifferent many persons are with regard to the laws upon which their health depends. A sound mind in a sound body every person extols in theory, but in practice, alas! how rarely do we come across either the one or the other? Health all agree to be the chief good of life, the principal aim of man; and yet how few pursue it as though they considered it worth the seeking for. Money, fame, the "bubble-reputation," ambition, men struggle to obtain, overcoming what appear to be insurmountable difficulties in the contest; but health, which is of a thousand times more importance than all the others put together, they scarcely bestow a thought upon, until it is irretrievably ruined and incapable of being restored. Then physicians are asked in vain to do that which was once so easy, but has now become impossible. It was Voltaire, I think, who defined a physician as a man who was asked every day to perform a miracle—viz., to reconcile health with intemperance. But it is not simply intemperance, in the sense in which that word is usually employed, that destroys health, but a thousand apparently harmless acts which are every day performed, which eat into and destroy the most vigorous frame and strongest constitution. The neglect of the important laws of life is one of the deplorable evils of the present age, and it is to be found, not simply amongst the illiterate, but it reigns supreme in the midst of the halls of intellect, the temples of genius, and even the places where Science should hold her sway. In this age, when knowledge of natural law is so general, and when most persons are aware that defective health is to be largely traced to a derangement of one or more of the vital functions, such as digestion, circulation, respiration, and that these functions are to a large extent mutually dependent in the economy of the human frame, we should expect them all to be most assiduously attended to and cultivated. Unfortunately, this is not so, for it too often happens that if one of these functions receive any at-

tention, the rest will be completely neglected, and even the utter neglect of them all is far from being uncommon. Sir Philip Sidney has well said that :—

“The ingredients of health and long life are,  
Great temperance, open air, light labour, little care.”

All these are most terribly neglected in these modern times. Our business pursuits, as a rule, shut out the whole of these ingredients, and hence the prevalent disease and premature deaths that abound amongst us.

The relations of the human body to the aliment which sustains it is a point of the greatest moment. As is the food of a people, so will the people be. Gross diet makes gross men and women ; an extravagant and luxurious regimen will result in indolence and apathy on the part of those who indulge in it, and pure, healthy, and unstimulating food will give rise to (other things being equal) a pure, virtuous, and healthy population. There can be no doubt that the downfall of the great Roman Empire, so long the mistress of the world, was largely due to the extravagant and luxurious living of the Emperors. From this came indolence, effeminacy, and finally the overthrow of the whole Empire. There is one fact in connection with food which may be mentioned here ; it is that nature has placed within us certain sensations, which point out to us, in an infallible manner, when we require a fresh supply. These, of course, we do not fail to attend to in some way or other, since to neglect them is painful. But we violate great and important laws bearing on the question notwithstanding. We eat too rapidly, we do not allow the requisite time for digestion, and, above all, we are not careful as to the kind of food we take. We study our appetites rather than our health. The consequence of all this may be easily foreseen. As we have to go in search of our food, we require to labour to procure it, and hence some sort of forethought and judgment is essential to the obtaining it, which fact of itself no doubt causes us to devote a larger share of attention to the subject than we otherwise should do ; but still with all this the neglect is terrible to contemplate.

With the air we breathe the case is very different from the food. Except under circumstances attending its entire exclusion, we experience no sensations as to the need of it at all corresponding to the appetite for food. Neither does any sense analogous to taste enable us to detect its impurities. True, this is done to a certain

textent with the nose, but only in a very partial degree. The atmosphere of a room may be deteriorated to an extent highly prejudicial to health, and we may remain in entire ignorance of the fact. The consequence is that our negligence here is a thousand times greater than in regard to food, and hence the innumerable train of diseases that flow from the inhaling of impure air, with which every student of sanitary science is familiar.

Impure air is one of the chief causes of disease at the present time, and it is also a source of enfeebled intellect and deteriorated morals. For virtue and health are more nearly allied than many persons imagine. And the intellect cannot be clear in an atmosphere that is not fit to breathe. The great thinkers of the past spent most of their time in the open air. Sir Isaac Newton made his greatest discovery in a garden where he was accustomed to carry on his studies. To go farther back, the Peripatetics, the most enlightened philosophers, perhaps, of their age, used to walk up and down in the porches of the Lyceum at Athens. And of old Homer, who spent most of his life in wandering from place to place in the open air, it is said ;—

“ Seven cities contend for Homer dead,  
Through which the living Homer begged his bread.”

This is not the place to enlarge in detail upon the advantages of pure air or sound food ; but to point out the great importance of attending to the laws of health is the duty of every Secular teacher, for what is true Secularism but to make the very best use of the world in which we live ? Hence the health of the body should claim the foremost attention amongst Secular duties.

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## II. INTELLECTUAL.

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THE great John Locke well remarked that “ In the sciences every one has as much as he really knows and comprehends. What he believes only, and takes upon trust, are but shreds which, however well in the whole piece, make no considerable addition to his stock who gathers them. Such borrowed wealth, like fairy money, though

it were gold in the hand from which he received it, will be but leaves and dust when it comes to use." Knowledge is to-day diffused over a larger surface in society than it ever was before. Yet, unfortunately, through indolence or inability, or some other cause, the great mass of mankind are content to skim lightly over its surface, leaving the sweets of its inner mysteries untasted. Such persons are like tourists who content themselves with congregating upon the frontiers of a country, but do not care to penetrate into the interior. It is to be regretted that most men's information upon the great questions of science and philosophy is extremely superficial. As a rule, men are not thinkers; thinking is a process, which, being laborious, becomes tiresome and fatiguing to all but a few who have cultivated their intellectual powers to such a degree as to render it easy and agreeable. The consequence is, that for every one who possesses anything like profound information upon any particular topic there are ten thousand who simply repeat other men's opinions, having none of their own, nor any real material stored in their minds out of which such could be manufactured. The bright side of this state of things is that it has greatly tended to the multiplication of elementary books on the various branches of science. These books, elementary as they are, usually show a considerable improvement upon the knowledge of former days, and prove, therefore, conclusively the direction in which humanity is moving. That mankind are advancing intellectually there can be no doubt. Looking back to the infancy of our race, at least as near to that time as history will allow us to approach, and contrasting the state of things then existing with what we experience to-day, we cannot but be struck with surprise at the enormous changes that have occurred. Yet in science more real progress has been made in the last half century than in all the previous ages. The present is, therefore, essentially a scientific age. And although the general knowledge of mankind is on the surface, still it is a great improvement on the past, which argues well for the future. Our task—the task of to-day—is rather to help on the movement than to complain that it has not gone further on, or struck its roots deeper into the soil of human nature.

Civilization, says Guizot, embraces two elements—the improvement of society and the improvement of the man; and the question which he says is put to all events is, What have they done for the one or the other? I stop not here to enter upon a discussion fraught with difficulty, and yet full of interest, as to which of these



is the cause and which the effect, or whether they may not each be cause and effect in turn. Guizot himself seems to think—and he quotes Collard on that side—that the individual is made to advance society. But much might be said on the other side. Our real business as Secularists, however, is to see that some kind of advance does take place, and to help it on to the utmost extent of our power. No doubt, mental progress is a law of the race, and as such will force its way on at any risk or cost. As the poet has said:—

“Go bid the ocean cease to heave,  
 The river cease to flow,  
 Bid smiling Spring retrace her steps,  
 And flowrets cease to blow.  
 Go drive the wild winds to their home,  
 The lightning to its nest,  
 Then bid the car of progress stay,  
 Whose courses never rest.”

In this matter we should resolve to aid in pushing on the great car of progress; and he who does not, but stands in its way, is very likely to get crushed after the fashion of the victims of Juggernaut, beneath its wheels. All progress is intellectual, all improvement refers to the mind; hence, the importance of intellectual discipline.

There can be no doubt that the publication of so large a number of books at the present time tends greatly to the spread of knowledge and the deepening of the intellectual character of the age. The printing press has been the instrument employed for furthering education and increasing mental culture. “In these late ages,” says old Vicesimus Knox, “there is scarcely a subject which can reasonably excite human curiosity on which satisfactory information may not be acquired by the perusal of books; and books, too, from their multitude and cheapness, obvious to all who are disposed to give them their attention. Poetry, history, eloquence, and philosophy, in all their ramifications, are constantly at hand, and ready to gratify the mental appetite with every variety of intellectual substance. The imagination can at all times call up, by the medium of books, the most vivid representations of every object which the physical and moral world have been known in any age or country to produce. Exempt from the inconvenience of foreign travel, from the dangers of a military life, from the narrow escapes of the voyager, from the tumult of political engagements, the student can enjoy, in the comfortable retreat of his library, all that has em-

ployed the active faculties of man in every department of life." Books are brilliant stars in the intellectual hemisphere, and their value must not be underrated nor their advantages neglected. Mind receives its necessary pabulum by communing with mind, and this it can do more easily and more perfectly in books than perhaps anywhere else. Hence books are the greatest and most powerful agents in mental development. Some one has curiously described a book as a brain preserved in ink—not a bad description, remembering that the mightiest thoughts of the mightiest brains are there preserved.

In almost every department of knowledge has the genius of improvement and invention been at work, and the results may be seen scattered abundantly around us whichever way we look. The entire earth has been converted into a huge observatory or laboratory for man, in almost every part of which he is found daily working in comparing results and communicating knowledge. Could the great men of the past, who devoted themselves to physical science—foremost amongst whom was Aristotle—rise from their graves, and catch a glimpse of the present state of things, how, after the first feeling of surprise was over, would their hearts be gladdened by the spectacle they would then behold! Astronomical, geological, physiological, and chemical discoveries, throwing all the science of the past into the shade, form the heritage of the poorest and most insignificant of mankind. True, the great problem of life is yet unsolved, and a score of metaphysical questions still remain unanswered; but in physical science the discoveries that have been made, and the improvements that have taken place, are startling even to contemplate. In all that concerns the practical, in all that has to do with the subjugation of natural forces and the direction of the laws of the Universe to new issues conducing to the happiness of man, modern progress has been rapid almost beyond conception. The simplicity of the processes by which some of the mightiest and grandest of the discoveries of the age have been made, and the elementary character of the laws concerned in their production, are exceedingly pleasing to the man of intellect. "Almost all the great combinations of modern mechanism," remarks Sir John Herschel, "and many of its refinements and nicest improvements, are creations of pure intellect grounding its exertions upon a moderate number of very elementary propositions in theoretical mechanics and geometry." The truth of these remarks will be apparent to every scientific student.

In what position do we as Secularists stand intellectually towards the present age? This is a question that each and all of us should carefully consider. Every Secularist should make it his especial business to practise mental culture, and to induce others to do the same. A man who neglects the discipline of his intellectual powers is a stranger to the highest enjoyments of existence; he is no recipient of that lofty influence which emanates from the pure fountain of intellectual treasures. Secularists profess not to waste their time in attempting to solve problems that defy solution, nor to search for discoveries in the field of metaphysics as impossible as the object of alchemy. We are taught by our principles to have to do with the real side of human life, and to care only for the speculative in so far as it has a direct influence on practical things. Intellectual culture is a reality. We know what it means, and we prefer to deal with it from a practical standpoint, and on its useful side. The moment we stop to discuss the question, What is the intellect in its nature and essence? we bid fair to leave the well-beaten track of the real, to wander in fields of speculative ether, where there are no highways and no places to which they could lead. What do we know of the exact nature of what is termed the human mind after thousands of years of theorising on the part of philosophers? We simply employ the word "mind" as having reference to the intellectual part of our organisation. But as to what constitutes its essence little or no progress has been made towards that discovery, since the days of the great Stagyrte, and, perhaps, earlier. Such is not the case with experimental science. Our obvious duty, therefore, is to cultivate our intellectual powers, and no Secularist ought to neglect it. As I have said, the age is superficial in its knowledge. Let it be our business to remedy this state of things as far as possible, and to render it deep and profound; at any rate, we can do this in the case of ourselves. Good books exist around us; let us read them with care and profit. Much of the literature of the age I know is worthless and even worse; but there is, after all, a great deal that will pay for more serious reading and thinking over. Especially is it a Secular duty to discriminate between the two, and, having done so, to reject the weeds, and devote our time and ability to the cultivation of the flowers. We, of all people, should prize good books, and turn them to good account, and at the same time emphatically denounce bad ones, that are likely, not only to mislead human thought, but also to corrupt and deprave, rather than to elevate, the intellect of man.

## III. THE PRESENT CONDITION OF SOCIETY.

“PHYSICIAN, heal thyself,” is most excellent advice, especially deserving of application in these days of “Mind-other-people’s-business-instead-of-your-own.” Morally, the theological opinions of neighbours are too frequently considered before personal ethical culture; politically, public attention is often directed to foreign affairs rather than to home questions; socially, the condition of the heathen is regarded with the greatest solicitude, while the disgraceful state of our own poor is sadly neglected; religiously, the soul’s salvation of the semi-savage abroad is deemed of far greater importance than the moral regeneration of people at home. What has been the result of such policy? The present condition of society, morally diseased to its very core, supplies the answer. After eighteen hundred years of the active reign of Christian theology, what do we discover in our very midst? A deplorable lack of real physical comfort among the masses of the people; a thoroughly unhealthy moral tone, no less in the religious than in the political and commercial world; and an air of artificiality permeating most phases of society. Both in public and private life the real is discarded for the imaginary, and the shadow is accepted in lieu of the substance. Principle is sacrificed to selfish interest, and fidelity to conviction is made subordinate to popular favour. Theological professions we have in abundance; but a marked inconsistency robs them of true ethical potency. The blessings of peace are preached, while the humane observer stands aghast at the world’s record of the blood and carnage of a brutal warfare. Love is exalted to a pinnacle of sublime admiration by the same people who dim its transcendent lustre with dense clouds of theological hatred and spite. Liberty, with its golden blossoms, is adored in name, while many of its most sacred rights are ruthlessly trampled under the feet of a self-appointed authority. The brotherhood of man is loudly proclaimed at the same time that its fraternal bonds are being divided by the monopoly of wealth and the false ideas associated with class distinctions. The poor are blessed by the teachings of theology and cursed by the laws and customs fostered and defended by the Church and its priests. Might takes the place of right, false-

hood is substituted for truth, and law stands for justice. Society may not be sick unto death; but its health is sadly impaired, and a skilful physician is indeed required. Where is this saviour of the race to be found? Not in the domain of theology, for from its school have come so many moral quacks that its genuine reputation cannot be maintained. Evidently these theological physicians do not understand the nature of the disease they profess to cure, and consequently they apply a false remedy. Regarding all moral diseases as being alike, they have only one remedy for each and all, and that remedy is theology. Thus we have the introduction of the "kill or cure" principle, and there can be no doubt that the moral deaths far outnumber the patients cured through the adoption of this alleged panacea. The lesson of history clearly demonstrates that theology is impotent to rid society of those moral evils which now so extensively mar the happiness of the human race; the true requirement, therefore, is a correct knowledge and application of ethical science.

The human race is in reality governed by the two great principles of good and evil, right and wrong. Upon one of these principles must the construction of society, and the character of those beings who compose it, be based. The old religion of the Persians appears to have sprung from the recognition of this fact, and modern legislation has proceeded upon a similar acknowledgment. By the term good, when applied to man's activity, we mean that line of conduct based upon truth, leading to unity and general happiness. By evil we understand those actions founded on falsehood and deceit, ending in disunion, vice, and wretchedness.

Taking society as it is, there are few persons who will contend that it is constituted as firmly as it should be upon the principles of goodness, union, and mutual love. Theoretically—from the Christian standpoint—this certainly should be the character of society, for so many years have gone by since, according to the orthodox belief, the angels of an omnipotent God came down through the blue vault of the firmament with the welcome message of "Peace on earth, goodwill towards men." Instead, however, of such a peace and goodwill having been inaugurated, the centuries that have flown by since those words were supposed to have been uttered, have been notorious for their falsehood, disunion, and misery; and up to the present time little or no fundamental improvement has taken place. Many of our institutions, having em-

anated from laws based upon ignorance of the real requirements of human nature, have been the means of keeping the people imbecile in mind and wretchedly poor in body. These institutions and laws still keep many in idleness who would gladly be employed in adding to the general wealth; they allow others to be a dead-weight upon industry; they perpetuate pauperism, foster bad habits, and encourage crime. The great ethical science is ignored, and while the primary causes of physical diseases are lost sight of or neglected, millions of money and much valuable time are wasted in every generation in futile endeavours to effect a partial cure of the diseases thus engendered. Throughout Europe we find a bitter feud existing between the aristocracy and the democracy, leading to conspiracies, ostracisms, and the maintenance of huge standing armies. In short, the present state of society is something worse than artificial: it is opposed to the welfare of mankind, it causes degradation, injustice and cruelty; hence it is that in so many countries there are conspiracies—men banding together, and pledged to effect, at any risks, immediate social revolution.

The same evil conditions existing around us affect even the rising generation. Those who know what the tuition of the ordinary street Arab is, who have instituted comparisons between the gutter-child with his fluttering rags, his unkempt hair, dirty face, obscene and ribald language, habits of theft, lying, etc., and the well-clad, neat, dainty, and "respectable" scion of the aristocrat or plutocrat, can well appreciate the necessity for radical reformation. In the image of God, says the theologian, are they all made; but shame to the hypocrisy which, Pharisee-like, suffers this neglected gutter-urchin to give the lie direct to its own loud professions of love to God and man. To-day, under the shadow of our proud cathedrals and lofty domes, under which incense burns and gaudily-vested priests and choristers chant praises to God for having done all things well; to-day, be it remembered, beneath the shadows of the towers and pinnacles of the many churches and chapels, staring with gaunt countenance, hollow cheek, and hungry eye, rustling the gay dresses of fine ladies as they pass, dying ever and anon on door-steps, or being carted away enclosed in a parish coffin, are thousands of those "images" for whom apparently God has done nothing, and society, if possible, even less.

That improvement of a very fundamental character is considered necessary is evident from the fact that in all civilised countries the

major portion of the population are urgently demanding reform. The question is, what is the remedy for existing evils, and to whom shall we look to obtain it? To my mind, the true remedy is to be found in the highest moral, physical, and intellectual development of human nature, the acquirement and application of genuine education, and the destruction of all priestly and imperial power which seeks to fetter human thought and despotically control individual action. The highest outcome of ancient civilisation in Greece and Rome was at a time when true freedom adorned their history. In Athens and Republican Rome we have glorious illustrations of this fact. Potent in arms, able at one period to defend and preserve their liberties against every aggressor, these States were mighty in other and nobler fields. In philosophy, science, literature, art, and all that enriches and elevates mankind, these grand democracies were unequalled. Even to-day they are to us as luminaries—they "being dead yet speak" to all posterity.

The great object that Secularists should keep in view is to promulgate principles capable of re-moulding society in such a manner that the greatest possible liberty and happiness may be secured to the individual and to the general community. To obtain this thoroughly, a knowledge of the causes of good and evil to man must be acquired. Ignorance is admitted to be an evil which directly impedes human progress and stands in the way of human happiness. This ignorance many of us regard as being possible to remove, and to substitute in its place a knowledge of the pathway leading to goodness, truth and virtue.

It must distinctly be understood that no sudden revolution, in recklessly overturning the social equilibrium, by fire and sword, is recommended by Secularism. All such attempts would be cruelly disastrous; besides, the misery and bloodshed thereby engendered and caused would in all probability "put back the hands of the clock," and hand society over to the tender mercies of some other unprincipled tyrants and oppressors. Having established a sound system of education; having secured a knowledge of the power and duty of man; of the value of truth; of the necessity of fidelity to conviction; of the recognition of the rights of others; of the impotence of all theologies as reforming agencies; of the service of science; of the nobility of self-reliance; of the necessity of intellectual discipline and moral purity, our attention should then be directed to the best means of extending the usefulness of these re-

quirements, and of applying them to the practical duties of daily life.

It has been clearly demonstrated that the panacea for the wrongs and woes of the time is not to be found in Church doctrines or dogmas. Old creeds have had their day, and before the power of modern thought the superstition that those creeds bolstered up is rapidly tottering to its basis. Society, as now constituted, with its strongly-marked distinctions between rich and poor, its blatant hypocrisy, its wicked extravagance and abject penury, has been too long supported by the theories of so-called Divine predestination and ordination. These theories are, fortunately, becoming more and more discredited by the intelligence of the nineteenth century. The world of man is waiting and struggling for some signs of its redemption by human agencies. The priest, with his incantations and conjurings, will, we hope, shortly be known only as an evil of the past, and then will be inaugurated a new era, wherein we shall all be true kings and priests—kings in our own free individuality, and priests in the grand temple of nature, offering up daily and hourly an uninterrupted and unselfish sacrifice of duty and devotion for the benefit of an enlightened and a progressive humanity.

