

THE ORIGIN AND NATURE OF SECULARISM.

ERRATUM.

Page 16, for "useful men" read "usefulness."

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THE ORIGIN AND NATURE
OF
SECULARISM;

*SHOWING THAT WHERE FREETHOUGHT
COMMONLY ENDS SECULARISM BEGINS.*

BY
GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE.

“The right of thinking freely and acting independently, of using our minds without excessive awe of authority, and shaping our lives without unquestioning obedience to custom, is now a finally-accepted principle, in some sense or other, with every school of thought that has the smallest chance of commanding the future.”—JOHN MORLEY.

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THE ORIGIN AND NATURE OF SECULARISM.

CHAPTER I.

OPEN THOUGHT THE FIRST STEP TO INTELLIGENCE.

“It is not prudent to be in the right too soon, nor to be in the right against everybody else. And yet it sometimes happens that, after a certain lapse of time, greater or lesser, you will find that one of those truths which you had kept to yourself, as premature, but which has got abroad, in spite of your teeth, has become the most commonplace thing imaginable.”—ALPHONSE KARR.

ONE purpose of this little work will be to explain how unfounded are the objections of many excellent Christians to secular instruction in Board schools. The secular is distinct from theology, which it neither ignores, assails, nor denies. Things secular are as separate from the Church as land from the ocean. And what nobody seems to discern is that things secular are in themselves quite distinct from Secularism. The secular is a mode of instruction; Secularism is a code of conduct. Secularism does conflict with theology; Secularist teaching would, but secular instruction would not.

Persuaded as I am that lack of consideration for the convictions of the reader creates an impediment in the way of his agreement with the writer, and even disinclines him to examine what is put before him; yet it is nevertheless

possible that some of these pages may be open to this objection. If so, it is owing to want of thought, or want of art in statement; and it is no part of the intention of the writer.

He would have diffidence in expressing, as he does in these pages, his dissent from the opinions of many Christian advocates—for whose character and convictions he has great respect, and for some even affection—did he not perceive that few have any diffidence or reservation (save in one or two exalted instances*) in maintaining their views and dissenting from his.

Open thought, which in this chapter is brought under the reader's notice, is sometimes called "self thought," or "free thought," or "original thought"—the opposite of conventional, second-hand thought, which is all that the custom-ridden mass of mankind are addicted to.

Open thought has three stages.

The first stage is that in which the right to think independently is insisted on, and the free action of opinion so formed is maintained. Conscious power thus acquired satisfies the pride of some; others limit its exercise from prudence. Interests which would be jeopardised by applying independent thought to received opinion keep more persons silent, and thus many never pass from this stage.

The second stage is that in which the right of self-thought is applied to the criticism of theology, with a view to clear the way for life according to reason. This is not the work of a day or year, but is so prolonged that clearing the way becomes, as it were, a profession, and is at length pursued as an end, instead of a means. Disputation becomes

* Of whom the greatest is Mr. Gladstone.

a passion, and the higher state of life, of which criticism is the necessary precursor, is lost sight of, and many remain at this stage, when it is reached, and go no farther.

The third stage is that where ethical motives of conduct, apart from Christianity, are vindicated for the guidance of those who are indifferent about theology, or who reject it altogether. Supplying to such persons Secularist reasons for duty is Secularism, the range of which is illimitable. It begins where Freethought usually ends, and constitutes a new form of constructive thought, the principles and policy of which are quite different from those acted upon in the preceding stages. Controversy concerns itself with what *is*; Secularism with what *ought* to be.

It is pertinent here to say that Christianity does not permit eclecticism—that is, it does not tolerate others selecting portions of Christian Scriptures possessing the mark of intrinsic truth, to which many could cheerfully conform in their lives. This rule compels all who cannot accept the entire Scriptures to deal with its teachings as they find them expressed, and for which Christianity makes itself responsible. All the while it is quite evident that Christians do permit eclecticism among themselves. The great Congress of the Free Churches, recently held in Nottingham, representing the personal and vital form of Christianity, had a humanness and tolerance unmanifested by Christianity before, showing that humanity is stronger than historical integrity. If anyone, therefore, should draw up, as might be done, a theory of Christianity solely from such doctrines as are represented in the elliptical preaching, practice, and social life of Christians of to-day, a very different estimate of the Christian system would have to be given from that with which the author deals in the subsequent

chapters. In them Christianity is represented as Free thought has found it, and as it exists in the Scriptures, in the law, in the pulpit, and the school, which constitute its total force, in the respects in which it represses and discourages independent thought. Science, truth, and criticism have engrafted themselves on historic Christianity. It has no new articles of belief. When it avows them it will win larger concurrence and respect than it can now command.

CHAPTER II.

THE QUESTION STATED.

“ Look forward—not backward ;
 Look up—not down ;
 Look around ;
 Lend a hand.”*

—EDWARD EVERETT HALE, D.D.

WHERE a monarchy is master, inquiry is apt to be a disturbing element ; and, though it be exercised in the interest of the commonwealth, it is none the less resented. Where the priest is master inquiry is sharply prohibited. The priest represents a spiritual monarchy in which the tenets of belief are fixed—assumed to be infallible, and to be prescribed by Deity. Thus the priest regards inquiry as proceeding from an impertinent distrust, to which he is not reconciled on being assured that it is undertaken in the interest of truth. Thus the king denounces inquiry as sedition, and the priest as sin. In the end the inquirer finds himself an alien in Church and State, and laws are made against his life, his liberty, property, and veracity.†

* Dr. Hale did not popularise these energetic maxims of earnestness in the connection in which they are here used ; but their wisdom is of general application.

† When martyrdoms and imprisonments ceased, disabling laws remained, which impose the Christian oath on all who appealed to the Courts ; and those who had the pride of veracity and declined to swear were denied protection for property, or credence of their word.

Thus, from the time when monarch and priest first set up their pretensions in the world, the inquiring mind has had small encouragement. When Protestantism came it merely conceded inquiry *under direction*, and only so far as it tended to confirm its own anti-papal tenets. But when inquiry claimed to be independent, unfettered, uncontrolled—in fact, to be *free* inquiry—then Papist, Lutheran, and Dissenter alike regarded it as dangerous, and stigmatised it by every term calculated to deter or dissuade people from it.

But, though this combined defamation of inquiry set many against it, it did not intimidate men entirely. There arose independent thinkers, who held that unfettered investigation was the discoverer of truth and dangerous to error only, and that the freer it was the more effective it must be. Still, timorous-minded persons remained suspicious of *free* thought. At its best, they found it involved conflict with false opinion, and conflict, to those without aspiration or conscience, is disquieting; and where impartial investigation interfered with personal interests, it was opposed. No one could enter on the search for truth without finding his path obstructed by theological errors and interdictions. Having taken the side of truth, all who were loyal to it were bound, like Bunyan's Pilgrim, to withstand the Apollyons who opposed it, and a combat began which lasted for centuries and is not yet ended. But, though theology was always in power, men of courage at length established also a free platform and a free press for the publication of the results arrived at. These rights were so indispensable for progress, and were so long resisted, that generations fought for them as ends in themselves. Thus there grew up, as in military affairs, a class whose profession was destruction,

and Freethinkers came to be regarded as Negationists. When I came into the field the combat was raging. Richard Carlile had not long been liberated from successive imprisonments of more than nine years' duration. Charles Southwell was in the Bristol Gaol. Before his sentence had half expired I was in Gloucester Gaol. George Adams was there; Mrs. Harriet Adams was committed for trial from Cheltenham. Matilda Roalfe, Thomas Finlay, Thomas Paterson, and others, were incarcerated in Scotland. Robert Buchanan and Lloyd Jones, two social missionaries—colleagues of my own—escaped disabling consequences only by swearing they believed what they did not believe—an act I refused to imitate; and no mean inconvenience resulted to me from it. I took part in the vindication of the free publicity of opinion till it was practically conceded.

At the time when I was arrested in 1842 the Cheltenham magistrates, who were angered at defiant remarks I made, had the power (and used it) of committing me to the Quarter Sessions as a "felon," where the same justices could resent, by penalties, what I had said to them. On representations I made to Parliament, through my friend, John Arthur Roebuck, and others, Sir James Graham caused a Bill to be passed which removed trials for opinion to the Assizes. I was the first person tried under this Act. Thus, for the first time, heresy was ensured a dispassionate trial, and was no longer subject to the jurisdiction of local prejudice and magisterial resentment.

When overt acts of outrage were no longer possible against the adherents of Freethought, some from fairness, and others from necessity, began to reason with them, and asked: "Now you have established your claim to be

heard, what have you to say ?" The reply I proposed was :
"Secularism—a form of opinion relating to the duty of
this life, which substituted the piety of useful ~~men~~ ^{men} for the
usefulness of piety."

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST STAGE OF FREETHOUGHT: ITS
NATURE AND LIMITATION.

“He who cannot reason is defenceless; he who fears to reason has a coward mind; he who will not reason is willing to be deceived, and will deceive all who listen to him.”—*Maxim of Freethought.*

FREETHOUGHT is founded upon reason. It is the exercise of reason, without which Freethought is free foolishness. Freethought being the precursor of Secularist thought, it is necessary to describe its principles and their limitation. Freethought means independent self-thinking. Some say all thought is free—since a man can think what he pleases, and no one can prevent him. Unfortunately, thinking can be, and is, prevented by subtle spiritual intimidation in earlier, and even in later, life. When a police-agent found young Mazzini in the fields of Genoa, apparently meditating, his father's attention was called to the youth. His father was told that the Austrian Government did not allow persons to think. The Inquisition intimidated nations from thinking. The priests, by preventing instruction and prohibiting books, limited thinking. Archbishop Whately shows that no one can reason without words, and since speech can be, and is, disallowed and made penal, the highway of thought can be closed. No one can think to any purpose without inquiry concerning

his subject, and inquiry can be made impossible. It is of little use that anyone thinks who cannot verify his ideas by comparison with those of his compeers. To prevent this is to discourage thought. In fact, thousands are prevented thinking by denying them the facilities of thinking.

Freethought means fearless thought. It is not deterred by legal penalties nor by spiritual consequences. Dissent from the Bible does not alarm the true investigator, who takes truth for authority, not authority for truth. The thinker who is really free is independent; he is under no dread; he yields to no menace; he is not dismayed by law or custom, or pulpits, or society, whose censure appals so many. He who has the manly passion of Freethought has no fear of anything save the fear of error.

Fearlessness is the essential condition of effective thought. If Satan sits at the top of the Bible with perdition open underneath it, into which its readers will be pushed who may doubt what they find in its pages, the right of private judgment is a snare. A man is a fool who inquires at this risk. He had better accept at once the superstition of the first priest he meets. It is not conceivable how a Christian can be a *free-thinker*. He who is afraid to know both sides of a question cannot think upon it. Christians do not, as a rule, want to know what can be said against their views, and they keep out of libraries all books which would inform others. Thus the Christian cannot think freely, and is against others doing it. Doubt comes of thinking; the Christian regards doubt as sin. How can he be a Freethinker who thinks thinking a sin? Freethought implies three things as conditions of truth:—

1. Free inquiry, which is the pathway to truth.

2. Free publicity of the ideas acquired, in order to learn whether they are useful—which is the encouragement of truth.

3. The free discussion of convictions, without which it is not possible to know whether they are true or false—which is the verification of truth.

A man is not a man unless he is a thinker ; he is a fool, having no ideas of his own. If he happens to live among men who do think, he browses, like an animal, on their ideas. He is a sort of kept man, being supported by the thoughts of others. He is what in England is called a pauper, who subsists upon "outdoor relief" allowed him by men of intellect.

Without the right of publicity, individual thought, however praiseworthy and however perfect, would be barren to the community. Algernon Sidney said : "The best legacy I can leave my children is free speech and the example of using it." The clergy of every denomination are unfriendly to its use. The soldiers of the Cross do not fight adversaries in the open. Mr. Gladstone, alone among eminent men of piety, has insisted upon the duty of the Church to prove its claims in discussion. In his introduction to his address at the Liverpool College (1872-3) he said : "I wish to place on record my conviction that belief cannot now be defended by reticence, any more than by railing or by any privileges or assumption." Since the day of Milton there has been no greater authority on the religious wisdom of debate.

Thought, even theological, is often useless, ill-informed, foolish, mischievous, or even wicked ; and he alone who submits it to free criticism gives guarantees that he means

well and is self-convinced. By criticism alone comes exposure, correction, or confirmation. The right of criticism is the sole protection of the community against error of custom, ignorance, prejudice, and incompetence. It is not until a proposition has been generally accepted, after open and fair discussion, that it can be considered as established, and can safely be made a ground of action or belief.*

These are the implementary rights of thought. They are what grammar is to the writer, which teaches him how to express himself, but not what to say. These rights are as the rules of navigation to the mariner. They teach him how to steer a ship, but do not instruct him where to steer to. The full exercise of these rights of mental freedom is what training in the principles of jurisprudence is to the pleader; but it does not provide him with a brief. It is conceivable that a man may come to be a master of independent thinking and never put his powers to use; just as a man may know every rule of grammar and yet never write a book. In the same way, a man may pass an examination in the art of navigation and never take command of a vessel; or may qualify as a barrister, be called to the Bar, and never plead in any court. We know from experience that many persons join in the combat for the right of intellectual freedom for its own sake, without intending or caring to use the right when won. Some are generous enough to claim and contend for these rights from the belief that they may be useful to others. This is the first stage of Freethought, and many never pass beyond it. Independent thinking is concerned primarily with re-

* See *Formation of Opinions*, by Samuel Bailey.

moving obstacles to its own action, and in contests for liberty of speech by tongue and pen. The free mind fights mainly for its own freedom. It may begin in curiosity and may end in intellectual pride, unless conscience takes care of it. Its nature is iconoclastic, and it may exist without ideas of reconstruction. Though a man goes no further, he is a better man than he who never went as far. He has acquired a new power, and is sure of his own mind; just as one who has learned to fence, or to shoot, has a confidence in encountering an adversary which is seldom felt by one who never had a sword in hand or practised at a target. The sea is an element of recreation to one who has learned to swim; it is an element of death to one ignorant of the art. Besides, the thinker has attained a courage and confidence unknown to the man of orthodox mind. Since God (we are assured) is the God of Truth, the honest searcher after truth has God on his side, and has no dread of the King of Perdition—the terror of all Christian people—since the business of Satan is with those who are content with false ideas, not with those who seek the true. If it be a duty to seek the truth and to live the truth, honest discussion, which discerns it, identifies it, clears it, and establishes it, is a form of worship of real honor to God and of true service to man. If the clergyman's speech on behalf of God is rendered exact by criticism, the criticism is a tribute, and no mean tribute, to heaven. Thus the free exercise of the rights of thought involves no risk hereafter. Moreover, so far as a man thinks, he gains. Thought implies enterprise and exertion of mind, and the result is wealth of understanding, to be acquired in no other way. This intellectual property, like other property, has its rights and duties. The thinker's right is to be left in undisturbed

possession of what he has earned, and his duty is to share his discoveries of truth with mankind, to whom he owes his opportunities of acquiring it.

Free expression involves consideration for others on principle. Democracy without personal deference becomes a nuisance; so free speech without courtesy is repulsive, as free publicity would be if not mainly limited to reasoned truth. Otherwise, every blatant impulse would have the same right of utterance as verified ideas. Even truth can only claim priority of utterance when its utility is manifest; as the number and length of hairs on a man's head is less important to know than the number and quality of the ideas in his brain.

True, Freethought requires special qualities to insure itself acceptance. It must be owned that the thinker is a disturber. He is a truth-hunter, and there is no telling what he will find. Truth is an exile who has been kept out of her kingdom, and Error is a usurper in possession of it; and the moment Truth comes into her right, Error has to give up its occupancy of her territory; and as everybody, consciously or unconsciously, harbors some of the emissaries of the usurper, they do not like owning the fact, and they dispute the warrant of Truth to search their premises, though to be relieved of such deceitful and costly inmates would be an advantage.

An inalienable attribute of Freethought, which no theology possesses, is absolute toleration of all ideas put forward in the interest of public truth and submitted to public discussion. The true Freethinker is in favor of the free action of all opinion which injures no one else, and of putting the best construction he can on the acts of others, not only because he has thereby less to tolerate, but from perceiving

that he who lacks tolerance towards the ideas of others has no claim to the tolerance of his own. The defender of toleration must himself be tolerant. Condemning the coercion of ideas, he is pledged to combat error only by reason ; vindictiveness towards the erring is not only inconsistency, it is persecution. Thus Freethought is not only self-defence against error, but, by the toleration it imposes, is itself security for respectfulness in controversy.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SECOND STAGE—ENTERPRISE.

“Better wild ideas than no ideas at all.”—PROFESSOR NICHOL,
at Horsham.

THE emancipation of the understanding from intimidation and penal restraint soon incited thinkers of enterprise to put their new powers to use. Theology being especially a forbidden subject and the greatest repressive force, inquiry into its pretensions first attracted critical attention. In every century forlorn hopes of truth had set out to storm one or other of the ramparts of theology. Forces had been marshalled by great leaders, and battle often given in the open field; and unforeseen victories are recorded in the annals of the wars of infantine Rationalism against the full-grown powers of superstition and darkness. In every age valiant thinkers, scholars, philosophers, and critics—even priests, in defiance of power, ecclesiastical and civil—have, at their own peril, explored regions of forbidden truth. In Great Britain it was the courage of insurgent thinkers among the working classes—whom no imprisonment could intimidate—who caused the right of free speech and free publicity to be finally conceded. Thus, rulers came round to the conclusion of Caballero, that “tolerance is as necessary in ideas as in social relations.

As soon as opinion was known to be emancipated, men

began to think who never thought before. The thinker no longer had to obtain a "ticket of leave" from the Churches before he could inquire; he was free to investigate where he would and what he would. Just power is, as a rule, never imparted nor acquired in vain, and honest men felt they owed it to those who had won freedom for them that they should extend it. Thus it came to pass that independence was an inspiration to action in men of intrepid minds. Professor Tyndall, in the last words he wrote for publication, said: "I choose the nobler part of Emerson when, after various disenchantments, he exclaims, 'I covet truth!'" On printing these words, the *Westminster Gazette* added: "The gladness of true heroism visits the heart of him who is really competent to say this."

