

THE

SECULARIST'S CATECHISM:

BEING

AN EXPOSITION OF SECULAR PRINCIPLES,

*Showing their Relation to the Political and Social  
Problems of the Day.*

BY

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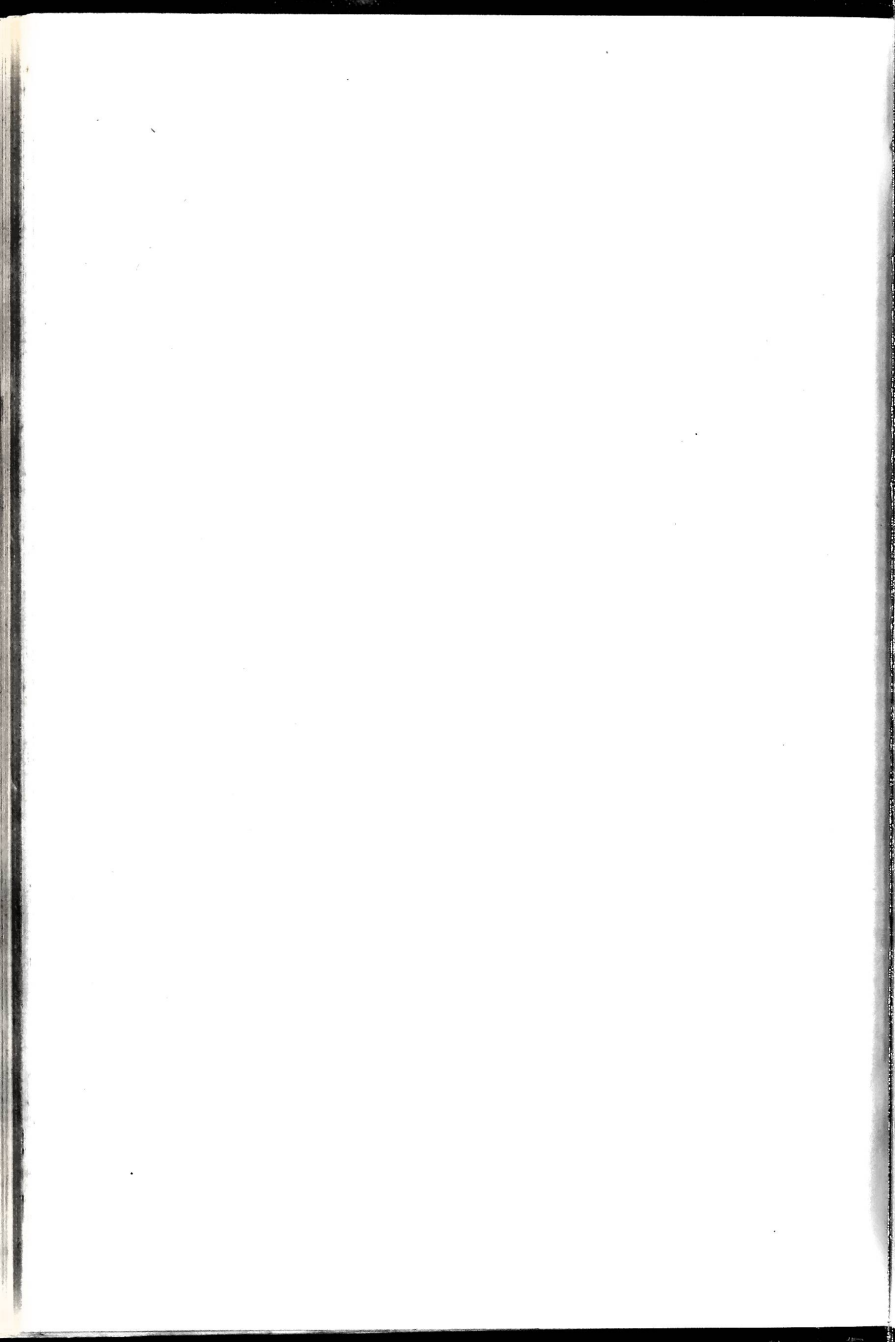
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# THE SECULARIST'S CATECHISM.

## PROEM.

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It has frequently occurred to me that the presentation of Secular views in the form of question and answer would be an advantage, not only to youthful inquirers, but also to adults who lack either the opportunity or the inclination to study in detail the nature of Secularism and its principles and teachings. Moreover, I have often been asked to give a plain and concise definition of Secular philosophy, and to point out wherein it differs from New Testament Christianity, and in what way it is superior to the Christian faith. Many inquiries have also reached me as to what are the Secular views in reference to the nature and destiny of man, the government of the universe, and to the political and social problems of the day. I propose to comply with these requests on the Socratic method—that is, by putting questions and supplying answers thereto. In doing this my endeavor will be to employ language that may be readily understood by those who wish to learn what the various phases of Secularism really are.

