

## LECTURE VI.

## SECULARISM.

## I.

THE subject of my last lecture was Positivism. Now I wish to speak of Secularism. These two theories are nearly related in nature. They are manifestations of the same principles and tendencies. They may almost be said to be the two halves of the same whole; in other words, secularism may be regarded as the theory of life or conduct which flows from the theory of belief or knowledge that constitutes the substance of positivism. And yet it would be an error to represent secularism as historically an offshoot of positivism. It may fairly claim, I believe, to be as much of English growth as positivism must be admitted to be of French growth. Its representatives have been, it is true, considerably influenced by the writings of the founder of positivism, and still more influenced by the writings of his English followers,

particularly by those of Mr J. S. Mill and G. H. Lewes; but in the main their scepticism is a native product. Thomas Paine and Richard Carlile, Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, Robert Owen and George Combe,—all contributed at least as much to the formation of secularism as Auguste Comte.

It is difficult, or rather impossible, to ascertain to what extent secularism is prevalent. There are, so far as I know, no reliable statistics on the subject. Many are doubtless complete secularists who do not call themselves so, and who belong to no secularist society. On the other hand, some who call themselves secularists, and perhaps even the majority of the members of some of the secularist societies, hold probably only a very small part of what is usually implied by the term secularism. Mr Holyoake represents what may be called one school of secularists, and Mr Bradlaugh another; and one main difference between them is, that the former denies that the principles of secularism include atheism, while the latter affirms that they do. Yet even Mr Bradlaugh does not hold that atheism is a necessary condition of membership in secularist associations. Such membership may, consequently, be in some, or even in many cases, merely the expression of more or less dissatisfaction with the theology taught in our churches, and of sympathy with

certain projected social and political changes. It may not exclude either belief in a God or belief in a future state. Hence even those who ought to know best the strength of secularism are found to differ widely from one another as to what its strength is, and as to whether its strength be increasing or not. In proof, I may quote from the discussion between Messrs Bradlaugh and Holyoake held in the New Hall of Science, London, in 1870. The former thus replies to the latter's statement that the Freethought party is in a state of disorganisation: "I presume my friend means relatively to some other period of their existence. It is so disorganised, that I think we can send something like a hundred petitions to the House of Commons in favour of any measure we desire to support. It is so disorganised, that within three days I will undertake to have all the principal towns of England and Scotland placarded with any particular placard which it is desired to have brought before the notice of the people. It is so disorganised, that there is not a large town, not a village in England, not a large town in the south of Scotland, and not many in the north, not many in the south-west of Ireland, that within four or five days I could not have any kind of communication placed by the hands of the members of the Secular Society in the hands of the clergymen of those towns. I am not speaking of what could be

done. I am speaking of what has been done during the last few years. Our organisation has been such that we have played a part in the political action of the country which has made itself felt" (p. 56). Mr Holyoake answers: "Mr Bradlaugh wanders through this land proclaiming the principles of secularism as though they were atheism, and arguing with the clergy. Why, when I go now to Glasgow, to Huddersfield, to Liverpool, to Manchester, I find the secularists there unadvanced in position. Even in Northampton, which Mr Bradlaugh knows, I found them lately meeting on the second floor of a public-house, where I found them twenty or twenty-five years ago. In Glasgow they are in the same second-rate position they were in twenty-five or thirty years ago. What have we been doing? Does not this show an obsolete policy? Ranters, Muggletonians, Mormons, and men of their stamp, are superior to acting so. Any party in the present state of opinion in the world could with thought have done more. The most ordinary sects build or hire temples, and other places, where their people decently meet. Mr Bradlaugh, with all his zeal and appeals, finds to-day that all London can do is to put up this kind of place in which we now meet opposite a lunatic asylum, where people, so the enemy says, naturally expect to find us. He is even obliged to tell you that at the West-end of

London he does not think highly of their state. Now, we who have principles of materialism, and descant incessantly on their superiority and efficacy, what halls of splendour and completeness we ought to put up! . . . All that Mr Bradlaugh said about the organisation of the party was not an answer to what I said. I spoke of the organisation of ideas in it. I spoke of the number of your paying members that belong to your societies in any part of the country. Look at the poverty of their public resources. Look at the few people of local repute that will consent to share their name and association. Why do they not do it? Because they find no definite principle set down which does not involve them in atheism and infidelity. The truth is, that there are liberal theists, liberal believers in another life, liberal believers in God, perfectly willing to unite together with the extremest thinkers, for secular purposes, giving effect to every form of human liberty—but they refuse to be saddled with the opprobrium of opinions they do not hold, or do dislike.”