The energies of intellectual intrepidity had doubtless been devoted to science and social progress; but, as philosophers have found down to Huxley's day, all exploration was impossible in that direction. Murchison, Brewster, Buckland, and other pioneers of science were intimidated. Lyell held back his book on the antiquity of man twenty years. Tyndall, Huxley, and Spencer were waiting to be heard. As Huxley has justly said: "There was No Thoroughfare into the Kingdom of Nature.—By order, MOSES." Hence to examine theology, to discover whether its authority was absolute, became a necessity. It was soon seen that there was ground for scepticism. The priests resented criticism by representing the sceptics of their pretensions as being sceptical of everything, whereas they were only sceptics of clerical infallibility. They, indeed, did aver that branches of human knowledge, received as well established, were really open to question,

in order to show that, if men could not be confident of things of which they had experience, how could the Churches be confident of things of which no man had experience, and which contradicted experience? So far from disbelieving everything, scepticism went everywhere in search of truth and certainty. Since the Church could not be absolutely certain of the truth of its tenets, its duty was to be tolerant. But, being intolerant, it became, as Julian Hibbert put it, "well-understood self-defence" to assail it. The Church fought for power, the thinker fought for truth.

Freethought among the people may be likened to a good ship, manned by adventurous mariners who, cruising about in the ocean of theology, came upon sirens, as other mariners had done before—dangerous to be followed by navigators bound to ports of progress. Many were thereby decoyed to their own destruction. The sirens of the Churches sang alluring songs, whose refrains were :—

1. The Bible the Guide of God.
2. The origin of the universe disclosed.
3. The care of Providence assured.
4. Deliverance from peril by prayer dependable.
5. Original sin effaceable by grace.
6. Perdition avoidable by faith in Christ's crucifixion.
7. Future life revealed.

These propositions were subjects of resonant hymns, sermons, and tracts, and were not, and are not, disowned, but still defended in discussion by orthodox and clerical advocates. Save salvation by the blood of Christ (a painful idea to entertain), the other ideas might well fascinate the uninquiring. They had enchanted many believers, but the explorers of whom we speak had acquired

the questioning spirit, and had learned prudently to look at both sides of familiar subjects, and soon discovered that the fair-seeming propositions which had formerly imposed on their imagination were unsound, unsightly, and unsafe. The Syracusans of old kept a school in which slaves were taught the ways of bondage. Christianity has kept such a school, in which the subjection of the understanding was inculcated; and the pupils, now free to investigate, resolved to see whether such things were true. Then began the reign of refutation of theological error—by some from indignation, at having been imposed upon; by others from zeal that misconception should end; by more from enthusiasm for facts; by the bolder sort from resentment at the intimidation and cruelty with which inquiry had been suppressed so long; and by not a few from the love of disputation, which has for some the delight men have for cards, chess, cricket, or other pursuit which has conflict and conquest in it.

Self-determined thought is a condition of the progress of nations. Where would science be but for open thought, the nursing mother of enterprise, of discovery, of invention, of new conditions of human betterment? A modern Hindu writer* tells us that the Hindu is sorely handicapped by customs, which are prescribed by his religious books. Hedged in by minute rules and restrictions, the various classes forming the Hindu community have had but little room for expansion and progress. The result has been stagnation. Caste has prevented the Hindus from sinking, but it has also prevented them from rising.

The old miracle bubbles which the Jews blew into the air of wonder 2,000 years ago delight Churches still in their

* Pramatha Nath Bose.

childhood. The sea of theology would have been stagnant centuries ago had not insurgent thinkers, at the peril of their lives, created commotion in it. Morals would have been poisoned on the shores of theology had not Free-thought purified the waters, by putting the salt of reason into that sea, freshening it year by year.

CHAPTER V.

CONQUESTS OF INVESTIGATION.

“The secret of genius is to suffer no fiction to live.”—GOETHE.

THEOLOGIANS had so choked the human mind with a dense undergrowth of dogmas that it was like cutting through an African forest, such as Stanley encountered, to find the path of truth. On that path, when found, many things, unforeseen before, became plain. The siren songs of orthodoxy were discovered to have strange discords of sense in them.

1. The Guide of God seemed to be very human—not authentic, not consistent; containing things not readable nor explainable in the family—fictions such as the Incarnation, reluctantly believable as the device of a moral Deity. Men of genius and of noble ethical sympathy do, however, deem that defensible. In any human book the paternal exaction of such suffering as fell to Christ would be regarded with alarm and repugnance. Wonder was felt that Scripture, purporting to contain the will of Deity, should not be expressed so unmistakably that ignorance could not misunderstand it, nor perversity misconstrue it. The Gods know how to write.

2. The origin of all things has excited and disappointed the curiosity of the greatest exploring minds of every age. That the secret of the universe is undisclosed is manifest

from the different and differing conjectures concerning it. The origin of the universe remains unknowable. What awe fills, or rather takes possession of, the mind which comprehends this! Theism takes wonder out of the universe.

3. Pleasant and free from anxiety life would be, were it true that Providence is a present help in the day of need. Alas! to the poor it is evident that Providence does not interfere, either to befriend the good in their distress, or to arrest the bad in the act of crime.

4. The power of prayer has been the hope of the helpless and the oppressed in every age. Every man wishes it were true that aid could be had that way. Then every just man could protect himself at will against his adversaries. But experience shows that all entreaty is futile to induce Providence to change its universal habit of non-intervention. Prayer beguiles the poor, but provides no dinner. Mr. Spurgeon said at the Tabernacle that prayer filled his meal barrel when empty. I asked that he should publish the recipe in the interest of the hungry. But he made no reply.

5. There is reason to think that original sin is not anything more than original ignorance. The belief in natural depravity discourages all efforts of progress. The primal imperfection of human nature is only effaceable by knowledge and persistent endeavor. Even in things lawful to do, excess is sin, judged by human standards. There may be error without depravity.

6. Eternal perdition for conscientious belief, whether erroneous or not, is humanly incredible. The devisers of this doctrine must have been unaware that belief is an affair of ignorance, prejudice, custom, education, or evidence. The liability of the human race to eternal punishment is the foundation on which all Christianity (except Unitarianism)

rests. This awful belief, if acted upon, with the sincerity that Christianity declares it should be, would terminate all enjoyment, and all enterprise would cease in the world. None would ever marry. No persons with any humanity in their hearts would take upon themselves the awful responsibility of increasing the number of the damned. The registrar of births would be the most fiendish clerk conceivable. He would be practically the Secretary of Hell.

The theory that all the world was lost through a curious and enterprising lady eating an apricot or an apple, and that, 3,000 or more years after, mankind had to be redeemed by the murder of an innocent Jew, is of a nature to make men afraid to believe in a Deity accused of contriving so dreadful a scheme. This reasoning may seem to many an argument against the existence of God, whereas it is merely against the attributes of Deity as ascribed to him by Christianity. If God be not moral, in the human sense of the term, he may as well be not moral at all. It is only he whose principles of justice men can understand that men can trust.

Professor Huxley, conspicuous for his clearness of view and dispassionateness of judgment, was of this opinion, and said: "The suggestion arises, if God is the cause of all things, he is responsible for evil as well as for good; and it appears utterly irreconcilable with our notions of justice that he should punish another for that which he has, in fact, done himself." The poet concurs with the philosopher when he exclaims:—

The loving worm, within its clod,
Were diviner than a loveless God
Amid his worlds.*

* Browning.

Christianity, indeed, speaks of the *love* of God in sending his son to die for the security of others. But not less is the heart of the intelligent and humane believer torn with fear as he thinks what must be the character of that God who could only be thus appeased. The example of self-sacrifice is noble ; but is it noble in anyone who deliberately creates the necessity for it ? The better side of Christianity seems overshadowed by its worse.

7. Future life is uncertain, being unprovable and seemingly improbable, judging from the dependence of life on material conditions. Christians themselves do not seem confident of another existence. If they were *sure* of it, who of them would linger here when those they love and honor have gone before ? Ere we reach the middle of our days the joy of every heart lies in some tomb. If the Christian actually believed that the future was real, would he hang black plumes over the hearse and speak of death as darkness ? No ! the cemeteries would be hung with joyful lights ; the grave would be the gate of Paradise. Everyone would find justifiable excuse for leaving this for the happier world. All tenets which are contradicted by reason had better not be.

Many preachers now disown, in controversy, these doctrines ; but, until they carry the professions of the platform into the statute-book, the rubric, and the pulpit, such doctrines remain operative, and the Churches remain answerable for them. Nonconformists do not protest against a State Church on account of its doctrines, which include all those enumerated. When the doctrines which conflict with reason and humanity are disowned by authority, ecclesiastical and legal, in all denominations, the duty of controverting them as impediments to progress will cease.

It may be said, in reply to what is here set forth as tenets of Christian Scripture, that the writer follows the letter and not the spirit of the word. Yes, that is what he does. He is well aware of the new practice of seeking refuge in the "spirit," of "expanding" the letter and taking a "new range of view." He, however, holds that to drop the "letter" is to drop the doctrine. To "expand" the letter is to change it. New "range of view" is the term under which desertion of the text is disguised. But new "range" means new thought, which, in this insidious way, is put forward to supersede the old. The frank thing is to say so, and admit that the "letter" is obsolete, is gone, is disproved, and that new views which are truer constitute the new letter of progress. The best thing to do with the "dead hand" is to bury it. To try to "expand" dissolution is but galvanising the corpse and tying the dead to the living.

CHAPTER VI.

STATIONARINESS OF CRITICISM.

“Zeal without knowledge is like expedition to a man in the dark.”—JOHN NEWTON. —

CRITICISM in theology, as in literature, is with many an intoxication. Zest in showing what is wrong is apt to blunt the taste for what is right, which it is the true end of criticism to discover. Lord Byron said critics disliked Pope because he afforded them so few chances of objection. They found fault with him because he had no faults. The criticism of theology begets complacency in many. There is a natural satisfaction in being free from the superstition of the vulgar—in the Church as well as out of it. No wonder many find abiding pleasure in the intellectual refutation of the errors of supernaturalism, and in putting its priests to confusion. Absorbed in the antagonism of theology, many lose sight of ultimate utility, and regard error, not as a misfortune to be alleviated, so much as a fault to be exposed. Like the theologian whose color they take, they do not much consider whether their method causes men to dislike the truth, through its manner of being offered to them. Their ambition is to make those in error look foolish. Freethinkers of zeal are apt to become intense, and, like Jules Ferry, a late French premier, care

less for power than for conflict ; and the lover of conflict is not easily induced to regard the disproof of theology as a means to an end* higher than itself. It is difficult to impart to uncalculating zealots a sense of proportion. They dash along the war-path by their own momentum. Railway engineers find that it takes twice as much power to stop an express as it does to start it.

When I first knew Freethought societies they were engaged in Church-fighting, which is still popular among them. This has led the public to confuse anti-theology with Secularism, an entirely different thing. Insurgent thought, exclusively directed, breeds, as is said elsewhere, a distinct class of men—among scholars as well as among the uninformed—who have a passion for disputation, which, like other passions, “grows by what it feeds upon.” Yet a limited number of such paladins of investigation are not without uses in the economy of civilisation. They resemble the mighty hunters of old—they extirpate beasts of prey which roam the theological forests, and thus they render life more safe to dwellers in cities open to the voracious incursions of supernaturalism.

Without the class of combatants described, in whom discussion is irrepressible, and whose courage neither odium nor danger abates, many castles of superstition might never be stormed. But mere intellectualism generates a different and less useful species of thinkers, who neither hunt in the jungles of theology, nor storm strongholds. We all know hundreds in every great town who, having freed themselves, or been freed by others, from ecclesiastical

* Buckle truly says : “ Liberty is not a means ; it is an end in itself.” But the uses of Liberty are means to ends—else why do we want liberty ?

error, yet remain supine, content with their own superiority (which they owe to pioneers who went before them, more generous than they); they speak no word and lend no aid towards conferring the same advantages upon such as are still enslaved. They affect to despise the ignorance they ought to be foremost to dissipate. They exclaim, in the words of Goethe's Coptic song :—

Fools from their folly 'tis hopeless to stay ;
 Mules will be mules by the law of their mulishness :
 Then be advised, and leave fools to their foolishness ;
 What from an ass can be got but a bray ?

These Coptic philosophers overlook that they would have been "asses" also, had those who vindicated freedom before their day, and raised it to a power, been as indifferent and as contemptuous as believers in the fool theory are. Coptic thinkers forget that every man is a fool in respect of any question on which he gives an opinion without having thought independently upon it. With patience you can make a thinker out of a fool, and the first step from the fool stage is accomplished by a little thinking. It is well to remember the exclamation of Thackeray : "If thou hadst never been a fool, be sure thou wilt never be a wise man."

It is, however, but justice to some who join the stationaries, to own that they have fared badly on the war-path against error, and are entitled to the sympathy we extend to the battered soldier who falls out of the ranks on the march. Grote indicates what the severity of the service is in the following passage from his *Analysis of Natural Religion* : "Of all human antipathies, that which the believer in a God bears to the unbeliever is the fullest,

the most unqualified, and the most universal. The mere circumstance of dissent involves a tacit imputation of error and incapacity on the part of the priest, who discerns that his persuasive power is not rated so highly by others as it is by himself. This invariably begets dislike towards his antagonist."

Nevertheless, it is a reproach to those whom militant thought has made free, if they remain unmindful of the fate of their inferiors. Yet Christian Churches, with all the self-complacent superiority to which many of them are prone, are not free from the sins of indifference and superfineness. This was conspicuously shown by Southey, who, in a letter to Sir Henry Taylor, said :—

"Have you seen the strange book which Anastasius Hope left for publication, and which his representatives, in spite of all dissuasion, have published? His notion of immortality and heaven is, that at the consummation of all things he, and you and I, and John Murray, and Nebuchadnezzar, and Lambert the fat man, and the Living Skeleton and Queen Elizabeth, and the Hottentot Venus, and Thurtell, and Probert, and the Twelve Apostles, and the noble army of martyrs, and Ghenghis Khan and all his armies, and Noah with all his ancestors and all his posterity—yea, all men and all women and all children that have ever been or ever shall be, saints and sinners alike—are all to be put together, and made into one great celestial eternal human being.....I do not like the scheme. I don't like the notion of being mixed up with Hume, and Hunt, and Whittle Harvey, and Philpotts, and Lord Althorpe and the Huns, and the Hottentots, and the Jews, and the Philistines, and the Scotch and the Irish. God forbid! I hope to be I myself; in an English heaven, with you yourself—you

and some others, without whom heaven would be no heaven to me."

Most of these persons would have the same dislike to be mixed up with Mr. Southey. Lord Byron would not have been enthusiastic for his company. The Comtists have done something to preach a doctrine of humanity, and to put an end to this pitiful contempt of a few men for their fellows—fellows who in many respects are often superior to those who despise them.

All superiority is apt to be contemptuous of inferiors, unless conscience and generosity take care of it and incite it to instruct inferior natures. The prayer of Browning is one of noble discernment:—

Make no more giants, God,
But elevate the race at once.

Even Freethought, so far as it confines itself to itself, becomes stationary, and, like the squirrel in its cage—

Whether it turns by wood or wire,
Never gets one hair-breadth higher.

If any doubt whether stationariness of thought is possible, let them think of Protestantism, which climbed on to the ledge of Private Judgment three centuries ago, and has remained there. Instead of mounting higher and over-running all the plateaus of error above them, it has done its best to prevent any who would do it from ascending. There is, however, a new order of insurgent thought, of the excelsior cast, which seeks to climb the heights. Distinguished writers against theology in the past have regarded destructive criticism as preparing the way to higher conceptions of life and duty. If so little has been

done in this direction among working-class thinkers, it is because destructiveness is more easy. It needs only indignation to perfect it, and indignation requires no effort. The faculty of constructiveness is more arduous in exercise, and is later in germination. More men are able to take a state than to make a state. Hence Secularism, though inevitable as the next stage of militant progress, more slowly wins adherents and appreciation.

CHAPTER VII.

THIRD STAGE—SECULARISM.

“Nothing is destroyed until it has been replaced.”—MADAME DE STAEL.

SEEING this wise maxim in a paper by Auguste Comte, I asked my friend, William de Fonvielle (who was in communication with Comte), to learn for me the authorship of the phrase. Comte answered that it was the Emperor's (Napoleon III.). It first appeared, as I afterwards found, in the writings of Madame de Staël, and more fully expressed by her.

Self-regarding criticism, having discovered the insufficiency of theology for the guidance of man, next sought to ascertain what rules human reason may supply for the independent conduct of life, which is the object of Secularism. At first the term was taken to be a mask concealing sinister features—“a new name for an old thing”—or as a substitute term for “Scepticism” or “Atheism.” If impressions were always knowledge, men would be wise without inquiry, and explanations would be unnecessary. The term Secularism was chosen to express the extension of Freethought to Ethics. Freethinkers commonly go no further than saying, “We search for Truth.”* Secularists say we have

* M. Aurelius Antoninus said: “I seek the truth, by which no man was ever injured.” It would be true had he said mankind. Men are continually injured by the truth, or how do martyrs come, or why do we honor them?

found it—at least, so much as replaces the chief errors and uncertainties of theology.

Harriet Martineau, the most intrepid thinker among the women of her day, wrote to Lloyd Garrison a letter (inserted in the *Liberator*, 1853) approving “the term Secularism as including a large number of persons who are not Atheists, and uniting them for action, which has Secularism for its object. By the adoption of the new term a vast amount of prejudice is got rid of.” At length it was seen that the “new term” designated a new conception. Secularism is a code of duty pertaining to this life, founded on considerations purely human, and intended mainly for those who find theology indefinite or inadequate, unreliable or unbelievable. Its essential principles are three:—

1. The improvement of this life by material means.
2. That science is the available* Providence of man.
3. That it is good to do good. Whether there be other good or not, the good of the present life is good, and it is good to seek that good.

