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SECULARISM,

‘THE ONE THING NEEDFUL

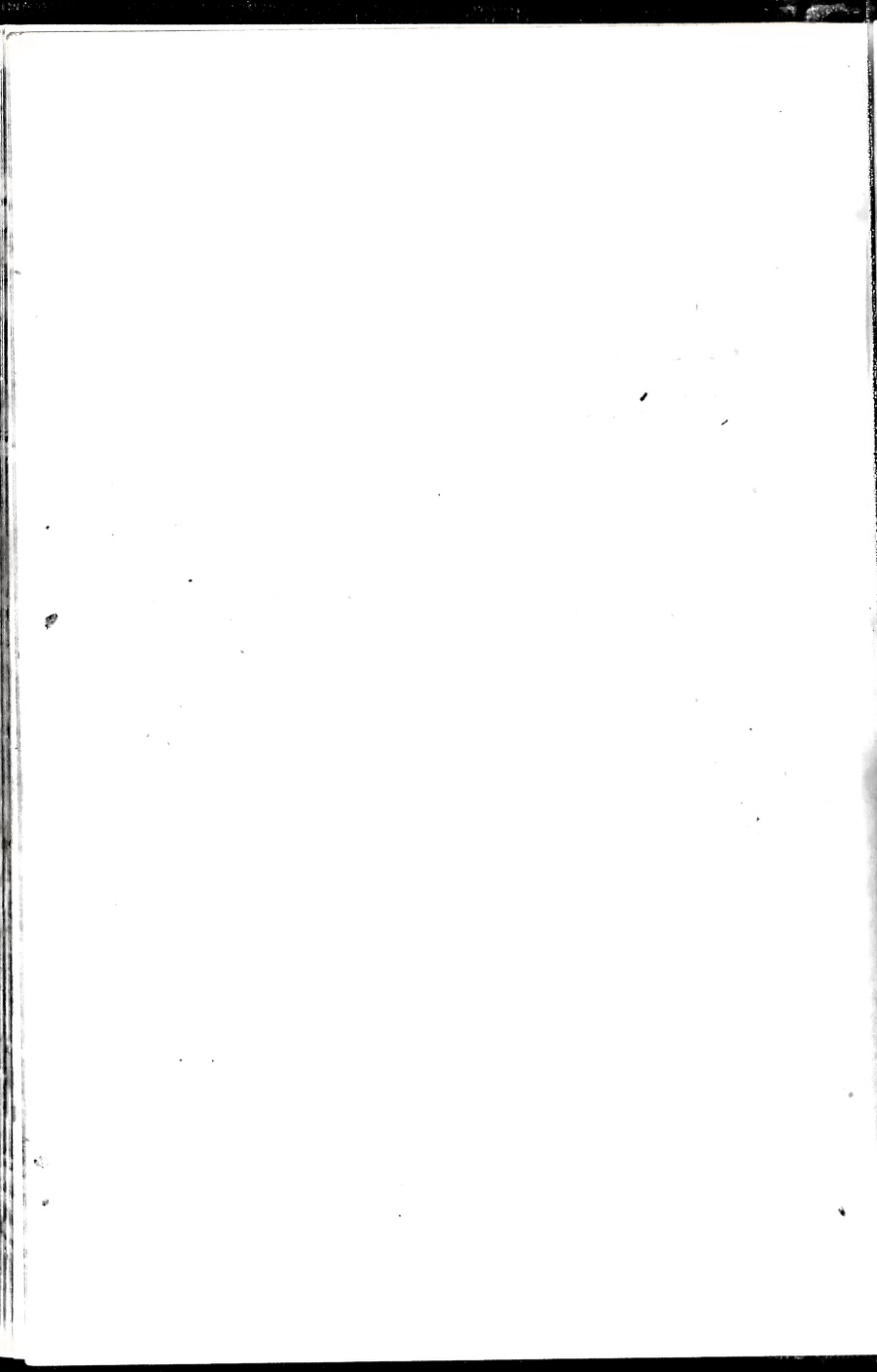
BY JOHN WATTS.

‘Theology, as dealing with the confessedly incomprehensible, is not the *basis* for human union, in social, or industrial, or political circles.’—PROFESSOR NEWMAN.

‘The grand error of life is, that we look too far, we scale the heavens, we dig down to the centre of the earth for systems, and we forget ourselves. Truth lies before us; it is the highway path.’—STERNE.

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SECULARISM, 'THE ONE THING NEEDFUL.'