These two estimates of the strength and progress of secularism by its two best-known representatives are very different, and yet probably they are not really contradictory. I am inclined to believe that they are both fair and unexaggerated statements, and that if we combine them, instead of contrasting them, we shall come tolerably near to

the truth. If secularism be dissociated from atheism it may be as strong as Mr Bradlaugh represents it to be, while if explicitly committed to atheism it may be as weak as Mr Holyoake represents it to be. Some of the advocates of atheistic secularism speak as if they represented the great body of the artisans of our large towns. This would be most alarming if it were true ; but no real evidence has been produced to show that it is true, and I for one entirely disbelieve it. I should be surprised if in Edinburgh, for example, there were not on the communion rolls of many a single congregation the names of more artisans—and skilled artisans too—than there are of avowedly atheistical secularists in the whole city ; and yet, I daresay, what secularists there are could get a large number of signatures to petitions in favour of purely secular education, the disestablishment and disendowment of the National Church, the abolition of the House of Lords, and a great many other things, wise and foolish. On the other hand, it may not improbably be the case that the strength of the most thorough secularism is by no means fully represented by the number of its avowed adherents ; that many are decidedly in sympathy with it who do not decidedly attach themselves to it ; and that many are on the way which would lead to acceptance of the atheism which it teaches who have not yet reached that goal. I believe that atheism

is more diffused at present among the literary classes of this country than among the labouring classes; but no doubt it is far too prevalent among the latter also—so prevalent that piety and patriotism both demand that every wise effort be made energetically to counteract it.

Secularism is the most prevalent form of unbelief amongst the manual workers of this country; it is almost confined to them; and the chief causes of its spread, and of the character which it bears, must be sought for in their history. It has always been closely associated with political dissatisfaction, and no candid and well-informed person will deny that the political dissatisfaction has been to a considerable extent reasonable and just. The French Revolution caused even in this country not merely a temporary reaction from the kind of unbelief which prevailed before it, but a sort of general anti-revolutionary terror, largely characterised by blindness, bigotry, and violence. The terror gradually died away; and the blindness, bigotry, and violence discredited even what was true in the principles with which they had been associated. The long war with France and a selfish and unjust commercial legislation spread wide and terrible suffering among the poor; and the blind opposition of the governing classes to political progress, and of the clergy to religious freedom, naturally produced a dangerous irritation which gave rise at once to

demands for the most radical political changes, and to the most sweeping rejection of the hitherto accepted religious beliefs.

Mr Owen, whose socialistic views found for a time a multitude of believers sufficiently sincere to endeavour to realise them in practice, severely denounced all the religions of the world, but he never ceased to be a theist, and latterly became a spiritualist. Jeremy Bentham and several of the group of thinkers who gathered around him were atheists; but, although far from timid men, they had not courage enough to avow publicly their real sentiments on the subject of religion, lest by doing so they should lessen their influence as political and juridical reformers. It was only from the ranks of the working classes that there came forth men with the full courage of their convictions—men who not merely dared openly to avow atheism, as well as republicanism and socialism, but to defend their atheism before the courts of law, and to endure for it imprisonment and other penalties. Such men were Charles Southwell, Thomas Cooper, George Jacob Holyoake, Thomas Paterson, &c.; and these men are to be regarded as the founders and first propagators of Secularism. It would be unjust to refuse them the honour due to their courage and honesty; and there can be no doubt that by their brave and self-sacrificing conduct they merited well of their fellow-countrymen, no



matter how erroneous may have been the convictions for which they suffered. Those who prosecuted them supposed, of course, that they were defending Christianity, but Christianity can be defended in no such way. It forbids all prosecution—all persecution—for the sake of religion. Force cannot possibly propagate the truth, or produce the faith, or promote the love in which the Gospel consists. The Gospel is intolerant, indeed, with the intolerance which is inherent in the very nature of truth. Truth can only be neglected by a man at his peril. No man is morally free to believe a lie of any kind. All truth carries with it the right to be believed, and moral truth carries with it, in addition, the right to be obeyed. The Gospel as truth, moral and spiritual truth, the highest truth, yea, the truth, does demand of us accordingly that we both believe and obey it—that we submit ourselves to it in mind, heart, and life. It holds us guilty if we do not. It warns us that either unbelief or disobedience is a most grievous sin, and will have most grievous consequences. But this intolerance, if it be intolerance, has nothing to do with coercion. Truth cannot be furthered by force. It must rest its claims to allegiance solely on evidence submitted to the scrutiny of reason and conscience; and if its evidence be rejected, however perversely, there is no help for that in compulsion,