Individual good attained by methods conducive to the good of others is the highest aim of man, whether regard be had to human welfare in this life or personal fitness for another. Precedence is, therefore, given to the duties of this life.

Being asked to send to the International Congress of Liberal thinkers (1886) an account of the tenets of the

* This phrase was a suggestion of my friend, the Rev. Dr. Henry Crosskey, about 1854. I afterwards used the word “available,” which does not deny, nor challenge, nor affirm the belief in a theological Providence by others, who, therefore, are not incited to assail the effectual proposition that material resources are an *available* Providence where a spiritual Providence is inactive.

English party known as Secularists, I gave the following explanation of them :—

The Secular is that the issues of which can be tested by the experience of this life. The ground common to all self-determined thinkers is that of independency of opinion, known as Freethought, which, though but an impulse of intellectual courage in the search for truth, or an impulse of aggression against hurtful or irritating error, or the caprice of a restless mind, is to be encouraged. It is necessary to promote independent thought—whatever its manner of manifestation—since there can be no progress without it. A Secularist is intended to be a reasoner—that is, as Coleridge defined him, one who inquires what a thing is, and not only what it is, but *why* it is what it is. One of the two great forces of opinion created in this age is what is known as Atheism,* which deprives superstition of its standing ground, and compels Theism to reason for its existence. The other force is Materialism, which shows the physical consequences of error, supplying, as it were, beacon lights to morality.

Though respecting the right of the Atheist and Theist to their theories of the origin of nature, the Secularist regards them as belonging to the debateable ground of speculation. Secularism neither asks nor gives any opinion upon them, confining itself to the entirely independent field of study—the order of the universe. Neither asserting nor denying Theism, or a future life—having no sufficient reason to give if called upon, the fact remains that material influences exist, vast and available for good, as men have the will and wit to employ them.

* Huxley's term, Agnosticism, implies a different thing—unknowingness without denial.

Whatever may be the value of metaphysical or theological theories of morals, utility in conduct is a daily test of common sense, and is capable of deciding intelligently more questions of practical duty than any other rule. Considerations which pertain to the general welfare operate without the machinery of theological creeds, and over masses of men in every land, where Christian incentives are alien or unregarded.

CHAPTER VIII.

THREE PRINCIPLES VINDICATED.

“Be wisely worldly; but not worldly wise.”—FRANCIS QUARLES.

1. *Of Material Means as Conditions of Welfare in this World.*—Theology works by “spiritual” means. Christians and Secularists both intend raising the character of the people, but their methods are much different. Christians are now beginning to employ material agencies for the elevation of life, which science, and not theology, has brought under their notice. But the Christian does not trust these agencies; the Secularist does, and in his mind the secular is sacred. Spiritual means can never be depended upon for food, raiment, art, or national defence.

The Archbishop of York (Dr. Magee), a clear-headed and candid prelate, surprised his contemporaries (at the Diocesan Conference, Leicester, October 19, 1889) by declaring that “Christianity made no claim to re-arrange the economic relations of man in the State, or in society. He hoped he would be understood when he said plainly that it was his firm belief that any Christian State carrying out, in all its relations, the Sermon on the Mount could not exist for a week. It was perfectly clear that a State could not continue to exist upon what were commonly called ‘Christian’ principles.”

From the first, Secularism had based its claims to be

regarded on the fact that only the rich could afford to be Christians, while the poor must look to other principles for deliverance. Material means are those which are calculable, which are under the control and command of man, and can be tested by human experience. No definition of Secularism shows its distinctiveness which omits to specify *material* means as its method of procedure. But for the theological blasphemy of Nature representing it as the unintelligent tool of God, the secular would have ennobled common life long ago. Sir Godfrey Kneller said he "never looked on a bad picture but he carried away in his mind a dirty tint." Secularism would efface the dirty tints of life which Christianity has prayed over, but not removed.

2. *Of the Providence of Science.*—Men are limited in power, and are oft in peril, and those who are taught to trust to supernatural aid are betrayed to their own destruction. We are told we should work as though there were no help in heaven, and pray as though there were no help in ourselves. Since, however, praying saves no ship, arrests no disease, and does not pay the tax-gatherer, it is better to work at once and without the digression of sinking prayer-buckets into empty wells, and spending life in drawing nothing up. The word illuminating secular life is *self-help*. The Secularist vexes not the ear of heaven by mendicant supplications. His is the only religion that gives heaven no trouble.

3. *Of Goodness as Fitness for this World or Another.*—Goodness is the service of others with a view to their advantage. There is no higher human merit. Human welfare is the sanction of morality. The measure of a good action is its conduciveness to progress. The utilitarian test of generous rightness in motive may be open to

objection—there is no test which is not ; but the utilitarian rule is one comprehensible by every mind. It is the only rule which makes knowledge necessary, and becomes more luminous as knowledge increases. A fool may be a believer,* but not a utilitarian, who seeks his ground of action in the largest field of relevant facts his mind is able to survey. Utility in morals is measuring the good of one by its agreement with the good of many. Large ideas are when a man measures the good of his parish by the good of the town ; the good of the town by the good of the county ; the good of the county by the good of the country ; the good of the country by the good of the continent ; the good of the continent by the cosmopolitanism of the world.

Truth and solicitude for the social welfare of others are the proper concern of a soul worth saving. Only minds with goodness in them have the desert of future existence. Minds without veracity and generosity die. The elements of death are in the selfish already. They could not live in a better world if they were admitted. In a noble passage in his sermon on "Citizenship," the Rev. Stopford A. Brooke said :—

"There are thousands of my fellow citizens, men and women and children, who are living in conditions in which they have no true means of becoming healthy in body, trained in mind, or comforted by beauty. Life is as hard for them as it is easy for me. I cannot help them by giving them money one by one, but I can help them by making the condition of their life easier by a good government of the city in which they live. And even if the charge on my property for this purpose increases for a time, year by year, till the work is done,

* The *Guardian* told us about 1887 that the Bishop of Exeter confirmed five idiots.

that charge I will gladly pay. It shall be my ethics, *my religion*, my patriotism, my citizenship, to do it."*

The great preacher whose words are here cited, like Theodore Parker (the Jupiter of the pulpit in his day, as Wendell Phillips described him to me), is not a Secularist; but he expresses here the religion of the Secularist, if such a person can be supposed to have a religion.

A theological creed which the base may hold—and usually do—has none of the merit of deeds of service to humanity, which only the good intentionally perform. Conscience is the sense of right with regard to others; it is a sense of duty towards others, which tells us that we should do justice to them; and if not able to do it individually, to endeavor to get it done by others. At St. Peter's Gate there can be no passport so safe as this. He was not far wrong who, when asked where heaven lay, answered, "On the other side of a good action."

If, as Dr. James Martineau says, "there is a thought of God in the thing that is true, and a will of God in that which is right," Secularism, caring for truth and duty, cannot be far wrong. Thus it has a reasonable regard for the contingencies of another life, should it supervene. Reasoned opinions rely for justification upon intelligent conviction and a well-informed sincerity. The Secularist is without presumption of an infallible creed, is without the timorous indefiniteness of a creedless believer. He does not disown a creed because theologians have promulgated Jew-bound, unalterable articles of faith. The Secularist has a creed as definite as science and as flexible as progress, increasing as the horizon of truth is enlarged.

* Preached in reference to the London County Council elections, March, 1892.

His creed is a confession of his belief. There is more unity of opinion among self-thinkers than is supposed. They all maintain the necessity of independent opinion, for they all exercise it. They all believe in the moral rightfulness of independent thought, or they are guilty for propagating it. They all agree as to the right of publishing well-considered ideas, otherwise thinking would be of little use. They all approve of free criticism, for there could be no reliance on thought which did not use or could not bear that. All agree as to the equal action of opinion without which opinion would be fruitless and action a monopoly. All agree that truth is the object of Freethought, for many have died to gain it. All agree that scrutiny is the pathway to truth, for they have all passed along it. They all attach importance to the good of this life, teaching this as the first service to humanity. All are of one opinion as to the efficacy of material means in promoting human improvement, for they alone are distinguished by vindicating their use. All hold that morals are effectively commended by reason, for all self-thinkers have taught so. All believe that God, if he exists, is the God of the honest, and that he respects conscience more than creeds, for all Freethinkers have died in this faith. Independent thinkers, from Socrates to Huxley and Herbert Spencer,* have all agreed—

In the necessity of Freethought.

In the rightfulness of it.

In the adequacy of it.

* See *Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers of all Ages and Nations*, by J. M. Wheeler, and *Four Hundred Years of Freethought (from Columbus to Ingersoll)*, by Samuel Porter Putnam, containing upwards of 1,000 biographies.

In the considerate publicity of it.

In the fair criticism of it.

In the equal action of conviction.

In the recognition of this life, and

In the material control of it.

The Secularist, like Karpos the gardener, may say of his creed: "Its points are few and simple. They are: to be a good citizen, a good husband, a good father, and a good workman." "I go no further," said Karpos, "but pray God to take it all in good part, and have mercy on my soul."*

* Dialogue between Karpos the gardener and Bashiew Tucton, by Voltaire.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW SECULARISM AROSE.

“We must neither *lead* nor *leave* men to mistake falsehood for truth. Not to undeceive is to deceive.”—ARCHBISHOP WHATELY.

BEING one of the social missionaries in the propaganda of Robert Owen, I was, like Vieussieu—a notable writer of those days—a “Student of Realities.” It soon became clear to me, as to others, that men are much influenced for good or evil by their environments. The word was unused then—“circumstances” was the term employed. Then, as now, there were numerous persons everywhere to be met with who explained everything on supernatural principles, with all the confidence of infinite knowledge. Not having this advantage, I profited as well as I could by such observation as was in my power to make. I could see that material laws counted for something in the world. This led me to the conclusion that the duty of watching the ways of nature was incumbent on all who would find true conditions of human betterment, or new reasons for morality—both very much needed. To this end the name of Secularism was given to certain principles which had for their object human improvement by material means, regarding Science as the Providence of man, and justifying morality by considerations which pertain to this life alone.

The rise and development (if I may use so fine a term) of these views may be traced in the following records:—

1. "Materialism will be advanced as the only sound basis of rational thought and practice."*

2. Five prizes were awarded to me for Lectures to be delivered in the Manchester Order of Oddfellows on taking Degrees. These Degree addresses (1846) were written on the principle that morality apart from theology could be based on human reason and experience.

3. "The *Reasoner* restricts itself to the known, to the present, and seeks to realise the life that is."†

4. A series of papers was commenced in the *Reasoner* entitled "The Moral Remains of the Bible," one object of which was to show that those who no longer held the Bible as an infallible book might still value it wherein it was ethically excellent.‡

5. "To teach men to see that the sum of all knowledge and duty is *secular*, and that it pertains to this world alone."§ This was the first time the word "Secular" was applied as a general test of principles of conduct, apart from spiritual considerations.

6. "Giving an account of ourselves in the whole extent of opinion, we should use the word 'Secularist,' as best indicating that province of human duty which belongs to this life."¶ This was the first time the word "Secularist" appeared in literature, as descriptive of a new way of thinking.

7. "Mr. Holyoake, editor of the *Reasoner*, will lay before the meeting [then proposed] the present position of Secu-

* *Prospectus of the Movement* (1843).

† Preface to the *Reasoner* (1846). In no. 27 (1846) the Principles of Secularism were fully stated.

‡ *Reasoner*, vol. v., no. 106, p. 17 (1848).

§ *Ibid*, Nov. 19, 1851; article, "Truths to Teach" (p. 1).

¶ *Ibid*, Dec. 3, 1851; p. 34.

larism in the provinces.”* This was the first time the word “Secularism” appeared in the press. The meeting above mentioned was held December 29, 1851, at which the statement made might be taken as an epitome of these papers. †

8. A letter on “The Future of Secularism” appeared in the *Reasoner*. ‡ This was the first time Secularism was written upon as a movement. The term was the heading of a letter by Charles Frederick Nicholls.

9. “One public purpose is to obtain the repeal of all Acts of Parliament which interfere with secular practice.”§ This is exactly the attitude Secularism takes with regard to the Bible and to Christianity. It rejects such parts of the Scriptures, or of Christianity, or Acts of Parliament, as conflict with or obstruct ethical truth. We do not seek the repeal of all Acts of Parliament, but only of such as interfere with secular progress.

10. “The friends of ‘Secular Education’ [the Manchester Association was then so known] are not Secularists. They do not pretend to be so; they do not even wish to be so regarded; they merely use the word ‘secular’ as an adjective, as applied to a mode of instruction. We apply it to the *nature* of all knowledge.”¶ We use the noun “Secularism.” No one else has done it. With others the term “Secular” is merely a descriptive; with us the term is used as a subject. With others it is a branch of know-

* *Ibid*, Dec. 10, 1851; p. 62.

† *Ibid*, no. 294, vol. xii.; p. 129 (1852).

‡ Feb. 4, 1852; p. 187.

§ *Reasoner*, no. 325, Aug. 18, 1852; article, “Nature of Secular Societies” (p. 146).

¶ See article, “The Seculars—the Propriety of their Name,” by G. J. Holyoake, *Reasoner*, Sept. 1, 1852 (p. 177).

ledge ; with us it is the primary business of life—the name of the province of speculation to which we confine ourselves. When so used in these pages, the word “Secularism” or “Secularist” is employed to mark the distinction.

A Bolton clergyman reported in the *Bolton Guardian* that Mr. Holyoake had announced as the first subject of his lectures, “Why do the Clergy Avoid Discussion and the Secularists Seek it ?”*

These citations from my own writings are sufficient to show the nature and origin of Secularism. Such views were widely accepted by liberal thinkers of the day as an improvement and extension of Freethought advocacy. Societies were formed, halls were given a Secular name, and Conferences were held to organise adherents of the new opinion. The first was held in the Secular Institute, Manchester, October 3, 1852. Delegates were sent from societies in Ashton-under-Lyne, from Bolton, Blackburn, Bradford, Burnley, Bury, Glasgow, Keighley, Leigh, London, Manchester, Miles Platting, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Oldham, Over Darwen, *Owen's Journal*, Paisley, Preston, Rochdale, Stafford, Sheffield, Stockport, Todmorden. Among the delegates were many well known, long known, and some still known—James Charlton (now the famous manager of the Chicago and Alton Railway), Abram Greenwood (now the cashier of the Co-operative Wholesale Bank of Manchester), William Mallalieu of Todmorden (familiarily known as the “millionaire” of the original Rochdale pioneers), Dr. Hiram Uttley (of Burnley), Thomas Hayes (then of Miles Platting, now manager of the Crumpsall

* *Reasoner*, no. 328, vol. xii., 1852 ; p. 294.

Biscuit Works of the Co-operative Wholesale Society), Joseph Place (of Nottingham), John Crank (of Stockport), James Motherwell (of Paisley), Dr. Henry Travis (Socialist writer on Owen's system), Samuel Ingham (of Manchester), J. R. Cooper (of Manchester), and the present writer.

CHAPTER X.

HOW IT WAS DIFFUSED.

"Only by varied iteration can alien conceptions be forced on reluctant minds."—HERBERT SPENCER.

IN 1853 a six nights' discussion took place in London (Cowper-street School-room) with the Rev. Brewin Grant, B.A. A report was published by Messrs. Partridge and Oakley, at 2s. 6d., of which 45,000 copies were sold, which widely diffused a knowledge of Secularistic views. Our adversary had been appointed, with clerical ceremony, on a "three years' mission" against us. He had wit, readiness, and an electric velocity of speech, boasting that he could speak three times faster than anyone else. But he proved to be of use to us without intending it. His acrid words turned the "sweet milk of kindness into curds," whereby he set many against the cause he represented. He had the cleverness to see that there ought to be a "Christian Secularism," which raised Secularism to the level of Christian curiosity. In Glasgow, in 1854, I met Mr. Grant again, during several nights' discussion in the City Hall. This debate also was published, as was one of three nights with the Rev. J. H. Rutherford (afterwards Dr. Rutherford) in Newcastle-on-Tyne, who aimed to prove that Christianity contained the better Secularism. Thus that new form of Freethought came to have public recognition.

The lease of a house (147 Fleet-street) was bought (1852), where was established a Secularist Institute, connected with printing, bookselling, and liberal publishing. Further Conferences were held in July, 1854; one at Stockport. At an adjourned Conference Mr. Joseph Barker (whom we had converted) presided.* We had a London Secular Society, which met at the Hall of Science, City-road, and held its council meetings in Mr. Le Blond's handsome house at London Wall. This work, and much more, was done before and while Mr. Bradlaugh—who afterwards was conspicuously identified with the movement—was in the army.

It was in 1854 that I published the first pamphlet on *Secularism the Practical Philosophy of the People*. It commenced by showing the necessity of independent, self-helping, self-extricating opinions. Its opening passage was as follows :—

“In a state of society in which every inch of land, every blade of grass, every spray of water, every bird and flower, has an owner, what has the poor man to do with orthodox religion, which begins by proclaiming him a miserable sinner, and ends by leaving him a miserable slave, as far as unrequited toil goes ?

“The poor man finds himself in an *armed* world, where might is God and poverty is fettered. Abroad the hired soldier blocks up the path of freedom, and the priest the path of progress. Every penniless man, woman, and child is virtually the property of the capitalist, no less in England than is the slave in New Orleans.† Society blockades poverty, leaving it scarce escape. The artisan is engaged in an imminent struggle against wrong and injustice; then what has he, the struggler, to do with

* *Reasoner*, no. 428, vol. xvii. ; p. 87.

† Not entirely so. The English slave can run away—at his own peril.

doctrines which brand him with inherited guilt, which paralyse him by an arbitrary faith, which deny saving power to good works, and menace him with eternal perdition?"