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#### IV. MORALITY.

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SECULARISM accepts as its moral code the system of ethics known as Utilitarian. There are hundreds of acts which we agree with all believers in an alleged supernatural religion in considering vicious, as there are hundreds of others that all men, whatever may be the particular system of ethics that they accept, admit to be virtuous. About these there is no dispute. The reasoning by which the conclusion is arrived at, that one set of actions are moral, and another set immoral, can in no sense affect the question as to our duty in relation to them, when their moral or immoral character has been once made out. This world is the scene of our deeds, be they good or bad. The most enthusiastic advocate of a future life admits that his duties lie in this world whilst he remains in this



world. Herein, therefore, we are agreed. To him there may be—and no doubt are—many duties which we, as Secularists, should not recognize as such; our business is not with them, but with the large class of acts about which we are agreed, and in reference to which, therefore, there is no dispute.

As soon as a human being comprehends the relation in which he stands to other human beings, there must arise between them a system of morals. This is based upon the fact that the one ought to exercise certain dispositions, and display certain feelings towards the other. At the same time he expects similar conduct from the rest towards himself. "It is manifest to everyone," says Wayland, "that we all stand in various and dissimilar relations to all the sentient beings created and uncreated with which we are acquainted. Among our relations to created beings are those of man to man, or of that of substantial equality, of parent and child, of benefactor and recipient, of husband and wife, of brother and sister, citizen and magistrate, and a thousand others." These relationships involve certain duties, which we call moral acts, and the best state of society is that in which they are the most perfectly practised.

Now, that morality to-day is terribly defective no one can doubt. There are fearful vices amongst us, which are eating into the heart's core of society. Drunkenness, debauchery, and hypocrisy prevail to an extent that is alarming, and things apparently are growing worse and worse. In trade, morality is at a very low ebb. The commercial world seems to have a moral (?) code of its own, to which it strictly adheres, but this code is not one of which a moralist can approve. In self-defence a civilised man has often to become a semi-savage; so it frequently happens that a scrupulous trader is driven to become unscrupulous, in order to compete with men less honest than himself. Mr. Darwin somewhere says that the law of the animal kingdom is "eat and be eaten;" in the trading community there is a sort of parallel in "cheat and be cheated." This state of things is much to be deplored, and it is our business, as Secularists, to do what we can to remedy it. What is needed is a purified public feeling, and this can only be accomplished by the individuals of which society is composed doing their duty.

The business of the Secularist in these cases is to set an example to his religious neighbours. We pride ourselves on having outgrown old and obsolete superstitions; we must, therefore, show

that with us morality is of paramount importance. It is often urged that even if religion be not true, yet it exercises certain restraints over men that would render it extremely dangerous to society to remove its influence, and thus turn the *quondam* devotee adrift without a guide. Perhaps there is some truth in this when applied to ignorant and uncultivated men; let Secularists show by their superior morals that the remark does not apply to them. Our business is to do the best that we can to promote the welfare of society. Of all people in the world, therefore, we must not neglect the sphere in which our whole duty lies. The Secularist who does not look properly after the affairs of this life is an anomaly and a paradox. To him this life is the only life—at least, the only one that he knows anything of—and, therefore, his every energy should be devoted to making the best of his present state. The Science of Morals it becomes the Secularist essentially to study, and not only to study theoretically, but to put into practice. The eyes of all men are upon us, watching for an opportunity of triumphing over our failings. It behoves us, therefore, to be exceedingly careful how we act. People who are content to run in the old grooves will be excused should they stumble; but those who chalk out a new path for themselves must keep erect, not even allowing a foot to slide, or heavy penalties will be visited upon their heads.

There is great room for improvement in this respect amongst mere Sceptics, and hence the necessity of obedience to the moral law being enforced as a Secular duty. Many persons are too much inclined to run into an opposite extreme from that which prevails in the religious world. While some rely entirely on faith as their rule of life, others seem to attach too much importance to the want of faith. The latter cry out loudly that belief cannot save mankind, but they appear to forget that neither can unbelief. The world wants deeds—great, noble, and consistent deeds. Society can only be reformed by works—*i. e.*, by moral acts, which carry in their train all the real blessings of peace, gentleness, kindness, justice, truth, and love. To perform work that will bring about these desirable results is the highest morality.

Among the systems of moral philosophy that have been promulgated as guides for human conduct, Utilitarianism occupies the foremost place. It appears to Secularists as more definite and satisfactory than any other, and certainly at the present time it is more

generally accepted by thinkers and that class of men whose views mould the intellectual opinions of the age. The principle of Utilitarianism has a regard solely to the uses of things; hence all actions by it are to be judged of by their use to society, and the morality of an action will consequently depend upon its utility. An important question here suggests itself: What is Utility, and how is it to be judged of and tested? What, it is urged, may appear useful to one man, another may regard as altogether useless; who, therefore, is to decide respecting the utility of an act? The answer will be found in the greatest-happiness principle, which is of itself a modern development of the doctrine, and somewhat in opposition to the first form of Utilitarianism. "Usefulness," observes David Hume, "is agreeable, and engages our approbation. This is a matter of fact, confirmed by daily observation. But useful? For what? For somebody's interest, surely. Whose interest, then? Not our own only, for our approbation frequently extends farther. It must, therefore, be the interest of those who are served by the characters or action approved of; and these we may conclude, however remote, are not totally indifferent to us. But, opening up this principle, we shall discover one great source of moral distinction." Here it is clear that with Hume the doctrine of utility was intimately associated with approbation—in fact, the two were inseparably connected. The greatest-happiness principle, as will be seen, grew very naturally out of this, but is a much more recent development.

The utility of acts and objects have doubtless had much to do with the estimation in which these are held in society, whether the fact be recognised or not. Hume says: "It seems so natural a thought to ascribe to their utility the praise which we bestow on the social virtues that one would expect to meet with this principle everywhere in moral writers, as the chief foundation of their reasoning and enquiry. In common life we may observe that the circumstances of utility is always appealed to; nor is it supposed that a greater eulogy can be given to any man than to display his usefulness to the public, and enumerate the services which he has performed to mankind and to society." That this is so there cannot be the slightest doubt. Nor is this principle a purely selfish one, as some have contended, since the use of arts refers not simply to their operation upon ourselves individually, but upon society at large. Self-love is no doubt involved here, as, in

fact, it is in everything we do. But self-love is not the ruling principle any further than that it is identical with the love of humanity. The great fact of mutual sympathy here comes in. The reciprocal feeling of joy or sorrow has been experienced probably by every person. The pleasures and pains of our fellows affect us largely, whether we will or no. There is no man so selfish but he finds his joys increased when they are shared by others, and his griefs lessened when he sorrows in company. This fact Hume has worked out at great length, with a view to show why it is that utility pleases. Viewing Utilitarianism, therefore, as simply a question of utility in the lowest sense of that word, it is yet a most potent agent in society, and has much more to do with forming our conclusions as to the morality of certain acts than is usually imagined. The man of use is the man whom society delights to honour; and very properly, for he is the real benefactor of his species. To say that a thing is useful is to bestow upon it a high degree of praise, while no greater condemnation can be passed upon any piece of work than to say that it is useless. Even the supposed Gods have been estimated by their utility; for Cicero charges the Deities of the Epicureans with being useless and inactive, and declares that the Egyptians never consecrated any animal except for its utility.

The principle of Utilitarianism as a moral system cannot be said to have received a definite shape until it was advocated by Jeremy Bentham. Even with him it did not appear in that clear and explicit form which John Stuart Mill has since imparted to it. In his writings we have for the first time something like philosophic precision. Pleasure and pain are shown to form the basis of utility, and to furnish us with the means of judging of what is useful and what is not.

To speak of pain and pleasure to ordinary persons conveys no idea as to the welfare or otherwise of society, but leads the mind to revert to its own individual good or evil, and then to impart a selfish basis to the whole thing. This was not what was meant by Bentham, as the following passage from his work will show: "By utility is meant that property in any object whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness (all this, in the present case, comes to the same thing), or (what comes again to the same thing) to prevent the happening of mischief, pain,

evil, or unhappiness to the party whose interest is considered: if that party be the community in general, then the happiness of the community; if a particular individual, then the happiness of that individual." Bentham takes great pains to show that the community is a "fictitious body composed of the individual persons who are considered as constituting, as it were, its members," and that, therefore, the interest of the community is simply "the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it." He then goes on to affirm that "an action may be said to be conformable to the principle of utility, or, for shortness' sake, to utility (meaning with respect to the community at large), when the tendency it has to augment the happiness of the community is greater than any it has to diminish it," which is really another way of saying the greatest happiness of the greatest number, or, to use a far more preferable phrase, the greatest amount of happiness for all. "The words ought and right and wrong, and others of that stamp," take their meaning from this principle. This philosophy was full of the practical spirit of the age which gave it birth, and it exhibited an utter disregard for the unproductive theories of the past. The idea of happiness very largely took the place of the old idea of duty, wherein was seen a powerful reaction against the sentimental ethics that had prevailed so long. Its attempt was to base virtue on moral legislation, rather than on feeling, and to construct an ethical code out of the most matter-of-fact materials. Thus self-sacrifice, which, of course, is one of the highest and noblest duties of man, is in no way incompatible with Utilitarianism and the pursuit of happiness; since, whatever pleasures he who practises self-denial may voluntarily forego, it is always with a view of procuring, if not for himself, yet for his fellows, some greater good. The martyr at the stake, the patriot in the field of battle, the physician penetrating into the midst of the death-breathing miasma with a view to alleviate pain, each feels a sense of satisfaction in the act, which is really the intensest kind of happiness to himself, and, what is more important, he is procuring happiness on a large scale for his fellow-creatures. It is not individual, but general, happiness that the Utilitarian has to keep before his eye as the motive of all his actions.

Secularism submits that acts are moral which produce the greatest amount of happiness to the greatest number. This view

of morality is justified by a knowledge of two important principles—namely, the doctrine of circumstances, and the doctrine that general utility should be the object of all our endeavours. Secularism urges that it is the duty of society to acknowledge these principles, to study their operation, and to develop their influence. The doctrine of circumstances teaches us the mutual relations of man and society, indicating how they affect and are affected by each other. The doctrine of utility shows that those relations may be improved by the proper encouragement of beneficial influences. The scientific definition of any particular object of our contemplation is, that it is the sum of all the causes which produced it. If one of the causes which tended to produce that particular phenomenon had been deducted, or if additional influence had been added, the result then produced would have differed from the result as it now stands, in precise proportion to the efficacy of the cause which had been added or withdrawn. Now, Secularism views human nature in this harmonious light. Man is as much the consequence of all the causes and circumstances which have affected him and his development previous to and since his birth as any one tree or mountain.

The influence of circumstances on human conduct is forcibly illustrated by a reference to the science of botany. In England the myrtle is a small shrub or plant, but in the north of Africa it is an immense tree. The English lily is remarkably fine and delicate, but within a few miles of Madrid it is a huge tree of some ten or fifteen feet in its dimensions. Botanists inform us that this difference is in consequence of the different circumstances by which each shrub or plant is surrounded. The influences in Africa and Spain are more favourable to the extensive development of those plants than they are in England. The same principle is shown in the various productions of the soil. We take a wild flower from the woods for the purpose of improving its appearance and value. It has grown up under what is named natural circumstances; we transplant it to a garden, and endeavour to modify its condition. According to the end we have in view, so are, to use technical language, the "artificial causes" we bring to act upon its particular condition. We begin with an examination into its constitution and character. If it has faults and blemishes, we immediately remove those chemical causes, or protect it from those

climatic influences which produced such faults. If it be its half-developed beauties which we wish to foster into full maturity, we multiply and stimulate those conditions which we have discovered by experience to have a positive influence on the better part of its nature. The change in its condition and appearance has been produced by the modification and encouragement here, discouragement there, depression in one quarter, elevation in another of causes, all of which were in existence and operation as much when the flower grew in its wild state as now when it adorns the house garden with its breadth of foliage. Now to apply this to the argument under consideration. Secularism may be here designated as the science of human cultivation. The problem that it sets to itself with reference to man in his moral relations to society is, to bring him from the condition of the wild flower to that of the garden flower. And as with the uncultivated flower, so it is in many respects with the wild, uneducated man. The flower is what *it is*, and the wild, undisciplined man is what *he is*, in consequence of the aggregate of causes which have made them both what they are. Secularism recognizes these influences of circumstances. It cannot, therefore, regard man as naturally bad; on the contrary, it believes in the goodness of human nature, remembering that man frequently lacks improvement as the result of being surrounded by imperfect conditions, through the neglect of correct discipline, and a want of proper understanding of his moral and intellectual faculties.

In any moral system it is essential that not only should the code laid down be clear, but the motive to obey it should also be made apparent. In other words, what is termed the sanction of the principle must be pointed out. It would be of little value to have a perfect method in morals unless the sanctions were such as were likely to influence mankind. Now, Mr. Mill has not overlooked this fact in connection with Utilitarianism, but has devoted considerable space to its consideration. He seems to think, however, that no new sanctions are needed for Utilitarianism, since in time—and in an improved state of society—it will have at command all the old ones. He says: "The principle of utility either has, or there is no reason why it might not have, all the sanctions which belong to any other system of morals. These sanctions are either external or internal." He then enlarges upon these with a view

to show that the greater number of them belong as much to Utilitarianism as to any other ethical code. The sanction of duty, upon which so much stress is laid by the opponents of Utilitarianism, becomes as clear and as powerful under the new system as under the old. Whatever may be the standard of duty, and whatever the process by which the idea has been attained, the feeling will in all cases be very much the same. The pain occasioned by a violation of what is called the moral law, constituting what is usually termed conscience, will be felt quite as keenly when the law has been arrived at by a Utilitarian process of reasoning, and when the moral nature has been built up upon Utilitarian principles, as in any other case. The ultimate sanction of all morality is very much the same—a subjective feeling in our own minds, resulting from physical conditions, country, and education.

This, then, is briefly the Utilitarianism which we hold to constitute a sufficient guide in morals, and to be worthy to supplant the old and erroneous systems that now prevail. As Secularists, we are content to be judged by this standard. This system we accept as the ethical code by which we profess to regulate our conduct. There can hardly be conceived a higher aim than happiness, especially the happiness of the race. That perfect happiness is not attainable we, of course, admit; but neither is anything else in perfection. Nothing, however, can be more certain than the fact that very many of the present causes of unhappiness could be removed by well-directed effort on the part of society, and the result be a state of things of which, at the present time, we can hardly form any conception. The duty of each of us is to do as much as possible towards bringing this about.

In Mr. Mill's work upon "Utilitarianism" the following passage occurs: "The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals utility, or the greatest happiness principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure. To give a clear view of the moral standard set up by this theory, much more requires to be said; in particular, what things it includes in the ideas of pain and pleasure; and to what extent this is left an open question. But these supplementary explanations do not affect the theory of life upon



which this theory of morality is grounded—namely, that pleasure and freedom from pain are the only things desirable as ends, and that all desirable things (which are as numerous in the Utilitarian as in any other scheme) are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as a means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain." It must be understood that the word pleasure here is used in its very highest sense, and includes, consequently, such enjoyments as arise from the culture of the intellect, the development of the sentiments, the use of the imagination, and the action of the emotions. One of the errors into which the opponents of Utilitarian happiness frequently fall is that of confounding pleasure with the mere gratification of the animal propensities. If this were so, the whole system would be a most despicable one, and unworthy the attention of men of intelligence and moral worth. But it is not; and he who brings this as a charge against it does so either in gross ignorance, or with a view to pervert the truth. Perhaps it was not wise to use the words pleasure and happiness as being synonymous, seeing that they are usually employed to mean two very different things; but the explanation having been given that they are so used, no one can plead this use as an excuse for falling into error on the subject.

Secular morality is based upon the principle that happiness is the chief end and aim of mankind. And although there are, doubtless, persons who would warmly dispute this fundamental principle, it is very questionable whether their objection is not more verbal than anything else. That all men desire happiness is certain. The doctrine enunciated in the well-known line of Pope is frequently quoted, and generally with approval :

" Oh, happiness ! our being's end and aim."

When we meet with persons who profess to despise this aspiration, it will be generally found that it is only some popular conception of happiness of which they are careless, while they really pursue a happiness of their own, in their own way, with no less ardour than other people. A definition of happiness itself is not easy to give. Each person would, were he asked to define it, in all probability furnish a somewhat different explanation; but the true meaning of all would be very much the same. To refer again to Pope, what truth there is in the following couplet !—

" Who can define it, say they more or less  
Than this, that happiness is happiness ? "

With one it is the culture of the intellect ; with another, the exercise of the emotions ; with a third, the practice of deeds of philanthropy and charity ; and with yet another—we regret to say—the gratification of the lower propensities. In each case it is the following of the pursuit which most accords with the disposition of the individual. And wherever this course does not interfere with the happiness of others, and is not more than counterbalanced by any results that may arise from it afterwards, it is not only legitimate, but moral. Broadly, then, Secular efforts for the attainment of happiness may be said to consist in endeavouring to perform those actions which entail no ill effects upon general society, and leave no injurious effects upon the actors. Such conduct as is here intimated involves the practice of truth, self-discipline, fidelity to conviction, and the avoidance of knowingly acting unjustly to others.

Mr. Mill points out—and herein he differs from Bentham—that not only must the quantity of the pleasure of happiness be taken into consideration, but the quality likewise. He remarks : “ It would be absurd that while, in estimating all other things, quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasure should be disposed to depend on quantity alone.” True, it may not always be easy to estimate the exact respective value of the different qualities of pleasure ; but this is not necessary. An approximation to it can be obtained without difficulty. In all those who have had experience both of the higher and lower kinds of pleasure—that is, of the culture of the intellect and the gratification of the passions—a preference is generally shown, at least in theory, for the higher. And the rest are in no position to fairly judge. It may be urged that many a man who possesses the rare wealth of a cultured mind will be found sometimes grovelling in the mire of sensuality, thereby showing a preference for a time for the lowest kind of pleasure. To this it may be replied that the fact is only temporary, and cannot, therefore, be set against the experience of months, and years—perhaps of the greatest portion of a life ; and, secondly, he does not in his own opinion, even while descending to indulge in the lower pleasure, give up his interest in the higher ; so that the defection cannot be looked upon in the light of an exchange. He feels that he will be able to go back again to his intellectual pursuits, and enjoy them as before. Ask him to make a permanent exchange—to give up for ever the higher pleasures, on the condition

that he shall have a continuance of the lower to his heart's content, and probably he will treat the offer with scorn. "Few human beings," observes Mr. Mill, "would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals for a promise of the fullest allowance of a beast's pleasure; no intelligent human being would consent to be a fool; no instructed person would be an ignoramus; no person of feeling and conscience would be selfish and base, even though they should be persuaded that the fool, the dunce, or the rascal is better satisfied with his lot than they with theirs. They would not resign what they possess more than he for the most complete satisfaction of all the desires which they have in common with him." Those who neglect their capacities for enjoying the higher pleasures may probably imagine that their happiness is greatest; but their opinion on the subject is worthless, because they only know one side. On this question, therefore, we find a unanimity—at least with all who are competent to judge of the question.

The most important point to be considered in connection with this question of Secular happiness is that it is not the pleasure of the individual that is considered paramount, but of the community of which he forms a part. The principle of the greatest happiness is often treated in a discussion of this subject as though it meant the greatest possible pleasure that the individual can procure for himself by his acts, regardless of the welfare of his fellow creatures, which would be selfishness in the extreme. Nothing can be more unselfish than Secular morality, since the sole object it has in view is the happiness of the community at large. And every act of the individual must be performed with this in view, and will be considered moral or not in the proportion in which this is done. In corroboration of this view, Mr. Mill truly remarks: "According to the greatest-happiness principle, as above explained, the ultimate end with reference to and for the sake of which all other things are desirable (whether we are considering our own good or that of other people), is an existence exempt as far as possible from pain, and as rich as possible in enjoyments, both in point of quantity and quality; the test of quality and the rule for measuring it against quantity being the preference felt by those who, in their opportunities of experience, to which must be added their habits of self-consciousness and self-observation, are best furnished with the means of comparison. This being, according to the utilitarian opinion, the end of human action, is necessarily also the standard of morality; which

may accordingly be defined, the rules and precepts for human conduct, by the observance of which an existence such as has been described might be, to the greatest extent possible, secured to all mankind; and not to them only, but to the whole sentient creation." Two facts of great importance are to be noticed in this extract; first, that happiness is the end of existence, and that all human effort should be bent as far as possible to the attainment of this object; and, secondly, that here, and here only, can the true standard of morality be found. The second principle flows as a necessary consequence from the first. All human action must, therefore, be brought to the test of how far it is conducive to the promotion of the greatest happiness of society at large. The consistent performance of such action will tend to promote the Secular idea of human happiness and the welfare of mankind.