This expository method appears to me to be necessary, particularly at the present time, when we are constantly receiving into our ranks, from the rising generation, numerous recruits, who evince a laudable desire to have at their command a definite record of Secular views, principles, objects, and aims. Of course I do not intend to give an elaborate disquisition of Secular philosophy, but simply to furnish a concise, matter-of-fact epitome of our views as they are explained by the National Secular Society, and also by the leading writers of the Secular party.

*THE CATECHISM.*

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QUESTION.—*What is Secularism?*

ANSWER.—In its etymological signification, it means the age, the finite, belonging to this world. Secularists, however, use the term in a more amplified sense, as embodying a philosophy of life, and inculcating rules of conduct that have no *necessary* association with any system of theology.

Q.—*Have the Secularists an official statement of their principles?*

A.—Yes, those recognized and adopted by the National Secular Society, which are as follows:—Secularism teaches that conduct should be based on reason and knowledge. It knows nothing of divine guidance or interference; it excludes supernatural hopes and fears; it regards happiness as man's proper aim, and utility as his proper moral guide. Secularism affirms that progress is only possible through liberty, which is at once a right and a duty, and, therefore, seeks to remove every barrier to the fullest equal freedom of thought, action, and speech. Secularism declares that theology is condemned by reason as superstitious, and by experience as mischievous, and assails it as the historic enemy of progress. Secularism accordingly seeks to dispel superstition, to spread education, to disestablish religion, to rationalize morality, to promote peace, to dignify labor, to extend material well-being, and to realize the self-government of the people.

Q.—*What is the basis of Secularism?*

A.—The exercise of Freethought, guided by reason, experience, and general usefulness. By Freethought is here meant the right to entertain any opinions that commend themselves to the judgment of the honest and earnest searcher after truth, without his being made the victim of social ostracism in this world, or threatened with punishment in some other. Experience has proved the impossibility of uniformity of belief upon theological questions; therefore Freethought should be acknowledged as being the heritage of the human race.

Q.—*Are Secularism and Freethought identical?*

A.—Not exactly. All Secularists must be Freethinkers, but all Freethinkers are not necessarily Secularists. Freethought represents a mental condition, but Secularism

contains a code of principles whereby human life can be regulated and human conduct governed.

*Q.—What is Reason?*

A.—We define reason as being man's highest intellectual powers—the understanding, the faculty of judgment, the power which discriminates, infers, deduces, and judges, the ability to premise future probabilities from past experience, and to distinguish truth from error.

*Q.—What is Truth?*

A.—That may be taken as true which the best knowledge endorses, the largest intellects accept, and the widest experience vouches for. Many so-called truths are liable to be corrected, modified, or superseded by more accurate power of judgment, or more perfect experience.

*Q.—What is Experience?*

A.—Experience represents knowledge acquired through study, investigation, and observation in the broadest sense possible. We do not use the word in the limited form, as Whately employs it, of individual experience, but as comprising the world's legacy of thought, action, scientific application, and mental culture, so far as we are enabled to avail ourselves of these intellectual agencies.

*Q.—What is Secular Morality?*

A.—We teach that morality consists in the performance of acts that will exalt and ennoble human character, and in avoiding conduct that is injurious either to the individual or to society at large.

*Q.—What do Secularists mean by the term Duty?*

A.—By "duty" we mean an obligation to perform actions that have a tendency to promote the welfare of others, as well as that of ourselves. Obligations are imposed upon us by the very nature of things and the requirements of society.

*Q.—From a Secular point of view, why should we speak the truth?*

A.—Because experience teaches that lying and deceit tend to destroy that confidence between man and man which has been found to be necessary to maintain the stability of mutual societarian intercourse.

*Q.—Why should we be honest?*

A.—Because a dishonest act is an infringement upon the rights of others.

*Q.—Why should we be just ?*

A.—Because history and observation have shown that where injustice has prevailed, there the happiness and well-being of the people have been impaired.

*Q.—What explanation is given to the word "ought" when it is said we "ought" to do so and so ?*

A.—The only explanation orthodox Christianity gives to this term is pure selfishness. It says you "ought" to do so and so for "Christ's sake," that through him you may avoid eternal perdition. On the other hand, Secularism finds the meaning of "ought" in the very nature of things, as involving duty, and implying that something is due to others.