The two first works of importance controverting Secularist principles were by the Rev. Joseph Parker and Mr. J. A. Langford. Dr. Parker was ingenious, Dr. Langford eloquent. I had discussed with Dr. Parker in Banbury. In his *Six Chapters on Secularism** (which was the title of his book) he makes pleasant references to that debate. The *Christian Weekly News* of that day said: "These six chapters have been written by a young provincial minister of great power and promise, of whom the world has not yet heard, but of whom it will hear pleasing things some day." This prediction has come true. I had told Mr. Freeman that the "young preacher" had given me that impression in the discussion with him. Dr. Parker said, in his first chapter, that "If the New Testament teachings oppose our own consciousness, violate our moral sense, lead us out of sympathy with humanity, then we shall abandon them." This was exactly the case of Secularism, which he undertook to confute. Dr. Langford held a more rational religion than Dr. Parker. His answer (which reached a "second thousand") had passages of courtesy and friendship, yet he contended with graceful vigor against opinions three-fourths of which justified his own.

In an address delivered September 29, 1851, I had said that "There were three classes of persons opposed to Christianity—

1. The dissolute.

* Published by my then neighbor, William Freeman, of 69 Fleet street, himself an energetic, pleasant-minded Christian.

2. The indifferent.
3. The intellectually independent.

The dissolute are against Christianity because they regard it as a foe to sensuality. The indifferent reject it through being ignorant of it, or not having time to attend to it, or not being able to attend to it, through constitutional insensibility to its appeals. The intellectually independent avoid it as opposed to freedom, morality, and progress." It was to these classes, and not to Christians, that Secularism was addressed. Neither Dr. Parker nor Dr. Langford took notice that it was intended to furnish ethical guidance where Christianity—whatever might be its quality, or pretensions, or merit—was inoperative.* The New Form of Free-thought, under the title of "The Principles of Secularism," were submitted to Mr. John Stuart Mill, to whose friendship and criticism I had often been indebted, and he approved the statement as one likely to be useful to those outside the pale of Christianity.

A remarkable thing occurred in 1854. A prize of £100 was offered by the Evangelical Alliance for the best book on "The Aspects, Causes, and Agencies of" what they called by the odious, apostolic, defamatory name of "Infidelity."† The Rev. Thomas Pearson, of Eyemouth, won the prize by a brilliant book, which I praised for its many relevant quotations, its instruction, and fairness; but I represented

* In 1857 Dr. Joseph Parker published a maturer and more important volume—*Helps to Truth Seekers; or, Christianity and Scepticism*, containing the "Secularist Theory—a Critique." At a distance of more than thirty-five years it seems to me an abler book, from the Christian point of view, than I thought it on its appearance.

† A term of intentional offence, as here used. "Infidelity" means treachery to the truth, whereas the heretic has often sacrificed his life from fidelity to it.

that its price (10s. 6d.) prevented numerous humble readers from possessing it. The Evangelical Alliance inferred that the "relevancy" was on their side altogether, whereas I meant relevant to the argument and to those supposed to be confuted by it. They resolved to issue 20,000 copies at one shilling a volume. The most eminent evangelical ministers and congregations of the day subscribed to the project. Four persons put down their names for one thousand copies each, and a strong list of subscribers was sent out. Unfortunately, I published another article, intending to induce readers of the *Reasoner* to procure copies, as they would find in its candid pages a wealth of quotations of Freethought opinion, with which very few were acquainted. The number of eminent writers—dissentients from Christianity—and the force and felicity of their objections to it, as cited by Mr. Pearson, would astonish and instruct Christians, who were quite unfamiliar with the historic literature of heretical thought. This unwise article stopped the project. The 20,000 shilling edition never appeared, only a small number were issued, and the public lost the most useful and informing book written against us in my time. The Rev. Mr. Pearson died not long after; all too soon, for he was a minister who commanded respect. He had research, good faith, and courtesy—qualities rare in his day.

CHAPTER XI.

SECULAR INSTRUCTION DISTINCT FROM
SECULARISM.

“A mariner must have his eye on the rock and the sand as well as upon the North star.”—*Maxim of the Sea.*

It is time now to point out what many never seem to understand, that secular instruction is entirely distinct from Secularism. In my earlier days the term “scientific” was the distressing word in connection with education; but the trouble of later years is with the word “secular.” Theological critics run on the “rock” there. Many persons regard secular teaching with distrust, thinking it to be the same as Secularism. Secular instruction is known by the sign of separateness. It means knowledge given apart from theology. Secular instruction comprises a set of rules for the guidance of industry, commerce, science, and art. Secular teaching is as distinct from theology as a poem from a sermon. A man may be a mathematician, an architect, a lawyer, a musician, or a surgeon, and be a Christian all the same—as Faraday was both chemist and devout Sandemanian; as Buckland was a geologist as well as a dean. But if theology be mixed up with professional knowledge, there will be muddle-headedness.* At a separate time theology can be taught, and

* Edward Baines (afterwards Sir Edward), who was the greatest opponent in his day of National schools and secular instruction, sent his son to a secular school because he wanted him to be clever as well as a Christian. He was both, as I well know.

any learner will have a clearer and more commanding knowledge of Christianity by its being distinctive in his mind.

Secular instruction neither assails Christianity nor prejudices the learner against it; any more than sculpture assails jurisprudence, or than geometry prejudices the mind against music. If the secular instructor made it a point, as he ought to do, to inculcate elementary ideas of morality, he would confine himself to explaining how far truth and duty have sanctions in considerations purely human, leaving it to teachers of religion to supplement, at another time and place, what they believe to be further and higher sanctions. Secular instruction implies that the proper business of the school-teacher is to impart a knowledge of the duties of this world; and the proper business of chapel and church is to explain the duties relevant to another world, which can only be done in a secondhand way by the school-teacher. The wonder is that the pride of the minister does not incite him to keep his own proper work in his own hands, and to protest against the school-teacher meddling with it. By doing so he would augment his own dignity and the distinctiveness of his office. By keeping each kind of knowledge apart a man learns both more easily and more effectually. Secular training is better for the scholar and safer for the State; and better for the priest if he has a faith that can stand by itself.

If the reader does not distrust it as a paradox, he will assent that the secular is distinct from Secularism, as distinct as an act is distinct from its motive. Secular teaching comprises a set of rules of instruction in trade, business, and professional knowledge. Secularism furnished a set of principles for the ethical conduct of life. Secular instruc-

tion is far more limited in its range than Secularism, which defends secular pursuits against theology, where theology attacks them or obstructs them. But pure secular knowledge is confined to its own pursuit, and does not come in contact with theology, any more than architecture comes in contact with preaching.

A man may be a shareholder in a gas company, or a water-works, a house-owner or landlord, a farmer or workman. All these are secular pursuits, and he who follows them may consult only his own interest. But if he be a Secularist, he will consider not only his own interest, but, as far as he can, the welfare of the community or the world, as his action or example may tell for the good of universal society. He will do "his best"—not, as Mr. Ruskin says, "the best of an ass," but "the best of an intelligent man." In every act he will put his conscience and character, with a view so to discharge the duties of this life as to merit another if there be one. Just as a Christian seeks to serve God, a Secularist seeks to serve man. This it is to be a Secularist. The idea of this service is what Secularism puts into his mind. Professor Clifford exclaimed: "The kingdom of God has come; when comes the kingdom of Man?" A Secularist is one who hastens the coming of this kingdom; which must be agreeable to heaven if the people of this world are to occupy mansions there.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DISTINCTIVENESS MADE FURTHER
EVIDENT.

“The cry that so-called secular education is Atheistic is hardly worth notice. Cricket is not theological; at the same time, it is not Atheistic.”—REV. JOSEPH PARKER, D.D., *Times*, October 11, 1894.

NOR is Secularism Atheism. The laws of the universe are quite distinct from the question of the origin of the universe. The study of the laws of Nature, which Secularism selects, is quite different from speculation as to the authorship of Nature. We may judge and prize the beauty and uses of an ancient edifice, though we may never know the builder. Secularism is a form of opinion which concerns itself only with questions the issues of which can be tested by the experience of this life. It is clear that the existence of Deity and the actuality of another life are questions excluded from Secularism, which exacts no denial of Deity or immortality, from members of Secularist societies. During their day only two persons of public distinction—the Bishop of Peterborough and Charles Bradlaugh—maintained that the Secular was Atheistic. Yet Mr. Bradlaugh never put a profession of Atheism as one of the tenets of any Secularist society. Atheism may be a personal tenet, but it cannot be a Secularist tenet, from which it is wholly disconnected.

No one would confuse the Secular with the Atheistic

who understood that the Secular is separate. Mr. Hodgson Pratt, a Christian, writing in *Concord* (October, 1894) a description of the burial of Angelo Mazzoleni, said "the funeral was entirely secular," meaning the ceremony was distinct from that of the Church, being based on considerations pertaining to duty in this world.

In the indefiniteness of colloquial speech we constantly hear the phrase, "School Board education." Yet School Boards cannot give "education." It is beyond their reach. Most persons confuse instruction with education. Instruction relates to industrial, commercial, agricultural, and scientific knowledge and like subjects. Education implies the complete training and "drawing out of the whole powers of the mind."* Thus instruction is different from education. Instruction is departmental knowledge. Education includes all the influences of life; instruction gives skill, education forms character.

The Rev. Dr. Parker is the first Nonconformist preacher of distinction who has avowed his concurrence with secular instruction in Board schools. When Mr. W. E. Forster was framing his Education Act, I besought him to raise English educational policy to the level of the much-smoking, much-pondering Dutch. "The system of education in Holland dates from 1857. It is a secular system, meaning by secular that the Bible is not allowed to be read in schools, nor is any religious instruction allowed to be given. The use of the school-room is, however, granted to ministers of all denominations for the purpose of teaching religion out of school hours. The schoolmaster is not

* Henry Drummond gave this definition in the House of Commons, and it was adopted by W. J. Fox and other leaders of opinion in that day.

allowed to give religious instruction, or even to read the Bible in school at any time."* No State rears better citizens or better Christians than the Dutch. Mr. Gladstone, with his customary discernment, has said that "secular instruction does not involve denial of religious teaching, but merely separation in point of time." It seems incredible that Christian ministers, generally, do not see the advantage of this. I should probably have become a Christian preacher myself had it not been for the incessantness with which religion was obtruded on me in childhood and youth. Even now my mind aches when I think of it. For myself, I respect the individuality of piety. It is always picturesque. Looking at religion from the outside, I can see that concrete sectarianism is a source of religious strength. A man is only master of his own faith when he sees it clearly, distinctly, and separately. Rather than permit secular instruction and religious education to be imparted separately, Christian ministers permit the great doctrines they profess to maintain to be whittled down to a School Board average, in which, when done honestly towards all opinions, no man can discern Christianity without the aid of a microscope. And this passes, in these days, for good ecclesiastical policy. In a recent letter (November, 1894) Mr. Gladstone has re-affirmed his objection to "an undenominational system of religion framed by, or under the authority of, the State." He says: "It would, I think, be better for the State to limit itself to giving secular instruction, which, of course, is no complete education." Mr. Gladstone does not confound secular instruction with education, but is of the way of thinking of

* Report from the Hague, by Mr. (now Right Hon.) Jesse Collings, M.P., May, 1870.

Milton, who says : " I call a complete and generous education that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully, and magnanimously all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war." Secular instruction touches no doctrine, menaces no creed, raises no scepticism in the mind. But an average of belief introduces the aggressive hand of heresy into every school, tampering with tenets rooted in the conscience, wantonly alarming religious convictions, and substituting for a clear, a frank, and manly issue, a disastrous, a blind, and timid policy, wriggling along like a serpent instead of walking with self-dependent erectness. This manly erectness would be the rule were the formula of the great preacher accepted who has said : " Secular education by the State and Christian education by the Christian Church is my motto."* Uniformity of truth is desirable, and it will come, not by contrivance, but by conviction.

Some one quoted lately in the *Daily News* (September 19, 1895) the following sentences I wrote in 1870 :—

" With secular instruction only in the day school, religion will acquire freshness and new force. The clergyman and the minister will exercise a new influence, because their ministrations will have dignity and definiteness. They will no longer delegate things, declared by them to be sacred, to be taught secondhand by the harassed, overworked, and oft-reluctant schoolmaster and schoolmistress, who must contradict the gentleness of religion by the peremptoriness of the pedagogue, and efface the precept that ' God is love ' by an incontinent application of the birch.....It is not secular instruction which breeds irreverence, but this ill-timed familiarity with the reputed things of God which robs divinity of its divineness."

* The Rev. Joseph Parker, D.D.

The Bible in the school-room will not always be to the advantage of clericalism, as it is thought to be now.

Mr. Forster's Education Act created what Mr. Disraeli contemptuously described as a new "sacerdotal caste"—a body of second-hand preachers, who are to be paid by the money of the State to do the work which the minister and the clergyman avow they are called by heaven to perform—namely, to save the souls of the people. According to this Act, the clergy are really no longer necessary; their work can be done by a commoner and cheaper order of artificers. Mr. Forster insisted that the Bible be introduced into the school-room, which gives great advantage to the Freethinker, as it makes a critical agitation against its character and pretensions a matter of self-defence for every family. Another eminent preacher, Mr. C. H. Spurgeon, wrote, not openly in the *Times* as Dr. Parker did, but in *The Sword and Trowel*, thus: "We should like to see established a system of universal application, which would give a sound secular education to children, and leave the religious training to the home and the agencies of the Church of Christ." It is worthy of the radiant common sense of the famous orator of the Tabernacle that he should have said this anywhere.

CHAPTER XIII.

SELF-DEFENSIVE FOR THE PEOPLE.

What suits the gods above
Only the gods can know ;
What we want is This World's sense
How to live below.

By its nature, Secularism is tolerant with regard to religions. I once drew up a code of rules for an Atheistic school. One rule was that the children should be taught the tenets of the Christian, Catholic, Moslem, Jewish, and the leading theological systems of the world, as well as Secularistic and Atheistic forms of thought ; so that, when the pupil came to years of discretion, he might be able intelligently to choose a faith for himself. Less than this would be a fraud upon the understanding of a man. In matters which concern himself alone, he must be free to choose for himself, and know what he is choosing from. That form of belief which has misgivings as to whether it can stand by itself is to be distrusted.

It is the scandal of Christianity that for twenty-five years it has paralysed School Board instruction by its discord of opinion as to the religious tenets to be imparted. In secularity there is no disunity. Everybody is agreed upon the rules of arithmetic. The laws of grammar command general assent. There are no rival schools upon the interpretation of geometrical problems. It is only in

divinity that irreconcilable diversity exists. When secular instruction is conceded, denominational differences will be respected, as aspects of the integrity of conscience, which no longer obstruct the intellectual progress of the people.

But there are graver issues than the pride and preference of the preacher—namely, the welfare of the children of the people. What the working classes want is an industrial education. Poverty is a battle, and the poor are always in a conflict—a conflict in which the most ignorant ever go to the wall. The accepted policy of the State leaves the increase of population to chance. It suffers none to be killed; it compels people to be kept alive, and abandons their subsistence to the accident of capitalists requiring to hire their services. Thus our great towns are crowded with families, impelled there by the wild forces of hunger and of passion. From the working man thus situated the governing class exact four duties:—

1. That he shall give the parish no disquietude by asking it to maintain his family.
2. That he shall pay whatever taxes are levied upon him.
3. That he shall give no trouble to the police.
4. That he shall fight generally whomsoever the Government may see fit to involve the nation in war with.

Whatever knowledge is necessary to enable the future workman to do these things is his right, and should be given to him in his youth in the speediest manner; and any other inculcation which shall delay this knowledge on its way, or confuse the learner in acquiring it, is a cruelty to him and a peril to the community which permits it; and the State, were it discerning and just, would forbid it.

In April, 1870, in a letter which appeared in the *Spectator*, I wrote as follows :—

“In the speech of the Bishop of Peterborough, delivered at the Educational Conference at Leicester, and published in a separate form by the National Education Union, his Lordship quotes from a recent letter of mine to the *Daily News* some words in which I explained that ‘unsectarian education amounts to a new species of parliamentary piety.’ It is a satisfaction to find that the Bishop of Peterborough is able to ‘entirely endorse these words.’ The Bishop asks: ‘Whose words do you suppose they are? They are the words of that reactionary maintainer of creeds and dogmas—Mr. Holyoake.’ So far from being a ‘reactionary’ in this matter, I have always maintained that every form of sincere opinion, religious or secular, should have free play and fair play. I have never varied in advocating the right of free utterance and free action of all earnest conviction. The State requires a self-supporting and tax-paying population. But the State cannot insure this, except by imparting *productive* knowledge to the people. It is necessary for the people to receive, it is the interest of the State to give, *productive* instruction in national schools.”

If people realised how much extended secular instruction is needed, they would be impatient with the obstruction of it by contending sects. Children want industrial education to fit them for emigrants. A knowledge of soils, of cattle, of climate, and crops, and how to nail up a wigwam and grow pork and corn, is what they need. For want of such knowledge Clerkenwell watch-makers, Northampton shoemakers, Lancashire weavers, and Durham miners perish as emigrants, and their bones bleach the prairies. Yet all orthodox teaching turns out its pupils uninstructed, for, as Tillottson has said, “He that does not know those things which are of use and necessity for him to know is but an

ignorant man, whatever he may know beside." To know this world, and the secular conditions of prosperity in it, is indispensable to the people.

Christianity is entirely futile in industry. If a workman cannot pay his taxes, the most devout Chancellor of the Exchequer will not abate sixpence in consideration of the defaulter's piety. The poor man may believe in the Thirty-nine Articles, be able to recite all the Collects; he may spend his Sundays at church, and his evenings at prayer-meeting; but the reverend magistrate, who has confirmed him and preached to him, will send him to gaol if he does not pay. The sooner workmen understand that Christianity has no commercial value, the better for them.

Why should purely secular instruction be regarded with distrust, when purely religious education does not answer? It does not appear in human experience that purely religious teaching, even when dispensed in a clergyman's family, is a security for good conduct. It is matter of common remark that the sons of clergymen turn out worse than the sons of parents in other professions.

We want no whining or puling population. The elements of science and morality will give children the use of their minds, and minds to use, and teach justice and kindness, self-direction, self-reliance, fortitude, and truth. There is piety in this instruction—piety to mankind—exactly that sort of piety for the want of which society suffers.