The question is 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 we believe its moral basis to be more definite and practical than other existing ethical codes; and (2) because Secular teachings appear to us 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.

First, compare Secular views of morality with the numerous and conflicting theories that have been put forward at various times on the important topic of moral philosophy. From most of those theories it is not easy to reply satisfactorily to the question, Why is one act wrong and another right? There is no difficulty, generally speaking, in pointing out what acts are vicious and what others virtuous; but to say why one is immoral and another moral is a very different matter. Ask for a definition of virtue, and you receive in reply an illustration. You will be told that it is wrong to lie, to steal, to murder, etc.—about which there is no dispute; but why it is wrong to indulge in these acts, and right to perform others, is the business of ethical science to discover. But here again the method that will be resorted to, with a view to reply to this query, will depend upon the moral code believed in by the person to whom the question is put. This method it is, in point of fact, which constitutes what is called ethical science. On looking over the history of moral philosophy, apart from Secularism, we find such diversified and conflicting theories advanced on this sub-

ject that it is frequently difficult to arrive at the conclusion that there can be any certainty in the matter whatever. Some hold, with Dr. Samuel Clarke, that virtue consists in the fitness of things; others, with Adam Smith, discover its basis in sympathy; others, with Dr. Reed, Dr. Thomas Brown, and Dugald Stewart, contend for a moral sense; another class, with Miss Cobbe, maintain, that there is such a thing as intuitive morality; others, with Paley, assert that virtue consists in doing good to mankind in obedience to the will of God, and for the sake of everlasting happiness; others, with Dr. Johnson, are content with the will of God as a basis, without adding the motive introduced by Paley; and yet others, with George Combe, fancy they have a key to the whole thing in phrenology. Now, all these theories are resolvable broadly into three great classes—first, those who regard the “will of God” as the basis of moral action; secondly, those who contend that the true guide of man in morality is something internal to himself—call it conscience, moral sense, intuition, or any other name that you please to give it; and, thirdly, those who urge that moral science is, like other science, to be discovered by the study of certain external facts. To the latter of these the Utilitarian or Secular system belongs.

A small section of professing Christians have now given up the will of God as the groundwork of their morality. This, however, seems to us inconsistent with their faith, for the following reasons: 1. If the Bible God be the father of all, surely to act in accordance with his will should be the best guide in life. 2. Christian morality is supposed to consist of the teachings of the Bible, the alleged record of the will of God. 3. If God's *will* is not the basis of Christian ethics, what is; from the Christian standpoint? As Secularists, we cannot regulate our conduct by the Bible records of God's will, inasmuch as that book is so thoroughly contradictory in its interpretation of the said will. In one passage the killing of human beings is forbidden by God, and in another passage special instructions are given by the same being to commit the prohibited crime. The same conflicting injunctions are to be found in the “inspired word” in reference to adultery, lying, retaliation, love, obedience to parents, forgiveness, individual and general salvation, and many other acts which form part of the conduct of human life.

As to the internal guide to morality, nothing can be more clear than the fact that, even if man possesses a moral sense with which

he is born into this world, and which is inherent in his nature, its teachings are not very distinct, and the code of law based upon it is by no means definite. For not only do the inhabitants of different countries vary considerably in regard to the dictates of conscience, according to the nature of their education, but the people of the same country will be found to be by no means agreed as to what is right and what wrong, except in a few well-marked deeds. One man feels a conscientious objection to doing that which another man will positively believe to be a praiseworthy act. In this, as in other matters, education is all-potent over the mental character. It would indeed be difficult to reconcile these facts with the existence of any intuitive moral power.

Recognizing the difficulties and drawbacks pertaining to the above theories, Secularists seek for a solution of this moral-philosophy problem elsewhere—that is to say, in the eternal results of the acts themselves upon society, and in the effects that invariably spring from them whenever they are performed. It must be distinctly understood that we do not claim perfection for our moral code; but we do believe that it is the best known at the present time, and that it is free from many of the objectionable features, which belong to those theories which we, as Secularists, cannot accept. It may be urged, as an objection to the external test of the result of action, that it tends to make morality shifting and dependent very much upon the circumstances existing at the time. This is doubtless true; but it is of no value as an argument against the doctrine of utility. For is not all that we have to do with subject to the same law of variation? Fashions change, customs alter, and even religions become considerably modified by external circumstances. The following stanza in Lord Byron's "Childe Harold" portrays a great truth:—

"Son of the morning, rise, approach you here;  
 Come, but molest not yon defenceless urn.  
 Look on this spot, a nation's sepulchre:  
 Abode of gods, whose shrines no longer burn.  
 Even gods must yield, religions take their turn;  
 'Twas Jove's, 'tis Mahomet's; and other creeds  
 Will rise with other years, till man shall learn  
 Vainly his incense soars, his victim bleeds;  
 Poor child of doubt and death, whose hope is built on reeds!"

## V.—ETHICS AND RELIGION.

THROUGHOUT the history of mankind morality and religion have been two potent factors in influencing the formation of human character. By the term morality is understood the principle which rules and regulates the customs and habits of society; and the word religion is employed to represent Theistic beliefs or aspirations which are said to be possessed by a majority of the human race. In connection with these two factors the arts of sacerdotalism and priestcraft have associated the error that religion and morality are really identical; that the two are mutually interdependent, and to sever them would be absolutely fatal to both.

The fact is that morality was distinct from religion in its origin, and the two have, in many important instances, remained so up to the present in their development. The origin of the first forms of religion of which we have any record was fear and the prostration of reason; while that of morality was the outcome of intellectual culture and thoughtful experience. This fact has been clearly shown in a very able work entitled "The Morals of Evolution," by Minot J. Savage. On page thirty-one he observes: "Religion and morality were totally distinct in their origin. At first they had nothing to do with each other. Religion was simply an arrangement between man and his gods, by which he was to gain their favour or ward off their wrath. Morality, on the other hand, is a matter of behaviour between man and man." On pages twenty-four and twenty-five Mr. Savage says: "Go far enough back into antiquity to come to the time when large numbers of men were fetish worshippers; when the object of their adoration, their reverence, or fear, is a stick, or a stone, or a reptile. Of course, you will understand in a moment that the worship of an object like this cannot be associated in the mind of a worshipper with any necessity for telling the truth, with any necessity for being pure, with any necessity for being charitable and kind towards his fellows." The same principle is enforced in the case of the Indian devotee, who fasts and torments himself, not that he may benefit mankind morally by his sufferings, but solely in order that he may

acquire favour and power with the gods Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva. Such a man is very religious, but he is not necessarily a moral man, for, if his fellow men were to emulate his example, the human race would be enervated, if not become extinct.

A similar proof as to the ancient differentiation between religion and morality can be found in the Old Mexican religion, and also in the Old Testament record of the dealings of Jehovah with the Hebrew people. Jacob was religious, but certainly not very remarkable for morality; as indeed were Samson, David, Jephthah, and other characters in the Hebrew records. It was not morality which induced Joshua to command the unmerciful slaughter of the Canaanitish men, women and children. It was not morality which led Samuel, God's high-priest, to murder Agag, whom even Saul would have spared; nor that prompted David to kill the Philistines, while he himself was the honoured recipient of Philistine hospitality. Such actions cannot be defended morally; but religiously they can; and they have been vindicated and excused by Christian teachers and preachers.

Not only have religion and morality been dissociated in the past, but we know that they have been kept far from each other in the immediate present. Need reference be made to those most iniquitous, immoral wars, not many years since, in Zululand and Afghanistan? Did not Christian bishops from their seats in the English Parliament openly express their approval of the cold-blooded and sanguinary policy which brought down upon the nation the opprobrium due to the cowardly and uncalled-for assailer and despoiler of the weak, the unprotected, and the semi-savage; a policy which directly led to national suffering, national poverty, national degradation and humiliation, and which caused the blush of shame to mantle the cheek of every true-hearted Englishman possessed of a virtuous zeal for the reputation of his native land? Mr. Gladstone publicly declared his sorrow at finding so many of his co-religionists going woefully, fatally wrong in matters of national morality. His words were: "To my great pain and disappointment, I have found during the last three years that thousands of Churchmen supplied the great mass of those who have gone lamentably wrong upon questions involving deeply the interests of truth, justice and humanity. I should hear with much comfort any satisfactory explanation of this very painful circum-



stance." It is not here contended that morality is never associated with religion, but rather that the two are not necessarily allied, and that there is no lack of instances where the one is to be found professed and acted upon without the other.

The highest forms of religion to-day bear upon them the impress of that morality which has gradually grown with our growth and strengthened with our strength; it is morality that has modified religion, not religion that has modified morality. This will explain in some measure why it is that men to-day are not worshippers of fetiches; that they have not deities of the wood, the mountain, and the cave; that the Christianity of to-day is more humane than it was in the time of the Inquisition; that it now reprobates offences which but four centuries ago it was wont to excuse and condone. 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.

The ethical science of the nineteenth century derives no assistance from orthodox Christianity, based as it is upon what is regarded as a divine revelation from God to man. Such a system is incapable of promoting 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 that mental progress which so widely removes the civilized man from the savage.

The manner in which society has been built up has been clearly shown by Mr. Spencer in his "Data of Ethics;" but we need no learned disquisition or treatise to convince us of what is a self-

evident fact. By experience we learn all things; as the homely proverb has it, "the burnt child dreads the fire." So, in the early ages of society, men had to learn from experience what was good and what was bad for society. In the early stages of national governments nations had to discover what was conducive to the welfare, and what detrimental to the well-being, of a State. The exercise of man's intellectual activities has also been purely empirical, or experimental. In literature, science, and art, the records of the past ages have been records of continually growing experiences. We are wiser to-day than our fathers were, because we possess all their experiences *plus* our own. Upon the same principle, subsequent generations will be superior to us, inasmuch as they will have additional experience to guide them to what we possess. Our morality is the resultant, the outcome of experiences, and wise action based thereon. Intelligent men no longer slay hundreds of thousands of sheep and oxen in sacrifice; desolate other regions; massacre myriads of their fellow men; burn heretics at the stake; or condemn a race to perdition because of their unbelief. Society would no longer tolerate the infliction of the tortures of the Inquisition, or the intolerant decrees of the Star Chamber; and why? simply because our social, political, and intellectual experiences have shown us how utterly absurd, cruel, and ridiculous all those past follies have been. What has altered all this? It cannot be said that Christianity, the Bible, and the Church have produced the change. All these orthodox agencies existed amid the human weaknesses and wrongs referred to; but the present improved moral sense did not then obtain, hence the immoral acts. This, then, constitutes the practical ethics of time—namely, our social, political, and intellectual status, and we are proportionately more moral in the present era as we are socially, politically, and intellectually superior to what our forefathers were. The orthodox revelation has really had nothing whatever to do with this improvement, because revelation from a God to man cannot logically change or modify itself; it must be, like the laws of the Medes and Persians, wholly unalterable, "the same yesterday, to-day, and forever." This, indeed, is what orthodox religionists claim for what they call their morality—that it never changes. But such a contention is fatal to their claim to possess a truly humanitarian system of morality. The very essence of such a system is its

adaptability to the ever-varying necessities and circumstances of mankind. It is not here contended that prudence, honesty, benevolence, must ever change their inherent nature. On the contrary, they will ever be binding upon man ; but for what reason ? Merely because he cannot exist justly and happily without them. He must be prudent or he loses his all, and thus becomes a burden on others ; he must be honest, or he will be a criminal to society, and will not be able to have any guarantee for his own rights and for the safety of his own possessions ; he must be benevolent, or else he will neglect his duty to others, and the old age of iron will return, with its law of might making right, and the despotic rule of the strong over the weak.

This is what is meant when we affirm that we can have no fixed rule of morality. It is said, however, that without such a fixed rule for conduct, all guarantees to virtue would be absent. Not so ; Secularism recognizes 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. Rules of life, "revealed" eighteen hundred years ago, do not meet the requirement and satisfy the genius of to-day. This progressive morality is the principle of the Utilitarian ethics which now govern the civilized world. It is not merely the individual, but society at large, that is considered. To use an analogy from nature, sociotarian existence may be compared to a beehive. What does the apiarian discover in his studies ? Not that every individual bee labours 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.

It has been intimated that a higher and still further improved

condition of society is before us. The true ethical standard of the future will doubtless be based upon the recognition of the primal truth that it must always be right to act for the welfare of society. One consequence of this will be that it will be our duty to promote our individual interests. No man can do this without indirectly benefiting his neighbour, so that from the increased good of the one springs the increased good of the many.

The welfare of humanity does not necessarily depend upon the belief in a Deity or a future state. "The proper study of mankind is man." The wisest of the Romans, the great statesman and philosopher, Cicero, taught his son that man's morality was the necessary result of reasoning built upon human necessities. Robert Owen gave practical meaning and force to this teaching, by inculcating principles the adoption of which would assuredly end in the establishment of a new moral world. Such a world, we believe, lies before us—a world wherein every human character shall be formed upon principles based upon right-knowing and right-doing, upon the enforced expulsion of ignorance and the removal of the causes of evil. If religion is to be retained in the future, the only religion which will be worthy of the name as a binding system will be one in which the good of all faiths shall be retained, and from which their errors shall be eliminated; a religion based, not upon supernatural figments and allegories, but upon the eternal laws of nature and the laws of that great kingdom of human nature whose only monarch and subject is man. He it is who must be regarded as the foremost actor in the great drama of life. Down through the ages we trace his footsteps, from the time when he appears tottering as the infant, to the present age wherein he is learning to stand erect. How gradual, indeed, has his progress been, with what slow and faltering steps has he gone on from generation to generation, from century to century. Truly, it has been a long and a toilsome journey that he has trodden; a journey over rough rocks, through brambles, briars, and thickets of ignorance; but, happily, the race has contrived always to keep the true light somewhere before it, although many a false light has been held up to mislead it.

"Through the shadow of the globe we sweep into the perfect day."

## VI. SECULARISM AND THE SUPERNATURAL.

It is very desirable that the teaching of Secularism in reference to the supernatural should be clearly understood. What does this term really mean? Etymologically it signifies, *super* ("above") and *natura* ("nature")—that is, something above, greater than, or distinctly higher than, nature, or things natural, as these phrases are ordinarily employed. This word nature mankind has used in a duplicate manner. Thus we talk of nature when we refer to what philosophers term the cosmos, or the whole of the things perceptible to the senses, from the rose and its delicate fragrance to the planets, comets, suns, stars, and their motions. The other application of this term is to the constitution, mental and physical, of man regarded as a living animal and as a rational being. When used in the latter sense, the word is generally conjoined to another, thus making the compound, "human nature."

The word superhuman would probably be more appropriate than supernatural. Still, if the latter phrase is intended only to convey the idea of something beyond general human experience, then it is not difficult to understand the meaning of its use. For example, take the old illustration; we can readily imagine a creature formed like the idol Dagon, of the Philistines, which was represented as being half fish, half woman. We can also create other mental visions which would, in their extreme grotesqueness, put to shame the ogres and chimeras of romance, but these would be supernatural in the above signification of the word, inasmuch as their archetypes were never known to man in any stage of his progress through the ages. Hence it may be possible to conceive a thing supernatural so far as human nature is concerned; but how, it may be asked, are we to determine with respect to the cosmos, to that universal nature of which the human nature forms, after all, but a part?

This question goes to the very root of the matter, and much more, both in philosophy, science, and religion, depends upon our answer than might, at first sight, be supposed. "How are we to determine as to what is supernatural with regard to the universe?" Man is, it will be urged, confessedly a finite being. His faculties

of perception, his powers of seeing, hearing, etc., are limited. How, then, it may be asked, is it possible for man to determine what realities may exist either "in the earth beneath" or in the heavens above? The reply to this is, that human nature is the key of universal nature; that the non-apparent is to man the non-existent; and that those things must be considered by man as things above nature of which no perception or demonstration can be possible.

If by the term supernatural is meant a personal being above and apart from nature, then Secularism says: Such a problem it leaves for each mind to decide, if it can, for itself. Being unable to inform, the Secularist should refuse to dogmatize upon a subject upon which he can impart no information. In the opinion of the present writer Secularism has no *necessary* connection with any form of Theism. If it be asked whether or not a Theist can be a Secularist, the answer is, It depends upon the nature of his Theism. A consistent believer in the Bible God cannot be a genuine Secularist. On the other hand, if a Theist believes that he can best serve and love and honour his God by serving, loving, and honouring his fellow-men, and by making the most of this life, then he may be an admirable Secularist.

The lesson of history is that the mystic and dogmatic teachings in reference to the existence of a Supernatural Being have ever been fraught with wrong to man. The records of the past are ample proof of this. Whether it be Pagans with their deities, Jews with their Jehovah, or Christians with their Trinity, all such theologisms have brought forth cruelty, oppression, and intolerance. Truth, virtue and love are the three elements which should go towards the foundation of human conduct. They formed its basis in the case of Buddhism, in the humanitarianism of Auguste Comte, and in the great science of man's true education and enlightened benevolence, as promulgated by that great philanthropist and philosopher, Robert Owen.

From the historical development of the churches' idea of the Supernatural it will be seen that it has never been a necessary factor in human elevation. We should, therefore, apart from all such vague speculation, learn how to perform aright the duties and requirements of life. The true way to effect this is to work for the improvement of Humanity, and this can be done by the formation of good characters, which ennoble it, by the exemplification of

tion of good characters, which ennoble it, by the exemplification of correct conduct, which enriches it, and by securing the triumph of the better part of our natures, which dignifies it.

Ethical unity is the proper basis of true benevolence. This great human instinct is not dependent upon any form of Supernaturalism for its manifestation; its activity is evoked by a desire to alleviate the sufferings of the afflicted, and to enhance the happiness of the unfortunate. To aid in securing a fair opportunity for the exercise of this benevolence prompts Secularists to aim at correcting every cherished error by the substitution of a true knowledge of the natural for the old doubtful speculations as to the alleged Supernatural.

The Church proclaims that love to God is the basis of religion; Secularism, on the other hand, teaches that the principle that fosters the development of virtue, happiness and nobility of character is service to man. This is practical morality, and experience demonstrates that it is superior as a reforming agency to Supernatural beliefs. For eighteen hundred years the Supernatural notion has been incorporated into the Church. "To it has been given all power. Its hand has wielded every sword. Every cannon has stood ready charged to second its command. Every crown has received its blessing; every standing army its prayers and the training of its priests. But what has it done to establish justice and truth in the earth? Let the dungeons of the Inquisition make answer. Let the gibbets, whose chains hang heavily freighted with skeletons, rattle in your ear. Ask the millions of ragged, starving paupers, covered with filth and vermin, on their knees to the few who are covered with diamonds and royal insignia, to sing its triumphs. Alas, poor wretches! blinded by ignorance, they do; but their song breathes no hope for this world. Let the millions, upon whom it rivets its fetters of slavery, tell how it brought them glad tidings. Let the prisons, glutted with men and women, their hearts filled with savage hate produced by the cruelty and vengeance of our criminal laws, illustrate its beauty. Let the thousands of brothers, sustained by the degradation and ignorance it has cursed the bodies of men and women with, in order to save their souls, establish its power to cleanse the world with blood. Let the millions who, after toiling ten hours a day, cannot satisfy the bare necessities of life, the thousands of

white-faced and sad-hearted children toiling in the factories, witness to its power to make men just and kind. In the name of reason and humanity, is this morality? Are these things right? Is this the ought-to-be, to which all must yield in the spirit of faith? Must we continue to say that man is born to misery, as the sparks fly upward, and that all this is but just punishment for our sins? Are we always to have the poor with us, because even the revised New Testament says so? Are the powers that be ordained of God? Is there in reality a Devil, an almost infinite fiend, who is permitted to go about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour?"