*Q.—Wherein is Secularism superior to Christianity ?*

A.—In the fact that Secularism affirms certain rights which are denied by the orthodox Christianity of the Churches and the New Testament. These are:—1. The right of a person to reject any or all of the religions in the world, without fear of excommunication here, or condemnation hereafter. Christianity condemns this right in teaching: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal. i. 8). "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark xvi. 16). 2. The right to refuse to regard all that Christ is supposed to have taught as "true gospel." Christianity denies this, and says to those who do not accept Christ's gospel, that he will come "in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them" (2 Thess. 8). 3. The right of anyone adhering to Free-thought, even if it culminates in the denial of the very foundation of the Christian faith. This is denied by Christianity, which says: "For whosoever will deny me before men, him will I also deny before my father which is in heaven" (Matt. x. 33). 4. The right to act upon the opinion that attention should be given to this world in preference to any other. Christianity discourages this right, inasmuch as it teaches: "Take no thought for your life, .....but seek ye first the kingdom of God" (Matt. vi. 25, 33). 5. The right to regard Science as being more valuable than theological faith. The New Testament teaches the opposite to this in saying: "Is any sick among you ?.....The

prayer of faith shall save the sick" (James v. 14, 15). "By grace are ye saved through faith.....Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. ii. 8, 9). 6. The right to deem salvation quite possible apart altogether from Christ. The scripture says no, "for there is none other name [except Christ's] under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts iv. 12).

*Q.—What is the difference between Secularism and Christianity?*

*A.—*"Christianity," in the words of Mr. G. J. Holyoake, "treats of two sets of duties—to God and to man: we hold that the duties to man take precedence in importance, and, indeed, include the highest possible duties to a benevolent God. Christianity holds that faith in Christ alone will save us: we hold that faith in good works will better save us, as humanity is higher than dogmas. Christianity teaches that prayer is a means of providential help: we teach that Science is the sole available means of temporal help. Christianity professes to supply the highest motives and the surest consolations: we say no motives can be purer or stronger than the love of goodness for its own sake, which brings consolation sweeter than dignities and loftier than talents. Christianity assumes that the moral sense cannot be educated without the Bible: we answer that the high culture attained in Greece, before the days of the Bible, is possible, in a purer and more universal sense, in these days of scientific civilization; we answer that the Bible, which has been understood in opposite senses by the ablest men—the Bible, which has divided the holiest churches, and which down to this hour dictates harshness of language and bitterness of spirit—cannot be a book of moral culture to the people. Christianity declares it has the promise of this life and of that which is to come: Secularism secures the realisation of this life, and establishes fair desert also in any life to come; for the 'best use of both worlds' is the secular use of this. Christianity contends that if the Christian is wrong he will be no worse off than ourselves hereafter; while, if he is right, we shall be in danger: but this only proves that our system is more generous than the Christian, because our system still provides no harm for the Christian hereafter, while his system does provide harm for those who do not accept it.

Christianity either denies that there can be sincere dissent from its doctrines, or it teaches that for conscientious difference of opinion the last hour of life will be the beginning of never-ending misery. Secularism, on the contrary, says that that solemn moment when Death exerts his inexorable dominion, and the anguish of separating affection blanches the cheek; when even the dumb brute betrays inarticulate sympathy, and the grossest natures are refined, and rude lips spontaneously distil the silvery words of sympathy; when the unfeeling volunteer acts of mercy, and tyranny pauses in its pursuit of vengeance, and the tempest of passion is stilled, and the injured forgive, and hate is subdued to love, and insensibility to affection—we say, *that* can never be the moment chosen by a God of love in which to commence the execution of a purpose which humanity cannot conceive without terror, nor contemplate without dismay.”

*Q.—Is Secularism a necessity?*

A.—Yes; for the three following reasons: (1) Because theology has failed to regenerate society; (2) because there are thousands of honest inquirers who cannot accept as true any of the supernatural faiths of the world; (3) because some guide for human conduct is desirable, therefore Secularism is a necessity to those who are unable to believe in theological teachings.

*Q.—What do Secularists seek to destroy?*

A.—Not the truths that are contained either in Christianity or in the Bible; these are for the service of mankind, irrespective of any religious profession. Our aim is to destroy the errors of theology—such as the belief in its creeds and dogmas; dependence upon alleged supernatural power as a means of help; the notion that the prayer of supplication is of any practical value; that man is necessarily a depraved being; that an ill-spent life can be atoned for by a death-bed repentance; that salvation can be obtained through the merits of Christ; that, if there be a heaven, the only passport to it is faith in the Christian scheme of redemption; that there exist a personal Devil and a material hell; and that the Bible is an infallible record.