A PROMINENT feature of man's mind is the desire to fathom the Unknown. Nature, ever revealing secrets to man, still leaves him in anxious solicitude for additional information. Geology may make us familiar with the crust of the earth, Astronomy may reveal the revolutions of the planets, Electricity may astonish us with Nature's inherent power, Physiology may teach us the structure of our bodies, and Psychology the constitution of our minds; but still we feel our knowledge incomplete, and so strive on for further information. This aspiration is necessary and legitimate, only dangerous when misdirected or uncontrolled. It is often mis-called the 'religious sentiment,' and systems of theology are propounded in accordance therewith. But if one fact be more apparent than another concerning man's history, it is, that all systems of theology have perverted the noblest attributes of our nature, and retarded, to a considerable degree, our advancement and our happiness. Ignorance, strife, hatred, and war, have been the fruits, in all known ages and countries, of systems of theology, built on the *false supposition* of a 'religious element' in man. The evils arise, not so much from the supposition of man, that he *has* this 'religious element,' as from the theological systems built thereon. If we take Christianity, which, in this country, is the latest and most powerful system of theology, we find it to contain the elements of discord, hatred, and persecution, coupled, it is true, with noble sentiments, just precepts, and useful illustrations—the good ones emanating from man's unperverted nature, and the evil ones arising from the *theology* of the system. Who can look without sorrow on the fate of past movements for man's amelioration, witnessing the efforts, advice, and assistance of good, useful men, disregarded or rejected, simply because they were known to be disconnected with theological systems?—a prejudice arising from the following New Testament commands and statements:—'Be ye not unequally yoked together with *unbelievers*;.....what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?' (2 Cor., vi., 14, 15.) 'If any teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, *even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ*,.....he is proud, *knowing nothing*.....of *corrupt mind*, from such *withdraw* thyself.' (1 Tim., vi., 3-5.) 'He that believeth not on the Son shall not see life, but the *wrath of God* abideth on him.' (John, iii., 36.) When we find these passages, among others of a similar tendency, put forth as the word of God, urging men not to join with unbelievers, calling them men of corrupt minds, knowing nothing, upon whom is the wrath of God, can we wonder that Christians, who make the Bible their guide, should oppose all reforms of 'unbelievers,' and persecute all those not able to see the truth, as it *might* have been in Jesus? Or, can we expect legitimate progress until these *sectarian conditions* are superseded by the holier conditions of man's moral worth, and the useful tendency of all reforms?

Secularism, I think, offers this advantage, and hence its adaptation to the requirements of man's progressive nature. The term *Secularist*, however, is often adopted by those who fail to perceive its full meaning. Hence we have it confounded with Atheism. Were it Atheism, it would not offer that catholic advantage it now presents. For Atheism, useful as it is in opposition to superstitious theology, is of little positive good to man. It creates the wrong feeling ever to unite, for practical purpose, to any great extent. It is making *non-belief* the *sine qua non* of union, as Christians make belief their condition. Both of which are prejudicial to progress.

'Exclusive Atheism is an obstructive form of sectarianism—it not only requires that conduct shall be regulated on Secular principles, but insists that the Secular principles shall proceed from Atheistic convictions. The Atheist holds that morality is founded on the laws of nature, and this is the positive side of his negation of Theism. But many eminent Theists also hold that morality is founded on the nature of things, as well as sanctioned by religion. Bishop Butler taught this doctrine. Archbishop Whately, Dr. Chalmers, and Thomas Binney among Dissenters, not to mention many others, hold the same principles. Professor Newman and Mazzini, whose Theism is unquestionable, deep, and passionate, hold the common ground of Secular morality. Orthodox ministers, indeed, have begun to proclaim a "Christian Secularism," which means attention to human as well as spiritual welfare. Now this kind of Secularism, *so far* as it promotes human welfare by material means, is identical with Atheistic Secularism—the only difference being this, that Christian Secularism is founded on the Bible, and Atheistic Secularism on Nature. Then there is a large and increasing class of Deists and Pantheists, who believe, with Tindal and Emerson, that the laws of Nature are the voice of God, and that to obey the laws of Nature is the first dictate of natural piety. These persons are so far Secularists, with a Theistical reason for their Secularism. Others hold clearly and firmly to the belief in the Immortality of the Soul, yet regard that use of this life which conduces to the purest human happiness as the best preparation for a world to come. Now what is to hinder, except bigotry and narrowness, all these persons from acting together on great public questions for the Secular improvement of society? Though nine-tenths of them hold principles adverse to Atheism, they all hold sentiments common to humanity. This common ground is Secular ground. The difference between Atheism and Secularism is this—Atheism insists upon its point of difference from all being made the bond of union. Secularism proposes that its agreement with all shall be a ground of common action. Atheism, however true in itself, can never be a ground of wide co-operation until it has effected the conversion of society. It must therefore delay universal moral union for many generations yet.

'The great and fertile source of human differences, of warring sects, needless and immoral hostilities, has been the refusal to recognise a right aim, unless it proceeded from some motive prescribed by the church or creed. Now, a thousand men may be found to mean the

same thing, and hardly two for the same reason. Uniformity of understanding is as impossible among men as uniformity of age or stature. The only uniform sentiment which all creeds might usefully insist upon, and all be brought to manifest, is *sincerity*. Atheism and Orthodoxy both agree in prescribing one creedal reason as the essential condition of fellowship. Secularism prescribes earnestness of moral aim, irrespective of the source of its inspiration, whether Theistical, Atheistical, or Biblical.