These are the errors and delusions and impotent views taught by believers in the Supernatural, and is it not time that such evils and weaknesses were removed, and a course of action adopted to avoid their repetition? To perform this task effectually, we must inculcate the truth that right and wrong have their foundation in the mind of man, and not in Supernatural ideas. A cultivated reason and a well-trained judgment are the surest guarantees for noble actions and benevolent and just consideration for others. This may not be religion, but it is the teaching of Secularism; and in proportion as it is adopted by mankind, so shall we advance to the physical, moral and intellectual regeneration of our race.

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## VII. SECULARISM AT THE HOUR OF DEATH.

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It is a favourite, and, as they seem to think, an effective argument of the Christians, that, although Secularism may do very well in healthy life, it fails in sickness and at the hour of death. Were this supposition true, it would be but a poor compliment to Christianity. If its chief use is for the sick or dying, it is a mere drug or anodyne, things which are abominable to the strong and healthy, instead of being wholesome food and drink. A dose of opium would be just as good. The only religion or philosophy which should command our allegiance is one that supplies a sound rule of life, a principle by which we may live well, not by which we may die easily. Very few instances of Christian resignation equal the calmness and indifference with which any ordinary Eastern submits to death when death can no longer be avoided. The stories still current



among the more ignorant of orthodox Christians of the terrible death of eminent Freethinkers have again and again proved to be but pious frauds. Even were they true, they are counterbalanced by the accounts given themselves of the deaths of very religious persons, haunted and agitated almost to their last moments by dreadful fears of perdition. But, in fact, as those who have had a large death-bed experience, can testify, nearly all men die serenely, without reference to their faith or want of faith. Fallen into extreme weakness, they cannot feel strongly on any subject; the past, the present, and the future are but as dim dreams, in which their languor takes but the faintest interest; life slips very easily from the relaxed grasp; exhausted with the long struggle, they are not only willing, but rather anxious to sleep.

But, apart from these considerations, let us take the case of a consistent Secularist lying for weeks upon a sick-bed, regarding with lucid mind the certain approach of death. What has he to fear? If he has been faithful to his convictions, acting up consistently to the light which his intellectual industry has acquired, why should the honest Secularist have any dread as to any hereafter? His life has been glad and he has made the most of it; he has drained the cup of its wine to the lees, and can retire satisfied to slumber after the banquet. Or his life has been stern, and still he has made the most of it; he has fought its battle to the bitter end; and wounded, worn out, and broken down, must rejoice when he can sink to rest. There surely should be no forebodings in the forethought that the sleep may be eternal. As John Stuart Mill finely says in concluding his posthumous Essay on the "Utility of Religion," which, unlike the following Essay on Theism, was written before his mind was shaken by the loss of his idolized wife: "I cannot but think that as the condition of mankind becomes improved, as they grow happier in their lives, and more capable of deriving happiness from unselfish sources, they will care less and less for this flattering expectation (of a future life). It is not, naturally or generally, the happy who are the most anxious either for a prolongation of the present life, or for a life hereafter; it is those who never have been happy. They who have had their happiness can bear to part with existence; but it is hard to die without ever having lived. When mankind cease to need a future existence as a consolation for the sufferings of the present,

it will have lost its chief value to them, for themselves. I am now speaking of the unselfish. Those who are so wrapped up in self, that they are unable to identify their feelings with anything which will survive them, or to feel their life prolonged in their younger contemporaries, and all who help to carry on the progressive movement of human affairs, require the notion of another selfish life beyond the grave, to enable them to keep up any interest in existence.....But if the Religion of Humanity were as sedulously cultivated as the supernatural religions are (and there is no difficulty in conceiving that it might be much more so), all who had received the customary amount of moral cultivation would up to the hour of death live ideally in the life of those who are to follow them; and though, doubtless, they would often willingly survive as individuals for a much longer period than the present duration of life, it appears to me probable that after a length of time, different in different persons, they would have had enough of existence, and would gladly lie down and take their eternal rest.....The mere cessation of existence is no evil to any one; the idea is only formidable through the illusion of imagination which makes one conceive oneself as if one were alive and feeling oneself dead. What is odious in death is not death itself, but the act of dying and its lugubrious accompaniments, all of which must be equally undergone by the believer in immortality." And in the final sentence: "It seems to me not only possible but probable, that in a higher, and, above all, a happier condition of human life, not annihilation but immortality, may be the burdensome idea; and that human nature, though pleased with the present, and by no means impatient to quit it, would find comfort and not sadness in the thought that it is not chained through eternity to a conscious existence, which it cannot be assured it will always wish to preserve." In this thought Mr. Mill was anticipated by Lord Bacon in his fine fragment on Death: "I have often thought upon death, and I find it the least of all evils. All that which is past is a dream; and he that hopes or depends upon time coming, dreams waking..... Physicians in the name of death include all sorrow, anguish, disease, calamity, or whatsoever can fall in the life of man, grievous or unwelcome; but these things are familiar unto us, and we suffer them every hour, therefore we die daily. I know many wise men

who fear to die ; for the change is bitter, and flesh would refuse to prove it ; besides, the expectation brings terror, and that exceeds the evil. But I do not believe that any man fears to be dead, but only the stroke of death." If there be an eternal sleep, it promises the positive gain of release from all suffering and sorrow, while the seeming loss of pleasure is cancelled by unconsciousness. If we are not to see our loved ones more we shall have no wish to see them, and soon also they will have no wish to see us. And so with every other apparent privation. The dreamless slumberer desires nothing, regrets nothing. " There the wicked cease from troubling ; and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together ; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and great are there ; and the servant is free from his master."

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

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

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

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### VIII. SECULARISM IN THEORY.

THE theory of Secularism is simply that this life and this world in which we live demand and will reward our utmost cultivation; that the instruments of this cultivation are reason and social effort; that the harvest to be reaped from it is happiness, general and individual.

Looking at the world, we are convinced by what human reason has already discovered in it, and by the experience which has verified the discoveries, that it is perfect order, in the sense that its operations follow unvarying laws, that the like antecedents have always the like consequents. This immutable constancy of what are termed the Laws of Nature, gives us a stable foundation on which to build up physical science and all the arts which are the applications of such science. The laws we know we cannot change; but the more we learn of them the better we can adapt ourselves

and the conditions of our life to them, the better we can avoid such of their workings as would be otherwise harmful to us, the better we can avail ourselves of all in their workings which is profitable to us. Thus Secularism regards science as the true Providence; and affirms that by persistent careful study of Nature, and persistent application of the results of that study, this Providence can be made to yield ever richer and richer benefits to our race.

Looking at mankind, we are convinced in the same manner, that human nature, no less than nature in general, is the subject of unvarying laws, that in it also the like antecedents have always the like consequents; and the stability of law in this domain gives us firm ground on which to build up physiological, psychological, and sociological science, and the political and social constitutions which are the applications of such science. These laws also we know we cannot change; but in their case also the more we learn of them the better we can adapt ourselves and the conditions of our life to them, the better we can avoid their injurious and avail ourselves of their beneficial workings. So that here also Secularism regards science as the true Providence; and affirms that by the study of Man, and the application of the results of that study, this Providence can be wrought to confer ever richer and richer boons on our race.

As for the controversy between virtue and happiness, which is in a great measure a mere contest as to words, we know how the great name of Epicurus was almost from the first degraded by his opponents into a great synonym for the pursuit of coarse sensuous pleasure, in the term Epicureanism. But why should this happiness, which Utilitarianism teaches us to seek in common, be spoken of as something mean? The great object of Christian life is to gain eternal happiness in heaven, and we do not find that such happiness is supposed to be concerned only with sensual joys; on the contrary, it is assumed to involve all the most sacred emotions and aspirations, to include all the beatitudes. It is such happiness, in so far as it shall prove to be attainable, that Secularism seeks to realise, not in heaven but on earth, not in eternity but in time; not for elect individuals here and there, but for all mankind. This happiness implies, firstly, material well-being, sufficiency of food, clothing and houseroom, with good air, good water, and good sanitary conditions: for these things are necessary to bodily health.

and this is essential to the health of the mind, and only in health is real happiness possible. Again, it implies mental well-being, sufficiency of instruction and education for every one, so that his intellect may be nourished and developed to the full extent of its capabilities. Given the sound mind in the sound body, it further implies free exercise of these, absolutely free in every respect so long as it does not trench on the equal rights of others, or impede the common good. In this full development of mind as well as body, it need scarcely be said that true happiness brings into its service all the noblest and most beautiful arts of life. Some persons seem to fancy that Secularists have nothing to do with music, painting, sculpture, care nothing for the glories and grandeurs of the world, have no part in the treasures of the imagination; as if there were no utility in any of these. But we recognize in them the very high utility of touching to rapture some of the finest chords in our nature; we know and feel just as well as others, and perhaps better than most, since we give ourselves more to the scientific study of man, that there are different kinds and degrees of enjoyment, and that some kinds are far superior to others, and we know how to value the superior as compared with the inferior.

But yet more, this social happiness implies all the great virtues in those who can attain and keep it. Wisdom, for without this, transitory and selfish pleasures will be continually mistaken for happiness; and even with a desire for the common good, this good will be misconceived, and the wrong means taken to secure it. Fortitude, to bear when necessary, and the necessity in the present state of the world is as frequent as it is stern, deprivation of personal comfort rather than stifle our aspirations and relax our efforts for the general interest. Temperance, for with excess no permanent happiness is possible. Magnanimity, for only by aid of this virtue can we keep steadily in view, as the sole aim of all our striving, the sole aim worthy of true men and women, the greatest good of the greatest number; all littlemindedness ever turns to selfishness. Truth, for without it the stability of society could not be maintained. Justice, and above all else Justice, for it is the profound and unchangeable conviction of the equal rights of all which alone can inspire and impel us to seek the freedom and happiness of all, oppressions since the world began having been based on injustice, the oppressors exaggerating their own rights at

the expense of those of the oppressed. And to these great virtues of the mind, we must add, as essential to this true happiness, what are commonly called the virtues of the heart, the fervour of Zeal or Enthusiasm, and the finer fervour of Benevolence, Sympathy, or, to use the best name, Love. For if Wisdom gives the requisite light, Love alone can give the requisite vital heat; Wisdom climbing the arduous mountain solitudes, must often let the lamp slip from her benumbed fingers, must often be near perishing in fatal lethargy amidst ice and snow-drifts, if love be not there to cheer and revive her with the glow and the flames of the heart's quenchless fires.

Seeing thus what qualities and energies are required in those who would win this happiness for themselves and their fellows, or would even advance but a little the great day of its advent, we are surely entitled to ask, What virtue can be more noble than this? What more lofty and unselfish object can be proposed for human effort than this of destroying ignorance, oppression, and suffering, of instituting enlightenment, freedom and happiness? We believe that the final test of any so-called virtue, as of any action, is the question, Does it tend to the common good? If it does, we hold it in esteem, and in some cases in reverence; if it does not, however fine the name it bears, we look upon it as an error, and in some cases as a vice or crime.

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## IX. SECULARISM IN PRACTICE.

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SECULARISM is clearly a theory of action, to be realized in conduct; not a theory of speculation, which may be held without influencing our every-day life. The theory of Secularism is a theory of War against theological pretensions; and the warfare to which it applies is continual, without intermission of treaty or truce, for every brave and loyal man, being warfare against all that is noxious and may be vincible, in nature and human nature. So that if any one makes profession of Secular principles, without putting them or striving to put them into practice, we must declare that he is really not a Secularist; just as we should declare him no soldier who should

pore over military books, and dream about strategy and tactics, without ever taking part with head or hand in the fight to which his duty called him. With head or hand, because it is clear that the solitary thinker, carrying on his profound investigations into the elements and processes and evolution of the world, or into the subtle nature and obscure history of man, and communicating the results of these for the enlightenment and advantage of his fellows, is not less but rather more essentially active on our side in the battle of life, than he who is called the man of action himself; just as the statesman who prepares for the war, the administrator who organizes the army, and the general who plans and directs the campaign, have far more to do with the result—though they strike no blow and fire no shot—than any of the banded subordinates who use sabre, lance, or rifle.

We are in constant struggle with Nature,—to make its barren regions fertile, its unhealthy regions wholesome; to soften its rigours, and guard against its perils; to breach its barriers, and bridge its abysses, between nation and nation; to bend its powers to our service, and fashion its productions to our commodity; to trace out its hidden treasures, and penetrate its secrets, availing ourselves to the utmost of every discovery. Wherefore the Secularist, to the full extent of his faculties and opportunities, assists, encourages, and welcomes each advance in any of the sciences or useful arts. Nothing which gives or promises new knowledge of nature can be indifferent to him, however remote it may seem from the concerns of ordinary life; for in wrestling for such knowledge the intellect is braced, and in conquering it is expanded; while it is always possible, and has frequently been the case, that the most abtruse researches have led to priceless practical benefits.

We are also in constant struggle with Human Nature, as hitherto developed in ourselves and others, and with the political and social institutions which have sprung from it; to cure its manifold diseases of body and mind, amend its manifold defects, establish it in vigorous health to diminish, and, if possible, destroy, its abounding gross ignorance, want, oppression, bigotry, disunion, hatred, envy, selfishness; to increase, and, if possible, make universal, the contraries of all these. And with regard to the question of possibility, as we who look forward with hope and trust to vast and indefinite improvements in the state of mankind, are often mocked as impracticable dreamers, there is one word to say: Until all



who love their fellows and regard posterity, find themselves, having done their utmost, without spark of hope or sinew of strength for further effort, until our whole race crouches in impotence and despair, no one can say, Here is the extreme boundary of improvement; and until such boundary is reached, indefinite advance is possible. For this is a contest in which hope itself is puissant toward victory, and in very truth a sure pledge of victory; for hope means endeavour, and endeavour precludes defeat; seeing that our object is to vanquish Nature, not by resisting her laws, but by taking advantage of them, and that we are ever living successful lives, and fighting a winning battle, while we can endeavour with hope.

Therefore, the true Secularist is, and always will be, in the van of all efforts to improve the condition of the great bulk of the people, physically, mentally, morally, socially, politically. As he regards all men as really his brothers (not his "dear brethren," as clergymen say on Sunday from the secure height of their pulpits, to poor creatures whom they consider mere serfs, hewers of wood, and drawers of water, on week days) and believes that all have equal rights to full development and free exercise of their faculties, his politics will naturally be of a most liberal tendency; he will constantly work towards the government of the people by the people, towards making the Executive the servant and not the Master of the nation. It does not follow that in all cases he will desire the immediate establishment of a Republic; he may be convinced that the mass of his countrymen are not yet fit for such a form of government. But if so, he will not be content that they should remain thus unfit; he will do his best and urge all whom he can influence to do their best likewise, to decrease and ultimately to destroy this unfitness; preparing the way for a government based upon the will of the nation. To this end he will do all in his power to diffuse Secular instruction, particularly among those of the rising generation, whose minds are fresh and eager for new knowledge, whose characters are plastic to training, who are not yet hide-bound in prejudice and hardened by old habits. Feeling himself essentially a "rational social animal," he will endeavour always to act in company with as many of his fellows as possible, and will frankly support co-operation in every department of activity. Thus for the political education of the people, both in theory and practice, nothing can be more valuable than well organ-

ized Clubs and Societies. Lectures, debates, and readings inform and brighten the intelligence; the various functions of the members, and the mutual forbearance requisite to amicable working, furnish excellent civic training; and the "rational social" being thus provided for, there is every opportunity to cultivate the "social" in its most familiar sense by amusements in common; for the reflection of joy from one to another, where many friends are gathered, indefinitely multiplies the enjoyment of each.

The Secularist cannot but strive for the abolition of all privileges of Class or Sect in the body politic; while he will seek to make all change with as little violence as possible and with as much consideration for those who must be dispossessed of what does not belong to them, as they themselves and the circumstances would allow. For doubtless all the reforms demanded by our principles can be brought about by legal means; by patient, orderly, persistent, and combined constitutional efforts on the part of the people. We do not wish to stir up Class or Sectarian animosities, though we are continually accused of doing so; we are well aware that the privileged persons have become what they are by long habit and training, or, generally speaking, by the force of circumstances; and that we ourselves, if brought up in the same conditions, would probably cling as stubbornly as they do to these inequitable distinctions; but we cannot cease or remit our endeavours to redress wrongs or cancel injustice, in the interest of the whole nation, out of tenderness for certain misguided and selfish sections.

In our relation with other countries, the ruling desire of the Secularist, who regards not only his own people but all mankind as brothers, will necessarily be for peace and amity, for mutual profiting instead of mutual destroying. There have been, and probably will be often again until nations in general have grown much better and wiser than they are, wars certainly justifiable, because necessary, on the one part. But no reader of history can fail to see that the majority of wars have been justifiable neither on the one part nor on the other; that they have been brought about by the pride, greed, passion and folly of rulers, and the imbecile ignorance of subjects, who allowed themselves to be first inflamed, then impoverished and slaughtered, for objects in which they had no real interest, which indeed very often were such that their real interests were far better served by defeat than by victory.

Secularism in practice does not seek to destroy any one truth that is associated with Christianity. Its practical force is employed in building up Secular principles, and in combatting orthodox doctrines and actions which are so many obstacles to the development of positive Secular principles. For though the influence of orthodoxy is much less than it used to be, both in depth and expanse, and is decreasing year by year, it still floods wide tracts, making barren fens and swamps of what should be, and will be, when it is drained off, among our most fruitful fields. If it has now little of whatever power for good it once had over the thoughts and actions of men, it has still much power for evil. If it no longer makes saints and martyrs, it makes serfs and bigots. We want real Secular education for all our children, such as shall endow them with some useful knowledge and the instruments for acquiring much more, such as shall prepare them for their work in the world, and make them intelligent citizens; and we cannot get this because of sectarian squabbles, because of the arrogant greed of the Church. Primer, copy-book, and arithmetic shall be withheld, unless the Bible may be everywhere thrust in amongst them; the Bible, with its beautiful stories of Noah, Lot, Dinah, Tamar, and the rest, to inform the intellect and purify the heart of the young; the Bible, with its lucid dogmas, as to which all the sects are at loggerheads among themselves. Hard at work all the week, we want to enjoy ourselves on Sunday; but orthodoxy, so far as it can, shuts us out from all means of rational amusement; closing museums and art galleries, stopping innocent entertainments, leaving the general masses of the people no alternative but the stupefying influence of most stupefying sermons. Politically, again, the mass of the Church has been for long generations, and is henceforth pretty sure to be always obstructive to every movement for the benefit of the mass of the people.

Orthodox Christianity is opposed to civic freedom, free thought, free speech, free action; it is opposed to Science, at the heels of whose noblest philosophers its curs are always yelping now they dare not bite; it is opposed to Utilitarianism, withdrawing fine intellects from useful studies into barren controversies, and generous hearts from social labours into cloistered asceticism. Therefore, Secularism in practice must be at war with it continually, until its cathedrals, churches, and chapels are ennobled into Schools of Science, Museums of Arts and Secular Halls.

## X. SECULARISM MORE REASONABLE THAN CHRISTIANITY.

ORTHODOX Christianity being, by its own avowal, built upon faith, which is the abnegation of reason, while Secularism is built upon reason and experience, it may be thought superfluous to enter upon an argument to prove that the latter is more reasonable than the former. But Christians in general, although in the interest of their mysteries they vilify reason, are very glad to avail themselves of whatever help, or apparent help, they can derive from it.

This is especially true of Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, more consistent and thorough, gallantly offering to us in itself the *reductio ad absurdum* of faith trampling reason under foot. Protestantism is an illogical compromise between reason and faith, expediency and religion, common sense and uncommon nonsense. It upholds the right of private judgment, and condemns all who exercise this right beyond its own strait limits. It appeals to reason against the absolute claims of Rome, and to faith against the unanswerable arguments of science. It worships an alleged infallible book, and rejects an infallible interpreter of the book. It tries to buttress its sinking and sloping walls with laborious "evidences," and brands the inspection which shows that these are hollow and unsound as heterodox Rationalism. It has no firm ground to stand upon; nor can there be any between the orthodox faith without reason of the Ultramontane and the reason without the orthodox faith of the Secularist.