which can only add to what sin already exists the sin of hypocrisy. Persecution can never arise from zeal for the Gospel as truth—from zeal for the Gospel properly understood. If ever due to zeal in any measure, and not to pride, selfishness, anger, ambition, and other hateful lusts which war against the soul, and set men at strife and war with one another, it must be to a zeal which is in alliance with error. Zeal for the Gospel and erroneous views of its nature may lead to persecution, but never zeal and true views of its nature. If the kingdom of God be thought of as a kingdom of truth,—if to receive, love, and obey the truth as it is in Jesus be felt to be the only means of belonging to it,—the utmost intensity of zeal cannot incline or tempt us to the use of force, since force can have no tendency to promote the interests of such a kingdom. The men, therefore, who by their courage and endurance were specially instrumental in convincing their countrymen that persecution for the avowal and advocacy even of atheism is a folly and a crime, have really rendered a service to the cause of Christian truth, and their names will not be recorded without honour when the history of our century is impartially written.

The person to whom Secularism owes its name, and who has done most to make it what it is in England, is George Jacob Holyoake, and it is chiefly as presented by him that I shall consider it

for a little. In doing so, we must determine first how secularism is related to religion. As I have already indicated, there is on this point a fundamental difference of opinion among secularists. Mr Holyoake and those who agree with him hold that secularism ought to start with the study of nature as manifested to us, and ignore religion. Mr Bradlaugh and those who agree with him hold that secularism can only be founded in the disproof and rejection of religion. Mr Holyoake is an atheist in the same sense and to the same extent as Mr Bradlaugh. He objects, however, to the name, while Mr Bradlaugh does not. The ground of his objection is that atheist is understood to mean "one who is not only without God, but without morality." But surely it can only be in very bad dictionaries and by very uncandid persons that the word atheist is so defined and employed. It properly means merely a man who thinks that there is reason for disbelieving that there is a God, or a man who thinks that there is no reason for believing that there is a God. It is in the latter sense that both Mr Holyoake and Mr Bradlaugh are atheists, and the former is so as much as the latter, and he fully acknowledges this, although he would prefer to be called a cosmist to being called an atheist. It is not because he does not accept and advocate atheism in the only sense in which it is accepted and advocated by Mr Bradlaugh that he

entirely differs from him on the question as to whether atheism is or is not involved in secularism

What, then, are his reasons for maintaining that secularism ought to be severed from atheism? The first is that the severance is rationally necessary. Secularism is, in his view, a theory of life and its duties founded exclusively on a study of the laws of nature. Theism, pantheism, and atheism, are all hypotheses as to the origin of these laws. But if we know what the laws are we may order our life according to them, although ignorant of their origin, or whatever hypothesis we may adopt as to their origin. Our present existence is a fact; and men may agree, and ought to agree, to deal with it as such, although they cannot agree as to whether there is a future life or not. "To ignore is not to deny. To go one way is not to deny that there may be, to other persons, another way. To travel by land is not to deny the water. The chemist ignores architecture, but he does not deny it. And so the secularist concerns himself with this world without denying or discussing any other world, either the origin of this, or the existence of that."