'Suppose that during the past years there had been instituted in Europe a Society for the Promotion of Freethought, to which no one was admissible unless he was an Atheist, or an Orthodox believer. Whom would such a rule exclude? Let us take names as they occur to the memory, without regard to chronological order, and we must enumerate Locke, Pope, Shaftesbury, Spinoza, Descartes, Bolingbroke, Edgeworth, Voltaire, Goethe, Rousseau, Volney, Franklin, Jefferson, Gibbon, Paine, Priestley, Sir William Drummond, Sir William Jones, Sir Charles Morgan, Lady Morgan, Byron, Shelley, Godwin, Leigh Hunt, Richter, Gall, Spurzheim, Pestalozzi, Bunsen, Rev. Robert Taylor, Sir W. Molesworth, Lloyd Garrison, Comte, Lammenais, Robert Owen, Blanco White, J. Pierpont Greaves, Emerson, Theodore Parker, Douglas Jerrold, Thomas Carlyle, Charles Dickens, Froude, Professor Newman, Foxton, R. D. Owen, Lord Brougham, Harriet Martineau, G. H. Lewes, W. R. Greg, Dr. Southwood Smith, Dr. Elliotson, Dr. Engledue, H. G. Atkinson, Dr. John Chapman, Godfrey Higgins, W. J. Fox, George Combe, William Maccall, G. Dawson, Ronge, Joseph Barker.*

The words Atheist, Deist, Christian, Theist, Pantheist, Spiritualist, and all other similar distinctions, should sink, when questions of public utility are at stake, into that of Man, as represented in Secularism, where all sectarian distinctions are subdued for the attainment of useful measures of progressive reform by purely Secular, human means. The leading maxim of Secularism is, to make the best use of this world. And as the reality of this life is *more* apparent, and the duties more clear, than a *future* life and its duties, Secularism teaches the prudence and wisdom of making this life our first consideration. There are thousands of persons who cannot see reasons to induce them to accept the orthodox Christian faith. This number of unbelievers, as they are termed, are constantly on the increase, they differ only in degree. Some entertain a belief in a personal Deity, others in some sort of Supreme Power; some disbelieve in the person of Christ, others in his Divinity. Some believe the Scriptures to *have* been inspired, but to have answered their purpose, and no longer to be considered binding on us; whilst others think only certain portions of Scripture to be inspired. And then we have a variety of interpretations of texts, one party making them mean quite the opposite of the other. Hence we have Deists, Pantheists, Philosophical Theists, Transcendentalists, Unitarians, and a number of other sects, all infidels to orthodox Christianity, and all denied the hearty co-operation of such Christian Societies in any measure of reform for the

* REASONER, May 12th, 1858.

people's benefit. Secularism now steps forward, and proposes to unite all these various elements of progress. Understanding that uniformity of belief is impossible, it disregards altogether speculative opinion, leaving each person to entertain his own notions of all those subjects which have so often perplexed the wisest men, without adding proportionately to their information. The general theory of Secularism is, that the existence of Deity, and questions arising therefrom, are not to be dogmatically assumed, are debateable points, and therefore open questions. That while Secularists oppose orthodox Christianity in assuming what has not been proved, and censuring, hating, and persecuting all those who differ from it, it concedes the right to every person to entertain what views appear to him most consistent in reference to theology. And herein consists the practical value of Secularism over Christianity on the one hand, and Atheism on the other. While Christians are labouring to prove the existence of Deity, and Atheists to disprove such existence, the Secularist, looking at society's inequalities, and men's requirements, sets himself to the task of human improvement; believing that if a God exist, who is the loving parent of all men, he cannot be better pleased than to witness the destruction of social evils and political and civil inequalities; and should such Being not exist, the Secularist is still right, and meets a reward from the consciousness of doing good, and receiving the approbation of many around him. Some persons, holding mere Atheistical opinions, but professing themselves Secularists, often cause Secularism to be misunderstood. Statements have been published, and speeches are often delivered, to the effect that a union between Secularists and Christians is impossible, whereas the very name Secularists adopt should show them its possibility; and until this is seen by them, they are Secularists only in name.

'Secularism commences not in Atheism, but Cosmism. It acknowledges that Nature is—it does not declare why it is. It traces the order of the universe, but does not pronounce upon the cause. It studies manifestations, but does not pledge itself to account for them. Guided by the principle of Materialism, which we define as the search, not after primary, but after calculable causes, it labours in the inexhaustible field of positive philosophy. A Secular Society may contain classes for the study of Atheism, as it may of Theism, but the society is not compromised by such pursuits. It neither proposes to define, nor to limit, nor to answer for the opinions of its members. Its function is to indicate to its members reliable methods of forming their opinions, and to defend their right to acquire them, to hold them, to utter them, and to debate them.*

It often happens that valuable information is afforded, and useful aid rendered to Secularists by Christians, men whom orthodoxy in its narrow, cramped creeds rejects, but whom Secularism, in its catholicity, gladly receives. An objection often raised against Secularism is, that whilst it professes to be neutral on religious topics, its adherents are often engaged in the discussion of theology, and taking sides

* 'Trial of Theism.' By G. J. Holyoake.

against it. This objection, applicable, it is true, to merely Atheists, adopting the Secularist name, has little force with the true Secularist. Those who raise this objection confuse the basis of union with spontaneous individual acts. When Secularists take sides in theology, the opinions promulgated are not enforced by Secularism; but merely the right to hold any opinions formed by honest and patient investigation.