Christianity boasts an infallible book, and no two of its manifold sects can agree in its interpretation. Ah, they reply, in a momentary truce with each other, that all their arms may be turned against the unbeliever, our differences are on points not essential, in essentials we all agree. But if the differences are of such small moment, why dispute so desperately about them? Why fine, imprison, banish, torture, and put to death, because of them? Why organize wholesale massacres, and engage in bloody wars, whose records are atrociously cruel even for the annals of warfare, on account of these insignificant differences? Lollards and Puritans, Waldenses, Albigenses, and Huguenots, Guelphs and Ghibellines, Lutherans and Roman Catholics, none of these were Atheists or Sceptics, they were all alike ardent Christians, and their murderers were:

ardent Christians too. But such things can be no more ! Probably not, but no thanks to orthodoxy ; they have receded before the growing spirit of Secularism. The spirit of the sects is just as loving as of old ; but we, whom they slander, have bound them over to keep the peace ; they dare not smite, they can only rail at each other. Romanism cries : " Let every man who trusts in his reason be accursed," while Protestants exclaim : " The Romish Church is the masterpiece of Satan." Christianity professes to have an infallible book, which it worships. Yet all Christians competent to judge admit that there are doubtful and interpolated passages in the original, and many errors in the translation. Hence a body of learned but fallible divines have been engaged in revising our version, so as to settle its infallibility. All intelligent Christians, also, while affirming that it is the very Word of God, adding to or taking from which is to be followed by certain penalties, understand it in various senses : some parts in the literal, some as allegorical, some as poetical, some as spiritual. But what right have they to do so ? Where can such a process end ? Who has the infallible authority to draw the lines, saying, This you shall interpret thus, that you shall interpret otherwise, and so on ? An infallible book must be taken as a whole, if taken at all, though reason be entirely ignored in the taking ; you are not at liberty to say, I will accept this bit, I will reject that ; who are you to set up for a judge, citing the very Word of the living God before your tribunal, making it justify and explain itself, ruling this verse to be admissible and that not, deciding that God said just what he meant in one place, but did not in another ? The first exercise of private judgment, in explaining or explaining away the meaning of any single verse, leads logically and inevitably to the criticism of the whole Bible as if it were any other book ; tamper with a word, and you lose the infallibility ; the Bible is handed over by faith to reason, that merciless inquisitor for inspired writings.

This infallible book includes a story of the Creation of the World, of a universal Deluge, of the confusion of tongues ; long historical narratives ; positive statements affecting chronology, astronomy, and other sciences ; all of them demonstrably wrong in certain particulars, many of them self-contradictory. It is not necessary here to go into details on these matters, for they have been abundantly analyzed and the assertions proved in books which Christians have tried in vain to refute ; nay, in many instances, the wiser or

lowing his example ; they tell us his precepts are divine, and utterly ignore them in daily life.

more astute Christians, after defending to the utmost their untenable positions, have evacuated them altogether, with the consolatory remark that they were really worth nothing, that the Bible teaches moral and spiritual and theological truths, not history and science. Thus no one of any intelligence, however orthodox, would, I suppose, venture now in England to assert that the sun and the moon stood still at the command of Joshua, or that the sun went back ten degrees as a sign to Hezekiah that his life should be prolonged.

It is urged, however, that the infallible book is only infallible in its moral, spiritual, and theological teachings ; and, of course, in its narratives of the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of the Divine Man, Christ Jesus. But the narratives differ so among themselves that no amount of ingenious sophistry, and assuredly abundance of this has been brought to bear, can reconcile them. No one has hitherto even proved it probable that they were written by the men whose names they bear, or within a century and a half of the time to which they refer ; no one has given valid reason why they should be preferred to a multitude of similar contemporary narratives which the Christians call Apocryphal. No Christian can give a reason for accepting the miracles recorded in the Gospels, which would not, were he consistent, make him accept the miracles recorded of Brahma, Buddha, Mohammed, and the innumerable miracles of the Romish hagiology, stretching without interruption from the Acts of the Apostles to the acts of our Lady of Lourdes, from the wounds of the risen Christ to the stigmata of Louise Latour. No Christian can prove that all the principal superhuman features in the career of his Christ were not copied from the much older myths of the Hindoo Christna, these themselves pointing to physical myths far more ancient.

And then, supposing the Gospels authentic as to the moral teachings of this God-man, and as to the life he led upon earth. Are not many of his precepts injurious, many quite impracticable ? and all affected by the illusion possessing him that the end of the world was at hand ? Was not his mode of life such that if any one in this un-Christian Christendom of the nineteenth century dared to imitate it, he would be certainly imprisoned as a vagabond, probably confined as an incurable lunatic. The Christians hold him (Christ) up as the Great Exemplar, and carefully refrain from fol-

As to the theological teachings of this infallible Book. It has been super-abundantly demonstrated in Freethought literature, that its cardinal doctrines, the Triune God, the Creation, the Origin of Sin, Fall of Man, Original Sin, Incarnation, Atonement, Resurrection, Ascension, eternal Heaven and Hell, are absurd and self-contradictory; that they make the Deity at once a remorseless and unjust tyrant, and a vacillating ruler. No Christian really believes them, for no Christian, nor any other man, can understand them; and we cannot believe propositions of which we cannot catch the meaning, which cannot be put into plain words without manifest self-contradiction. The Christian can only suppress his intellect with regard to them; resolutely shut his eyes and mutter, I believe that anything may be there for aught I can see to the contrary; he can only act with reference to these astounding mysteries, as he knows it would be ruinous to act in any other business of life.

So much for the reasonableness of Christianity. Over against this inextricable entanglement of reason and faith, freedom and servility, candour and sophistry, these absurd and degrading impossibilities, self-contradictions, self-stultifications, Secularism offers the plain, straight, spacious pathway of reason and experience. It has no science, no history, no books, no persons, that it wants to hide or shield from free human criticism. It has no theories which it is not ready and eager to abandon, directly facts shall have declared against them; no rule of conduct which it will not at once modify if change seems necessary in the interest of the general happiness. Mysteries it acknowledges, and confesses that they are truly mysterious, without proceeding to exhibit them in dogmas as if it had turned them inside out. It is not weighted with the impossible tasks of reconciling the existence of evil with that of an Omnipotent and All-good Creator; and of proving and worshipping the Infallibility of a book crowded with evident errors. It does not threaten the vast majority with never-ending torments, and promise an elect few never-ending bliss, both alike preposterously disproportioned to any possible merits or demerits of human life; it simply seeks by the best approved means to make this life as happy as possible for all, assured that if there be another it could not be better prepared for than thus.

## XI. SECULARISM MORE NOBLE THAN CHRISTIANITY.

Not only are the cardinal doctrines of Christianity intellectually absurd and self-contradictory, but many of them are also morally degrading. Not only do they soften and confuse the brain which tries to believe them; they also harden and pervert the heart which tries to justify them. Thus in the endeavour to reconcile the subsistence of an All-good, All-wise, All-powerful God, Infinite and Eternal, Creator of all things and beings, with the existence of Evil and the Devil; with the dogmas of the Fall, the Atonement, and the everlasting Hell for unbelievers; a man's conscience must be sophisticated as injuriously as his reason. They are as revolting to the healthy moral sense as to the healthy common sense. They could only have arisen among a barbarous people, who looked upon God as an irresponsible tyrant, like the human tyrants they were accustomed to crouch under abjectly, but fiercer and more powerful, able to extend his vengeance over all regions and prolong it through all times; they only survive now among persons who are otherwise comparatively free and intelligent, by the force of early training and habit, by the influence of venerable associations, which benumb the moral sense, emasculate the reason, and baffle honest inquiry with their prodigious prestige. If a thousand average children were brought up without hearing of Christianity, subject simply to the Secular education and moral discipline now generally recognized in England and on the American continent, as needful to prepare them for the ordinary work of the world and make them good citizens (and assuredly this is no high standard of instruction and training); and if, as they approached manhood and womanhood, the Bible were placed in their hands, and its leading doctrines calmly explained to them, as held by the leading Christian Churches, it may be safe to assert that every one of these youths and maidens would reject large portions of the Book, not merely with contempt, but with abhorrence, and reject the whole of the doctrines, not merely as irrational, but as immoral, essentially wicked and vile. And surely the priests are one with us in this forecast; else why do they so desperately insist on thrusting their Bible into our public



schools, even though they have ample opportunities for instilling its teachings into the young in private, in the family, in the church ?

The more nakedly and coldly one states the chief doctrines of this Bible, and the chief acts it records of its Deity, the more false and ignominious do they show themselves. The perfect God makes a perfect man, having previously made a wicked Tempter ; and the perfect man succumbs to the very first temptation. For this lapse the Merciful God curses, not only him, but likewise all his posterity, and the very earth on which they live. In the course of time this Immutable God repents him of having made man, and destroys with a flood, not only all mankind, but all living things, save the few of each in the Ark. The destruction works no good, for men are as wicked after the deluge as before. This God, who is no respecter of persons, has his chosen people, whom he leads into a promised land, ordering them to murder ruthlessly all its inhabitants, but not finding power in his Omnipotence to enable them to do so. This is the only thing in which the chosen people heartily try to fulfil his commandments ; in all else they are constantly rebelling against him and falling away from his worship, despite the countless miracles it is said he works amongst them. This good God rends the kingdom from Saul for not utterly destroying the Amalekites, as divinely ordered, " man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." This loving God slays seventy thousand of his chosen people because David, at God's instigation, has caused a census to be taken. Having left all mankind, except the Jews, in the perdition of idolatry for about two thousand years ; having also destroyed or dispersed ten-twelfths of the chosen people, so that no sure trace of them is left, and reduced those remaining to servitude, soon to be followed by dispersion ; this tender God resolves to redeem the world, that as in Adam all died, so in Christ may all be made alive. This one God has by this time become three Gods, while ever remaining one, having begotten on himself a Son, and from the Father and Son a Holy Ghost having proceeded, the three co-eternal, co-equal, and each almighty. Nothing less than the sacrifice of a God can atone for the sins of men ; so God the Holy Ghost begets God the Son from a human virgin, who remains a virgin after conception and child-bearing, though she purifies her untainted self from the maternal taint, in accordance with the low notions of her people ; and God the Son,

who is innocent, must suffer death to appease the wrath of himself and the other two persons of the sole God against man. God the Son is crucified, and dies and descends into Hell, and rises from the dead and ascends into Heaven; yet as God he could not die, as God he was and is everywhere; and if only his manhood died, there was no divine, no sufficient atonement. The scheme of his sacrifice involved inexpiable and unpardonable guilt in his betrayer and murderers; God could only assure the atonement by securing the necessary crime in men who are in his hands as clay in the hands of the potter. All who believe in this God-man shall be saved, all who disbelieve shall be damned or "condemned"; and as the vast majority who have since lived never heard of him, and a continually-increasing minority of those who hear of him can't believe in him, while the bulk of those who profess to do so don't keep his commandments, this Gospel of Salvation is in truth a Gospel of Damnation; as he said himself, "Many are called, but few are chosen." The chosen people, of whom he was one on the mother's side, among whom he lived, and who had the opportunity of knowing and judging him, rejected him, and their descendants reject him still. Jesus, good as a man, is decidedly objectionable as a God; for in this character he could have revealed himself indisputably and immediately, to the redemption of all.

Orthodox Christianity is ignoble in that it makes our salvation depend upon blind faith instead of upon reason and love and good works. It is ignoble in that its votaries must more and more sophisticate the moral sense in seeking—and seeking how vainly!—to reconcile ever-growing natural truths with stark old superstitions. It is ignoble in that, by demanding absolute faith from men who *must* doubt and disbelieve much of its teachings, it manufactures dissemblers and hypocrites. It is intensely ignoble in its "sublimated selfishness" of making the chief end of life the salvation of one's own precious soul. It is horribly ignoble in making the eternal bliss of the few elect, compatible with the eternal torment of the majority predestined to damnation: a man must be fiendishly callous and selfish who can rejoice in looking forward to such a Heaven counterpoised by such a Hell. It is ignoble in what it deems its noblest emotions, its love and reverence and adoration of the Deity, its ecstasies of Divine influx and communion. For these emotions

are irrational, the object of the love is a dream and a delusion, the God revered and worshipped is pourtrayed in its own Bible as capricious, unjust, vindictive, merciless; and these orgies of religious excitement, which overstrain, rend, and often ruin the moral fibre, are as harmful as any other drunken revels.

Secularism, on the other hand, is quite free from all these moral degradations which are of the essence of orthodoxy. Secularism is not called upon to reconcile irreconcilable antinomies; has no need to palter with the standard of right and wrong, truth and falsehood; does not ask for pretence of belief where there is no assurance; does not fetter the reason and mutilate the conscience. It recognises abundant evil and misery in the world, and endeavours by hard work to decrease and as far as possible destroy them; it recognises much good and happiness, and endeavours by wise work to increase and extend them; untrammelled in either case by obsolete myths or incredible dogmas. The true Secularist loves and reveres his fellow men whom he knows, not the Bible God of whom he does not know. Upright, as an honest man who respects himself and his fellows, he does not abase himself, and crouch down crying that he is a miserable sinner, because he has read in an old story-book that the first woman and man ate an apple countless millenniums, as science has taught him, after the human race came into existence. He seeks happiness, not selfishly, but unselfishly, not for one, but for all; the Heaven on earth towards which he strives would be no Heaven to him if counter-balanced by a Hell.

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## XII. SECULARISM MORE BENEFICIAL THAN CHRISTIANITY.

It has been already shown in previous articles that Secularism is more beneficial than Christianity in two most important respects, namely, its freedom from intellectual absurdities and from moral sophistication. But generally, and avowedly, Christianity is not beneficial for this life and this world. The teachings and actions of its author were based upon the fixed delusion that the end of the world was at hand. Thus he says: "For the Son of Man

shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels ; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." Again, having foretold wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, false Christs, and false prophets showing great signs and wonders, he adds : " Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven : and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." And he concludes : " Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled." (Matt. 24 : 5-34 ; compare Luke 21 : 25-32, and 1 Thess. 4 : 14-17.) These are among the most explicit prophecies in the Bible, and the most exact as to date of the events foretold. Yet it would be difficult to find them quoted by any Christian advocate in the very astonishing collections of " Prophecies fulfilled " with which we are abundantly favoured. This omission may be due to the facts that, although the period for their fulfilment is long overdue, although all standing there have tasted of death, and all that generation have passed away nearly eighteen centuries since ; although frequent alarms have been given, and a bright look-out has been everywhere kept ; the Son of Man has *not* been seen coming in the glory of his Father with his angels.

Consider the effects of this delusion upon Christ's teachings. Why care for this world, whose destruction was imminent ? Why trouble about this life, so soon to be swallowed up in the life eternal ? This life and this world were naturally contemptible to him ; their enjoyments and treasures were baits and snares of the Devil. Therefore we read in the Gospel called of St. John (which Luther tells us " is the true and pure Gospel, the chief of the Gospels, inasmuch as it contains the greatest portion of our Saviour's sayings " ), " He that loveth his life shall lose it ; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal " (John 12 : 25) ; and again, " I pray not for the world ; but for

them which thou hast given me ; for they are mine. . . . They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." (John 17 : 9, 16). Therefore he said : "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink ; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. . . . Take therefore no thought for the morrow ; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself" (Matt. 6 : 25, 34). Therefore he contemned all natural affections (Matt. 10 : 37 ; 12 : 46-50 ; 19 : 29). Therefore he taught, Resist not evil (Matt. 5 : 39) ; and his great apostle taught abject submission to tyranny, "the right divine of kings to govern wrong" (Rom. 13 : 1, 2). Therefore he enjoined poverty and asceticism (Matt. 19 : 21, 23, 24) ; not the regulation, but the destruction, of our natural instincts, the continence of self-mutilation and castration (Matt. 5 : 29, 30 ; 18 : 8, 9 ; 19 : 12). As every student of the New Testament is aware, it would be easy to multiply texts from the Gospels and Epistles, all in a similar strain, and all spoken or written under the influence of the fanatical delusion that the destruction of this world and the advent of the kingdom of Heaven were imminent. It is clear from these maxims and precepts that all the improvements, social and political, scientific and artistic, commercial and mechanical, which have been made in the world since the birth of Christianity, have been made, in spite of it, not because of it ; have been wrought by the spirit of Secularism ever struggling, and in recent centuries with ever-growing success, against the spirit of dogmatic religion.

But Christianity puts in a predominant claim to beneficence, in that it secures to its believers everlasting bliss after death, or, at the worst, blesses their lives here with the hope and expectation thereof, even should the expectation not be realised. In the first place, we answer that it likewise assures, not only to all disbelievers, but to nearly all if not quite all professing believers, everlasting torture after death ; or, at the best, curses their lives here with the dread and expectation thereof, even should the expectation not be realized. For Jesus said, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and keep not my commandments?" and again, "By their fruits ye shall know them;" and the truth is there is no man or woman living in Christendom who does keep his commandments, and scarcely any who seriously and thoroughly tries. Who takes no thought for the morrow? Who resists not evil? Who, being smitten on the one cheek, turns the other also? Who, being asked

for his cloak, gives also his coat? Who sells all that he has and gives it to the poor? So-called Christians would have been extinct in the first century after the crucifixion of their Jesus had they not copiously adulterated their other-worldliness with this-worldliness, their uncommon nonsense with common-sense; and the result is that we can't find a genuine Christian among the hundreds of millions of Christendom, unless it be here and there a fanatical monk or hysterical nun.

As to the hope of Heaven, which the Christians claim as a blessing in this life, it is over-balanced by the curse of the fear of Hell. But in truth, though the hope and the fear seem effective to some minds as arguments in a debate, they are seldom effectual in real life. A good many Christians in rare moments, a very few zealots more commonly, may be exalted by the foretaste of Heaven or tormented by the foretaste of Hell. When wrought to intensity fear certainly does more harm than the hope can do good; there are but too many instances of persons thus terrified into incurable lunacy, into the very worst species of *delirium tremens* known. But, as a rule, every honest and intelligent man must be aware that the fear of Hell in itself has scarcely any influence in keeping Christians from what they think sin, and the hope of Heaven scarcely any influence in attracting them to what they think holiness. No stronger proof of the weakness and unreality of the general faith in Heaven could be adduced, than the fact that good "Christians" cling to this life as hard and as long as they can; that when they are sick they pray for recovery—from what? from the danger of going straight to eternal beatitude; that they will physic and doctor themselves desperately, preferring a miserable death-in-life here to perfect life in the kingdom of glory; that they never resign themselves to the Saviour's bosom until they can no longer keep out of it. If this point had really the important bearing on the case that some weak-minded and low-thoughted persons seem to fancy it has, one could further answer that Christianity, in this respect, simply stands on a level with all other revealed religions, since each of these promises future felicity to its own faithful and threatens future punishment to unbelievers. Why, then, should hope of Heaven allure us, or fear of Hell frighten us, into Christianity rather than into Mohammedanism, Brahminism, or Buddhism? If intelligent belief were subject to the will, and not the offspring of independent reason, probably most men would

prefer the Heaven of Mohammed, and most men and women the Nirvana of Buddha to that everlasting psalm singing in long white nightgowns, amidst the howling of "all the menagerie of the Apocalypse," which constitutes the Heaven of Christ.

Secularism is more beneficial than Christianity, inasmuch as it teaches no figment of the "end of the world," of the existence of a personal Devil; no submission to despots; no anxiety whether we shall "be with the damned cast out or numbered with the blest." The world is our home, and Secularism teaches us a paramount duty to make the best of it by striving to increase its usefulness, its purity, and its ethical greatness.

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### XIII. SECULARISM PROGRESSIVE; CHRISTIANITY STAGNANT.