Now I think this reasoning will not stand even a slight examination. One science is, it is true, distinct from another, and yet to cultivate one is not to deny another. So theology, as a mere department of thought, is distinct from the physical

and mental sciences, and he who studies the latter may not direct his attention to the former. But observe, first, that although the sciences are so far distinct that to cultivate one is not to deny another, they are also so related that he who cultivates one cannot afford to ignore others. The student of astronomy will not succeed if he ignores mathematics. If you entertain false views of mechanical and chemical laws you will never correctly explain geological phenomena. And in like manner, if there be a theology which directly or indirectly denies any law of nature, the science which establishes that there is such a law must do more than merely ignore the theology which disowns it—it must oppose that theology. It cannot otherwise maintain its own truth and self-consistency. Then observe, secondly, that secularism is not mere knowledge, but an art, or at least the theory of an art, professedly based on knowledge, and that consequently it cannot reasonably ignore any kind of knowledge which may concern it as an art. Architecture is an art—the art of building houses—and as such it cannot afford to ignore any kind of knowledge that bears on the building of houses. An architecture which took no account of the law of gravitation and other principles of mechanics, of the properties of stone, lime, and wood, of wind and water, light and air, would be only the art of trying to build houses that would not stand, or

which could not be inhabited if they did. Apply this to the case before us. Secularism professes to teach us a more difficult and complex art than that of building houses—the art of ordering our lives aright in this world—the art of properly discharging our duties in this present life; and at the same time secularism, as represented by Mr Holyoake, tells us that we may ignore the questions, Is there a God? is there a future world? I ask if such secularism be not precisely like an architecture which would advise us to take no account in building our houses of light and air, and therefore not to trouble ourselves about windows and ventilators? Give me reason to believe that there is no God and no future existence, and then I shall have reason to ignore them; but to ask me to ignore them before you have done so, is neither more nor less than to ask me to act like a fool. If I cannot find out that there is a God or a future life, I must be convinced by reason that I cannot. If I can find out anything about them, I ought to do my best to find out as much about them as I can. And whatever I find out, or think I find out about them, I am bound as a reasonable and moral being to take account of in my conduct in this life.

But Mr Holyoake has another reason. He wishes secularism to be a positive, peaceful, fruitful system. He dislikes a merely negative form

of freethought. He comes into the provinces and finds secularist societies ruled by young orators who are mere negationists, who have no capital in principles, whose whole stock-in-trade is denial of what somebody else holds, and he says that that is not secularism in any possible sense, and does harm rather than good by angering people instead of instructing them. To remedy this he would have secularists to intrench themselves in the inculcation of purely secular principles, and to apply their energies directly and mainly to the development and realisation of these principles, with little or no regard either to atheism or theism.

The motive originating and underlying this argument is most honourable to Mr Holyoake, and is in accordance with his character. But I cannot see the justice of it in itself. It does not seem relevant against even a secularist like Mr Bradlaugh, because, of course, he is able to reply that he teaches atheism because he thinks theism very pernicious, so that to destroy it is to do a vast amount of good; and that he also teaches what is positive in secularism, when he has shown that he has a right to be a secularist at all. Nor can the argument recommend itself to the theist. To him Mr Holyoake's secular principles, in so far as they do not involve atheism, will seem to belong to himself as much as to Mr Holyoake. What truth of science, he will say, is there which I do not

accept as much as you? What law of secular duty do you acknowledge which I reject? As a theist I am bound by even more obligations than you are to honour all science and all duty. It is only by your atheism, therefore, and by the negations implied in your atheism, that you can distinguish yourself from me. All the purely positive truth in your secularism, all the science, all the duty, is not more yours than it is mine, although I reject utterly your secularism, and maintain that man has no duties more important than those which he owes to his God, and that it is sheer folly for an immortal being to live as if death were the end of all.

It must be added that Mr Holyoake acknowledges that he was not uninfluenced in the formation and adoption of his opinion by considerations of expediency. In the debate already referred to he said: "The principles of secularism, which I maintain are definable quite apart from the Bible, quite apart from atheism, are not the imaginary, or incoherent, or capricious selection from a variety of principles, resting merely or only on my authority—they were principles which we had acquired by the slow accretion of controversy, by contesting for them from platform to platform all over the country; and when they were drawn up, I submitted them in the aggregate form, many years after they had been separately formulated, to Mr