The principles for which during two centuries Nonconformity in England has contended are, that the State should forbid no religion, impose no religion, teach no religion, pay no religion. In 1870, the year in which Mr. Forster's Act came into operation, I was the only person who issued a public address to the "School Board Electors" in favor of

free, compulsory, and secular instruction. Two of the proposals, the least likely to be favorably received, have since been adopted. The turn of the third must be near, unless fools are always at the polls.

CHAPTER XIV.

REJECTED TENETS REPLACED BY BETTER.

“False ideas can be confuted by argument, but it is only by true ideas they can be expelled.”—CARDINAL NEWMAN.

ERROR will live wherever vermin of the mind may burrow ; and error, if expelled, will return to its accustomed haunt, unless its place be otherwise occupied by some tenant of Truth. Suppose that criticism has established :—

1. That God is unknown.
2. That a Future Life is unprovable.
3. That the Bible is not a practical guide.
4. That Providence sleeps.
5. That prayer is futile.
6. That original sin is untrue.
7. That eternal perdition is unreal.

What is Freethought going to do ? All these theological ideas, however untrue, are forces of opinion on the side of error. After taking these doctrines out of the minds of men, as far as reasoning criticism may do it, what is proposed to be put in their place ? When we call out to men that they are going down a wrong road, we are more likely to arrest their attention if we can point out the right road to take.

No mind is ever entirely empty. The objection to ignorance is not that it has no ideas, but that it has wrong ones. Its ideas are narrow, cramped, vicious. It likes without reason, hates without cause, and is suspicious of

what it might trust. It is not enough to tell a man who is eating injurious food that it will harm him. If he has no other aliment, he must go on feeding upon what he has. If you cannot supply better, you cannot reproach him who takes the bad. But if you have true principles, they should be offered as substitutes for the false. Secularist truth should tread close upon the heels of theological error.

1. For the study of the origin of the universe Secularism substitutes the study of the laws and uses of the universe, which, Cardinal Newman admitted, must be regarded as consonant to the will of its Author.

2. For a future state Secularism proposes the wise use of this, as he who fails in this "duty nearest hand" has no moral fitness for any other.

3. For Revelation it offers the guidance of observation, investigation, and experience. Instead of taking authority for truth, it takes truth for authority.

4. For the Providence of Scripture Secularism directs men to the Providence of Science, which provides against peril, or brings deliverance when peril comes.

5. For prayer it proposes self-help and the employment of all the resources of manliness and industry. Jupiter himself rebuked the waggoner who cried for aid, instead of putting his own shoulder to the wheel.

6. For original depravity, which infuses hopelessness into all effort for personal excellence, Secularism counsels the creation of those conditions, so far as human prevision can provide them, in which it shall be "impossible for a man to be depraved or poor." The aim of Secularism is to promote the moralisation of this world, which Christianity has proved ineffectual to accomplish.

7. For eternal perdition, which appals every human

heart, Secularism substitutes the warnings and penalties of causation attending the violation of the laws of nature, or the laws of truth—penalties inexorable and unevadable in their consequences. Though they extend to the individual no farther than this life, they are without the terrible element of divine vindictiveness, yet, being near and inevitable—following the offender close as the shadow of the offence—are more deterrent than future punishment, which “faith” may evade without merit.

The aim of Secularism is to educate the conscience in the service of man. It puts duty into Freethought. Men inquired for self-protection, and from dislike of error. But if a man was in no danger himself, and was indifferent whether an error—which no longer harmed him—prevailed or not, Secularism holds that it is still a duty to aid in ending it for the sake of others. It was J. W. Fox, the most heretical preacher of his day, who said (1824): “I believe in the right of religion and the *duty* of free inquiry.” He is a very exceptional person—as we know in political as well as in questions of mental freedom—who cares for a right he does not need himself. A man is generally of opinion, as I have seen in many agitations, that nobody need care for a form of liberty he does not want himself. It is as though a man on the bank should think that the man in the water does not want a rope. Duty is devotion to the right. Right in morals is that which is morally expedient. That is morally expedient which is conducive to the happiness of the greatest numbers. The service of others is the practical form of duty. “He,” says Buddha, “who was formerly heedless, and afterwards becomes earnest, lights up the world like the moon escaped from a cloud.”

Constructiveness is an education, which attains success but slowly. Some men have no distinctive notion whatever of truth. It seems never to have occurred to them that there is anything intrinsic in it, and they only fall into it by accident. Others have a wholesome idea that truth is essential, and that, as a rule, you ought to tell it, and some do it. This is a small conception of truth, but it is good as far as it goes, and ought to be valued, as it is scarce. If anyone asks such a person whether what he says is what he *thinks*, or what he *knows*, to be true, he is perplexed. The difference between the two things has not occurred to him. He has been under the impression that what he believes is the same thing as what he knows, and when he finds the two things are very different his idea of truth is doubled, and is twice as large as it was before.

There is yet a larger view, to which many never attain. To them all truth is truth of equal value. All geese are geese, but all are not equally tender. Though all horses are horses, all are not equally swift. Yet many never observe that all facts are not equally succulent or swift, nor all truth of equal value or of equal usefulness.

Social truth has three marks—it must be explicit, relevant to the question in hand, and of use for the purpose in hand. But it requires some intelligence to observe so much, and judgment to act upon it.

CHAPTER XV.

MORALITY INDEPENDENT OF THEOLOGY.

“Religion, as dealing with the confessedly incomprehensible, is not the basis for human union, in social, or industrial, or political circles, but only that portion of old religion which is now called moral.”—PROFESSOR FRANCIS WILLIAM NEWMAN.

BISHOP ELLICOTT was the first prelate whom I heard admit (in a sermon to the members of the British Association for the Advancement of Science) that men might be moral from other motives than those furnished by Christianity. Renan says that Justin Martyr, “in his *Apology*, never attacks the principle of the empire. He wants the empire to examine the Christian doctrines.” A Secularist would have attacked the principle, regarding freedom as of more consequence to progress than any doctrine without it.

Those who seek to guide life by reason are not without a standard of appeal. “Secularism accepts no authority but that of nature, adopts no methods but those of science and philosophy, and respects in practice no rule but that of the conscience, illustrated by the common sense of mankind. It values the lessons of the past, and looks to tradition as presenting a storehouse of raw materials for thought, and, in many cases, results of high wisdom for our reverence; but it utterly disowns tradition as a ground of belief, whether miracles and supernaturalism be claimed or not claimed on its side. No sacred scripture or ancient

Church can be made a basis of belief, for the obvious reason that their claims always need to be proved, and cannot without absurdity be assumed. The association leaves to its individual members to yield whatever respects their own good sense judges to be due to the opinions of great men, living or dead, spoken or written; as also to the practice of ancient communities, national or ecclesiastical. But it disowns all appeal to such authorities as final tests of truth."*

Morality can be inspired and confirmed by perception of the consequences of conduct. Theology regards free-will as the foundation of responsibility. But free-will saves no man from material consequences, and diverts attention from material causes of evil and good. Under the free-will doctrine the wonder is that any morality is left in the world. It is a doctrine which gives scoundrels the same chance as a saint. When a man is assured that he can be saved when he believes, and that, having free-will, he can believe when he pleases, he, as a rule, never does please until he has had his fill of vice, or is about to die—either of disease or the hangman. If by the hangman, he is told that, provided he repents before eight o'clock in the morning, he may find himself nestling in Abraham's bosom before nine. Free-will is the doctrine of rascalism. It is time morality had other foundation than theology. The relations of life can be made as impressive as ideas of supernaturalism. But in this Christians not only lend no help, they disparage the attempt to control life by reason. When Secularism was first talked of, the President of the

* I owe the expression of this passage, whose comprehensiveness and felicity of phrase exceed the reach of my pen, to Professor Francis William Newman.

Congregational Union, the Rev. Dr. Harris, commended to the Union the words of Bishop Lavington of a century earlier (1750): "My brethren, I beg you will rise up with me against mere moral preaching."* A writer of distinction, R. H. Hutton, writing on "Secularism" in the *Expositor* so late as 1881, argues strenuously that moral government is impossible without supernatural convictions. The egotism of Christianity is as conspicuous as that of politics. No ethic is genuine unless it bears the hall-mark of the Church. Secularism does not deny the efficacy of other theories of life upon those who accept them, and only claims to be of use as commending morality on considerations purely human, to those who reject theories purely spiritual.

Anyone familiar with controversy knows that Christianity is advertised like a patent medicine, which will cure all the maladies of mankind. Everybody who tries reasoned morality is encouraged to condemn it, and is denounced if he commends it.

It is a maxim of Secularism that, wherever there is a rightful object at which men should aim, there is a secular path to it.

Nearly all inferior natures are susceptible of moral and physical improvability, which improvability can be indefinitely advanced by supplying proper material conditions.

Since it is not capable of demonstration whether the inequalities of human condition will be compensated for in another life, it is the business of intelligence to rectify them in this world. The speculative worship of superior

* *British Banner*, Oct. 27, 1852.

beings, who cannot need it, seems a lesser duty than the patient service of known inferior natures and the mitigation of harsh destiny, so that the ignorant may be enlightened and the low elevated.

Christians often promote projects beneficial to men; but are they not mainly incited thereto by the hope of inclining the hearts of those they aid to their cause? Is not their motive proselytism? Is it not a higher morality to do good for its own sake, careless whether those benefitted become adherents or not?

Going to a distant town to mitigate some calamity there will illustrate the principle of Secularism. One man will go on this errand from pure sympathy with the unfortunate; this is goodness. Another goes because the 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 theological piety. Another goes because he is aware that the neglect of suffering will not answer; this is utilitarianism. But another goes on the errand of mercy because it is an immediate service to humanity, knowing that material deliverance is piety and better than spiritual consolation; this is Secularism.

One whose reputation for spirituality is in all the Churches says: "Properly speaking, all true work is religion, and whatsoever religion is not work may go and dwell among the Brahmins, the Antinomians, Spinning Dervishes, or where it will. Admirable was that maxim of the old monks, '*Laborare est orare*' (Work is worship)." * In

* Carlyle, *Past and Present*.

his article on Auguste Comte, Mr. J. S. Mill says he "uses religion in its modern sense as signifying that which binds the convictions, whether to deity or to duty—deity in the theological sense, or duty in the moral sense." This is the only sense in which a Secularist would employ the term. Religious moralism is a term I might use, since it binds a man to humanity, which religion does not. "Without God," said Mazzini to the Italian working men forty years ago—"without God you may compel, but not persuade. You may become tyrants in your turn; you cannot be educators or apostles." One night, when Mazzini was speaking in this way, in the hearing of Garibaldi, arguing that there was no ground of duty unless based on the idea of God, the General turned round and said: "I am an Atheist. Am I deficient in the sense of duty?" "Ah," replied Mazzini, "you imbibed it with your mother's milk." All around smiled at the quick-witted evasion.

In one sense Mazzini was as Atheistic in mind as orthodox Christians. He disbelieved that truth, duty, or humanity could have any vitality unless derived from belief in God. Devout as few men are, in the Church or out of it, yet Mazzini believed alone in God. Dogmas of the Churches were to him as though they were not; yet there were times when he seemed to admit that other motives than the one which inspired him might be operant for good in other minds. In a letter he once addressed to me there occurred this splendid passage:—

"We pursue the same end—progressive improvement, association, transformation of the corrupted medium in which we are now living, the overthrow of all idolatries, shams, lies, and conventionalities. We both want man to be, not the poor passive, cowardly, phantasmagoric

unreality of the actual time, thinking in one way and acting in another ; bending to power which he hates and despises ; carrying empty popish or Thirty-nine Article formulas on his brow, and none within ; but a fragment of the living truth, a real individual being linked to collective humanity—the bold seeker of things to come ; the gentle, mild, loving, yet firm, uncompromising, inexorable apostle of all that is just and heroic—the Priest, the Poet, and the Prophet.”

Mazzini saw in the conception of God the great “Indicator” of duty, and that the one figure, “the most deeply inspired of God, men have seen on the earth was Jesus.” Mazzini’s impassioned protest against unbelief was itself a form of unbelief. He believed only in one God ; not in three. If Jesus was inspired of God, he was not God, or he would have been self-inspired. But, apart from this repellent heresy, if Theism and Christianity are essential to those who would serve humanity, all propaganda of freedom must be delayed until converts are made to this new faith.

The question will be put, Has independent morality ever been seen in action ?

Voltaire, at the peril of his liberty and life, rescued a friendless family from the fire and the wheel the priests had prepared for them. Paine inspired the independence of America, and Lloyd Garrison gave liberty to the slaves whose bondage the clergy defended. The Christianity of three nations produced no three men in their day who did anything comparable to the achievement of these three sceptics, who wrought this splendid good, not only without Christianity, but in opposition to it. Save for Christian obstruction, they had accomplished still greater good without the peril they had to brave.

None of the earlier critics of Secularism, as has been said (and not many in later years), realised that it was addressed, not to Christians, but to those who rejected Christianity, or who were indifferent to it, and were outside it. Christians cannot do anything to inspire *them* with ethical principles, since they do not believe in morality unless based on their supernatural tenets. They have to convert men to Theism, to miracles, prophecy, inspiration of the Scriptures, the Trinity, and other soul-wearying doctrines, before they can inculcate morality they can trust. We do not rush in where they fear to tread. Secularism moves where they do not tread at all.

CHAPTER XVI.

ETHICAL CERTITUDE.

“You can tell more about a man’s character by trading horses with him once than you can by hearing him talk for a year in prayer-meeting.”—*American Maxim.*

A FORM of thought which has no certitude can command no intelligent trust. Unless capable of verification, no opinion can claim attention, nor retain attention, if it obtains it.

If a sum in arithmetic be wrong, it can be discovered by a new way of working; if a medical recipe is wrong, the effect is manifest in the health; if a political law is wrong, it is sooner or later apparent in the mischief it produces; if a theorem in navigation is erroneous, delay or disaster warns the mariner of his mistake; if an insane moralist teaches that adherence to truth is wrong, men can try the effects of lying, when distrust and disgrace soon undeceive them. But if a theological belief is wrong, we must die to find it out. Secularism, therefore, is safer. It is best to follow the double lights of reason and experience than the lightless lantern of faith. “In all but religion,” exclaims a famous preacher,* “men know their true interests and use their own understanding. Nobody takes anything on trust at market, nor would anybody do so at church if there were

* W. J. Fox.

but a hundredth part the care for truth which there is for money."

Mr. Rathbone Greg has shown, in a memorable passage, that "the lot of man—not perhaps altogether of the individual, but certainly of the race—is in his own hands, from his being surrounded by *fixed laws*, on knowledge of which, and conformity to which, his well-being depends. The study of these and obedience to them form, therefore, the great aim of public instruction. Men must be taught:—

"1. The *physical laws* on which *health* depends.

"2. The *moral laws* on which *happiness* depends.

"3. The *intellectual laws* on which *knowledge* depends.

"4. The *social and political laws* on which *national prosperity and advancement* depend.

"5. The *economic laws* on which *wealth* depends."

Mr. Spurgeon had flashes of secularistic inspiration, as when engaging a servant, who professed to have taken religion, he asked "whether she swept under the mats." It was judging piety by a material test.

There is no trust surer than the conclusions of reason and science. What is incapable of proof is usually decided by desire, and is without the conditions of uniformity or certitude.

Duty consists in doing the right because it is just to others, and because we must set the example of doing right to others, or we have no claim that others shall do right to us. Certitude is best obtained by the employment of material means, because we can better calculate them, and because they are less likely to *evade* us, or *betray* us, than any other means available to us.

Orthodox religions are pale in the face now. They still

keep the word of material promise to the ear, and break it to the heart ; and a great number of people now know it, and many of the clergy know that they know it. The poor need material aid, and prayer is the way *not* to get it ; while science, more provident than faith, has brought the people *generous gifts*, and inspired them with *just expectations*. What men need is a guide which stands on a business footing. The Churches administer a system of foreign affairs in a very loose way, quite inconsistent with sound commercial principles. For instance, a firm giving cheques on a bank in some distant country—not to be found in any Gazetteer of ascertained places, nor laid down in any chart, and from which no persons who ever set out in search of it were ever known to return—would do very little business among prudent men. Yet this is precisely the nature of the business engaged in by orthodox firms.

On the other hand, Secularism proposes to transact the business of life on purely mercantile principles. It engages only in that class of transactions the issue of which can be tested by the experience of this life. Its cheques, if I may so speak, are drawn upon duty, good sense, and material effort, and are to be cashed from proceeds arising in our midst—under our own eyes—subject to ordinary commercial tests. Nature is the banker who pays all notes held by those who observe its laws. To use the words of Macbeth, it is here, “on this bank and shoal of time” upon which we are cast, that nature pays its cheques, and not elsewhere ; which are honored now, and not in an unknown world, in some unknown time, and in an entirely unknown way. By lack of judgment, or sense, the Secularist may transact bad business ; but he gives good security. His surety is experience. His references are to the facts of

the present time. He puts all who have dealings with him on their guard. Secularism tells men that they must look out for themselves, think for themselves, act for themselves, within the limits of neither injuring nor harming others. Secularism does not profess to be infallible, but it acts on honest principles. It seeks to put progress on the business footing of good faith.* Adherents who accept the theory of this life, for this life, dwell in a land of their own—the land of certitude. Science and utilitarian morality are kings in that country, and rule there by right of conquest over error and superstition. In the kingdom of Thought there is no conquest over men, but over foolishness only. Outside the world of science and morality lies the great Debateable Ground of the existence of Deity and a Future State. The Ruler of the Debateable Ground is named Probability, and his two ministers are Curiosity and Speculation. Over that mighty plain, which is as wide as the universe and as old as time, no voice of the gods has ever been heard, and no footsteps of theirs have ever been traced. Philosophers have explored the field with telescopes of a longer range than the eyes of a thousand saints, and have recognised nothing save the silent and distant horizon. Priests have denounced them for not perceiving what was invisible. Sectaries have clamored, and the most ignorant have howled—as the most ignorant always do—that there is something there, because they want to see it. All the while the white mystery is still unpenetrated in this life.