CHRISTIANITY, as taught in our churches, is chained fast and riveted with iron to the immutable dogmas of an immutable God; round its neck hangs the millstone of an infallible book, which it worships in abject stupor as a Fetish; the multiplex windowless walls of its dungeon are adamantine Traditions and Creeds, Articles and Catechisms, Decrees of Councils, and Decrees of Popes. It is thus essentially stagnant and inert; it does comparatively but little useful work in the world; it is perishing of atrophy, brain and heart and limbs irretrievably wasting away. In this life it has no future; its future is in the life to come (or not to come!); its ideal is in the past, to which its vacant eyes are ever reverted in the dense gloom of its prison-cell. Its perfection was in the Primitive Apostolic Church, the Church of the immediate disciples of its Lord and Saviour; the Lord who has almost practically ceased to reign, the Saviour who has almost ceased to save. His example and teachings were regarded as being perfect; those who lived with him were thought to be blessed with these in unstinted abundance, in untainted purity. Flowing through the long centuries since, the slender rill has grown a mighty river, pouring itself through many branches into the sea; but how the purity of the fountain has been adulterated in its course!—it has been impregnated with the most various soils, mingled with affluents from

diverse regions, polluted with all the abominations of the cities that have arisen on its banks, and the ships that have sailed upon its waters. Such now is the Church of many churches; but the genuine Christianity thereof is limited to that thin thread of "the pure water of life" which has trickled down from the divine source, Jesus. It is, therefore, a fallacy to speak of the development of Christianity; if it were born full-grown and perfect, how could it admit of development? The great churches have swelled from it, but how? By unlimited dilution and adulteration. They have taken to themselves the things of this world, which are alien from true Christianity; they have allied themselves with the powers of this world, which are hostile to true Christianity; they have mixed reason with faith, science with Providence, time with eternity, earth with Heaven, wealth with poverty, comfort with asceticism, self-indulgence with self-renunciation; and this unclean composite slush is the Holy water of Ecclesiasticism, but assuredly it is not the "living water" of Christ. As well talk of developing a bottle of good wine into a barrel, by flooding it with gallons of ink, milk, gin, beer, and blood.

And this fallacy of the development of Christianity suggests another not less gross: the fallacy that former Freethinkers have been refuted, because modern Freethinkers as a rule take other grounds for attack. The shifting is always due, not to the repulse of the assailants, but to the retreat of the assailed. Speaking broadly, no Freethought assault on the entrenchments of Christianity has ever been baffled. But as the Christian champions were driven out of one line they withdrew to another; and the Freethinkers in following up their success of course had to abandon their old parallels. Sap and mine had done their work effectually there, and must be advanced against the next inner line. Driven out of this in turn, the Christians fell back on another, to be there duly beleaguered by the ever-advancing Secularists. Let us honestly confess that the Christians have shown immense ingenuity and industry in planning and throwing up entrenchment within entrenchment. Let us honestly admit that they have made a most stubborn defence, having such mighty power and enormous wealth to fight for. But the leaguer cannot last for ever. Storming one after another, steadily and irresistibly, these concentric lines, we must at length girdle and constrain the inmost citadel with a ring of fire and iron, not to be broken by sallies from within, not to be



broken by assaults from without, which, indeed, are not to be feared, since all the open country is friendly. Then the last hold of the Christian Church will have its choice of surrender or starvation; with the chance of some stray bombshell exploding her magazine, blowing casemates and garrison to the—fourth person in the Christian Godhead. If she has then any sense left, she will abdicate the usurped powers she has abused, disgorge the vast treasures she has stolen and obtained under false pretences, and come down to live human life with human kind, happier and better than she ever has been as Priestess of Delusions and Empress of Slaves.

The Primitive Church was the realized ideal of genuine Christianity. In so far as any of the modern Churches deviate from this archetype they are degenerate and corrupt, void of the essential spirit of Christianity. The first Christians, we are told, were filled with the Holy Ghost, had the gift of tongues, worked miracles, were delivered by angels, had all things in common, suffered all things for Christ's sake, believed that the end of the world was at hand as Jesus had assured them, cared nothing for patriotism or political freedom, had absolute faith, were opposed to the wise and prudent, but at one with babes, preferred celibacy to marriage; we are even told, though it seems incredible to our modern experience, that they continued together in one accord and loved each other. In so far as our modern professors resemble these, they are real Christians: in so far as they differ from these, not Christians at all. Thus the Pope and the Ultramontanes are consistent Christians in denouncing Rationalism, Liberalism, Science; in encouraging celibacy; in valiantly continuing to cultivate miracles, scornful of a sceptical world; and the Pope is signally consistent in enduring persecution and the horrible imprisonment of the Vatican, for the sake of the Church, and in the unlimited dust he shakes off his feet against those who refuse to receive him. The Catholic Apostolic Church of Edward Irving is consistently Christian in claiming and exercising the primitive endowments, such as the power to work miracles and edification by unknown tongues. The Shakers are consistent Christians in having all things in common; and the Peculiar People in depending upon Prayer and Providence instead of worldly Science for the cure of disease. On the contrary, all the Churches and Sects are inconsistent and un-Christian in so far as they add to or take from the

revealed Word of God, in so far as they compromise with the world and common-sense, in so far as they care for the mortal body and neglect the immortal soul, in so far as they depend upon work and science instead of prayer and providence, in so far as they are concerned with this life instead of the life to come.

Christianity is essentially inert, stagnant, with its ideal perfection in the past, Secularism is essentially active, progressive, with its ideal of a loftier and nobler mundane existence in the future. It is chained and riveted to no stark dogmas, it has no infallible Book like a millstone round its neck, it is imprisoned in no adamantine creeds and formulas. It has no decrees of Popes nor authority of Thirty-nine Articles to retard its intellectual advancement. It refuses to regulate its modern life by the dictums of by-gone days. Its mendacity is not fixed to the "rock" of the first century. On the contrary, Secularism is constantly growing in thought with the constant growth of Science, it is always open to the corrections of Experience, it holds no theories so tenaciously that it is not ready to fling them away directly facts contradict them. As time rolls on and the treasures of the universe are revealed by the activity of the human mind, Secular philosophy is ever ready to avail itself of this natural revelation. It assimilates gladly all it can find of good and true in the Bible, the Koran, the Vedas, as in Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare, without burdening itself with what it deems bad or false. It is ever increasing in action with the ever-increasing inter-communication between the various countries of the world, and the ever-increasing common interests of their inhabitants. Its life of life is unintermitted activity and progress.

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#### XIV. SECULARISM: ITS STRUGGLES IN THE PAST.

ALTHOUGH the name Secularism is comparatively new, the principles it embodies were recognized and influential long before the birth of Christianity. The old classical religions were in a large measure Secularistic, notwithstanding their myths, which, indeed, were more fanciful than gloomily superstitious; they deified the powers of nature, the great inventors and improvers of the useful and beautiful arts, and the heroes who compelled into orderly

peace the disorders of the world. They did not starve and degrade this life in subservience to a dubious hereafter. And the old classical sages, who dissolved the grossness of the myths into symbols and allegories of natural and moral philosophy, had carried far the cultivation of reason and science, before the blight of Christianity fell upon them, and kept them barren for more than a thousand years. In Alexandria, the great capital in which the intellect and culture of the East met and commingled with those of the West, there was immense literary and scientific activity long before and long after the Christian era. Libraries of hundreds of thousands of volumes were collected in the Museum and the Serapion; there were zoological and botanical gardens; experiments were vigorously carried on. The Alexandrians knew that the earth is a globe; they had correct ideas of the poles, the axis, the equator, the arctic and antarctic circles, distribution of climates, &c. They had invented a fire engine and a steam engine. The geometry of Euclid comes from them; the genius and achievements of Archimedes in pure and applied mathematics have probably never been surpassed; Ptolemy's "Treatise on the Mathematical Construction of the Heavens" remained unequalled and uncontroverted until the time of Copernicus. Christianity, with its contempt for this world, and the science of this world, with its fanatical visions of a new Jerusalem, coming in the clouds, swelled to a deluge and overwhelmed the fruitful fields of philosophy with ignorance and delusion. Constantine adopted it as a powerful engine of statecraft, and it was adapted to the popular gross Paganism in order to render it agreeable to the masses. No historical facts can be more certainly proved than that the greater part of the rites and symbols of Christianity came from the Pagan idolatry, and most of the subtleties of its theology from Pagan metaphysics. On the ground that all truth was contained in the infallible Word of God, the early fathers and their successors for centuries firmly held (and woe to him who overtly disagreed with them!) that the earth was a plane, with the sky for dome, and the sun, moon, and stars for lamps; with Heaven above the sky, and Hell beneath the earth. Their chronology and geology, in so far as they could be said to have any, were equally absurd, being based on the Book of Genesis. St. Augustine got Pelagius condemned, and the great truth established that there was no death in the world before the Fall of Adam and Eve! In Alexandria

itself Christianity celebrated its triumph over human reason by destroying the Serapion and scattering its incomparable library, and by murdering Hypatia. The sweet Saint Cyril, who instigated a Christian mob to this foul and brutal murder, was the same representative of piety who triumphed over the Nestorians, and foisted the worship of the Virgin into the Church; Mary and her son being but a Christian revival of the old Egyptian Isis and Horus. Faith being supreme, science lay in a long catalepsy. For fifteen hundred years Christendom did not produce a single astronomer. Even the pure mathematics, which needed no experiment or apparatus, were utterly neglected; the monks and hermits believing that they had better things to think of! The learned (by comparison) were chiefly occupied with miraculous legends, commentaries ingeniously obscuring the obscurities of the Bible, disputes about mysteries and dogmas of which none really knew or could know anything. The knights and nobles were always fighting among themselves, or plundering traders and artisans.

The Church, as it grew more powerful, grew more worldly and corrupt; Popes bribed and intrigued for election; two, and even three, at one time fought and cursed each other; bishops and abbots were great luxurious lords; monasteries and nunneries, which at first were the dungeons of starved and mutilated lives, grew proverbial for all voluptuousness; Rome was the common sink for the worst vices of all Europe. The peasantry and labourers were mere serfs, crushed in hopeless misery beneath feudal exactions and despotism. Their food was the food of hogs, their cabins were sties. As no laws of nature were acknowledged, no sanitary measures were thought of, though from the general filth and want dreadful plagues and famines were frequent; the Church got a rich revenue from shrine-cures, and relic-cures, and miraculous cures of all sorts, which were so beneficial to the people that it has been reckoned that in England, to take one example, the population scarcely doubled during the five hundred years succeeding the Norman Conquest. As for superstition, it was omnipotent; the air was supposed to swarm with devils and angels; witchcraft was thought to be so common that "witches" and "wizards" were always being put to death; relics commanded a fetish worship as degraded as exists among the lowest tribes of Africa.

Such was the beatific civilization established by Christianity (of

whose civilizing influences we hear so much) after a thousand years! Whence came the re-awaking of the spirit of Secularism, which has already brought us to a condition that, with all its drawbacks, is perfection itself compared with that of the holy Middle Ages, so dear to the sentimental faithful? Was it aroused by some growth of Christianity within, or was it stirred from without? It was stirred from without, for Christianity had no life in itself for the development. Mohammedanism, with all its faults and errors, kept itself pure from the base idolatry almost universal in Christendom, and fostered to a certain extent literature, science, and all the useful arts. Scholars tell us that the great Persian poets rank with the greatest poets of all time. The noble works of the Greek philosophers were translated into Arabic; hence the revival of learning and science in the West. The Moors in Spain were centuries ahead of the rest of Europe in every department of civilization. The Jews, whose treatment by Christians in the Middle Ages was simply fiendish, were well treated by the Moslems, tolerant of everything but image-worship, and developed trade, and were skilful physicians. We know too well how both the Moors and Jews of Spain were dealt with when the Christians had re-conquered that country. The Crusaders, who went out in half millions about twice a century, to recover the Holy Land from the accursed Paynims, were hordes of barbarians, strong only in brute strength and steel armour, compared with the liberal and cultivated Saracens. When Godfrey took Jerusalem in 1099, he and his chiefs wrote to the Pope that they had enjoyed a week's massacre of the Infidels, till "our people had the blood of the Saracens up to the knees of their horses." From this commerce between East and West came the revival of science, learning, and art in Europe, which made the introduction of the basis of Secular philosophy possible. The Greek and Latin classics were studied, and as learning spread beyond the monkish cells heresies sprang up, heresies which were the first faint germinations of Freethought amidst the mental slavery of the Church, which fiercely resisted every step of progress—physical, moral, and intellectual. The only good things the Church seemed to foster were the fine arts; and these were really fostered, not by its Christianity, but by its Paganism. For the Popes and Dignitaries of the *Renaissance* were mere pagans, and its lovely Madonnas and babes are but Venuses and Cupids with halos. As Mr. Ruskin candidly testifies

in the second volume of his "Stones of Venice": "I never met with a Christian whose heart was thoroughly set upon the world to come, and so far as human judgment could pronounce, perfect and right before God, who cared about art at all."

It is but fair to admit that the sceptical elements associated with the Reformation of the sixteenth century played an important part in preparing the way for the consolidation of Secular principles. Doubtless the religious reformers, in fighting for freedom, gave an impetus to Freethought. But, unfortunately, dauntless as they were, they lacked consistency. Having reached the pinnacle of freedom, they forgot the rugged path up which they had climbed. Having overcome the tyranny of their oppressors, they themselves persecuted those who desired to travel further on the road of progress. Hence, liberty was deprived of much of its valuable service through the influence of theology on the minds of men who commenced fighting the battle of freedom, but who had to yield to the dictates of a limited and exclusive faith. The Freethought of to-day has been stimulated by men who cared little or nothing for popular religion at a time when orthodoxy was at its lowest ebb. The last century, the years from 1700 to 1800, was the least religious, the least Christian century of the Christian era. It was the era of philosophy, of science and of Freethought; of Voltaire, of Rousseau and of Hume; of Black, with his discovery of the true principles of heat; of Dalton, with his discoveries in chemistry; of Watt, with his improvement of the steam-engine; of Hume, with his demonstrations of the absurdity of religion; and of Thomas Paine, with his clear exposition of the great fundamental principles of government. These are the men who have really assisted in the progress of the world. Their principles have sown the seeds of modern progress. \*To their efforts we are indebted for much of the prosperity of the nineteenth century. As Theodore Parker once said, the progressive philosophers of Christendom to-day are not Christians. The leaders of science and philanthropy in modern times are men who have the love of truth and the love of justice, who possess large and benevolent hearts, but who have no practical faith in Christianity.

How the Church encouraged Freethought in the past may be read in the lives of heretics and the histories of heresies: Abelard, Arnold of Brescia, Bruno, Vanini, Dolet, Berquin, Huss, Servetus, Latimer, Ridley; the Waldenses, Albigenes, Lollards, Coven-

anters. How she encouraged science may be seen in her condemnations of the works of Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo. First she resisted printing, then tried to control it with her *Index Expurgatorius*, her list of books forbidden to be read, being, in fact, a list of books best worth reading. She opposed insurance, inoculation, and vaccination; she condemned the use of anæsthetics in obstetrics as impiously tending to remove from women the curse imposed by God as recorded in Genesis. Geology, of course, she has resisted with all the little might left her, for its immense cycles of life make unutterably absurd her Biblical chronology of six thousand years. She has steadfastly done her best and worst to keep us back, and she has always been beaten in the long run; she could imprison, banish, and murder isolated men and women, and even multitudes of men and women; but she could not for ever imprison the human mind, or banish free thought, or murder our aspirations toward liberty and light. Yet, in justice to her, to prove how consistently and persistently she has struggled against progress, two instances may be cited. It has been reckoned that between 1481 and 1808 the Holy Inquisition punished 340,000 persons, of whom nearly 32,000 were "punished as gently as possible, and without effusion of blood," or, in common English, were burnt alive; and Buckle refers to a list of 60,000 Dissenters, mentioned by Jeremy White, who in the 17th century were persecuted by the Church of England, of whom no less than 5,000 died in prison.

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## XV. SECULARISM: ITS DEFINITE SERVICE TO MANKIND.

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It is urged by orthodox believers, as an objection to Secularism, that its principles have not accomplished the same amount of good for society that Christianity has. This comparison, however, is as unjust as the conclusion drawn therefrom is fallacious. In order that opposing principles shall produce equally beneficial results, it is necessary that both shall have the same opportunities and facilities for manifesting their respective worth. This has not been the case with the two systems under consideration; for while Christianity has had nearly eighteen hundred years to exhibit its value, the

public recognition of Secularism is but of comparatively recent date. Besides, Christianity has commanded all the advantages which wealth, influence, and patronage could bestow, while Secularism has had to struggle in the cold shade of opposition, against theological prejudices and religious persecutions. And history and experience testify to the fact that systems which appeal to the fears, the weaknesses, and the credulity of a people, have a better chance of temporary success, than those principles whose claims are submitted to the judgment of mankind. Hence, Secularists are less emotional, as a rule, in their advocacy than orthodox Christians are. Secularists seek to win with the aid of argument, not with the use of threats. They, believing in works of utility, pursue an even course of conduct, disregarding alike the perplexities of a mystic faith, and the allurements of the orthodox fancied life beyond the grave.

The question is, has Secularism achieved more useful results during its brief existence as an organized force than Christianity accomplished in a relative time of its primitive days? Unquestionably we answer in the affirmative. It is a favourite boast of orthodox exponents that Secularists have built no hospitals, erected no orphan asylums, and established no homes for the poor. It is true that in their distinctive organization Secularists have not had an opportunity to do this, but in their individual capacity they have always rendered valuable support to these useful agencies, and for hundreds of years Christians did no more. It is the height of folly to suppose that we are indebted to the Christian faith for the benevolence of the world. Professor Max Muller has shown that philanthropy and charity existed in abundance long before Christianity dawned upon the world, that the chief characteristic of Buddhist morality was charity, and that Buddha himself proclaimed the brotherhood of man and exhorted the rich to perform their duty by giving to the poor. That eminent and impartial author, R. Bosworth Smith, M. A., of Trinity College, Oxford, furnishes some valuable facts upon this subject in his work on Mohammedanism. "No Christian," says he, "need be sorry to learn, or be backward to acknowledge, that, contrary to what is usually supposed, two of these noble institutions [hospitals and lunatic asylums] which flourish now most in Christian countries . . . owe their origin and their early spread, not to his own religion, but to the great heart of humanity, which beats in two



other of the grandest religions of the world" ("Mohammed and Mohammedanism," p. 253). The writer then goes on to demonstrate that "hospitals are the direct outcome of Buddhism," and that lunatic asylums are the result of "Mohammedan influence." Lecky also observes that "no lunatic asylum existed in Christian Europe till the fifteenth century. The Mohammedans, in this form of charity, preceded the Christians" ("History of European Morals," vol 2, p. 94).

Thus it will be seen that these institutions are not fruit from the Christian tree. Such monuments of charity are supported by benevolence, which is a human instinct belonging exclusively to no one nation and to no one people. It is to be found wherever human nature exists. It obtained long before Christianity was heard of, and it will doubtless continue to benefit mankind when the Christian faith has shared the fate of other imperfect systems. If benevolence is a Christian instinct only, how is it that we find it so largely displayed by those who have no faith in Christianity? Voltaire was no Christian, yet his benevolent acts won words of praise from Lord Brougham. Robert Owen, who had no sympathies with the religions of the world, spent a life and fortune in doing good to his fellow-creatures. During the distress in 1806, caused by the embargo placed on the ports of America, this Freethought philanthropist paid £70,000 for wages while his mills were stopped, rather than the families of his work-people should suffer through the lack of employment. Surely, this was disinterested benevolence. The history of Stephen Girard, the Philadelphia merchant, indicates how "infidelity" and philanthropy may be allied. Girard was a "total disbeliever in the Christian religion." Notwithstanding this, during his life he gave the following proofs of his generous nature:—"He subscribed \$110,000 for purposes of navigation, \$10,000 towards the erection of a public exchange, and \$200,000 for railway enterprises. At his death he bequeathed \$30,000 to the Pennsylvania Hospital, \$20,000 to the deaf and dumb institution, \$10,000 to the public schools of Philadelphia, and the same amount to the orphan asylum. In addition to these bequests, Girard left large sums of money to the general poor, and for sanitary and social improvements." James Lick gave more than \$1,000,000 for scientific and benevolent purposes; James Smithson, an unbeliever, left half-a-million to found the Smithsonian Institute at Washington; Peter

Brigham gave \$3,000,000 for the purpose of establishing hospitals for the sick-poor of Boston; John Redmon gave \$400,000 to support free beds in the hospitals at Boston; William McClure gave half-a-million to aid the workingmen of Indiana. In Glasgow, Scotland, the Mitchell Library, with its bequest of £70,000, is the legacy of a Socialist and a Freethinker. Mr. George Baillie, of the same city, left over £18,000 to establish unsectarian schools, reading rooms, etc.; and the Haldan bequest, of Glasgow, and the Glen Institution were gifts of those who had no faith in the religion of the Churches. The fact is, benevolence is a human instinct born of human sympathy and stimulated by utility, which is pre-eminently a Secular principle.