J. S. Mill, and asked him whether or not, in his judgment, we had made such a statement of secular principles as were worthy to stand as self-defensive principles of the working class, as an independent mode of opinion which should no longer involve them in the necessity of taking on their shoulders the responsibility of an atheistic or infidel propagandism except when it suited the purpose of a member to do it. He admitted it in terms which it was a reward to read. It was not until we had the sanction of one so competent to judge, that these principles were promulgated in a definite manner as the principles of a party. The reason they were drawn up in the form ultimately submitted to the public was this: we found in a memorable address by Sir James Stephen, at Cambridge, it was represented that Mr Grote, Mr Mill, and other eminent philosophers whom he named, had been so outraged by the offensive observations of the clergy—by their charging every man of science with infidelity, scepticism, or atheism—that they refused any longer to take notice of Christianity; they had withdrawn from it, they stood apart from it, they constructed a system of their own, they had a philosophy of their own, they had principles whereby they regulated their own line of conduct; and when the minister spoke they no longer felt called upon to regard him; they could deny his authority to give an opinion on

their proceedings. The clergyman applies to them, but they make no response; he preaches his doctrine, but they condescend to no criticism. The result is, the clergyman, when too late, has to exclaim, 'The philosophers pass us by, they ignore Christianity, and in the end we shall have to become suppliants for their attention, because we repelled them when they were suppliants for ours.' Now it struck me, that was a far prouder and more triumphant thing to accomplish than any wild warring against theologians; we were at the mercy of their overwhelming power. My purpose was to put into the hands of the working classes principles which should serve their purpose in the same way, and make them equally independent and equally proud, defiant, and unassailable."

This seems to me to be an argument of a lower type. It is an appeal to policy such as one would scarcely have expected from Mr Holyoake. A man who had so courageously avowed the most unpopular sentiments regarding religion, and so unflinchingly borne the consequences, might well have been supposed little to admire the conduct of any one who, however eminent, should shrink from the responsibility implied in the conviction that Christianity is a gigantic delusion, and venture only to attack it secretly, anonymously, or posthumously. If Christianity be, in the judgment of any person, an imposture, which has pro-

duced, and is daily producing, a host of moral, social, and political evils, how can he, as an honest man, take no notice of it, or even slight notice of it? Is he not as much bound earnestly to assail it as one who esteems it an incalculable blessing is bound zealously to defend and propagate it? Is he not all the more bound to oppose it, because its influence is wide and powerful? He who is not for it must be against it. Neutrality is logically and morally impossible. Reason and conscience prescribe a policy which must be conformed to whatever expediency may suggest, and that policy is not one of concealment and evasion. But even an expediency which is real and not merely apparent, universal and not simply individual, must declare against the course recommended by Mr Holyoake. Supposing Sir James Stephen's account of the conduct of Mr Grote, Mr Mill, &c., to have been correct, was the policy attributed to them really beneficial to any person but themselves, and those whom they regarded as their opponents? Mr Grote writing his 'History of Greece,' and Mr Mill writing his 'Logic,' were, no doubt, admirably employed, and deservedly meriting the gratitude of their contemporaries and of posterity; but what did they effect thereby against Christianity? How did they injure it by ignoring it? Who were the clergymen who became suppliants for their attention? Was there any clergy-

man so stupid as to expect that Christianity should be either attacked or defended in a 'History of Greece,' or in a scientific treatise on 'Logic'? The policy ascribed to Mr Grote and Mr Mill is as absurd as would be that of an admiral who, if ordered to reduce Cronstadt, should, by way of carrying out his commission, stay in London and write a work on mechanics or navigation. That might be good policy for him, but it would have little effect on Cronstadt. Christianity cannot and will not leave secularism alone. If it have any belief in itself, any life and sincerity, it must attack by all fair means a system so utterly alien to itself. Is secularism prepared to renounce the right of reply and counter-attack? I should be rejoiced to hear it; but I must candidly admit that the reasons of my satisfaction would be a conviction that the policy would prove a very bad one for secularism, and, still more, the belief that its adoption might be accepted as a sign that secularists distrusted their power to refute the claims of Christianity.

I fail to see, then, that Mr Holyoake's position is at all an intelligible one. Mr Bradlaugh's I quite understand; indeed, it would be rather difficult not to understand words like these: "What we say is, and what you do not say is, that theological teachings prevent human improvement. and that it is the duty of every secularist to make