'In controverting Theism, the Secularist is lost in the Atheist, in denying the truth of Scripture the Secularist is merged in the "Infidel." The Secularist, as such, confines himself, like the geometer or chemist, to his proper field of study. The geologist, for instance, may, as an individual, dispute the discovery of a comet, but as a member of a Geological Society the essay he reads to his co-members must relate rather to the discovery of fossils. In the same manner, a Secularist, as an individual, may enter upon anti-Scriptural or anti-Theistical arguments; but in his capacity as a Secularist his business is with the exposition and defence of the principles which constitute the points of agreement with his colleagues. If passages from the Scriptures are brought forward in opposition to Secular principles, it is sufficient to show the erroneousness of such passages, without entertaining any question as to their authorship. After proving that certain sentiments are misleading and injurious, it becomes an act of temerity in any one to rise up, and charge their authorship upon God. If a man declare, ever so reverentially, that passages of Scripture, which he regards as untrue, are not divinely inspired, he will be treated as a blasphemer; but if he restrict himself to the Secular rule of showing that these passages are deficient in guiding truth, or are morally injurious, then the Christian, who declares such to proceed from God, becomes the actual blasphemer. Thus the odium and responsibility of this offence rest upon the real offender.*

Secularists, as well as other men, know that it would be mere folly to attempt the *suppression* of theological discussions. The desire in man to unravel mystery, and to oppose what is conceived to be error, is so strong, that no attempt to suppress it would be successful. So Secularism, offering every man the opportunity of investigation, and the right of expression, seeks to methodise inquiry, to maintain equality for all, to destroy the stigma of guilt as attached to dissent, and to establish a union among men, not upon faith, creeds, or unproved dogmas, but upon the broader and more congenial grounds of good intent, good will, and good works.

Mr. Holyoake, the exponent of Secularism, and one of the ablest advocates of Freethought, has claimed for Secularism four rights:—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 it must remain uncertain. The Fair Action of Conviction thus attained, without which conscience will be impotent on practice. Christianity will allow you to think, it is true, but not to differ. And although St. Paul tells

us to prove all things, and hold fast that which is good, we are reminded that he who believes will be saved, and he who believes not will be damned. The same Paul who tells us to prove all things, says, if we differ from him, 'that we are unruly, and vain talkers and deceivers, whose mouths must be stopped.' And that 'if any man preach any other gospel.....let him be accursed.' And then the Apostle John asks—'who is a *liar* but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?' The man, therefore, who never thinks on such subjects, but believes because he was taught to believe, fares better with Christianity than he who requires a reason for the faith within him. The astonishment I once felt at Roman Catholicism gaining so many adherents has long since ceased. I now view the Catholic as the most consistent of all Christians. *He* is not allowed to use his reason lest it should damn him. The priest tells him what to believe, and how to interpret texts of Scripture, and by that decision he must abide. In any system you cannot see the effects better than by witnessing its most consistent development. In Catholicism, you have at once the most consistent and most revolting aspect of Christianity.

Secularism as opposed to orthodox Christianity, endeavours to enforce 'Truth for Authority, and not Authority for Truth.' It asserts that morality is independent of theological teachings, that sincerity in forming and holding opinions is a sufficient justification. Orthodoxy will not admit this; it devolves, therefore, on Secularists to show to inquiring minds that such is true, and in the end they must succeed.

'Truth, crushed to earth, will rise again,
The immortal years of Time are hers.
But error, wounded, writhes in pain,
And dies amid its worshippers.'

That morality is totally independent of theology, a glance at the lives and actions of men who lived thousands of years before Christianity was known will speedily demonstrate. Cicero, who lived half a century before Christ, displays in his writings the most stringent regard for virtue and morality, not only in appearance, but in reality. He says, 'Can we say that a man pays sufficient regard to the dictates of modesty who simply contrives so to indulge his lusts as to have no witnesses of his conduct? Or is there not something simply intrinsically bad in licentiousness, even if no loss of reputation follows?' Again, 'Look into your own mind; turn the question over in your thoughts; examine yourself, whether you would prefer to pass your days in ease and pleasure, in the enjoyment of every personal advantage and selfish gratification, or while deserving well of all nations, and bearing assistance and affording protection to all who need it, encounter even the distresses of Hercules..... We are impelled by nature to wish to benefit as many persons as possible, especially by instructing them, and giving them lessons of prudence.' After observing the general tendency of the preceding philosophers to inculcate virtue, he observes, 'It was surely worthy of those heroes of philosophy to ennoble by their genius a virtue so eminently beneficent and liberal, which everywhere exalts the social interests above the selfish, and teaches us to love others rather than ourselves.' He