But a future being undisclosed is no proof that there is no future. Those who reason through their desires will

* See *Secularism a Religion which Gives Heaven no Trouble.*

believe there is; those who reason through their understanding may yet *hope* that there is. In the meantime, all stand before the portals of the untrodden world in equal unknowingness. If faith can be piety, work is more so. To bring new beauty out of common life—is not that piety? To change blank stupidity into intelligent admiration of any work of nature—is not that piety? If our towns and streets be made to give gladness and cheerfulness to all who live or walk therein—is not that piety? If the prayer of innocence ascend to heaven through a pure atmosphere, instead of through the noisome and polluted air of uncleanness common in the purlieus of towns and of churches, and even cathedrals—is not that piety? Can we, in these days, conceive of religious persons being ignorant and dirty? Yet they abound. If, therefore, we send to heaven clean, intelligent, bright-minded saints—is not that piety? Is *it* no bad religion—as religions go—to believe in the good God of Knowledge and Cleanliness and Cheerfulness and Beauty, and offer at his altar the daily sacrifice of intelligent sincerity and material service.

We leave to others their own way of faith and worship. We ask only leave to take our own. Carlyle has told us that only two men are to be honored, and no third—the mechanic and the thinker: he who works with honest hand, making the world habitable; and he who works with his brain, making thought artistic and true. “All the rest,” he adds with noble scorn, “are chaff, which the wind may blow whither it listeth.” The certainty of heaven is for the useful alone. Mere belief is the easiest, the poorest, the shabbiest device by which conscientious men ever attempted to scale the walls of Paradise.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ETHICAL METHOD OF CONTROVERSY.

“It was one of the secrets of my craft in the old days, when I wanted to weld iron or work steel to a fine purpose, to begin gently. If I began, as all learners do, to strike my heaviest blows at the start, the iron would crumble instead of welding, or the steel would suffer under my hammer, so that when it came to be tempered it would ‘fly,’ as we used to say, and rob the thing I had made of its finest quality.”—ROBERT COLLYER, D.D.

“THEY who believe that they have Truth ask no favor, save that of being heard; they dare the judgment of mankind; refused co-operation, they invoke opposition, for opposition is their opportunity.” This was the maxim I wrote at the beginning of the Secularistic movement, to show that we were willing to accept ourselves the controversy, which we contended was the sole means of establishing truth. No proposition, as Samuel Bailey showed, is to be trusted until it has been tested by very wide discussion. We soon found that the free and open field of Milton was not sufficient. It needed a “fair” as well as a “free and open encounter.” Disputants require to be equally matched in debate as in arms.

The Secularist policy is to accept the purely moral teaching of the Bible, and to controvert its theology, in such respects as it contradicts and discourages ethical effort. Yet theological questions are always sought to be forced upon us. The Rev. Henry Townley followed me to the

Leader office (1853-4) to induce me to discuss the question of the "existence of God." I never had done so, and objected that it would give the impression that Secularism was Atheistic. He was so insistent and importunate that I consented to discuss the question with him. Never after did I do so with anyone. The Rev. Brewin Grant endeavored to get my acceptance of propositions which pledged me to a wild opposition to Christianity. Mr. Samuel Morley, honorable in all things, admitted I had objected to it, but in the end I assented to it, that the discussion might not be broken off. Thomas Cooper was persistent that I should discuss with him the authenticity of the Scriptures. What I proposed was the proposition that the authenticity of the Scripture, its miracles, and prophecies are quite apart from moral truth.

The discussion took place in the city of York, lasting five nights. Canon Robinson and Canon Hey presided alternately. Mr. Cooper was an able man in dealing with the stock propositions of Christianity; but their relevance as tests of morality was an entirely new subject to him. He protested rather than reasoned, and declared he would never discuss the question of the ethical test of the truth of Scriptures; nor have I ever found any responsible minister willing to do so down to this day. Thus Christians should condemn with reservation the tendency in Secularists to debate theology, seeing how reluctant they are to do otherwise themselves. Christians seem incapable of understanding how much the objection to their cause arises in the revolt of the moral sense against it.

On first meeting Richard Carlile in 1842, some years before Secularism took a distinctive form, he invited me

to hear him lecture upon the principles of the *Christian Warrior*,* of which he was editor, and to give my opinion thereon. In doing so I explained the ideas from which I have never departed—namely, that no theologic, astronomic, or miraculous mode of proving Scriptural doctrine could ever be made even intelligible, except to students of considerable research. Such theories, I contended, must rest, more or less, on critical and conjectural interpretation, and could never enable a working man to dare the understanding of others in argument. Scientific interpretation laid entirely outside Christian acquirements, and seemed to Christians disingenuous evasion of what they took to be obvious truths. My contention was that the people have no historic or critical knowledge enabling them to determine the divine origin of Christianity.

On the platform he who has most knowledge of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin will always be able to silence any dissentient who has not equal information. If by accident a controversialist happen to possess this knowledge, it goes for nothing unless he has credit for classical competency. In controversy of this nature it is not enough for a man to know; he must be known to know before his conclusions can command attention. To myself it was not of moment whether the Scriptures were authentic or inspired. My sole inquiry was, Did they contain clear moral guidance? If they did, I accepted that guidance with gratitude. If I found maxims obviously useful and true, judged by human experience, I adopted them, whether given by inspiration or not. If precepts did not answer to this test, they were not acceptable, though all the apostles in

* The last periodical Mr. Carlile edited.

session had signed them. To miracles I did not object, nor did I see any sense in endeavoring to explain them away. We all have reason to regret that no one performs them now. It was our misfortune that the power, delegated with so much pomp of promise to the saints, had not descended to these days. If any preacher or deacon could, in our day, feed five thousand men on a few loaves and a few small fishes, and leave as many baskets of fragments as would run a workhouse for a month, the Poor Law Commissioners would make a king of that saint. But if a precept enjoined me to believe what was not true, it would be a base precept, and all the miracles in the Scriptures could not alter its character; while, if a precept be honest and just, no miracle is wanted to attest it; indeed, a miracle to allure credence in it would only cast suspicion on its genuineness. The moral test of the Scriptures was sufficient, since it had the commanding advantage of appealing to the common sense of all sorts and conditions of men, of Christian or of Pagan persuasion. Ethical criticism has this further merit, that on the platform of discussion the miner, the weaver, or farm laborer is on the same level as the priest. A man goes to heaven upon his own judgment; whereas, if his belief is based on the learning of others, he goes to heaven second-hand.

When Mr. J. A. Froude wrote for John Henry Newman the Life of St. Belletin, he ended with the words: "And this is all that is known, *and more than all*, of the life of a servant of God." In the Bible there appears to be a great deal more than was ever known. This does not concern the Secularist, though it does the scholar. If there be moral maxims in the Scripture, what does it matter how they got there?

CHAPTER XVIII.

ITS DISCRIMINATION.

“There is nothing so terrible as activity without insight.”—
GOETHE.

IN 1847 I commenced in the *Reasoner* what I entitled “The Moral Remains of the Bible”—a selection of some splendid moral stories, incidents, and sentences having ethical characteristics such as I doubted not would “remain” when the Bible came to be regarded as a human book. I wrote a “Logic of Life.”* My *Trial of Theism* was only “as accused of obstructing secular life,” as stated on the title-page. The object was to show how much useful criticism could be entered upon without touching the questions of authenticity, or miracles, or the existence of deity. Thus it was left to opponents to declare that things morally incredible were inspired by God. In this case it was not I, but *they*, who blasphemed.

Take the case of Samson’s famous engagement with the Philistines at Ramath—Lehi surrounded by a band of warlike Philistines (though, as the text implies, 3,000 of his own armed countrymen were at hand). Samson, who had no weapon, was not given one by them, but had to look about for a “new jawbone of an ass.” With this

* Companion to the “Logic of Death,” both contained in the *Trial of Theism*.

singular instrument he killed, one after the other, a thousand Philistine soldiers, who were big, strong men, and, unless every blow was fatal, it must have taken several blows to kill some of them.

Are there three places in the human body where a single blow will be sure to kill a man? Did Samson know those places? and was he always able to direct his blow with unerring precision to one or other of those particular spots? If the thousand Philistines "surrounded" him, how did he keep the others off while he struggled with the one he was killing? It is not conceivable that the Philistines stood there to be killed, and meekly submitted to ignoble blows, death, and degradation. The jawbone must have been of strange texture to have crashed through armor, and have turned aside spears and swords of stalwart warriors without chipping, splitting, or breaking in two. What time it must have taken Samson to pursue each man, beat off his comrades, drag him from their midst, give him the asinine *coup de grâce*, drag and cast his dead body upon the "heaps" of slain he was piling up! What struggling, scuffling, and turmoil of blood and blows Samson must have gone through! Spurted all over with blood, Barnum would have bought him for a Dime Museum as the deepest-colored Red Indian known. No Deerfoot could have been nimbler than Samson must have been on this mighty day. When this Herculean fight was over, which, with the utmost expedition, must have occupied Samson six days—which would give 166 killed single handed per day—the only effect produced upon Samson appears to have been that he was "soreathirst." Even after this extraordinary use of the jawbone it was in such good condition that, a hollow place being "clave" in it, a fount of water gushed forth for refreshing this remarkable

warrior. Were it not recorded in the Bible, it would be said that the writer intended to imply that the jawbone of the ass is to be found only in the mouth of the reader.

Can it need miracle or prophecy, authenticity or inspiration, to attest this story of the Jewish Jack-the-Giant-killer? What moral good can arise from a narration which it is reverence to reject? By leaving it to the Christian to say it is given by "inspiration" of God, it is he who blasphemes. But if the question of authenticity were raised, the character of the narrative would be lost sight of, and would not come into question; while the test of moral probability decides the invalidity of the story within the compass of the knowledge of an ordinary audience.

In the same manner, keeping to the policy of affirmation, he who maintains the self-existence, the self-action and eternity of the universe can be met only by those who defame nature as a second-hand tool of God. Such are Atheists towards Nature, the author of their existence, and God, one would think, must so regard them.

A single precept of Christ's, "Take no thought for the morrow," has bred swarms of mendicants in every age since his day; but a far more dangerous precept is "Resist not evil," which has made Christianity welcome to so many tyrants. Christ, whatever other sentiments he had, had a slave heart. Every friend of freedom knows that "resistance is the backbone of the world." The patriot poet* exclaims:—

Land of our Fathers—in their hour of need
God help them, guarded by the passive creed.

* Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes.

No miracle could make these precepts true, and he who proved their authenticity would be the enemy of mankind.

Whether Christ existed or not affected in no way what excellence and inimitableness there were in his delineated character. His offer of palpable materialistic evidence to Thomas showed that he recognised the right of scepticism to relevant satisfaction. His concession of proof in this case needed no supernatural testimony to render it admirable.

The reader will now see what the policy of Secularist advocacy is—mainly to test theology by its ethical import. To many all policy is restraint; they cry down policy, and erect blundering into a virtue. Whereas policy is guidance to a chosen end. Mathematics is but the policy of measurement; grammar but the policy of speech; logic but the policy of reason; arithmetic but the policy of calculation; temperance but the policy of health; trigonometry but the policy of navigation; roads but the policy of transit; music but the policy of controlling sound; art but the policy of beauty; law but the policy of protection; discipline but the policy of strength; love but the policy of affection. An enemy may object to an adversary having a policy, because he is futile without one. The policy adopted may be bad, but no policy at all is idiocy, and commits a cause to the providence of Bedlam.

CHAPTER XIX.

APART FROM CHRISTIANISM.

“What is written by Moses can only be read by God.”—*Bihar Proverb.*

SECULARISM differs from Christianity in so far as it accepts only the teachings which pertain to man, and which are consonant with reason and experience

Parts of the Bible have moral splendor in them, but no Christian will allow anyone to take the parts he deems true, and reject as untrue those he deems false. He who ventured to be thus eclectic would be defamed as Paine was. Thus Christians compel those who would stand by reason to stand apart from them.

To accept a part, and put that forward as the whole—to pretend or even to assume it to be the whole—is dishonest. To retain a portion, and reject what you leave, and not say so, is deceiving. To contend that what you accept as the spirit of Christianity is in accordance with all that contradicts it is to spend your days in harmonising opposite statements—a pursuit demoralising to the understanding. The Secularist has, therefore, to choose between dishonesty, the deception of others and deception of himself, or ethical principles independent of Christianity—and this is what he does.

The Bible being a bundle of Hebrew tracts on tribal life

and tribal spite, its assumed infallibility is a burden, contradicting and misleading to all who accept it as a divine handbook of duty.

In papers issued by religious societies upon the Bible it is declared to be "so complete a system that nothing can be added to it, or taken from it," and that "it contains everything needful to be known or done." This is so false that no one, perceiving it, could be honest and not protest against it in the interest of others. Recently the Bishop of Worcester said: "It was of no use resisting the Higher Criticism. God had not been pleased to give us what might be called a perfect Bible."* Then it is prudence to seek a more trustworthy guide.

If money were bequeathed to maintain the eclectic criticism of the Scripture, it would be confiscated by Christian law. So to stand apart is indispensable self-defence. Individual Christians, as I well know, devote themselves with a noble earnestness to the service of man, as they understand his interests; but so long as Christianity retains the power of fraud, and uses it, Christianity as a system, or as a cause, remains outside the pale of respect. Prayer, in which the oppressed and poor are taught to trust, is of no avail for protection or food, and the poor ought to know it. The Bishop of Manchester declared, in my hearing, that the Lord's Prayer will not bring us "daily bread," but that "it is an exercise of faith to ask for what we shall not receive." But if prayer will not bring "daily bread," it is a dangerous deception to keep up the belief that it will. The eyes of forethought are closed by trust in such aid, thrift is an affront to the generosity of heaven,

* *Midland Evening News*, 1893.

and labor is foolishness. But, alas! aid does not come by supplication. The prayer-maker dies in mendicancy. It is not reverence to pour into the ears of God praise for protection never accorded. Dean Stanley, admirable as a man as well as a saint, was killed in the Deanery, Westminster, by a bad drain, in spite of all his Collects. Dean Farrar has been driven from St. Margaret's Rectory, in Dean's Yard, by another drain, which poisons in spite of the Thirty-nine Articles; and Canon Eyton refuses to take up his residence until the sanitary engineers have overhauled* the place, which, notwithstanding the invocations of the Church, Providence does not see to. To keep silence on the non-intervention of Providence would be to connive at the fate of those who come to destruction by such dependence.

O mother, praying God will save
 Thy sailor! While thy head is bowed,
 His heavy-shotted hammock-shroud
 Drops in his vast and wandering grave!

True respect would treat God as though at the least he is a gentleman. Christianity does not do this. No gentleman would accept thanks for benefits he had not conferred, nor would he exact thanks daily and hourly for gifts he had really made, nor have the vanity to covet perpetual thanksgivings. He who would respect God, or respect himself, must seek a faith apart from such Christianity.

A divine, who excelled in good sense, said: "Dangerous it were for the feeble brain of man to wade far into the doings of the Most High. Our soundest knowledge is, to know that we know him not; *and our safest eloquence concerning*

* See *Westminster Gazette* London Letter, November 19, 1895.

Him is our silence ; therefore it behoveth our words to be wary and few."*

Mrs. Barbauld may have borrowed from Richard Hooker her fine line :—

Silence is our least injurious praise.†

An earnest Christian, not a religious man (for all Christians are not religious), assuming the professional familiarity with the mind of God, said to me : "Should the Lord call you to-day, are you prepared to meet Him ?" I answered : Certainly ; for the service of man in some form is seldom absent from my thoughts, and must be consonant with his will. Were I to pray, I should pray God to spare me from the presumption of expecting to meet him, and from the vanity and conceit of thinking that the God of the universe will take an opportunity of meeting me.

Who can have moral longing for a religion which represents God as hanging over York Castle to receive the soul of Dove, the debauchee, who slowly poisoned his wife, and whose final spiritual progress was posted day by day on the Castle gates until the hour of the hangman came ? Dove's confession was as appalling as instructive. It ran thus :—

I know that the Eternal One,
Upon his throne divine,
Gorged with the blood of his own Son,
No longer thirsts for mine.

Many a man has passed his life
In doing nought but good,

* Ecclesiastical Polity, book i., § 2.

† Charles Lamb was of this opinion when he remarked : "Had I to say grace, I would rather say it over a good book than over a mutton chop." Christians say grace over an indigestible meal. But perhaps they are right, since they need supernatural aid to assimilate it.

Who has not half the confidence I have
In Jesus Christ, his blood.*

By quoting these lines, which Burns might have written, the writer is sorry to portray, in their naked form, principles which so many cherish. But the anatomy of creeds can no more be explained, with the garments of tradition and sentiment upon them, than a surgeon can demonstrate the structure of the body with the clothes on. Divine perdition is an ethical impossibility.

Christianism is too often but a sour influence on life. It tolerates nature, but does not enjoy it. Instead of giving men two Sundays, as it might—one for recreation and one for contemplation—it converts the only day of the poor into a penal infliction. It is always more or less against art, parks, clubs, sanitation, equity to labor, freedom, and many other things. If any Christians eventually accept these material ideas, they mostly dislike them. Art takes attention from the gospel. In parks many delight to walk, when they might be at chapel or church. Clubs teach men toleration, and toleration is thought to beget indifference. Sanitation is a form of blasphemy. Every Christian sings:—

Diseases are thy servants, Lord ;
They come at Thy command.

But sanitation assassinates these "servants of the Lord." In every hospital they are tried, condemned, and executed as the enemies of mankind. If Labor had justice, it would be independent, and no longer hopeless, as the poor always are. Freedom renders men defiant of subjection, which all priests are prone to exercise. Secularism has none of this

* From a volume of verse privately circulated in Liverpool at the time, by W. H. Rathbone.

distrust and fear. It elects to be on the side of human progress, and takes that side, withstand it who may. Thus those who care for the improvement of mankind must act on principles dissociated from doctrines repellent to humanity and deterrent of ameliorative enterprise.

CHAPTER XX.

SECULARISM CREATES A NEW RESPONSIBILITY.

“Mankind is an ass, who kicks those who endeavor to take off his panniers.”—SPANISH PROVERB.