active war on theological teachings. It is no use saying, ignore the clergy. You cannot talk of ignoring St Paul's Cathedral—it is too high. You cannot talk of ignoring the Religious Tract Society—it is too wealthy. You cannot talk of ignoring Oxford and Cambridge Universities—they are too well endowed. They command too many parties to enable you to ignore their power, but you may strive to crush it out a little at a time. You cannot strike all errors effectually at once, but you can strike at some and encourage others to strike too. This is the secularist's work Paine and Carlile cut out years ago. This is the secularist's work Southwell and yourself undertook. This is the secularist's work in which every man has got his share to do, who feels as I feel. The secularist's work which we have to do is to cut down, as my friend put it, the banyan-tree of superstition, which tree seeks to send its roots down into every baby brain, and which holds by the habit-faith of the rich, and by the ignorant credulity of the poor. Every branch of this superstitious tree bears poisonous fruit; but before you can get the branches effectively destroyed, you must cut away the roots as well as gently train the tree. The upas-tree of religion overspreads the whole earth; it hides with its thick foliage of churchcraft the rays of truth from humankind, and we must cut at its root and

strip away its branches that reason's rays may go shining through, and give fertility to the human soil, long hidden from their genial warmth."

There can be no doubt what this means; no doubt that it signifies war,—war open and incessant—a war of life and death—war to the uttermost. So be it. There really is, I believe, no other relationship possible between religion and secularism.<sup>1</sup>

## II.

Let us now proceed to the consideration of the leading positive principles of secularism.

The first of these, as stated by Mr Holyoake, is, "That precedence should be given to the duties of this life over those which pertain to another life." And the reason alleged for it is, that "this life being the first in certainty, ought to have the first place in importance." "We do not say that every man ought to give an *exclusive* attention to this world, because that would be to commit the old sin of dogmatism, and exclude the possibility of another world, and of walking by different light from that by which alone we are able to walk. But as our *knowledge* is confined to this life, and testimony and conjecture and probability are all that can be set forth with respect

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix XXIII.

to another life, we think we are justified in giving *precedence* to the duties of this state, and of attaching primary importance to the morality of man to man.”<sup>1</sup>

Mr Holyoake expresses his principle in this form so that he may not exclude theists from the secularist ranks. The message of secularism to them is, Be more worldly and less pious; think much about this world and little about the next; much about man and little about God. I know no message which the world needs less, seeing that it is one which not only avowed secularists, but millions of professed Christians, are already acting on with all their might. It is true, however, that all but convinced atheists and the most careless of men have hitherto felt that doing so was wrong and inexcusable. There are few men even among those most engrossed by the cares and interests of this present life, who have not at times felt that there is another life of which it were well to think more. Bibles and religious books, sermons and Sundays, the monitions of conscience, the reflections of reason, “sorrow dogging sin, afflictions sorted, anguish of all sizes,” the rapid flight of time, the instability of human things, the loss of friends, the warnings of disease, the prognostications of death, all speak of the claims of eternity; and few have not thereby

<sup>1</sup> ‘Discussion between the Rev. Brewin Grant and G. J. Holyoake’ (London, 1853), p. 39.

been sometimes at least transiently impressed with the conviction that these claims had been sadly neglected. But secularism scouts the idea. It says to the merely nominal Christian, to the man who lives as if his religion were a dream or a lie, that he is quite right; and it says this, if Mr Holyoake be a correct interpreter of it, not on the ground that religion is a delusion or a lie, but on the ground that the present life is more certain and more important than another life.

This would be a very comfortable doctrine to many minds, if it were not so irrational that only very few will be able to believe it. There is nothing particularly certain about the present life. What is certain even about the present moment, except that before you can so much as think of it it has already ceased to be, and you can no longer either discharge duty or enjoy pleasure in it? The present is so evanescent that it hardly concerns us at all. And as to the future, who is certain of what a day or an hour will bring forth? Who can reckon with confidence on to-morrow? We may easily be far more certain of the existence of God and of the immortality of the soul than that we shall be alive on the morrow. The one thing certain about this life is that it is uncertain. And as it is not only uncertain but short at the longest, the notion that it can be more important than eternal life is a fancy for which there can be no possible warrant.



The secularist principle in question is erroneous for this further reason, that it falsely distinguishes duties into duties of this life and duties which pertain to another life. That is not a distinction which can be reasonably defended. If there be a God, the duties which we owe to Him are duties of this life. If there be a future world, it is our *present* duty to take full account of that fact. On the other hand, all our duties are duties to God, and the way in which all our duties are discharged will have an influence on our eternal destiny. There is thus no absolute separation possible between secular and spiritual duties ; and still less can they be rationally opposed. A man who neglects any of his so-called secular duties must look for God's disapproval. He who would live a truly pious life must work the works of integrity and uprightness, of benevolence and mercy, of temperance, prudence, and industry. A man will surely not do his duty in and for this world worse but better because he feels that God blesses his efforts in the cause of truth and goodness ; and that when the labours of life are ended, he will, if he have acquitted himself faithfully, enter not into utter annihilation but into eternal happiness.