*Q.—What is the Secular view of the Bible?*

A.—Secularism affirms that the Bible is a merely human



production, abounding in the errors and superstitions specially common to ancient human works, the venerable days of old being the infancy of mankind. Secularists regard the Bible as a book composed of a large number of distinct and incongruous pamphlets, quite unauthenticated, written by various person, nobody really knows by whom ; at far distant periods, nobody exactly knows when ; which have been floated down to us, as the "accidents of time" determined, by oral traditions and written copies, subject to all the blunders and perversions of ignorant and fanatical men, in ages perfectly uncritical and unscrupulous ; whose originals have irretrievably perished ; which frequently refer to prior authorities that have utterly perished also, and whose various readings are counted by tens of thousands. The various books which compose the New Testament were first circulated at a time when ignorance was the rule, and knowledge the exception ; when the critical spirit was non-existent, and true believers accounted all forgeries in favor of their religion not only permissible, but praiseworthy. The amount of falsification prevalent which can be demonstrated even now, when so many of the required testimonies are lost, is astounding, and even appalling, to one who newly enters upon the inquiry by studying the works of some competent and impartial scholar. Of these falsifications and uncertainties the ordinary Christian knows nothing ; and the learned Christians, who are thoroughly aware of them, are anything but anxious to point them out to their less informed brethren. The Secularist, knowing these facts, together with the equally demonstrated truth that both the Old and New Testaments are contradictory in their statements and teachings, estimates the book by its merits, and not by its supposed authority. The Bible, like all books, should be our servant, and not our master. Secularism applies the eclectic principle to all books, and, being bound by no authority save cultivated reason, the evil, folly, and errors of each are discarded, while the good, wise, and true are retained to assist in making a noble, dignified, and happy life for mankind on earth.

*Q.—Are Secularists Atheists ?*

A.—Not necessarily so. Mr. George Jacob Holyoake, the founder of Secularism, says to the reader in his preface

to the *Trial of Theism* : "All we beg of him is not to confound Atheism with Secularism, which is an entirely different question. It is not necessary to Secularism to say God does not exist, nor to question the alleged proofs of such existence. The sphere of Secularism is irrespective of Theism, Atheism, or the Bible. Its province is the ethics of nature. Secularism does not declare why nature exists, or how it exists. Nature is. Secularism commences with this ample, indisputable, and infinite fact of wonder, study, and progress."

*Q.—Did not Mr. Bradlaugh say that Secularism leads to Atheism when logically reasoned out?*

*A.—Yes; but he also said, in his debate with Dr. McCann: "Clearly, all Secularists are not Atheists. Clearly, many people who believe themselves to be sincere Theists can sign the declarations and principles which I have read to you [those of the National Secular Society], without doing any violation to their honest declaration; but, so far as I am personally concerned, and probably many will agree with me, I contend that the result of Secularism is Atheism. Only don't put it on all. Don't put it on the Society. There are many Atheists in the Society, and some who are not." Besides, if Secularism and Atheism were necessarily one, then Mr. Bradlaugh's words would have no meaning when he said that Secularism led, when logically carried out, to Atheism. If it leads to Atheism, then it is not Atheism.*

*Q.—What is the difference between Secularism and Atheism?*

*A.—Secularism is a practical philosophy, providing rules for human guidance in daily life, while Atheism represents certain theories in reference to the supposed existence of God and the supernatural in the universe.*

*Q.—Have Christians in their teachings anything analogous to the stated relation between Secularism and Atheism?*

*A.—Yes; many Christians believe that the logical outcome of their teachings is Calvinism, while others will not admit that Calvinism is any part of Christianity.*

*Q.—Where is the Secular science, and where are the hospitals and other institutions of the Secular party?*

*A.—All science is secular, and it did not originate in any supernatural faith. Hospitals, and other benevolent institutions, are the result of human sympathy. They*

existed long before the dawn of Christianity, and to-day Secularists and all classes of unbelievers contribute towards their support. The Christians built no hospitals until the fourth century A.D.

*Q.—What is the reason that professed Christians suppose they have done more useful work than Secularists?*

A.—Because they have had more time, greater wealth, and better opportunities than Secularists have had. Christians claim a history of two thousand years, during which time they have possessed untold wealth, and almost unlimited power. Secularism, on the other hand, has only existed, *as an organisation*, for about fifty years, funds left for its propagation have been stolen by Christians, and Christian laws have made Secular advocacy illegal.

*Q.—Have Secularists accomplished as much in their fifty years of existence as the Christians did during the first half century of their existence?*

A.—Undoubtedly, and more. The early Christians had no science worthy of the name; they achieved no political or social reforms, and they gave the masses no real education. It was not until the third century that Christian places of worship were erected. Secularists have several halls throughout the country, and they would have many more but for the disgraceful fact that, as already stated, Christians have appropriated to themselves money left for Secular purposes.

*Q.—What progressive movements have Secularists taken part in?*

A.—In the struggles for the abolition of slavery; the repeal of the taxes upon knowledge; the establishment of a national system of education; the various efforts that have been made to extend the franchise among the masses; the securing of the right of free speech and a free press; the substitution of affirmation instead of swearing; the improvement of the social status of woman; the fostering of kindness to animals; the cultivation of peace and goodwill among nations; the settlement of disputes by intellectual arbitration rather than by brute force; the better adjustment of the relations between Capital and Labor, and the entire cessation of either persecution or prosecution for the holding of opinions, let them be what they may.