further asks, 'Which is the obligation that is most binding on society? It is the firm conviction that one man ought not to injure the person of another man, nor appropriate to himself another's property; that a greater outrage against humanity cannot be committed; and that it is preferable to endure the reverses of fortune, disease, mental alienation—in short, everything that can happen to us for the worst, rather than to offend against justice; for that only is the legitimate rule and the principle of all duties.' Aristotle held the same principle, for he observes that 'A virtuous life is in itself a source of delight. Virtue consists not so much in just perceptions, as in correct habits. Justice is the virtue of rendering every man his due.' Plutarch says:—'To indulge our unrestrained and irrational appetites, is a kind of licence which is mean and degrading; and it is always attended by repentance..... The natural right of mankind is liberty; but we should conform to those constitutional laws that are necessary to preserve society and individuals from injustice, and for the punishment of injuries committed.' Seneca gives the following moral injunction:—'Every action during our whole lives should be regulated by considerations of honour or shame to ensue therefrom. On this rule morals, or the distinction between what we ought to do, and what we ought not to do, are founded. Wisdom consists in distinguishing good from evil.' Again, 'Can he be happy whose entire regards are engrossed by himself—whose whole thoughts are occupied in his own selfish interests? We truly live for ourselves only when we live for others.' In speaking of human rights, he says:—'No man is nobler born than another, unless he is born with a better capacity and a more amiable disposition: those who make such a parade of their family pictures and their pedigrees, may, properly speaking, be called notorious, rather than noble persons. I think it right to say thus much, in order to repel the insolence of some folks, who owe their distinction entirely to accidental circumstances, and not at all to their own merits.' With regard to crime, and its punishment, instead of telling us we shall be damned hereafter, he says:—'Crime is itself its own corrector; at the moment it is committed commences its punishment; the criminal thinks himself discovered, although his crime may as yet be concealed. Impunity may attend crime; but success never.' Socrates, too, held a similar opinion. He says:—'The cultivation of virtuous manners is necessarily attended with pleasure as well as profit; the honest man alone is happy; and it is absurd to attempt to separate things which are in their nature so closely united as virtue and interest.' Plato is reported to say, 'It is better to die than to sin: it is better to suffer ruin than to do wrong.' Arjon, too, says, 'Although my enemies would kill me, I wish not to fight them..... not even for the dominion of three kingdoms.' Is not the Persian maxim, quoted by Mr. Holyoake to the Rev. Brewin Grant, as refined and pure as anything Christ is reported to have said:—

'The sandal tree perfumes when riven
The axe that laid it low;
Let man who hopes to be forgiven,
Forgive and bless his foe.'

Does not Dr. Chalmers admit, that not only is morality independent of theological systems, but even of the idea of God's existence? He says:—'The idea of a God may be expunged from the heart of man, and yet that heart be still the seat of the same constitutional impulse as ever.' 'We appeal,' he says, 'to your own consciousness of what passes within you, if the heart do not experience the movement of many a constitutional feeling, altogether unaccompanied by any reference of the mind to the love, or to the character, or even to the existence of God.' When we hear the assertions of persons who say that Freethought is without sanctions of morality, that if we set aside the Bible authority society would be disorganised and vice reign supreme, we have only to refer them to the opinions of the ablest 'divines,' and point them to the lives of those men they calumniate, to show the mistake of such a supposition. The Bishop of Hereford truly said, that in asserting the independence of moral obligation of any religious sanction, he only had to refer to the indisputable instances which have appeared of an upright tenor of life—of the duties belonging to the various relations of life—correctly performed by men who have wanted [to him] the higher inducements to right conduct. Dr. Chalmers represents eloquently and truly what might be seen even in an Atheistic community. He says:—'Amiable mothers might be seen shedding their graceful tears over the tomb of departed infancy, high-toned integrity maintaining itself unsullied amid the allurements of corruption, benevolence plying its labours of usefulness, and patriotism earning its proud reward in the testimony of an approving people. Here then we have compassion and natural affection, and justice and public spirit.' These quotations show that even among Christians the best and most thoughtful, admit morality to be founded in human nature, and not on the authority of the Bible.

In all the extracts quoted we find the same principle—that of inculcating a love of virtue and morality, and showing the benefits arising therefrom, without the extravagance and arbitrary conditions of the Bible statements. And the above extracts are not alone. The same sentiments are to be found throughout the writings of the ancient philosophers, men totally uninfluenced by 'Christian truths.' And certainly the lives of those men, if not in *every* instance defensible, will profit by a contrast with 'God's chosen people.' After giving an account of the lives and precepts of the 'heathen' philosophers, William Penn says—'Nor is this reputation, wisdom, and virtue only to be attributed to men: there were women also in the Greek and Roman ages that honoured their sex by great examples of meekness, prudence, and chastity, and which I do the rather mention that the honour story yields to their virtuous conduct, may raise an allowable emulation, in those of their own sex at least, to equal the noble character given to them by antiquity.'