It is alleged that the service of Secularism to the world has been impaired in consequence of its being partly negative in its advocacy. But its positive teachings should not be overlooked. Moreover, if negation be an error, Christianity is certainly not free from it, inasmuch as it negates all systems but its own, and even to that it is not consistently positive. But why this professed alarm at negative advocacy? Is negation to error a crime? Is the destruction of wrong useless to society? Is it no service to mankind, while shams are regarded as realities and falsehoods worshipped as truth, to pursue a negative course of action? Should we be wise in being positive to foolish conjectures about another world and injurious conduct in this? On the contrary, it is necessary, to prepare public opinion for the reception of advanced views by clearing the human mind of the weeds of error, that we may have some hope of successfully planting the flowers of truth. Instead, therefore, of believing indiscriminately in ancient creeds, the Secular advocate deems it wise to examine all faiths presented to him, and to seek to destroy what is contained therein that is inimical to modern improvement. The province of Secularism is not only to enunciate positive principles, but also to break up old systems which have lost their vitality, and to refute theologies which have hitherto usurped judgment and reason. Secularism relies on no dogmas, and pays no heed to religious theories about saving faith. It professes to know nothing about worlds beyond the tomb, and asserts, should there be any, their duties do not commence here. It declines to be dictated to by any priests, or to listen to the ridiculous stories about alleged sacred books. It recognizes no church but that of humanity, and knows no code of morals but that which is based

upon the happiness of man. Whatever interferes with general usefulness, Secularism regards as dangerous to the commonwealth. Hence the Secularist opposes orthodox Christianity, because he considers it antagonistic to the principles of utility. Secularism, however, is not limited to "cold negation." While as Secularists we are negative to the follies of theology, we are positive to the wisdom of humanity; while many of us reject what is said to pertain to the supernatural, we readily accept that which belongs to the natural, and deem it right to conform as far as possible to nature's laws. Experience proves that such obedience is the best guarantee against the many "ills that flesh is heir to." Thus Secularism inculcates the most positive duties of life, such as the study of physiology, by which man can learn to know himself; a knowledge of the chemistry of food, water, and air, whereby he may be able to maintain a healthy organization; an acquaintance with the mental nature of man, which will enable us to know how circumstances impel us in a certain direction, producing vice here, virtue there, morality at one time, and immorality at another; a consciousness of domestic obligations which will prompt men to provide by their own industry for those dependent upon them, and to seek to make provision by care and prudence for the evening of life.

Secular workers have found it necessary to till and prepare the soil of the human mind for the reception of the seed of truth which has slowly but surely developed into flowers of mental liberty. True liberty is not the offshoot of a day, but rather the growth of years. "Our Elliots, our Hampdens, and our Cromwells, a couple of centuries ago, hewed with their broad-swords a rough pathway for the people. But it was reserved for the present century to complete the triumph which the Commonwealth began." And this is just the century in which Secularism has manifested its activity. The battle of the freedom of the press and liberty of speech has been nobly fought, and practically won, but the victory cost Paine, Hone, Wright, Carlile, Williams, Hetherington, Watson, and many others their liberty, and imposed upon them privations which were keen to endure. For selling the *Poor Man's Guardian* only, upwards of 500 persons were thrown into prison. For publishing the "Age of Reason" in 1797, Williams suffered twelve months' imprisonment in Coldbath prison. In 1812, Daniel Isaac Eaton was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment and

the pillory, for the same grave offence ; and the following year, Mr. Houston was sentenced to be imprisoned for two years in Newgate, and fined £200, for publishing his book called "Ecce Homo." In October, 1819, Carlile was tried for publishing Paine's Theological Works, and Palmer's "Principles of Nature," and condemned for the first to Dorchester Gaol, and a fine of £1,000; and for the second to one year's imprisonment, and a fine of £500, and had to find security for good behaviour for himself in £1,000, and two securities in £100 each. His wife and sister were afterwards convicted of similar acts, and suffered heavy sentences. Upwards of thirty other persons, many of them journeymen of Mr. Carlile, and the rest small booksellers, were also subjected to fine and imprisonment in various degrees of severity. After this, Charles Southwell was imprisoned and fined £100, for publishing an article in the *Oracle of Reason*.

The Christian Church has ever persecuted those who differed from its teachings. This desire to promote free enquiry in its early history was exemplified in the memorable proclamation of the Christian Emperor Theodosius, in which he declared that the whole of the writings of Porphyry, and all others who had written against the Christian religion, should be committed to the fire. The writings of Celsus met with an equally *warm* reception, and for a proof that the same desire has existed in modern times, it is necessary not only to read the history of those Freethought pioneers of the last and early part of the present century, but also to remember that now, whenever Christians have the power, they close the halls against us, in order that we may not have the opportunity to promulgate the material for free inquiry.

Thus it will be seen that Secularism in the past has of necessity been principally destructive, having had to fight for its right of existence; till this was won it had no opportunity of exemplifying its constructive powers. It was reserved for a more recent date to formulate its principles into order and practical working. This is the pleasing task in which the Secular party is now engaged; and that is a work which we hope and believe will make Secularism an important factor in the training and elevation of the present generation.

## XVI. SECULARISM: ITS PRESENT TRIUMPHS.

WHAT benefits have accrued to us from the victories of our forefathers in the long and desperate conflict between Science and Religion? The Copernican system, perfected mathematically by Newton, in the words of Leibnitz, "robbed the Deity of some of his best attributes, and sapped the foundation of natural religion." For people who believed that the earth was the centre and chief of the universe, the sun and moon and stars being merely little lamps moving around it, and the sky a canopy above it, it was not ridiculous to conceive that beyond the sky there was a Heaven, beneath the flat earth a Hell; and that God was supremely interested in mundane affairs, and especially in the destiny of man, the noblest creature of this royal earth. But such conceptions are worse than ridiculous, they are idiotic, when we know that our globe is a speck so minute in the Immensity of Space, that "a full stop in this print, as seen by the naked eye at a distance of two feet, is several hundred times larger than the earth as seen from the sun;" while from the nearest of the fixed stars it would be quite indistinguishable with telescopes much more powerful than we possess. If God gave his Only Son for us animalcules on this microscopic spherule, what could he do for the Illimitable Universe? It is now seen that there is no above and no beneath; no place for Heaven or Hell. And we are not less insignificant in the boundlessness of Time than of Space. It is true that our race was in existence myriads of years before the date of birth entered in the family Bible, but other animals and the earth itself were in existence myriads of years before us; and as the condition of the earth is ever changing, all probabilities point to the prospect of the earth itself and other creatures being in existence myriads of ages after we are extinct. A hopeful look-out for our immortal souls!

While astronomy and geology have thus dethroned the earth and man, dissolved Heaven and Hell, and reduced the Book of Genesis to a jejune fable, the progress of all the sciences has impressed upon us the universality and immutability of law, the invariable sequences of events, thus slaying miracle, despatching Special Providence, and rendering prayer for celestial help a childish folly. Most of us look to medicine and sanitary measures for health, not to supplication and shrined relics. And in most of us

are included our so-called Christians, for, in spite of their dogmas, the greater part of their lives are conducted on the principles of Secularism, though generally it is a Secularism deprived of many of its better qualities. They shut down their brains on Sundays in church, but keep them open with their shops all the week. They are now willing to avail themselves of all the benefits of science, but beg us not to shock their bashfulness by exposing its principles and deductions in all their naughty nakedness.

If the question is asked, Is the present age practically Christian or Secular? to whom or to what shall we appeal for an answer? Shall we go to the Church of Rome? No; for its spirit is confessedly that of the past ages. Times change, governments alter, nations rise, civilizations come and go, but Catholicism remains the same. Its philosophy is still that of Thomas Aquinas; its creeds are still damnatory upon all who cannot accept them in every jot or tittle. Shall we appeal to the Anglican Church? No; for that Church refuses liberty of thought and speech to even her own children, as when she visited with excommunication, obloquy and reproach the endeavours of Bishop Colenso to throw the light of reason upon the hitherto dark cells wherein the Pentateuch was enshrouded from public inquiry. Not to either of these must we make application, but rather to the science, literature, philosophy and politics of this nineteenth century of the Christian era.

First, then, let us appeal to science. "Is the Bible scientifically true?" To the geologist we say, "Ought we to accept unquestioningly the Bible account of the Creation?" The answer is distinctly, "No!" To the anthropologist we say, "Is it true that all mankind have proceeded directly from one man and one woman?" The answer is distinctly, "No!" To the astronomer we say, "Is it likely that sun, moon, planets and stars were made in order to give light to the earth?" The answer is a decided "No!" "Is it," we ask, "true that the sun and moon stood still at the command of Joshua?" The astronomer says: "No; such a thing would, in the nature of things, have wrecked and destroyed the solar system." To the critical scholar, the man whose life has been devoted to the study of the age and the authenticity of the different portions of the Bible, we next apply to know whether these portions of the book were written by the men whose names they bear, and in the age wherein their alleged occurrences transpired. He, too, says: "No; these books are wholly human in their origin;

they have been antedated, interpolated, added to and taken from ; you must not accept them as being the very word of the very God."

So much for the characteristic of the age as represented by science. If we turn to literature, what does that tell us? That it is wholly emancipated from the trammels of theology, that the priest and the Index Expurgatorius no longer control it. There was a time when the literature of Europe was confined to works of theology and devotion. The first book, we believe, printed by Caxton was a Bible, then a Missal, and so on. Lives of the saints were abundant, telling of martyrs who, like St. Denis, walked about with their heads in their hands after they had been decapitated, of ten thousand virgins murdered at once, and other fictions even more incredible. All this, however, has been changed ; our literature now pays little or no heed to theology. True it is that Bibles are multiplied by the million ; that goody-goody tracts and pious story-books are circulated in all directions ; but these do not form the literature of the age. No ; that is the production of the leading spirits of the time—of its doctors, its political writers, its scientists, its lawyers, and its philosophers. Monthly, weekly—aye, and even daily, the Press teems with productions many of which are utterly at variance with the theological dogmas of the past.

It is admitted even by eminent divines that the phase of unbelief known as Agnosticism is a prominent characteristic of the age. Agnosticism declares that we have no knowledge of God ; that we cannot pretend to say that such a Supreme Intelligence exists ; and that we are absolutely precluded from affirming that the universe is really destitute of such a central *Nous*, or Highest Intelligence. "Canst thou," asked the writer of the grand old Semitic drama—"Canst thou by searching find out God?" This interrogation the honest Agnostic has put to himself, and after long and earnest exercitation of mind, after the intensest study of the world external and of the inner consciousness, he arrives at the conclusion that the question cannot be satisfactorily answered, either affirmatively or negatively.

The Philosophy of the age is far different to what it was when men made their ignorance the standard of belief. There was a time when even leeks, onions, and salt were worshipped as emblems of power and of the preserving influence. We have outgrown such idle Fetichism, and we believe that priestcraft has in the past

imposed these and all other theologies upon the world. It is not true that there is something in the heart of man which beats responsive to the figments of theologians. Fancy yourselves in a desolate island left to shift for yourselves from childhood, without either priests or Bibles, or any means of becoming acquainted with the thoughts and imaginings of other men in other regions. In such a situation is it to be supposed that people's hearts would prompt to the education of the doctrine of the Trinity, of the necessity of baptism, of regeneration, of the Apostle's Creed, or the Thirty-Nine Articles? Where would be natural religion in such a case? The probability is that, except people were strong-minded, if they were barbaric and ignorant, they would do as their distant predecessors in human history did—that is, fall down before and worship the thunder, the tornado, the sun, or the starry host. Each of these phenomena, then, would be endowed with a latent spirit, and, in process of time, have added to them one supreme Unknown Being, for whom would be invented a designation equivalent to our word God.

Orthodox Christians misrepresent the philosophy of the age, because they have been trained from infancy to attribute all things whatever to a being external to themselves. But the present age is more practical than any other by which it has been preceded: its energies are directed towards its own improvement.

The political world is conducted on Secular principles; scientific research is unfettered by theology, and is, therefore, Secular; and the practical ethics of modern society are utilitarian, and are, therefore, Secular. Happy, indeed, is it for the world that its politics are now finally severed from religion. The stronghold of the successful statesman to-day is the standard of utility. In his reasoning, his whole argument is made to rest upon this, the foundation of permanent progress. The career of Mr. Cobden in England, and Mr. Lincoln in America, were illustrations of the secularization of our modern public life." They reveal to us the path by which those must tread whose ambition it is to benefit their age. Had they lived a few hundred years ago, they might have built churches, or founded monasteries, or endowed colleges,—been the Wyckhams or St. Bernards of their time. Their lot was rather to legislate and agitate—to give food to the hungry, to undo heavy burdens, and to set the oppressed free; to remove impediments from the path of national progress, that human de-



velopment might be left to its own laws, to seek its welfare in its own way. Life thus became to them mundane, secular, rational, non-theological, spent amid the hard practical conflicts of politics, and aiming at nothing higher than the advancement of justice, righteousness, and liberty in the world."

Indeed, this ignoring Christian principles as a guide is not confined to public men. Christians themselves have long since ceased to be influenced in their every-day actions by the teachings of their Master. In his work upon "Liberty," John Stuart Mill says, "that not one Christian in a thousand guides or tests his individual conduct by reference to those (New Testament) laws." The reason why those laws cannot be obeyed in the nineteenth century is given in the words of Mill, that "the morality of Christ is in many important points incomplete and onesided, and that, unless ideas and feelings not sanctioned by it, had contributed to the formation of European life and character, human affairs would have been in a worse condition than they now are." The same writer tells us that, "other ethics than any which can be evolved from exclusively Christian sources, must exist side by side with Christian ethics to produce the moral regeneration of mankind." Buckle also in his "History of Civilization," after showing that until doubt began, civilization was impossible, and that the religious tolerance we now have has been forced from the clergy by the secular classes, states "that the act of doubting is the originator, or at all events, the necessary antecedent of all progress. Here we have that scepticism, the very name of which is an abomination to the ignorant, because it disturbs their lazy and complacent minds; because it troubles their cherished superstitions; because it imposes on them the fatigue of inquiry; and because it rouses even sluggish understandings to ask if things are as they are commonly supposed, and if all is really true which they from their childhood have been taught to believe. The more we examine this great principle of scepticism, the more distinctly shall we see the immense part it has played in the progress of European civilization. To state in general terms what in this introduction will be fully proved, it may be said, that to scepticism we owe that spirit of inquiry which, during the last two centuries, has gradually encroached on every possible subject; has reformed every department of practical and speculative knowledge; has weakened the authority of the privi-

leged classes, and thus placed liberty on a surer foundation ; has chastised the despotism of princes ; has restrained the arrogance of the nobles, and has even diminished the prejudices of the clergy. In a word, it is this which has remedied the three fundamental errors of the olden time : errors which made the people, in politics too confiding ; in science too credulous ; in religion too intolerant."

Thus, as the result of persistent Secular advocacy, we can congratulate ourselves upon having achieved many important triumphs. We have a freedom of speech unknown in Christian times. The press is more liberal than it ever was. Education is becoming more secular every year, and orthodox persecution dare not manifest itself as it did in the past. Hell is shut up, and the devil is practically dead, while the churches have left their old moorings and are seeking to adapt their teachings to the Secular requirements of the age.

We are told that the ethics of Jesus Christ are contained in the four Gospels, and *to the four Gospels they have ever been confined*. Like the old-fashioned silk dress of the old-fashioned cottager, they have always been kept locked up, as being excellent to look at but too fine for daily use. No man has ever succeeded, despite his protestations, in loving his enemy as himself ; no man has ever turned the second cheek to the ready blow of the smiter ; no man has systematically neglected himself out of a regard for the prosperity of his enemies. Indeed, the very heroes of the Bible never did this. David cursed his persecutors ; the Apostles called down vengeance from heaven upon Ananias, Sapphira, and Simon Magus ; Paul delivered over one of his enemies to Satan, "that he might learn not to blaspheme ;" and generally throughout Christian history we look in vain for the charity which beareth and endureth all things,

In our own age the real test of goodness of conduct is its usefulness to the world. Though we do not make loud pretensions of loving those who hate us, the whole gist and scope of our morality is directed towards promoting the welfare of society by means which will also secure the welfare of its component elements. This is utilitarianism, not theology ; it is the recognition of the fact that the thing called Duty is a something between man and man, not man and God. In our mutual relationship we find the natural encouragement and motive-power for the display of every virtue. The theory of immortality has nothing whatever to do with our prudence, our courage, our honesty, or our purity of character.

The stringent, adamant necessities of our existence imperatively require the exercise of these virtues. Would we live secure from peril of death by starvation, of penury the most abject, we must prudently provide against the danger. Would we preserve our national independence and individual freedom, we must be prepared to defend these against every adversary. Would we wish to be ensured against false dealing and breach of faith, we must ourselves deal honestly with all men. Would we keep a "sound mind in a sound body," would we preserve our wives and daughters from insult, we must keep our passions under restraint, and show by our own example the wisdom of so living. Upon prudence, truth, courage, honesty, and temperance is based the whole edifice of modern civilization. Without them we could not exist except as barbarians; they must always be the very corner-stones of societarian morality.

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## XVII. SECULARISM IN THE FUTURE.

IF ever since the *Renaissance* Science, Art and Freethought have steadily advanced in spite of all opposition, and the power of the Church has steadily decreased; if Naturalism, in the weak infancy of its birth, has not only defeated all the attempts of Supernaturalism to crush it, but has wrested more and more its rightful domains from the usurper; we cannot doubt the issue of the conflict between Secularism and its foes now that the former is grown to vigorous youth and the latter are falling into senile and anile decrepitude. If Hercules even in his cradle could strangle venomous serpents, he would have small fear of the brood when he was in his prime, and they were fangless with age. With the impetus of our long advance, with the growing momentum of our enlarging mass and accelerating speed, our progress as Secularists in the future, so far as human foresight can extend, must be yet more rapid and irresistible. We have plenty of work before us, and work abounding with difficulties; but if the past is the prophet of the to-come, we have every encouragement and augury of success in undertaking it. If we and our immediate successors do not signally triumph, it will be through our lack of courage, or energy, or wisdom, or of all three; for the triumph of our principles is sure as soon as they are worthily championed.

In the first place, we must continue our effort to educate the masses of the people, kept ignorant all these centuries back by the mental tyranny of Ecclesiasticism. The education on which we should insist must be free, compulsory, universal, and Secular. Those who want their children taught some religion can arrange for this at home, or elsewhere, out of school hours; the teaching for which the nation provides must be of subjects which all the nation recognizes as useful, and these subjects are strictly secular. We have to remove all legal and other disabilities founded on sex. Although the Christians are fond of boasting that their religion has elevated woman, we know that the New Testament, as well as the Old, distinctly proclaims her inferiority and subservience to man. With our belief that all human beings have an equal right to the full development and the free exercise of their faculties, we are bound to open to women as to men all spheres of activity. Women will succeed in those for which they are fit, they will fail in those for which they are not fit; it is waste of time to discuss beforehand their fitness or unfitness for this or that; it is absurd as it is unjust to hinder them from trying at what they will.

We have to promote sanitation in every direction, the provision of pure air, pure water, pure food, sufficient house-room for even the poorest classes. We have to do our utmost to extend and improve the cultivation of Science in general, and all the useful arts which are nurtured by Science; and especially we have to further both in theory and practice, the doctrines of Sociology, in order that the just relations of man to man and society may be determined and established in fact, and the present anarchy and hostility between the classes of the privileged and unprivileged may be destroyed, and merged into a free and fraternal harmony. We have to endeavour to convince our fellow creatures that the real object of existence should be to learn how to live well; and that this can only be accomplished by developing our physical organization, cultivating our moral sense, and training our intellectual faculties. We have to enforce the truth that all the real wants of human nature are comprised under the heads of the physical, moral, intellectual, social, political, domestic, and emotional requirements of mankind; and that all these requisites are supplied by Secularism without the aid of any theology.

A few special words may be addressed to our own party, to those who are consciously and avowedly Secularists, and profess them-

selves anxious to extend the principles and practice of Secularism. We are stronger than we ever were, not only in ourselves, and in the comparative freedom with which we can advocate our doctrines, but also in the increased and ever-increasing amount of powerful and intelligent opinion in favour of our leading principles, though not yet consciously or avowedly Secularistic, and in the diminished and ever-diminishing power of the Supernaturalism and despotism to which we are opposed. It rests with ourselves to make the most of our advantages. In the first place, we must combine more generally, organize more thoroughly, work together more cordially, than we have ever yet done. We cannot exercise our due influence, we cannot as we ought hearten ourselves and dishearten our adversaries without union and co-operation. The very essence of practical Secularism is social, not isolated, effort; as our end is freedom, education, health, and happiness in common, we must strive in common for this end. In many towns there are scattered Secularists who do little or nothing for the cause, while, if they formed societies, they could do much. Of course it is not required that any man should surrender or suppress his convictions on essential points for the sake of conformity with his brethren. But all genuine Secularists have so much that is essential in common, that they can honestly act together, and so multiply their strength, both for attack or resistance. Our devotion to mental, moral, social, and political freedom should surely enable us to live together in a brotherhood and sisterhood more cordial and intimate than can be dreamed of by those whose main object is selfish prosperity in this life, or selfish beatitude in a life to come, or the dual selfishness of the one and the other.