*Q.—Are there any records of special acts of benevolence upon the part of unbelievers in the Christian faith?*

A.—Yes, many. Among the numerous bequests left by rich men, the gifts of Freethinkers have appeared conspicuous. The founder of Girard College, not a believer in Christianity, in addition to the six million dollars required for the establishment of that college, gave, throughout his lifetime and at his death, thirty thousand dollars to the hospitals, twenty thousand dollars to the deaf and dumb asylum, twenty thousand dollars to the orphan asylum, twenty thousand dollars to the Lancaster schools, ten thousand dollars to provide fuel for the Philadelphia poor, ten thousand dollars to aid distressed sea-captains, twenty thousand dollars for the relief of poor masons, fifty thousand dollars for various other charities in Philadelphia, and three hundred thousand dollars for the absolute poor. James Smithson left five thousand dollars to found the institution named after him at Washington; John Redmond gave three hundred thousand dollars to support three beds in the Boston Hospital; James Lick gave one million dollars to found an astronomical observatory; William M'Clure gave half a million dollars to aid the working men; and George Ilford gave thirty thousand dollars for the scientific training of women. Mr. Butland, a prominent member of the Toronto Secular Society, bequeathed fifty thousand dollars to the general hospitals of Toronto. In Glasgow the Mitchell Library was established at the cost of seventy thousand pounds by a Freethinker; and in the same city Mr. George Baillie left eighteen thousand pounds to establish unsectarian schools, reading-rooms, etc.

*Q.—Have Secularists any faith or religion?*

A.—That depends upon the meaning attached to the words "faith" and "religion." If these terms are understood as representing theological and dogmatic teachings, we have neither.

*Q.—How do Secularists understand the terms here mentioned?*

A.—Our faith is limited to possible results in this life, and it is based upon the experience of the past, not upon conjectures as to a future existence. Religion, with us, signifies morality—that is, practical duties, not speculative opinions. This is the etymological meaning of the word.

*Q.—Have Secularists any standard of right, such as the Christian's "Golden Rule," which is: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even to them"?*

*A.—*We do not accept this as the best standard of right, but only as an expression of likes and dislikes. Besides, it belongs to the Pagan world, and it is not the unique teaching of Christianity. We hold that the best conduct is to do that which is conducive to the general good, independently of what we would that others should do to us. Conduct that results in being useful to others and ourselves is undoubtedly the best for all mankind.

*Q.—Does this express the Secular idea of duty?*

*A.—*Yes, inasmuch as it represents that conduct which grows out of our relation to each other. It includes our obligation to parents, family, and the State, to whom, and to which, we are individually indebted for benefits received.

*Q.—Is there no other duty?*

*A.—*No; because our only concern is with this world and its inhabitants, beyond which we recognise no moral duty or responsibility. The only demand we admit is, that our conduct should be in harmony with what the best interests of the community require of its members.

*Q.—What motive have Secularists for compliance with this demand?*

*A.—*The desire to maintain social affinity, and to raise the standard of ethical culture and general intelligence by the example of right-doing. Experience proves that this is the surest way of promoting the general good.

*Q.—But is not that reducing morality to a personal advantage?*

*A.—*Quite so; and herein lies the excellence of the Secular method, for the general good is the result of personal action. It is a mistake to suppose that individual happiness is possible while we are surrounded with ignorance and vice; therefore Secularists urge that their neighbors should be well instructed in order that all, individually, may share the highest good.

*Q.—Do Secularists believe in a future life?*

*A.—*Some do, and others do not. That is a question left to each person to decide for himself. The National Secular Society does not dogmatise upon the subject either

*pro* or *con*. It cannot affirm there *is* such a life, because to prove it is impossible; it cannot deny a future life, because we know nothing of it, and to deny that of which we acknowledge we know nothing would be illogical.

*Q.—Is the Secular position upon this subject a safe one?*

*A.—*We think so; for, by making the best of this life, physically, morally, and intellectually, we are pursuing the wisest course, whatever the issues in reference to a future life may be. If there should be another life, the Secularist must share it with his opponent. Our opinions do not affect the reality in the slightest degree. If we are to sleep for ever, we shall so sleep, despite the belief in immortality; and if we are to live for ever, we shall so live, despite the belief that possibly death ends all. It must also be remembered that, if man possesses a soul, that soul will be the better through being in a body that has been properly trained; and if there is to be a future life, that life will be the better if the higher duties of the present one have been fully and honestly performed.

*Q.—Have Secularists no fear of future punishment, supposing they are wrong?*

*A.—*Certainly not; for if there be a just God, before whom we are to appear to be judged, he will never punish those to whom he has not vouchsafed the faculty of seeing beyond the grave, because they honestly avowed that their mental vision was limited to this side of the tomb. Thus the Secularists feel quite safe as regards any futurity that may be worth having. If the present be the only life, then it will be all the more valuable if we give it our undivided attention. If, on the other hand, there is to be another life, then, in that case, we shall have won the right to its advantages through having been faithful to our convictions, just to our fellows, and in having striven to leave the world purer than we found it.