No one need go to Spain to meet with animals who kick you if you serve them. Spanish asses are to be found in every land. Could we see the legs of Truth, we should find them black and blue with the kicks received in unloosening the panniers of error, strapped by priests on the backs of the people. Even philosophers kick as well as the ignorant, when new ideas are brought before them. No improvement would ever be attempted if friends of truth were afraid of asses' hoofs in the air.

He who maintains that mankind can be largely improved by material means imposes on himself the responsibility of employing such means, and of promoting their use as far as he can, and trusting to their efficacy—not being discouraged because he is but *one*, and mankind are many. No man can read all the books, or do all the work, of the world. It is enough that each reads what he needs, and, in matter of moral action, does all he can. He who does less fails in his duty to himself and to others.

Christian doctrine has none of the responsibility which Secularism imposes. If there be vice or rapine, oppression or murder, the purely Christian conscience is absolved.

It is the Lord's world, and nothing could occur unless he permitted it. If any Christian heart is moved to compassion, it commonly exudes in prayer. He "puts the matter before the Lord, and leaves it in his hands." The Secularist takes it into his own. What are his hands for? The Christian can sit still and see children grow up with rickets in their body and rickets in their soul. He will see them die in a foul atmosphere, where no angel could come to receive their spirit without first stopping his nose with his handkerchief, as I have seen Lord Palmerston do on entering Harrow on Speech Day. The Christian can make money out of unrequited labor. When he dies he makes no reparation to those who earned his wealth, but leaves it to build a church, as though he thought God was blind, not knowing (if Christ spake truly) that the Devil is sitting in the fender in his room, ready to carry his soul up the chimney to bear Dives company. Why should he be anxious to mitigate inequality of human condition? It is the Lord's will, or it would not be. When it was seen that I was ceasing to believe this, Christians in the church to which I belonged knelt around me, and prayed that I might be influenced not to go out into the world to see if these things could be improved. It was no light duty I imposed on myself.

A Secularist is mindful of Carlyle's saying, "No man is a saint in his sleep." Indeed, if anyone takes upon himself the responsibility of bettering by reason the state of things, he will be kept pretty well awake with his undertaking.

Many persons think their own superiority sufficient for mankind, and do not wish their exclusiveness to be encroached upon. Their plea is that they distrust the effect of setting the multitude free from mental tyranny,

and they distrust democracy, which would sooner or later end political tyranny.

These men of dainty distrust have a crowd of imitators, in whom nobody recognises any superiority to justify their misgivings as to others. The distrust of independence in the hands of the people arises mainly from the dislike of the trouble it takes to educate the ignorant in its use and limit. The Secularist undertakes this trouble as far as his means permit. As an advocate of open thought and the free action of opinion, he counts the responsibility of trust in the people as a duty.

It will be asked, What are the deterrent influences upon which Secularism relies for rendering vice, of the major or minor kind, repellent? It relies upon making it clear that in the order of nature retribution treads upon the heels of transgression, and, if tardy in doing it, its steps should be hastened.

The mark of error of life is—disease. Science can take the body to pieces, and display mischief palpable to the eyes, when the results of vice startle, like an apparition, those who discern that

Their acts their angels are—if good ; if ill,
Their fatal shadows that walk by them still.

A man is not so ready to break the laws of nature when he sees that he will break himself in doing it. He may not fear God, but he fears fever and consumption. He may have a gay heart, but he will not like the occupation of being his own sexton and digging his own grave. When he sees that death lurks in the frequent glass, for instance, *that* spoils the flavor of the wine. He takes less pride in the beeswing who sees the shroud in the bottle. He may

hope that God will forgive him, but he knows that death will not. He who holds the scythe is accustomed to cut down fools, whether they be peers or sweeps. Death knows the fool at a glance. To prevent any mistake Disease has marked him with her broad arrow. The young man who once has his eyes well open to this state of the case will be considerate as to the quality of his pleasures, especially when he knows that alluring but unwholesome pleasure is in the pay of Death. Temperance advocates made more converts by exhibiting the biological effects of alcohol than by all their exhortations.

The moral nature of a man is as palpable as the physical to those who look for its signs. There is a moral squint in the judgment, as plain to be seen as a cast in the eyes. The voice is not honest; it has the accent of a previous conviction in it. The speech has contortions of meaning in it. The sense is limp and flaccid, showing that the mind is flabby. Such an one has the backbone of a fish; he does not stand upright. As the Americans say, he does not "stand square" to anything. There is no moral pulse in his heart. If you could take hold of his soul, it would feel like a dead oyster, and would slip through your fingers. Everybody knows these people. You don't consult them; you don't trust them. You would rather have no business transactions with them. If they are in a political movement, you know they will shuffle when the pinch of principle comes.

Crime has its consequences, and criminals, little and great, know it. When Alaric A. Watts wrote of the last Emperor of the French:—

Safe art thou, Louis!—for a time;
But tremble!—never yet was crime,
Beyond one little space, secure.

The coward and the brave alike
 Can wait and watch, can rush and strike.
 Which marks thee? One of them, be sure,—

few thought the bold prediction true; but it came to pass, and the Napoleonic name and race became extinct, to the relief of Europe.

Trouble comes from avowing unpopular ideas. Diderot well saw this when he said: "There is less inconvenience in being mad with the mad than by being wise by oneself." One who regards truth as duty will accept responsibilities.

It is the American idee
 To make a man and leave him be.

But we must be sure we have made him a man—self-acting, guided by reasoned proof, and one who, as Archbishop Whately said, "believes the principles he maintains, and maintains them because he believes them."

A man is not a man while under superstition, nor is he a man when free from it, unless his mind is built on principles conducive and incentive to the service of man.

CHAPTER XXI.

THROUGH OPPOSITION TO RECOGNITION.

So many gods, so many creeds—
 So many paths that wind and wind,
 While just the art of being kind
 Is all the sad world needs.—ELLA WHEELER WILCOX.

LADY HESTER STANHOPE said she knew "Lord Byron must be a bad man, for he was always *intending* something." To seek improvement in the method of life is "intending something," and society ought to be tolerant of those whose badness takes no worse form. The rules Secularism prescribes for human conduct are few, and no intelligent preacher would say they indicate a dangerous form of "badness." They are:—

1. Truth in speech.
2. Honesty in transactions.
3. Industry in business.
4. Equity in according gain among those whose diligence and vigilance help to produce it.

Though this world be but a bubble,
 Two things stand like stone—
 Kindness in another's trouble,
 Courage in your own.

Learning and fortune do but illuminate these virtues. They cannot supersede them. The germs of these qualities are in every human heart. It is only necessary that we

cultivate them. Men are like billiard balls—they would all go into the right pockets in a few generations, if rightly propelled. Yet these principles, simple and unpretending as they are, being founded on considerations apart from modes of orthodox thought, have had a militant career. The Spanish proverb has been in request: "Beware of an ox before, of a mule behind, and of a monk on every side." The monk, tonsured and untonsured, is found in every religion.

In Glasgow I sometimes delivered lectures on the Sunday in a quaint old hall situated up a wynd in Candleriggs. On the Saturday night I gave a woman half-a-crown to wash and whiten the stairs leading to the hall, and the passage leading to the street and across the causeway, so that the entrance to the hall should be clean and sweet. Sermons were preached in the same hall when the stairs were repulsively dirty. The woman remarked to a neighbor that "Mr. Holyoake's views were wrang, but he seemed to have clean principles." He who believes in the influence of material conditions will do what he can to have them pure, not only where he speaks, but where he frequents and where he resides. The theological reader, who by accident or curiosity looks over these pages, will find much from which he will dissent; but I hope he will be able to regard this book as one of "clean principles," as far as the limited light of the author goes.

Accepting the "golden rule" of Huxley—"Give unqualified assent to no propositions but those the truth of which is so clear and distinct that they cannot be doubted"—causes the Secularist to credit less than his neighbors, and that goes against him; being, as it were, a reproach to their avidity of belief. One reason for writing this book is

to explain—to as many of the new generation as may happen to read it—the discrimination of Secularism. Newspapers and the clerical class, who ought to be well informed, continually speak of mere free-thinking as Secularism. How this has been caused has already been indicated. Two or three remarkable and conspicuous representatives of Free-thought, who found iconoclasm easier, less responsible, and more popular, have given to many erroneous impressions. When Mr. Bradlaugh, Mrs. Besant, and Mr. Foote came into the Secularistic movement, which preceded their day, they gave proof that they understood its principles, which they afterwards disregarded or postponed. I cite their opinions lest the reader should think that this book gives an account of a form of thought not previously understood. One wrote :—

“From very necessity, Secularism is affirmative and constructive ; it is impossible to thoroughly negate any falsehood without making more or less clear the opposing truth.”*

Again :—

“Secularism conflicts with theology in this : that the Secularist teaches the improvability of humanity by human means ; while the theologian not only denies this, but rather teaches that the secular effort is blasphemous and unavailing unless preceded and accompanied by reliance on divine aid.”†

Mrs. Besant said :—

“Still we *have* won a plot of ground—men’s and women’s hearts. To them Secularism has a message ; to them it brings a rule of conduct ; to them it gives a

* “Secularism : What is It ?” National Secular Society’s Tracts—No. 7. By Charles Bradlaugh.

† “Why are we Secularists ?” National Secular Society’s Tracts—No. 8. By Charles Bradlaugh.

test of morality, and a guide through the difficulties of life. Our morality is tested only—be it noted—by utility in this life and in this world.”*

Mr. Foote was not less discerning and usefully explicit, saying :—

“Secularism is founded upon the distinction between the things of time and the things of eternity.....The good of others Secularism declares to be the law of morality ; and although certain theologies secondarily teach the same doctrine, yet they differ from Secularism in founding it upon the supposed will of God, thus admitting the possibility of its being set aside in obedience to some other equally or more imperative divine injunction.”†

For several years the *National Reformer* bore the sub-title of “Secular Advocate.”

We could not expect early concurrence with the policy of preferring ethical to theological questions—of Theism and unprovable immortality. We accepted the maxim of Sir Philip Sydney—namely, that “Reason cannot show itself more reasonable than to leave reasoning on things above reason.” We are not in the land of the real yet, common sense is not half so romantic to the average man as the transcendental, and an Atheistical advocacy gets the preference with the impetuous. The Secularistic proposal to consult the instruction of an adversary proved less exciting than his destruction. The patience and resource it implies to work by reason alone are not to the taste of those to whom a kick is easier than a kindness, and less

* “Secular Morality.” National Secular Society’s Tracts—No. 3. By Annie Besant.

† *Secularism and its Misrepresentation*, by G. W. Foote, who subsequently succeeded Mr. Bradlaugh as President of the National Secular Society.

troublesome than explanation. Those who have the refutatory passion intense say you must clear the ground before you can build upon it. Granted; nevertheless, the signs of the times show that a good deal of ground has been cleared. The instinct of progress renders the minority, who reflect, more interested in the builder than the undertaker. What would be thought of a general who delayed occupying a country he had conquered until he had extirpated all the inhabitants in it? So, in the kingdom of error, he who will go on breaking images, without setting statues up in their place, will give superstition a long life. *The savage man does not desert his idols because you call them ugly.* It is only by slow degrees, and under the influence of better-carved gods, that his taste is changed and his worship improved. The reader will see that Secularism leaves the mystery of deity to the chartered imagination of man, and does not attempt to close the door of the future, but holds that the desert of another existence belongs only to those who engage in the service of man in this life. Professor F. W. Newman says: "The conditions of a future life being unknown, there are no imaginable means of benefiting ourselves and others in it, except by aiming after present goodness."*

Men have a right to look beyond this world, but not to *overlook* it. Men, if they can, may connect themselves with eternity; but they cannot disconnect themselves from humanity without sacrificing duty. The purport of Secularism is not far from the tenour of the famous sermon

* Professor F. W. Newman, who is always clear beyond all scholars, and candid beyond all theologians, has published a *Palinode* retracting former conclusions he had published, and admitting the uncertainty of the evidence in favor of after-existence.

by the Rev. James Caird, of which the *Queen* said :—

“He explained in the most simple manner what real religion is—not *a thing to drive us from the world*, not a perpetual moping over ‘good’ books ; but being and doing good.”*

This end we reach not by a theological, but by a secular, path.

* The *Queen* on the Rev. J. Caird’s sermon, “Leaves from the *Journal of Our Life in the Highlands*.”

CHAPTER XXII.

SELF-EXTENDING PRINCIPLES.

“*Prodigious actions may as well be done
By weaver’s issue as by prince’s son.*”—DRYDEN.

So far as Secularism is reasonable, it must be self-extending among all who think. Adherents of that class are slowly acquired. Accessions begin in criticism, though that, as we have seen, is apt to stop there. In all movements the most critical persons are the least suggestive of improvements. Constructiveness excites enthusiasm only in fertile minds.

After the Cowper-street discussion with the Rev. Brewin Grant (1853; see Chapter X.), societies, halls, and newspapers adopted the Secular name. In 1863 appeared the *Christian Reasoner*, edited by the Rev. Dr. Rylance, a really reasoning clergyman, whom I afterwards had the pleasure to know in New York. His publication was intended to be a substitute for the *Reasoner*, which I had then edited for seventeen years. But when the *Reasoner* commenced, in 1846, Christian believing was far more thought of than Christian reasoning. One line in Dr. Rylance’s *Christian Reasoner* was remarkable, which charged us with “forgetfulness of the necessary incompleteness of Revelation.” So far from forgetting it, it was one of the grounds on which Secularism was founded. However, it is to the credit of Dr. Rylance that he should have

preceded, by thirty years, the Bishop of Worcester in discerning the shortcomings of Revelation, as cited in Chapter XIX.

In 1869 we obtained the first Act of Secular affirmation, which Mr. J. S. Mill said was mainly due to my exertions, and to my example of never taking an oath. In obtaining the Act I had no help from Mr. Bradlaugh, he being a frequent oath-taker at that time. It was owing to Mr. G. W. Hastings (then, or afterwards, M.P.), the founder of the Social Science Association, that the Affirmation clause was added to the Act of 1869. One of the objects we avowed was "to procure a law of affirmation for persons who objected to take the oath."*

Another of our aims was stated to be: "To convert churches and chapels into temples of instruction for the people . . . to solicit priests to be teachers of useful knowledge."† We strove to promote these ends by holding in honor all who gave effect to such human precepts as were contained in Christianity. This fairness and justice has led many to suppose that I accepted the theological as well as the ethical passages in the Scriptures. But how can a Christian preacher be inclined to risk the suspicion of the narrower-minded members of his congregation, if no one gives him credit for doing right when he does it?

With our limited means and newness of doctrine, we could not hope to rival an opulent hierarchy and occupy its temples; but we knew that the truth, if we had it, and could diffuse it in a reasonable manner, would make its way and

* *Secularism the Practical Philosophy of the People*, p. 12; 1854—fifteen years before the first Act was passed.

† *Secularism the Practical Philosophy of the People*, by G. J. Holyoake, p. 12; 1854.

gradually change the convictions of a theological caste. The very nature of Freethought makes it impossible for a long time yet that we should have many wealthy or well-placed supporters. Where the platform is open to every subject likely to be of public service—subjects suppressed everywhere else, and open to the discussion of the wise or foolish present who may arise to speak, outrages of good taste will occur. Persons who forget that abuse does not destroy use, and that freedom is more precious than propriety, cease to support a free-speaking society. The advocacy of slave emancipation was once an outrage in America. It is now regarded as the glory of the nation. In an eloquent passage it has been pointed out what society owes to the unfriended efforts of those who established and have maintained the right of free speech.

“Theology of the old stamp, so far from encouraging us to love nature, teaches us that it is under a curse. It teaches us to look upon the animal creation with shuddering disgust ; upon the whole race of man, outside our narrow sect, as delivered over to the Devil ; and upon the laws of nature at large as a temporary mechanism, in which we have been caught, but from which we are to anticipate a joyful deliverance. It is science, not theology, which has changed all this ; it is the Atheists, Infidels, and Rationalists, as they are kindly called, who have taught us to take fresh interest in our poor fellow denizens of the world, and not to despise them because Almighty benevolence could not be expected to admit them to heaven. To the same teaching we owe the recognition of the noble aspirations embodied in every form of religion, and the destruction of the ancient monopoly of divine influences.”*

Those who, in storm and stress, bring truth into the

* Leslie Stephen's *Freethinking and Plain Speaking*.

world may not be able to complete its triumph, but it makes its own way, and finally conquers the understanding of mankind.

Priestley, without fortune, having only the slender income of a Unitarian minister, created and kept up a chemical laboratory. There alone he discovered oxygen. Few regarded him, few applauded him; only a few Parisian philosophers thanked him. He had no disciples to spread his new truth. He was not even tolerated in the town which he endowed with the fame of his priceless discovery. His house was burnt by a Church-and-King mob; his instruments, books, and manuscripts destroyed; and he had to seek his fortune in a foreign land.

Yet what has come out of his discovery? Its use has become part of the civilisation of the world, and mankind owe more to him than they yet understand. When a young man he forsook the Calvinism in which he was reared. "I came," he said, "to embrace what is called heterodox views on every question."* He cared for this world as well as for another, and hence was distrusted by all "true believers." Though he had "spiritual hopes," he agreed that he should be called a Materialist.

We have now had (1895) a London Reform Sunday, more than 250 (one list gave 400) preachers of all denominations taking for their unprecedented text, "The Duties and Responsibilities of Citizenship"—a thing the most sanguine deemed incredible when advocated by me in 1854.† Within twenty years Dr. Felix Adler has founded

* See *Chambers' Encyclopædia* (1888); article: Priestley.