It is, then, most irrational and improper advice to tell a man who believes it even probable that there is a God, or that there is a future world, that he may be comparatively heedless of his duties

and interests as regards them without guilt or danger. If a man disbelieve in God and the future world, or believe that nothing can be known about them, he cannot, of course, be reasonably expected to give them even a subordinate place either in thought or practice. He can owe no duty to what does not exist,—no thought to the unknowable. If this world be all that our intellects can apprehend, our sole attention should be given to it. Secularism, in order to be self-consistent, must be complete, must be as exclusive as Christianity, must demand for the world our whole mind and heart, our whole strength and life. But in this form it is obviously a doctrine which none but convinced and confirmed atheists can do otherwise than utterly repudiate. It is a doctrine, also, by which the world will only lose. No good cause on earth will be more energetically promoted, no evil cause will be more energetically opposed, without faith in God and His eternal mercy and justice than with it. Where the love of God is not, love to man will certainly not be stronger in consequence.

A second secularist principle is, that "science is the providence of man, and that absolute spiritual dependency may involve material destruction." If men, we are told, would have things go well with them, they must discover and apply the laws of nature. They must learn what is true before they can do what is right, or can so act as to secure

happiness. Evil can be warded off and good can be obtained only by following the directions of science ; prayer is useless, experience proving that it receives no answer ; dependence on providence is a delusion, as we are under the dominion of general laws, and special providence there is none.

This is the substance of an argument which in Mr Holyoake's hands assumes many forms, and which all secularists often employ. There is nothing true in it, however, to which the theist cannot cordially assent. He believes that every law discovered by science is a law of God to which man is bound to pay due respect. The whole of science is more sacred to him than it can possibly be to the secularist, for, in addition to having the sacredness of truth, it has the sacredness of being a manifestation of God's character and will. Unless a very unintelligent and inconsistent man, indeed, he must feel more deeply than the secularist that every truth of science is entitled to his reverence, and to such obedience as he can give to it. He can make no exclusions, exceptions, or reservations, but must accept science in all its length and breadth, so far as his powers and opportunities extend. Secularism has no peculiar, and still less any exclusive, right to science. Theism has at least an equal claim to it, and to whatever good can be derived from it.

All that properly belongs to secularism is the

denial of the utility of prayer and the existence of providence. It opposes science to prayer and providence. But this is what those who believe in the two latter never do, so that the prayer and providence attacked by secularism are conceptions or misconceptions of its own. The theist believes in prayer, but he does not believe in mere prayer—in prayer which despises the use of means—in prayer which dispenses with watching and working. He believes in providence, but he does not believe in tempting providence—in casting himself down from a height with the expectation that angels will take charge of him—in a spiritual dependency which neglects the aids to material safety. The man who truly prays cannot credit the allegation that experience proves that prayer receives no answer. That is not his experience. He is conscious of having daily asked for spiritual blessings, and conscious of having daily received them. He knows a sphere of existence in which not the exception to the law but the law itself is, Seek and ye shall find, Ask and it shall be given unto you—a realm where sincere and earnest petitions are always directly accomplished. There are innumerable blessings, unfortunately unknown and unvalued by the secularist, although they are far more real and precious than bodily and external advantages; and these blessings, which science does not pretend to offer us, and which general laws

do not bring us, unless prayer itself be included among general laws, the experience of all who have sincerely asked them, or, in equivalent terms, the experience of all who have truly prayed testifies, are never withheld. In asking for these blessings, which are the main objects of prayer, we can ask unconditionally and absolutely, directly and definitely, not even needing, as it were, to say, Thy will be done, since we already assuredly know that God's will is to grant them to whoever truly asks them, while He will not, yea cannot, grant them to those who do not ask. Other blessings, however seemingly desirable, reasonable and pious men seek only in subordination to spiritual blessings. They never ask for them except conditionally. They are conscious that what they think best may be really bad, and that what mere nature shrinks from most may be for their highest good. They ask, therefore, for apparent temporal good only in so far as it may be agreeable to God to give it, and with the added supplication that He will give or withhold according to His pleasure, since His pleasure is ever in His children's welfare. All true prayer for temporal things is essentially prayer that God's will in regard to these things may become our will, through our will being elevated and conformed to His; it certainly never is prayer that His will, whether hid in His eternal counsels or expressed in His gen-

eral laws, should yield and give place to a will so blind and arbitrary as ours. There is no evidence that a single true prayer has been unanswered. There is the evidence of every truly prayerful man's experience that prayer is daily answered, and that it brings light, and strength, and blessing where science is utterly powerless and useless.