*Q.—Do not Secularists miss a great consolation in not believing in a future life?*

*A.—*Decidedly not; for the reason that the belief is only speculative, having no foundation in known facts. Besides, we have the conviction that our secular conduct on earth will entitle us to the realization of its fullest pleasure. And this conviction is not marred by the belief that the majority of the human race will be condemned to

a fate "which humanity cannot conceive without terror, nor contemplate without dismay."

*Q.—Is not the belief in a future life necessary as a motive to moral conduct?*

A.—No; because people live good lives without such a belief, while many who believe in "a life beyond the grave" are guilty of the most immoral conduct. The consideration that our actions affect, for good or for evil, our fellow creatures here ought to supply a sufficient motive for right living.

*Q.—But are not the hope of heaven and the fear of hell among the strongest incentives to virtue, and the most potent deterrents to vice?*

A.—In some cases this may be so, but that is the result of a false education. The highest incentive to good conduct should be our personal honor and the welfare of others; the strongest deterrent to bad conduct ought to be the knowledge that it results in injurious consequences upon the whole of the community.

*Q.—Do Secularists believe in what is termed the "Divine Providence" of the universe?*

A.—They do not. Our only providence is that which is derived from science, forethought, industry, and human effort. We have no faith in miracles or in the efficacy of prayer. Other conditions being equal, we believe that the crops of an unbeliever will ripen quite as well upon his estate as those upon the estate of the most pious.

*Q.—What injunction do Secularists give in accordance with their view of life?*

A.—That we should trust to ourselves, and not rely upon supposed heavenly favor. That we should seek in the order of nature a basis for practical precepts in life, and regard the laws of nature and man as being the foundation of all virtue and prosperity.

*Q.—Do Secularists accept any authority, or is every man allowed to do as he likes?*

A.—We accept the authority of cultivated reason, and facts that have been verified by experience. No one should be permitted to do as he likes, if in so doing his acts tend to injure others, and to disturb the harmony and well-being of the social state.

*Q.—What, from a Secular standpoint, principally influences man's character?*

A.—His physical organisation, early education, and general environment. These are the main conditions that determine the nature of human character and conduct.

*Q.—What is meant by education?*

A.—Not merely the possession of knowledge, but the ability to use knowledge so that it may be beneficial both to the individual and to the general community.

*Q.—Are men, their surroundings and natural laws, the only forces that are concerned with the affairs of life?*

A.—We believe that life is what it is through men acting and reacting upon each other, and in consequence of their complying, or non-complying, with the laws of existence, and making those laws subservient to their various objects in life as means to an end.

*Q.—Is there no power over human existence except nature's laws and man's effort?*

A.—That is more than we can say with our limited knowledge. But, so far as we know at present, these are the only agencies or factors that can be relied upon to sustain and regulate human affairs.

*Q.—How do Secularists account for the origin of nature and her laws?*

A.—We do not attempt to do so, inasmuch as we know nothing of what are called "final causes." Still, we accept the theory that probably nature and her laws may have always existed under some conditions—that there is one eternal existence of which all known forms are modes of manifestation.

*Q.—Which theory do Secularists regard as being the more reasonable—that of Special Creation, or that of Evolution?*

A.—Undoubtedly the theory of Evolution, for that accords with certain discoveries in science, and, moreover, it recognises the fact that all forms of nature are subject to perpetual change, and that the whole universe is the theatre of incessant activity.

*Q.—What is the difference between Evolution and Special Creation?*

A.—Evolution may be defined as an unfolding, opening-out, or unwinding; a disclosure of something which was not previously known, but which existed before in a more condensed or hidden form. According to this theory, there



is no new existence called into being, but a making conspicuous to our eyes that which was previously concealed. "Evolution teaches that the universe and man did not always exist in their present form; neither are they the product of a sudden creative act, but rather the result of innumerable changes from the lower to the higher, each step in advance being an evolution from a pre-existing condition." On the other hand, the special creation doctrine teaches that, during a limited period, God created the universe and man, and that the various phenomena are not the result simply of natural law, but the outcome of supernatural design. According to Mr. Herbert Spencer, the whole theory of Evolution is based upon three principles—namely, that matter is indestructible, motion continuous, and force persistent.

*Q.—What are the objections to the theory of Special Creation?*

A.—To accept this theory as being true, we have to think of a time when there was no time—of a place where there was no place. Is this possible? If it were, it would be interesting to learn where an infinite God was at that particular period, and how, in "no time," he could perform his creative act. Besides, if a being really exist who created all things, the obvious question at once is, "Where was this being before anything else existed?" "Was there a time when God over all was God over nothing? Can we believe that a God over nothing began to be out of nothing, and to create all things when there was nothing?" Moreover, if the universe was created, from what did it emanate? From nothing? But "from nothing nothing can come." Was it created from something that already was? If so, it was no creation at all, but only a continuation of that which was in existence. Further, "creation needs action; to act is to use force; to use force implies the existence of something upon which that force can be used. But if that 'something' were there before creation, the act of creating was simply the re-forming of pre-existing materials."