† We have now a Museum Sunday. Even twenty years ago those who advocated the Sunday opening of museums were counted irreverent and beyond the pale of grace. Their opening is now legalised (1896).

noble Ethical Societies. Dr. Stanton Coit is extending them in Great Britain. They are Secularist societies in their nature. South Place Chapel now has taken the name of Ethical Society. Since the days of W. J. Fox, who first made it famous, it has been the only successor in London of the Moral Church opened by Thomas Holcroft.* Though modern Secular societies, to which these pages relate, have been anti-theological mainly, the Secular Society of Leicester is a distinguished exception. It has long had a noble hall of its own, and from the earliest inception of Secularism it has been consistent and persistent in its principles. As stated elsewhere,† the *Principles of Secularism* were submitted to John Stuart Mill in 1854, and his approval was of importance in the eyes of their advocates. In the first issue of *Chambers' Encyclopædia* a special article appeared upon these views, and in the later issue of that work in 1888 a new article was written on Secularism. In the Rev. Dr. Molesworth's *History of England* a very clear account is given of the rise of Secularist opinions. This will be sufficient information for readers unacquainted with the subject.

The cause of Reason has had more to confront than the cause of Christianity, which has always been on the side of power since the days of Christ. The two most influential ideas which, in every age since Christianity arose, have given it currency among the ignorant and the credulous have been the ideas of hell and prayer. Hell has been the terror, and prayer the bribe, which have won the allegiance of the timid and the needy. These two master passions of alarm and despair have brought the unfortunate portions of mankind to the foot of the Cross.

* *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, chap. xxii. † *Idem*, chap. cx.

The cause of Reason has no advantages of this nature, and only the intelligent have confidence in its progress. If we expected to do more than we have done, we are not the only party who have been prematurely sanguine. The Rev. David Bogue, preaching in Whitfields Tabernacle, Tottenham Court-road, at the foundation of the Foreign Missionary Society (1790) of the Congregational denomination, exclaimed amid almost unequalled enthusiasm: "We are called together this evening to the funeral of bigotry." Judging from what has happened since, bigotry was not dead when its funeral was prepared, or it was not effectually buried, as it has been seen much about since that day.

Bigotry, like Charles II., takes an unconscionable time in dying. Down to Sir C. Lyell's days so harmless a study as geology was distrusted, and Lyell, like Priestley, had to seek auditors in America. While he lectured at Boston to 1,500 persons, 2,000 more were unable to obtain tickets, which were bought at a guinea each *extra*. At our great ancient seat of learning, Oxford, Buckland lectured on the same interesting subject to an audience of three.

Secularism keeps the lamp of Freethought burning by aiding and honoring all who would infuse an ethical passion into those who lead the growing army of independent thinkers. Our lamp is not yet a large one, and its supply of oil is limited by Christian law; but, like the fire in the Temple of Montezuma, we keep it burning. In all the centuries since the torch of Freethought was first lighted, though often threatened, often assailed, often dimmed, it has never been extinguished. We could not hope to captivate society by splendid edifices, nor many cultivated advocates; but truth of principle will penetrate where those who maintain it will never be seen and never

heard. The day cometh when other torches will be lighted at the obscure fire, which, borne aloft by other and stronger hands, will shed lasting illumination where otherwise darkness would permanently prevail. As Elizabeth Barrett Browning has said: "Truth is like sacramental bread—we must pass it on."

SECULARIST CEREMONIES.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SECULARIST CEREMONIES.

“Death is the decisive test of the value of the education and morality of society; secular funerals are the symbol of the social renovation.”—P. J. PROUDHON.

[CERTAIN ceremonies are common to all human society, and should be consistent with the opinions of those in whose name the ceremonies take place. The marriage service of the Church contains things no bride could hear without a blush, if she understood them; and the Burial Service includes statements the minister ought to know to be untrue, and by which the sadness of death is desecrated. The Secularist naturally seeks other forms of speech. It being a principle of Secularism to endeavor to replace what it deems bad by something better—or more consistent with its profession—the following addresses are given. Other hands may supply happier examples; but, in the meantime, these which follow may meet with the needs of those who have no one at hand to speak for them, and are not accustomed to speak themselves.]

I.—ON MARRIAGE.

Marriage involves several things of which few persons think beforehand, and which it is useful to call their attention to at this time. The bridegroom, by the act of marriage, professes that he has chosen out of all the women of the world, known to him, the one to whom he will be faithful

while life shall last. He declares the bride to be his preference, and, whoever he may see hereafter, or like, or love, the door of association shall be shut upon them in his heart for ever. The bride, on her part, declares and promises the same things. The belief in each other's perfection is the most beautiful illusion of love. Sometimes the illusion happily continues during life. It may happen—it does happen sometimes—that each discovers that the other is not perfect. The Quaker's advice was: "Open your eyes wide before marriage, but shut them afterwards." Those who have neglected the first part of this counsel will still profit by observing the second. Let those who will look about, and put tormenting constructions on innocent acts: beware of jealousy, which kills more happiness than ever Love created.

The result of marriage is usually offspring, when society will have imposed upon it an addition to its number. It is necessary for the credit of the parents, as well as for the welfare of the children, that they should be born healthy, reared healthy, and be well educated; so that they may be strong and intelligent when the time comes for them to encounter, for themselves, the vicissitudes of life. Those who marry are considered to foreknow and to foresee these duties, and to pledge themselves to do the best in their power to discharge them.

In the meantime, and ever afterwards, let love reign between you. And remember the minister of Love is deference towards each other. Ceremonial manners are conducive to affection. Love is not a business, but the permanence of love is a business.

Unless there are good humor, patience, pleasantness, discretion, and forbearings by each, love will cease. Those who expect perfection will lose happiness. A wise tolerance is the sunshine of love, and they who maintain it will come to count their marriage the beginning of the brightness of life.

II.—NAMING CHILDREN.

[In naming children it is well to avoid names whose associations pledge the child, without its consent, to some line of action it may have no mind to, or capacity for, when grown up. A child called "Brutus" would be expected to stab Cæsar—and the Cæsars are always about. The name "Washington" destroyed a politician of promise who bore it. He could never live up to it. A name should be a pleasant mark to be known by, not a badge to be borne. In formally naming a child it is the parents alone to whom useful words can be addressed.]

Heredity, which means qualities derived from parentage, is a prophecy of life. Therefore let parents render themselves as perfect in health, as wise in mind, and as self-respecting in manners as they can; for their qualities in some degree, will appear in their offspring. One advantage of children is that they contribute unconsciously to the education of parents. No parents of sense can fail to see that children are as imitative as monkeys, and have better memories. Not only do they imitate actions, but repeat forms of expression, and will remember them ever after. The manners of parents become more or less part of the manners and mind of the child. Sensible parents, seeing this, will put a guard upon their conduct and speech, so that their example in act and word may be a store-house of manners and taste from which their children may draw wisdom in conduct and speech. The minds of children are as photographic plates on which parents are always printing something which will be indelibly visible in future days. Therefore the society, the surroundings, and teachers of the child, so far as the parents can control them, should be well chosen, in order that the name borne by their offspring shall command respect when their time comes to play a part in the drama of life. To this end a child should be taught to take care what he promises, and that when he has given his promise he has to keep it, for he

whose word is not to be trusted is always suspected, and his opinion is not sought by others, or is disregarded when uttered. A child should early learn that debt is dependence, and the habit of it is the meanness of living upon loans. There can be no independence, no reliance upon the character of anyone, who habitually buys without the means of payment, or who lives beyond his income. Such persons intend to live on the income of someone else, and do it whether they intend it or not. He alone can be independent who trusts to himself for advancement. No one ought to be helped forward who does not possess this quality, or will not put his hand to any honest work open to him. Beware of the child who has too much pride to do what he can for his own support, but has not too much pride to live upon his parents, or upon friends. Such pride is idleness, or thoughtlessness, or both, unless ill-health causes the inability.

Since offspring have to be trained in health and educated in the understanding, there must not be many in the family unless the parents have property. The poor cannot afford to have many children if they intend to do their duty by them. It is immoral in the rich to have many because the example is bad, and because they are sooner or later quartered upon the people to keep them; or, if they are provided for by their parents, they are under no obligation to do anything for themselves, which is neither good for them, nor good for the community to which they contribute nothing.

Believing this child will be trained by its parents to be an honor to them, and a welcome addition to the family of humanity, it is publicly named with pleasure.

OVER THE DEAD.

III.—READING AT A GRAVE.

Esdras and Uriel.

[An argument in which the Prophet speaks as a Secularist.]

AND the angel that was sent unto me, whose name was Uriel, said:—I am sent to show thee three ways, and to set forth three similitudes before thee: whereof, if thou canst declare me one, I will show thee also the way that thou desirest to see.....

And I said, Tell on, my Lord.

Then said he unto me, Go thy way; weigh me the weight of the fire, or measure me the blast of the wind, or call me again the day that is past.

Then answered I and said, What man is able to do that, that thou shouldest ask such things of me?

And he said unto me, If I should ask thee how great dwellings are in the midst of the sea, or how many springs are in the beginning of the deep, or how many springs are above the firmament, or which are the outgoings of Paradise, peradventure thou wouldst say unto me, I never went down into the deep, nor as yet into hell, neither did I ever climb up into heaven.

Nevertheless, now have I asked thee but only of the fire, and wind, and of *the day wherethrough* thou hast passed, and of *things from which thou canst not be separated*, and yet canst thou give me no answer of them.

He said, moreover, unto me, Thine own things, and such as are *grown up with thee*, canst thou not know? How should thy vessel, then, be able to comprehend the way of the Highest?.....

Then said I unto him, It were better that we were not at

all than that we should live still in wickedness and to suffer, and not to know wherefor.

He answered me and said, I went into a forest, into a plain, and the trees took counsel, and said, Come, let us go and make war against the sea, that it may depart away before us, and that we may make us more woods.

The floods of the sea also in like manner took counsel, and said, Come, let us go up and subdue the woods of the plain : that there also we may make us another country.

The thought of the wood was in vain, for the fire came and consumed it. The thought of the floods of the sea came likewise to nought, for the sand stood up and stopped them.

If thou wert judge now betwixt these two, whom wouldest thou begin to justify ? or whom wouldest thou condemn ?

I answered, and said, Verily it is a foolish thought that they both have devised ; for the ground is given unto the wood, and the sea also hath his place to bear his floods.

Then answered he me and said, Thou hast given a right judgment ; but why judgest thou not thyself also ? For like as the ground is given unto the woods, and the sea to his floods, even so they that dwell upon the earth may understand nothing but that which is upon the earth : and he that dwelleth upon the heavens may only understand the things that are above the height of the heavens.

Then answered I and said, I beseech Thee, O Lord, let me have *understanding*.

For it was not my mind to be curious of the high things, but of such as pass by us daily.

(From "The Apocrypha.")

IV.—HARRIET MARTINEAU'S HYMN.*

[The only Hymn known to me in which a Supreme Cause is implied, without being asserted or denied, or the reader committed to belief in it.]

Beneath this starry arch
 Nought resteth or is still,
 But all things hold their march
 As if by one great will :
 Moves one, move all :
 Hark to the footfall !
 On, on, for ever !

Yon sheaves were once but seed :
 Will ripens into deed.
 As eave-drops swell the streams,
 Day-thoughts feed nightly dreams ;
 And sorrow tracketh wrong,
 As echo follows song,
 On, on, for ever !

By night, like stars on high,
 The hours reveal their train ;
 They whisper and go by ;
 I never watch in vain :
 Moves one, move all :
 Hark to the footfall !
 On, on, for ever !

They pass the cradle-head,
 And there a promise shed ;
 They pass the moist new grave,
 And bid bright verdure wave ;
 They bear through every clime,
 The harvests of all time,
 On, on, for ever !

V.—AT THE GRAVE OF A CHILD.

The death of a child is alone its parents' sorrow. Too young to know, too innocent to fear, its life is a smile and its death a sleep. As the sun goes down before our eyes, so a mother's love vanishes from the gaze of infancy, and

* Which may be sung where it can be so arranged.

death, like evening, comes to it with quietness, gentleness, and rest. We measure the loss of a child by the grief we feel. When its love is gone, its promise over, and its prattle silent, its fate excites the parents' tears; but we forget that infancy, like the rose, is unconscious of the sweetness it sheds, and it parts without pain from the pleasure it was too young to comprehend, though engaging enough to give to others. The death of a child is like the death of a day, of which George Herbert sings:—

Sweet day, so clear, so calm, so bright,
Bridal of the earth and sky;
The dew shall weep thy fall to-night—
For thou must die.

It is no consolation to say, "When a child dies it is taken from the sorrows of life." Yes! it is taken from the sorrows of life, and from its joys also. When the young die they are taken from the evil, and from good as well. What parents' love does not include the future of its offspring? No! we will not cheat ourselves. Death is a real loss to those who mourn, and the world is never the same again to those who have wept by the grave of a child. Argument does not, in that hour, reach the heart. It is human to weep, and sympathy is the only medicine of great grief. The sight of the empty shoe in the corner will efface the most relevant logic. Not all the preaching since Adam has made death other than death. Yet, though sorrow cannot be checked at once by reason, it may be chastened by it. Wisdom teaches that all human passions must be subordinate to the higher purposes of life. We must no more abandon ourselves to grief than to vice. The condition of life is the liability to vicissitude, and, while it is human to feel, it is duty to endure. The flowers fade, and the stars go down, and youth and loveliness vanish in the eternal change. Though we cannot but regret a vital loss, it is wisdom to love all that is good for its own sake; to enjoy its presence fully, but not to build on its continuance, doing what we can to insure its continuance, and

bearing with fortitude its loss when it comes. If the death of infancy teaches us this lesson, the past may be a charmed memory, with courage and dignity in it.

VI.—ON MEN OR WOMEN.

The science of life teaches us that while there is pain there is life. It would seem, therefore, that death, with silent and courteous step, never comes save to the unconscious. A niece of Franklin's, known for her wit and consideration for others, arrived at her last hour at the age of ninety-eight. In her composure a friend gently touched her. "Ah," murmured the old lady, "I was dying so beautifully when you brought me back! But never mind, my dear; I shall try it again." This bright resignation, worthy of the niece of a philosopher, is making its way in popular affection.

Lord Tennyson, when death came near to him, wrote:—

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar
When I put out to sea.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark,
And may there be no sadness of farewell
When I embark.

There is just a touch of superstition in these genial lines. He writes: "After death the dark." How did he know that? What evidence is there that the unknown land is "dark"? Why not light? The unknown has no determinate or ascertained color.

Where we know nothing, neither priest nor poet has any right to speak as though he had knowledge. Improbability does not imply impossibility. That which invests death with romantic interest is, that it may be a venture on untried existence. If a future state be true, it will befall those who do not expect it as well as those who

do. Another world, if such there be, will come most befittingly and most agreeably to those who have qualified themselves for it, by having made the best use in their power of this. By best use is meant the service of man. Desert consists alone in the service of others. Kindness and cheerfulness are the two virtues which most brighten human life. Wide-eyed philanthropy is not merely money-giving goodness, but the wider kindness which aids the ascendancy of the right and minimizes misery everywhere.

Death teaches, as nothing else does, one useful lesson. Whatever affection or friendship we may have shown to one we have lost, Death brings to our memory countless acts of tenderness which we had neglected. Conscience makes us sensible of these omissions now it is too late to repair them. But we can pay to the living what we think we owe to the dead; whereby we transmute the dead we honor into benefactors of those they leave behind. This is a useful form of consolation, of which all survivors may avail themselves.

Mrs. Ernestine Rose—a brave advocate of unfriended right—when age and infirmity brought her near to death, recalled the perils and triumphs in which she had shared, the slave she had helped to set free from the bondage of ownership, and the slave minds she had set free from the bondage of authority; she was cheered, and exclaimed: “But I have lived.”

The day will come when all around this grave shall meet death; but it will be a proud hour if, looking back upon a useful and generous past, we each can say: “I have lived.”

VII.—ON A CAREER OF PUBLIC USEFULNESS.

In reasoning upon death no one has surpassed the argument of Socrates, who said: “Death is one of two things:

either the dead may be nothing and have no feeling—well, then, if there be no feeling, but it be like sleep, when the sleeper has no dream, surely death would be a marvellous gain, for thus all futurity appears to be nothing more than one night. If, on the other hand, death be a removal hence to another place, and what is said be true, that all the dead are there, what greater blessing can there be than this ?”

Sir Edwin Arnold, in his “Secret of Death,” writes :—

Nay, but as when one layeth
His worn-out robes away,
And, taking new ones, sayeth,
“These will I wear to-day !”

So putteth by the spirit
Lightly its garb of flesh,
And passeth to inherit
A residence afresh.

This may be true, and there is no objection to it if it be. But the pity is, nobody seems sure about it. At death we may mourn, but duty ceaseth not. If we desist in endeavors for the right because a combatant falls at our side, no battle will ever be won. “Life,” Mazzini used to say, “is a battle and a march.” Those who serve others at their own peril are always in “battle.” Let us honor them as they pass. Some of them have believed :—

Though love repine and reason chafe,
There came a voice without reply—
“’Tis man’s perdition to be safe,
When for the truth he ought to die.”

They are of those who, as another poet has said, “are not to be mourned, but to be imitated.”* The mystery of Death is no greater than the mystery of Life. All that precedes our existence was unseen, unimaginable, and unknown to us. What may succeed in the future is unprovable by philosopher or priest :—

A flower above and the mould below :
And this is all that the mourners know.†

* W. J. Linton.

† Barry Cornwall.

The ideal of life which gives calmness and confidence in death is the same in the mind of the wise Christian as in the mind of the philosopher. Sydney Smith says: "Add to the power of discovering truth the desire of using it for the promotion of human happiness, and you have the great end and object of our existence."* Putting just intention into action, a man fulfils the supreme duty of life, which casts out all fear of the future.

A poet who thought to reconcile to their loss those whose lines have not fallen to them in pleasant places wrote:—

A little rule, a little sway,
A sunbeam on a winter's day,
Is all the proud and mighty have
Between the cradle and the grave.

Do not believe it. The proud and mighty have rest at choice, and play at will. The "sunbeam" is on them all their days. Between the cradle and the grave is the whole existence of man. The splendid inheritance of the "proud and mighty" ought to be shared by all whose labor creates and makes possible the good fortune of those who "toil not, neither do they spin"; and whoever has sought to endow the industrious with liberty and intelligence, with competence and leisure, we may commit to the earth in the sure and certain hope that they deserve well, and will fare well, in any "land of the leal" to which mankind may go.

* Moral Philosophy.

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