As morality is shown to be independent of Bible sanctions, so it may be shown that man's responsibility in the formation of his opinions is opposed to the orthodox teachings of Christianity. That man is not responsible (in the orthodox sense) for his belief is acknowledged by

some of the best thinkers our literature can present. Dr. Clarke observes, 'The eye, when open, sees the object necessarily, because it is passive in so doing. The understanding, likewise, when open, perceives the truth of a speculative proposition necessarily, because the understanding also is passive in so doing.....Neither God nor man can avoid seeing that to be true, which they see *is* true.' Bishop Hare also states—'This is the miserable condition of a convict heretic; he must continue to endure for barely thinking, which is a thing not in his own power, but depends on the evidence that appears to him.' Chillingworth says :—'If men do their best endeavour to free themselves from all error, and yet fail of it through human frailty, so well am I persuaded of the goodness of God, that if in me alone should meet a confluence of all such errors of all the Protestants in the world, I should not be so much afraid of them all, as I should be to ask pardon for them.' Dr. Wardlaw, in criticising Lord Brougham's doctrines of non-responsibility, observes, 'If it be true that for his belief, whatever it may be, a man is no more the subject of praise or blame, than he is for a light or a dark complexion.....then it follows, not merely that man should not account to man for his belief, but also, and with equal certainty, that man has no account to render for his belief to God..... We dare not hesitate to say that, between this sentiment, and the most explicit statements, and uniform assumptions of the Bible, there is a fearful contrariety. Our orator and the inspired penman are quite at issue.' Lord Brougham, however, in giving his opinion on a metaphysical question, acted quite right in not studying whether, in speaking the truth, it coincided with, or appeared contrary to, the 'inspired penmen.' One more extract we quote from Locke, whose opinion is surely worthy attention. He says :—'I never saw any reason yet why truth might not be trusted to its own evidence. I am sure if that be not able to support it, there is no defence against error, and then truth and falsehood are but names that stand for the same things. Evidence, therefore, is that by which alone every man is, and should be thought to regulate his assent, who is then, and then only, in the right way when he follows it.' But notwithstanding the acknowledged inability of man to believe as he pleases, we find the New Testament condemning him to perdition unless he believes what is therein contained, whether he see reason to do so or not. All other sins are considered nothing compared with the 'sin' of unbelief. The Rev. C. H. Spurgeon, in one of his sermons, says, 'Oh, Sirs, believe me, could ye roll all sins into one mass—could ye take murder and blasphemy, and lust and adultery, and fornication, and everything else that is vile, and unite them all into one vast globe of black corruption, they would not equal then the sin of unbelief. This is the monarch sin, the quintessence of guilt; the mixture of the venom of all crimes; the dregs of the wine of Gomorrah; it is the A1 sin, the masterpiece of Satan, the chief work of the Devil.'

In contradistinction to all this 'blatant verbiage,' Secularism maintains the innocence of honest conviction, whether in favour of, or opposed to, the Christian system, maintaining a vigorous protest

against coercion or aspersion. It seeks to destroy all fear as to consequences in reference to future punishments, asserting that no just God could punish any one for acting in accordance with the reason he possesses, even though it should fail to reveal to him the existence of a Being on whom his future happiness depends. It urges men to cease to hate and persecute each other for differing on points none can explain, and it seeks to unite all men on common unsectarian ground, to investigate the causes of evil and suffering here—to remove social anomalies, political corruptions, civil restrictions, and ecclesiastical abuses, learning better how to live, as the best guarantee of peace and consolation in the hour of death.

We hear it often stated that Christianity is the best Secularism, for while it teaches and enforces the duties of this life, it also seeks to prepare us for a life of immortality hereafter. But this statement calls forth at least three objections. Firstly. It assumes as certain what can only be conjectured or believed, not known—the reality of a future life of immortality. Secondly. That should there be a Future, it is presumed that the Secularist will then fare worse than the Christian. Thirdly. It is contended that the teachings of Christianity, as stated in the New Testament, are not opposed to the highest attainable happiness of this life, or to the Secular improvement of humanity.

In the first place it may be remarked that the 'certainty' of a future state is *not* certain. And being an unnatural belief, there is at least *primâ facie* evidence against it. Indeed, the greatest minds who have adorned antiquity, or who have added lustre to modern times, have felt the uncertainty and natural disbelief of such supposition—however much they might, with us, desire to believe it. On this point Whately affords useful corroborative testimony. He says:—'The belief of a life to come, though nominally professed, cannot be considered as practically forming any part of the creed of those ancient nations with whom we are best acquainted The Epicurean school openly contended against it; Aristotle passes it by as not worth considering, and takes for granted the contrary supposition, as not needing proof. . . . Of those philosophers who contended for a future state, it is to be observed, not only that, as Dr. Paley remarks, they did not, properly speaking, effect a discovery; "it was only one guess among many; he only discovers, who proves;" but also that their argument did not fully succeed in convincing even themselves. Those which at one time they bring forward as decisive proof, they seem at another time to regard as hardly possessing that degree of probability, which, now that the doctrine is established, most are ready to allow to them. Cicero especially we find distinctly acknowledging, at least in the person of one of his disputants, that though while he is reading the Phædo he feels disposed to assent to the reasons urged in favour of a future state, his conviction vanishes as soon as he lays down the book, and revolves the matter in his own thoughts; which was the feeling probably with which the author himself had written it.' Doubtless it *was* the feeling the author had; for it appears to us so very improbable that we should live after death, that any amount of faith is not