Again, even where we have Societies, they are usually much too restricted in their scope. Lectures, discussions, and reading are very valuable, and indeed necessary, but it should ever be remembered that if a man simply hears Freethought lectures, or reads Freethought books himself, leaving his family to gratify their social instincts in ordinary society, his children will probably grow up saturated with the prejudices and superstitions from which he has been freed. We want the wives, children, and other relatives of our members to be interested and delighted in our work. To this end our Societies must be not only schools of instruction, but also resorts for innocent recreation. We need tender hearts no less than hard heads, and must cultivate warm feeling as well as

cool reasoning. Secularism is little or nothing worth unless it be carried out in practice, unless it pervade the whole private and public life of those who profess it. There are men—we all know such—who, because they have been delivered from the fetters of Supernaturalism; because they have been enabled to learn that the Bible is, like any other book of ancient times, a mixture of truth and error, of good and bad; because they see clearly the injustice of certain laws which bear heavily on themselves; flatter themselves that they are very wise and distinguished men, far superior to the vulgar folk about them, that they are shining paragons of Secularism; while remaining as selfish and immoral as before they were thus partially enlightened. Such men are not Secularists at all, they are the opprobrium of Secularism. The genuine Secularist, ever working toward the greatest good of the greatest number, in the light of the clearest wisdom he can acquire, must be a brave, kindly, sincere and just man. His Secularism will be felt as a radiating blessing, first and most warmly and brightly in his own home, and farther off, in proportion to their distance, by all his neighbours. If a man neglects and ill-treats his wife and children, if he is idle and intemperate, if he cheats in trade or scamps his work, if he is tyrannical to those beneath him and obsequious to those above him, if he is jealous and envious, given to slander and falsehood, if he seeks only or mainly self-gratification, whether of appetite or vanity or pride, we must distinctly disavow him as a Secularist, however cleverly he may write, however fluently he may speak, against the doctrines adverse to our own. Secularism must no longer be charged, without protest, with the vices and lack of self-respect of persons who are really Nothingarians—men who are sceptical to the tenets of Christianity, but who never essay to regulate their every-day conduct in accordance with the moral teachings of practical Secularism. We can only achieve a real and enduring triumph, and can only deserve to achieve it, by approving ourselves not simply more intelligent, but also more virtuous, than our opponents, more courageous, honest, humane, zealous, and loving.

There is a large class of passive as distinguished from active Secularists; persons so circumstanced that they dare not, or think they dare not, avow themselves publicly, fearing to wound and estrange friends, or bring injury upon themselves. The cases of such persons vary so extremely and indefinitely that no peremptory

counsel can be given applicable to the majority, or even to a large number, save such as would be founded on the lofty but impracticable supposition, that all men alike must be and can be heroes, and, if the occasion calls, martyrs. One consideration, however, can safely be urged upon all such persons. They are much more numerous than they themselves suppose; so numerous that, if they all took courage to declare their principles, they would find themselves far too powerful to suffer from the social obloquy and ostracism from which they shrink severally in their isolation. Every Secularist is certainly required to show more vigour and courage than the vulgar bondsmen of creeds and conventionalities. We are already reaping rich harvests from the fields sown in the tears and blood of the heroes and martyrs who went before; it surely behoves us, to whom by their efforts the task has been rendered so much easier and less dangerous, to plant and sow more abundantly, for the reaping and gathering of those who shall come after. This is our just debt to our ancestry, which can only be paid to our posterity. If our forefathers dared undaunted the prison and the scaffold and the stake, when the ultimate triumph of the Good Old Cause was so remote and dubious, we must be degenerate indeed if we cannot dare some annoyance of ignorant contumely, some injury to our business or social prospects, when its final victory is so much nearer and so assured.

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#### XVIII. SECULARISM: SUMMING UP.

IN concluding an exposition of the teachings of Secularism, it may be of service to the reader to briefly summarize the leading features of Secular philosophy. Unfortunately it is too evident that throughout society there exist exceedingly imperfect ideas regarding man, his duties and requirements. The search for truth and the acquirement of a practical acquaintance with the obligations of life are too frequently confined to the few, while the many neglect to realize the real advantages of existence. Why is this? What has produced such misconception of the object of human effort? The

cause perhaps is not difficult to discover. It is apparent in the radical evil underlying the whole of the theological creeds of Christendom—namely, a lack of the desire to concentrate attention on the present. The term “present” is here used as having reference to the life we now experience, entirely apart from considerations of any existence “hereafter.” Accepted in this Secular sense, it is of course a duty to take thought for the morrow. Such a prospective aspiration is demanded by prudence, and justified by experience. But the mistake of 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 future 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 of the future, it is really the master of the present. The proceedings of bygone times are thus made the standard of appeal in this; 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 recognize 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. Observing this defect, Secularism asserts that immediate positive work is more valuable than either retrospective or prospective faith. And rather than worship mysteries, and venerate the unknown, a Secularist strives to avail himself of the utility and value of the realities which lie around him.

Secularism is a term selected to represent principles having reference to the existence and necessities of mankind on earth, neither affirming nor denying an existence “beyond the grave.” Secularists recognize this life as an indubitable fact; should there be another awaiting mankind in the future, all notions of such a state must, we think, be mere conjectures. Therefore, we deem it more useful to concentrate our efforts upon the *known* life—that which really is—seeking to realize its value,



physically, morally, and intellectually, as fully as possible, thereby making the best of existence, and also preparing for the highest enjoyment of any supposed life hereafter, if future experience should demonstrate its reality. In reference to certain theological views professed by the Christian world, the statement of the "Founder of Secularism" is here appropriate. "Many of us," he observes, "are not able to believe in the existence of a Supreme Being, distinct from nature; but we do not exact from members of Secular Societies an agreement in opinion on this theological question. We associate for practical purposes on the wide field of Secularism, outside the abstract question of the existence of Deity. Many of us do not hold the doctrine of the immortality of the soul; but neither do we exact agreement on this point from our friends. We seek the co-operation of all who can agree to promote present human improvement by present human means. The existence of God, the future condition of man, are questions which five thousand years of controversy have not settled; we, therefore, leave them open to the solution of intelligence and time; they shall not be with us barriers which shall divide us from our brethren; we will not embarrass human affairs with them. Morality, that system of human duties commencing from man, we will keep distinct from religion, that system of human duties assumed to commence from God" (Mr. Holyoake's debate with Rev. B. Grant in 1853, page 7).

The teachings of Secularism are:—(1) That, as this life is the only one of which we have any knowledge, we should seek to promote, by material means alone, the physical, moral, and intellectual condition of society. By material means we understand that which is calculable in its operations, being the very antithesis of what is called spiritual agencies. This, of course, includes the proper use of every intellectual faculty. (2) That personal excellence and general usefulness in human affairs ought to be regarded as being of greater importance than the consideration of theological speculations and the adherence to alleged supernatural teachings, and should be the chief objects of human solicitude and labour. (3) That the basis of all conduct is the temporal well-being of the people, and the object of all action is the acquirement and practice of wisdom, truth, temperance, fortitude, and justice. (4) That reliance upon the discoveries of science, and sharing in the benefits arising from their application to the needs of mankind, are preferable to reposing trust

in theological faiths and the teachings of the Bible. (5) That the motive prompting to action should be the attainment of the highest possible individual and general happiness on earth, not the desire for personal enjoyment in the alleged heaven of Christianity. (6) That, if a just God exist, and if a judgment day ever arrives, honest inquiry, earnest conviction, integrity of character, and fidelity to principle should secure as warm an approval and as good a reward for the Secularist who rejects the faith of Christendom as could be obtained by the Christian who is able to believe in the teachings of the New Testament. (7) That to select the good and reject the bad in any or all religions is a right that any and every person should be allowed honestly and conscientiously to exercise, without incurring any disadvantages here, or any punishment in any possible hereafter.

As to the "theory of the universe," Secularism allows its adherents to form what opinion upon this matter the individual deems in harmony with the evidence before him or her. Experience proves that uniformity of opinions upon speculative topics cannot obtain. All persons are left, therefore, to decide for themselves according to the "light before them." We impose no ancient conclusion as the limit and boundary upon modern thought. If men and women will work, irrespective of theological dogmas, for the good of society in this life, they are practical Secularists. Secularism is not necessarily Atheism or Theism; its principles are broad enough to admit either Theists, Atheists, or Pantheists within its ranks.

The Secular code of morals is based upon the principle of utility; it enjoins self-discipline, the love of truth, fidelity to conviction, acquirement and application of knowledge, fortitude in good conduct, temperance, magnanimity, justice, and considerateness for the rights, comfort, and welfare of others.

It is frequently asked: From a Secular standpoint, (a) What is the source of moral obligation? (b) What is the nature of a moral action? (c) What are the sanctions of morality? (d) What are the incentives to moral conduct? The answer is clear and decisive:—(a) Human nature is the source of moral obligation. The more that nature is improved by experience and cultivation the better and stronger will be the moral source. (b) Those actions only are moral which are beneficial to mankind, and which add to the welfare of society, both individually and collectively. (c) The sanctions of morality are the protection of the individual and the

debt he owes to the community for its protective service. (*d*) The incentives to moral conduct are personal excellence and the general happiness and well-being of the community.

Secularists are often invited to indicate what Secularism has to offer to mankind for their good that Christianity cannot consistently proffer? To which we reply: (1) The right to reject, without peril or condemnation, whatever appears to us to be erroneous in any or all of the religions of the world. Secularism defends this right; Christianity condemns it. "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16: 16.) (2) The full liberty to regard Christianity as being merely the outgrowth of the human mind. Secularism grants this. The Church denies it in contending that Christianity is a Divine system, and that its founder was a part of the Godhead. To those who do not obey Christ's Gospel he will come "in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them" (2 Thess. 1: 8). (3) The advantage of believing the Bible to be of human origin in estimating its contents by its intrinsic value and not by its supposed "Divine" authority. Orthodox Christianity does not concede this. If it did, its "court of appeal" would be at once gone as an infallible "authority." (4) The absence of any fear of being punished "hereafter" for the legitimate exercise of reason in its true sphere of Secular Freethought. Christianity does not permit this, inasmuch as it enforces uniformity of belief, demanding all mankind to accept Christ as their Saviour. In the case of rejecting this demand, Christianity says: "For whosoever will deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 10: 33). (5) The acting upon the opinion that the principal attention of man should be given to "time," and not to "eternity." The world practically acts upon this principle. If this is denied let it be shown (*a*) that national progress is the result of aught else but the devotion of man's principal attention to the things of "time;" and (*b*) that such attention renders a person less fit for any possible "eternity." (6) That science is of more value to man than faith in the alleged supernatural. This is the very opposite to the following New Testament teachings:—"Take no thought for your life;" "Labour not for the meat which perisheth;" "For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" "Man is saved by faith without works;" "Set your affections on things above, not on things

on the earth;" "For the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God;" "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the Church.....and the prayer of faith shall save the sick;" "Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known unto God;" "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things [material wants of man] shall be added unto you."

It is necessary to correct the erroneous orthodox allegation that the positive teachings of Secularism have been purloined from Christianity. We claim that the present life is the only one of which we have any knowledge; that well-being in this world is our highest duty; that the only means we can rely upon to secure this object are knowledge, wise action, and experience; that conduct should be judged by its issues on earth, and that science is of more practical value than belief in any supernatural being. Surely these teachings are positive enough; but where are they to be found in the New Testament? Again, the Secular motive for good conduct is the happiness of the individual and the welfare of the human race in *this* life, while the motive power of Christianity is supposed to pertain to some *future* life. Moreover, Secularism teaches positively that no apprehension should be entertained of punishment after death for disbelief during life. Christianity alleges the very opposite of this in its threatenings of eternal punishment in hell. For New Testament proof of this the reader is referred to Matthew 13: 42; 25: 30 and 46; Mark 9: 44; Revelation 14: 10, 11; 21: 8. The orthodox believer replies to this by saying, "You can reject any truth without suffering the consequences of such rejection." Just so; but mark the difference in the two cases. If you reject a Secular truth, the consequences are confined to this life, and they follow in time to make reformation possible. Not so with Christianity; in it there are not mere consequences, but punishment, to be inflicted for "ever and ever," when all opportunity for improvement has passed.

Equally desirable is it to correct the fallacy of our opponents in reference to Secular responsibility, and what they term the "freedom of the will." Secularism does recognize man's responsibility, but by that term it means that we should deem it our duty to consider the effect of our conduct upon society, and that it is incumbent upon us to act with a view of promoting, not to injure, the welfare of society. Such responsibility, however, is confined to this life.

and its extent depends upon the conditions and position of the individual, and his relation to the general community. Of course, where there is *no* power to choose, there can be no responsibility. Hence we fail to harmonize the doctrine of predestination and those passages in the New Testament which speak of the "elect," and that man of himself can do no good thing, with the theological notion of responsibility.

Secularism does not accept the "free-will" doctrine as taught by the churches. The "will" is, like all things else, an effect as well as a cause. It certainly counts for something, indeed for much, in human actions; but then it has itself sprung from, and is conditioned by, organization, environment, and other causes which it is powerless to control. Man's motives do not arise from his volition; on the contrary, they govern the will. Man is free, of course, in a sense—that is, he is free to act in accordance with his desires; but these desires act independently of volition. And this is all the freedom that is possible, and it is all that any rational person should demand. No man wants freedom to do that which he has no inclination to do, or to act contrary to his desires. His freedom lies in his capacity to obey his impulses; but these impulses the will has no power to create. The will is not an originating cause, but itself an effect, the result of a complication of circumstances, such as external surroundings, the condition of the brain, temperament, age, sex, and heredity. To say that the will is free in the sense that Arminians hold it to be, is to state that which is paradoxical. For, if a person has the power to call up a desire by the will, it is certain that some prior desire induced him to do so. What, therefore, caused that desire? Suppose one individual says he wills to do a thing, and he does it: he must have had an inclination, or he would not have thus willed and acted. Some inclination must, therefore, precede the will, and, clearly, the will cannot be the cause of that which precedes itself in point of time, and to which, in fact, it owes its existence.

In our Secular advocacy we are being constantly met with the statement that there is a "religious instinct in human nature," and we are asked, How does Secularism propose to satisfy this? Simply, by allowing every individual to worship according to his or her own desire, providing their action does not interfere with the rights of others. Religion, in its truest sense, is not the monopoly of the orthodox party. The Christian churches have robbed religion of

its legitimate etymological meaning and invested it with ecclesiastical creeds and dogmas, thus limiting its proper signification and also depriving it of its best and loftiest influence. With the thoughtless masses religion is accepted as the teacher of fear, dependence and blind faith, instead of being regarded as the inspirer of love, self-reliance and active service. The cross of Calvary is erected as an emblem of redemption, making its devotees blind to the lesson of history and experience, that the only redeemer of mankind is man. Accepting religion apart altogether from theological associations, it is quite possible to harmonize it with Secularism. Of course, Secularism is thoroughly antagonistic to orthodox Christianity; but, then, there are ample means, separate altogether from this faith, of satisfying every instinct of human nature. Probably, if this alleged "religious instinct" were thoroughly examined, it would be found to consist principally of veneration, fear, wonder, hope, and gratitude. These, however, are purely natural faculties, and the mode of their manifestation depends upon birth, education and locality. What would satisfy a Turk's "religious instinct" would not suit a devotee of the Greek Church, and there is a marked difference between the religious gratification of a Hindoo and that of a European. The Catholic would regard the Quaker's religious satisfaction as very inadequate, while the Primitive Methodist would view that of the Unitarian with equal disfavour. It is the misapplication of these human faculties, through ignorance of natural laws and the power of the priesthood that has perverted them from their legitimate functions. Secularists do not aim to destroy any human instinct; they wish rather that it should be properly understood, and that in its development it should be directed by wisdom and controlled by reason and science.

It is frequently charged against Secularism that it destroys the principle of the brotherhood of man. Such, however, is not the case. The foundation of the brotherhood of man, from a Secular point, is the recognition and application of the just principle that individuals should not work merely for their own good, but also for the well-being of general society, and that all mankind should have an opportunity of sharing in whatever conduces to their highest welfare. We do not accept the term "brotherhood of man" in its societarian application, in the sense that all mankind came from one parent, but rather as manifesting, in a general manner, that

feeling of love that exists in the domestic circle, and which is, or should be, mutual between brothers. If we adopt the theological application, what can be said of the conduct of an assumed Father of all, who could purposely arrange one race to be superior to and above all others on the face of the earth? who could decree that some of his children should be born and kept as slaves to others of his children? of a Father who could love one child and hate another before either of them was born? of one who gave to millions of his children such organizations that up to the present moment they have been wholly unable to understand and to appreciate the advantages enjoyed by a favoured few? and, finally, of a Father who should so order his family arrangements that the vast majority of his children should be lost forever?

"Secularism," as Mr. George Jacob Holyoake has said in his admirable work, "The Trial of Theism," "is a recognition of causation in nature, in science, in mind, morals, and manners. In electing its own sphere, however, it will combat without contemning others. It may also omit much that it respects, as well as that which it rejects—but to omit is not to ignore. The solution of the problem of union can only be effected by narrowing the ground of profession, and widening that of action—it requires to collect sympathies without dictating modes of manifestation.

"Secularism teaches the good of this Life to be a rightful object of primary pursuit, inculcates the practical sufficiency of Natural Morality apart from Atheism, Theism, or the Bible, and selects as its method of procedure the promotion of human improvement by material means.

"Secularism holds that the Protestant right of private judgment includes the moral innocency of that judgment, whether for or against received opinion; provided it be conscientiously arrived at—that the honest conclusion is without guilt—that though all sincere opinion is not equally true, nor equally useful, it is yet equally without sin—that it is not sameness of belief but sincerity of belief which justifies conduct, whether regard be had to the esteem of men or the approval of God.

"With respect to the service of humanity, deliverance from sorrow or injustice is before consolation—doing well is higher than meaning well—work is worship to those who accept Theism, and duty to those who do not.

"As security that the principles of Nature and the habit of

Reason may prevail, Secularism uses itself and maintains for others these rights of reason. The Free Search for Truth, without which it is impossible. The Free Utterance of the result, without which the increase of Truth is limited. The Free Criticism of alleged Truth, without which conscience will be impotent on practice.

“A Secularist sees clearly upon what he relies as a Secularist. To him the teaching of Nature is as clear as the teaching of the Bible, and since, if God exists, Nature is certainly His work, while it is not so clear that the Bible is—the teaching of Nature will be preferred and followed where the teaching of the Bible appears to conflict with it.

“All pursuit of good objects with pure intent is religiousness in the best sense in which this term appears to be used. The distinctive peculiarity of the Secularist is, that he seeks that good which is dictated by Nature, which is attainable by material means, and which is of immediate service to humanity, a religiousness to which the idea of God is not essential, nor the denial of the idea necessary.

“Going to a distant town to mitigate some calamity there will illustrate the principle of action prescribed by Secularism. One man will go on this errand from pure sympathy with the unfortunate; this is goodness. Another goes because his priest bids him; this is obedience. Another goes because the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew tells him that all such persons will pass to the right hand of the Father; this is calculation. Another goes because he believes God commands him; this is piety. Another goes because he perceives that the neglect of suffering will not answer; this is utilitarianism. But another goes on the errand of mercy, because it is an errand of mercy, because it is an immediate service to humanity; and he goes with a view to attempt material amelioration rather than spiritual consolation; this is Secularism, which teaches that goodness is sanctity, that Nature is guidance, that reason is authority, that service is duty, that Materialism is help.

“Speaking mainly on the part of Secularists, it is sufficient to observe—Man does not live by egotisms, hopes, and comforts—but rather by self-renunciation, by service and endurance. It is asked, will Secularism meet all the wants of human nature? To this we reply, every system meets the wants of those who believe