*Q.—Is there any other serious objection to the belief that an infinite God created the universe?*

A.—Yes. If God is infinite, he is everywhere; if everywhere, he is in the universe; if in the universe now, he was always there. If he were always in the universe, there

never was a time when the universe was not ; therefore, it could never have been created.

*Q.—Is it reasonable to believe in the theory of Special Creation, when science proclaims the stability of natural law ?*

*A.—*We think not ; for, as the late Professor Tyndall, in his lecture on “Sound,” remarked, if there is one thing that science has demonstrated more clearly than another, it is the stability of the operations of the laws of nature. We feel assured from experience that this is so, and we act upon such assurance in our daily life.

*Q.—What is the correct meaning of Agnosticism ?*

*A.—*It has been well said that, to clearly understand what Agnosticism is, it is desirable to remember the fact that one of the very first heresies which distracted the early Catholic Church was that of the Gnostics. They took their name from the Greek word for knowledge (or science) ; but, of course, they used it within certain sufficiently-marked limits. They did not mean that they possessed universal knowledge of all things, but only that they had *the* knowledge of what the Christian religion really was, or ought to be. This is here offered as a parallel example of the application of a general term to one particular subject or object of human knowledge. Precisely similar are the limits of the word which the addition of the little negative particle *a* (*without*) makes to signify precisely the opposite of Gnosticism. Gnosticism meant a full, complete, and accurate *knowledge* of the origin, nature, attributes, and mode of operation of the deity ; Agnosticism, on the contrary, signifies the very opposite of this. It declares that we have no knowledge of God ; that we cannot pretend to say that such a Supreme Intelligence exists ; and that we are absolutely precluded from affirming that the universe is really destitute of such a central *Nous*, or Highest Intelligence. “Canst thou,” asked the writer of the grand old Semitic drama—“Canst thou by searching find out God ?” This interrogation the honest Agnostic has put to himself, and, after long and earnest exercitation of mind, after the intensest study of the world external and of the inner consciousness, he arrives at the conclusion that the question cannot be satisfactorily answered, either affirmatively or negatively. The Agnostic does not argue that, “because we cannot see God, therefore he [God] is

not." The Agnostic knows too well his own limited nature and the boundary of the knowable to claim for himself a God-like degree and measure of knowledge.

*Q.—Is it not a fact that many of the principles of the National Secular Society are not new?*

A.—Probably that is so, but we are not aware that any sect, Christian or anti-Christian, possesses a special vested interest in goodness, or a monopoly of truth. Everything that is worth having belongs to man everywhere, and the principles of Secularism most certainly do not claim to be any exception to this rule. Truth is the universal prerogative of mankind in general, and goodness and virtue are qualities fortunately placed within the reach of humanity at large. If the principles of Secularism cannot lay claim to originality because they have been taught before, this is an objection that would apply with quite as much force, and certainly with as much truth, to most other systems, including Christianity itself. The ethical maxims to be met with in the New Testament may all be found in some form or other in heathen philosophies propounded long before Jesus of Nazareth is supposed to have trodden the shores of Galilee. It is surely a most puerile charge to bring against a system, that the whole of its teachings are not new. Morality is as old as humanity, and virtue co-existent with human action. But if Secularism or any other system can do something towards extending the domain of the one, and causing the other to take deeper root in the human mind, it deserves the respect of all good men, and it ought not to be sneered at because it has nothing new to teach.

*Q.—How do Secularists, as a rule, propose to deal with what they regard as the errors of Christianity?*

A.—There are three principal modes of criticizing the pretensions set forth on behalf of popular Christianity. First, it is alleged such pretensions are entirely destitute of truth, and that they have been of no service whatever to mankind. This view we certainly cannot endorse. Many of the superstitions of the world have been allied with some fact, and have, in their exercise upon the minds of a portion of their devotees, served, for a time no doubt, a useful purpose. In the second place, certain opponents of Christianity regard it as being deserving of immediate

extinction. This, in our opinion, is unjust to its adherents, who have as much right to possess what they hold to be true as we have to entertain views which we believe to be correct. Theological faiths should be supplanted by intellectual growth, not crushed by dogmatic force. The third and, as we think, the most sensible and fair mode of dealing with Christianity is to regard it as not being the only system of truth ; as not having had a special origin ; as not being suited to all minds ; as having fulfilled its original purpose, and as possessing no claim of absolute domination. This attitude of Secularism towards popular orthodoxy is based upon the voice of history and the philosophy of the true liberty of thought.