a safeguard against doubt, even though we wish the contrary. Professor Lawrence, in his 'Lectures on Man,' says, 'Life, using the word in its popular and general sense, which, at the same time, is the only rational and intelligible one, is merely the active state of the animal structure. It includes the notions of sensation, motion, and those ordinary attributes of living beings which are obvious to common observation. It denotes what is apparent to our senses, and cannot be applied to the offspring of metaphysical subtlety or immaterial abstractions without a complete departure from its original acceptation—without obscuring and confusing what is otherwise clear and intelligible. To talk of life as independent of an animal body—to speak of a function without reference to an appropriate organ—is physically absurd. That life, then, or the assemblage of functions, is immediately dependent upon organisation, appears to me, physiologically speaking, as clear as that the presence of the sun above the horizon causes the light of day; and to suppose that we could have light without that luminary, would not be more unreasonable than to conceive that life is independent of the animal body.' And Dr. Southwood Smith gives his testimony against the supposition of immortality in the following words:—'By the loss of one intellectual faculty after another, by the obliteration of sense after sense, by the progressive failure of the power of voluntary motion—in a word, by the declining energy and ultimate extinction of the animal life—man, from the stage of maturity, passes a second time through the stage of childhood back to those of infancy, lapses even to the condition of the embryo. What the *fœtus* was the man of extreme old age *is*: when he began to exist he possessed only organic life, and before he is ripe for the tomb he returns to the condition of a plant!' I think, therefore, the most thoughtful Christians will admit that immortality is not to be *clearly proved*. But their last argument generally is, that the idea is universal, and therefore there must be 'some truth in it.' Robert Cooper has rendered important service in collecting evidence which proves the idea *not* universal. In his published Lectures on the 'Immortality of the Soul,' he has the following passage:—'But this belief is *not* universal. In a work written by D. H. Kolf, entitled "Voyages of the Dutch brig of war, *Dourga*," through the southern and little known parts of the Archipelago, and along the previously unknown southern coast of New Guinea, performed during the years 1825-6, we read of people entirely ignorant of these sentiments. "Of the immortality of the soul," records the writer, "they have not the least conception." "No Arafura ever returned to us after death, and we know nothing of a future state," declared their chiefs. Their idea was "*Mati, mati, suda*"—when you are dead there is an end of you. Of the high morality of this people, I shall have occasion to speak in a future lecture. Sidney Smith, in his "Principles of Phrenology," mentions that Peron and other travellers in New Holland bear testimony to the fact that the natives have no idea of *any* supernatural existence, not even of a God. Moffat, in his "Enterprises in Africa," admits that the Kaffirs are also "natural Atheists." The Australian tribes are similarly "benighted." "Voyages of H. M. S. *Rattlesnake*," recently published,

narrates many interesting facts respecting them. "Neither at Cape York, nor in any of the islands of Torres Strait, so far as I am aware, do the aborigines appear to have formed an idea of the existence of a Supreme Being. The absence of this belief may appear questionable, but my informant, Giom, spoke decidedly on this point." Further proof of the falsity of this popular impression is rendered in a work dedicated to the late President of the United States, John Adams, entitled "Narrative of the Loss of the ship Hercules, Captain Benjamin Stent, on the Caffraria Coast, 18th of June, 1796."—"Enough I think has been said to show that a future life is not so certain as to cause any alarm to the Secularist, *supposing* he wished it not to be proved.

But to the second statement. Admitting a future life, the Secularist has no reason to anticipate worse consequences than the Christian. The quotations previously given show that man has no power over the conclusions of his reasoning. His duty is to investigate honestly and perseveringly; and should he arrive at conclusions adverse to orthodox Christianity, it cannot be maintained that he will suffer eternally for such conclusions. Admit a man may honestly hold 'heretical' views, and then say God will punish him for so doing, and you at once blaspheme Him you call upon others to worship. Very few are now to be found broadly stating such a doctrine. But orthodoxy, ever appealing more to the fears than to reason, endeavours to convey the same idea in language less offensive:—"If you do not believe you cannot be saved, any more than the dying man who refuses to accept the prescription of his physician." The fallacy of this pseudo analogy is at once apparent. Men are not to be considered intellectually sick, and depending upon a Supreme Physician for their mental salvation. They are not to be considered 'miserable sinners,' always at enmity with God. But finding themselves possessed with reasoning faculties, in the midst of a mighty universe, they are to exercise those faculties for the preservation, necessities, and comfort of their kind. And though they may not be able to discover the 'Author of all Good,' they should labour to master the problem of human happiness; and not being able to discover the Universal Physician, they cannot be punished for not accepting His prescription. If there be a God to punish in a future world, the dictates of the human heart assure us that that punishment will not be for inability to believe, but for omitting to act in accordance with your belief. The Secularist, therefore, has nothing to fear, but all to hope for, as he makes conduct alone the test of worth. How many persons are to be found so dead to the dictates of justice as to affirm that a life nobly spent in humanity's cause, irrespective of theological belief, will be rewarded only with the eternal displeasure of a 'just and loving God?'