*Q.—What does Secularism teach in reference to marriage ?*

A.—It teaches that marriage should be the result of mutual affection, and that such a union creates the responsibility of undivided allegiance, mutual fidelity, and mutual consideration. It affirms that in the domestic circle there should be no one-sided, absolute authority ; that husband and wife should be partners, not only in theory, but in deed, and animated alike by the desire to promote one another's happiness. The genuine Secularist must be a brave, kindly, sincere, and just man. His Secularism will be felt as a radiating blessing first, and most warmly and brightly, in his own home. If a man neglects and ill-treats his wife and children, we must distinctly disavow him as a Secularist.

*Q.—What does the term "happiness" imply ?*

A.—It implies, firstly, material well-being, sufficiency of food, clothing, and house-room, with good air, good water, and good sanitary conditions ; for these things are necessary to bodily health, which, in turn, is essential to the health of the mind, for only in health is real happiness possible. Again, it implies mental well-being, sufficiency of instruction and education for every one, so that the intellect may be nourished and developed to the full extent of its capabilities. Given the sound mind in the sound body, the term "happiness" further implies free exercise of these, absolutely free in every respect so long as the equal rights of others are not trespassed upon, or the common good is not impeded. In this full development of mind as well as body it need scarcely be said that true happiness

brings into its service all the noblest and most beautiful arts of life.

*Q.—Are there not other requisites to happiness besides those just mentioned?*

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

*Q.—Has the National Secular Society any political program advocating party politics?*

A.—No. Each member of the Society is allowed to entertain whatever political opinions may commend themselves to his or her judgment. There is, however, one requirement which we urge, and that is that all should do their best to promote political justice among every section of the community. The method to be adopted to secure this object is left to individual choice.

*Q.—What is the teaching of Secularism in reference to the social problems of the day?*

A.—It teaches as a duty that we should recognize the necessity of discovering the best possible solutions, and, when those solutions are found, to apply them with all the moral force at our command. This useful work must be carried on by each of us in our capacity as social reformers—a task which will be inspired by the genius of Secularism, for no consistent Secularist can remain idle while evils abound that mar the happiness of the human family. The special duty of a member of the Secular organization consists in demanding that freedom which will enable every reformer to carry on his good work without intimidation or persecution of any kind, and also in doing his utmost to remove such impediments to progress as have been caused by priestly invention, and by the false conceptions of human duty which have been engendered by theological teachings.

*Q.—What is the official attitude of Secularism towards Socialism, Individualism, and Anarchism?*

A.—The relation of Secularism to all the “isms” named is the same as it is towards the political and religious movements of the day—namely, Eclectic—that is, it selects the best from among them all. Provided he does his best to combat existing evils, each member of the Secular party is at liberty to support any movement that seems to him wise and useful, supposing it to be based upon “peace, law, and order.” In fact, Secularists should feel bound to investigate, as far as possible, all proposals made for the redemption of mankind, regardless of sect or party. Special care, however, should always be taken to discriminate between true and false methods, and not to confound vain theories with practical remedies.

*Q.—Has not the National Secular Society any published authoritative statement as to the duty of its members in reference to the political questions of the day?*

A.—Yes, it distinctly teaches that freedom of thought, of speech, and of action for all is a claim consistent with reason, and essential to human progress; that the exercise of personal liberty, which does not infringe upon the freedom of others, is the right of all, without any regard to class distinctions. This principle Secularists maintain, without committing themselves to all that is taught in the exercise of that right. The official position taken by the National Secular Society in reference to reforms of general social matters may be seen from its published statement, under the heading of “Immediate Practical Objects,” in the *Secular Almanack*, which is published annually.

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I have now concluded an exposition of the leading features of Secularism and its teachings, and my sincere hope is that this humble effort may prove an advantage to earnest searchers after truth. Secularists find ample work to be done; for, as time rolls on, one improvement suggests another. The watchword of Secular philosophy is “Onward, and onward still.” It has been well remarked, human progress is like the ascent of a mountain, whose crest does not look very high from the distant plain, but which, as we climb it, heaves shoulder beyond shoulder,

each fresh one discovered as we reach the summit of the inferior, and each summit in its turn seeming the very utmost peak as we are toiling towards it. True, the Secularistic fabric may be slow in its erection, as imperceptible as is the construction of a coral reef ; it is, however, certain in its growth. And although at present we have to encounter the obstacles of superstition and the spite of intolerance, the work of progress still goes on. This inspires us with hope for the future. We believe the time will arrive when fancy will give place to reality, and imagination will yield to the facts of life. Then, instead of the evils of priestcraft, the reign of bigotry, and the strife of theology, we trust to have manifestations of sincere love of man to man ; an awe-inspiring happiness in the majestic presence of universal nature, and "man, the great master of all," shall live a life of enduring service to the cause of individual and national redemption.