'When life in duty's cause is spent,
With faithful heart and pure intent;
When he hath thought, and toiled, and striven
True to the light by nature given,
For Truth, for Right, for Liberty,
Why should the *Secularist* fear to die?

'What if there be a heaven above,
A God of truth, and light, and love?
Will He condemn us? It was He
Who gave the sight that failed to see!
If He be just who reigns on high,
Why should the *Secularist* fear to die?

'The voice of wrath is heard no more,
The storms of hate have ceased to roar.
The martyr's life he dared to brave,
All honour to the martyr's grave!
Things worse than death he dared defy:
Why should the *Secularist* fear to die?'

In justification of the third objection, it may readily be seen that many of the teachings of the New Testament are opposed to the 'Secular good of this life.' It is no legitimate answer to say, in reply to quotations that may be cited, 'Christians do not act in accordance with the interpretation you give these passages, and therefore they cannot be the teachings of Christianity.' We answer that the conduct of Christians, like the teachings of Christianity, is often necessarily inconsistent. Although assuming 'free agency,' they are virtually the 'creatures of circumstances,' interpreting various texts to harmonise with the circumstances of the time. When we are told to 'take no thought for the morrow,' we have a command apparently clear, incapable of two interpretations. Still, so objectionable is this 'divine command,' that human wisdom is ever explaining it away. Its meaning is said to be, that we are not to be anxious for the morrow. But even with this latitude of interpretation, a person obeying such command, cannot give due attention to the affairs of this life. Christ, who thought the world drawing to its close, who said that generation should not pass with his sayings unfulfilled, wished men, as he said, to take no thought for the morrow, but to seek the kingdom of heaven, omitting any longer to lay up treasures on earth. His teachings on this point are clear, and only abandoned by his professed followers because found opposed to human advancement. The same difficulty occurs, when we are told to obey the powers that be; that all power is of God; that rulers are a terror to evil works; that if we do good we shall receive praise. Here we have that conservative principle which has so often induced the churches to oppose reformatory measures. The antagonism of such statements to the 'best use of this life' is too apparent to need further comment. Christians, to become reformers, must set aside such teachings, and adopt those Secular principles they appear so much to deplore. Stephen Coldwell, in his 'New Themes for the Protestant Clergy,' justly observes, 'In Chartism, in democracy, in Socialism, there is not necessarily any ingredient of infidelity; and yet we find them, to a large extent, travelling together; because Christians, as such, and those who pretend to be such, have, without just discrimination, opposed every movement of reform as dangerous to society.' And Henry Ward Beecher, brother to Harriet Beecher Stowe, confesses that—'Among all the earnest-minded men, who are at this moment leading in thought and action in America, we venture

to say that four-fifths are sceptical, even of the great historical facts of Christianity. What is held as Christian doctrine by the churches claims none of their consideration, and there is among them a general distrust of the clergy, as a class, and an utter disgust with the very aspect of Christianity and of church worship. This scepticism is not flippant; little is said about it. It is not a peculiarity alone of the radicals and fanatics; most of them are men of calm and even balance of mind, and belong to no class of ultraists. It is not worldly and selfish. Nay, the doubters lead, in the bravest and most self-denying enterprises of the day.' And so it ever has been. Sceptics have had to initiate reforms, and make them popular, with a few noble exceptions, and then a sluggish church has followed despondingly in the rear. Those only who have associated with religious societies can fully estimate the disinclination there existing to 'meddle with the things of the world.' The principal desire is

'To make their own election sure,
That when they fail on earth,
Secure a mansion in the skies.'

Thinking

'Nothing worth a thought beneath,
But how they may escape the death
That never never dies.'

And thus they look upon the world with suspicion. They think men depraved who differ with them, and follow, in this case, the teachings of the New Testament, 'If any teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ..... he is proud, knowing nothing..... of corrupt mind; from such withdraw thyself.' In these words we have the incentive to persecution, and the impediment to progress. Thousands are desirous to make the best of this life, by steady and useful improvements; but unable conscientiously to accept the Christian doctrines, they are deprived of Christian co-operation, and their noble work of service is thus retarded, and man's highest happiness indefinitely postponed. Do we wish to eradicate this evil; do we wish for a system of education—which is now thwarted by religious bigotry; do we wish to destroy religious persecution; do we wish to establish a union among men irrespective of creeds or sects, for the removal of political and social inequalities, and for the securing of man's highest possible happiness, let us accept Secularism as 'the one thing needful.'