Science is admirable, and we grudge it no praise to which it is entitled; but we must deny that it can be a substitute for providence. It is at the utmost an indication of some of the rules—a delineation of part of the plan—of providence. It has no existence in itself, no power of its own. It is but a name for a kind of human knowledge, which must be appropriated and applied by a human mind before it can be of any avail. It will only be of use to us if we make use of it. We may either make a good or a bad use of it. We constantly see it employed to injure men as well as to benefit them. There is as much science displayed on the battle-field as in the hospital or the factory. The possession of it is no guarantee whatever that it will be honourably and beneficially employed. To use science worthily and well we must not only be conversant with it, but we must be good men. How are men to be good, however—how are they to have right affections and aims—without dependence on God, without prayer, without Divine grace? This is a problem

which secularism must consider far more seriously than it has done. Science does not make men good ; and where men are bad, science will be perverted to the service of evil. But surely nothing which is merely instrumental, and especially nothing which can be perverted, is properly designated providence.

The third fundamental principle of secularism is, that man has an adequate rule of life independently of belief in God, immortality, or revelation. Morality and not religion, it maintains, is our business. The former is not based on the latter, nor inseparable from it, nor even advantageously associated with it. We can and ought to disjoin them. Abandoning religion, we should cultivate a purely natural and human morality. An adequate standard of such morality, secularists generally believe, may be found in utility. Secularism has practically adopted utilitarianism as its ethical doctrine, and maintains that it supplies a guide of conduct which is independent of religion.

Now I do not oppose secularism at this point by arguing that morality is founded on religion. It is, on the whole, more correct to say that religion is founded on morality than that morality is founded on religion. We cannot know God as a moral Being to whom we stand in moral relations, if we have no moral notions until we know God, if we are unconscious of moral relationship

until conscious of Divine relationship. A man, we admit, may endeavour to regulate, and may so far actually regulate, his life, from a regard to what is due to humanity, without any reference to God. He may attend to what reason and conscience tell him should be his conduct to his fellow-men, the lower animals, and himself, and put away every idea of duty to the Divine Being, of regard to the Divine will. But clearly this morality is most defective unless it can justify itself by proof that there is no God, or that nothing is due to God. If there be a God, and especially if God be the very author of our moral nature and the moral law, to pay no moral regard to Him must be most wicked behaviour. If there be a God, morality must be as incomplete when religious duties are neglected as it would be were no attention given to personal or social duties.

Further, the morality which ignores religion is inherently weak because inherently self-contradictory. There is in the very nature of the moral law a reference to God which cannot be denied without disrespect to its whole authority. The law bids man sacrifice pleasure, property, reputation, life itself, everything, if need be, to duty. But can this moral law be a righteous and rational law on any other supposition than that the sacrifice will not be in vain, and that the power which, through conscience, demands the sacrifice, will



justify the demand by the final issue of things, the eventual victory of the right over pleasure and expediency? I cannot see how it can. The notion of a law demanding that a man should sacrifice not merely apparent to real good, or a lower to a higher good, but his real and highest good—that he should lose life and soul without hope of finding them again—is the notion of a moral law which is profoundly immoral. Conscience in enjoining such a law must be at hopeless variance with reason and with itself. If a man say, "I will not obey such a law," conscience will condemn him, and yet it must also acquit him and condemn itself. In other words, conscience and moral law require, in order to be self-consistent and reasonable, to be supplemented by the notion of a moral government and a moral Governor. The demands of duty necessarily imply that both humanity and nature are under the rule of a God of righteousness and are moving onwards to a moral goal—the triumph of goodness. "It is not enough to know," says Ullmann, "that the good has a certain authority and supreme right given it by man. No; we must possess a much higher assurance; we must be convinced that the final triumph of goodness is a part of the grand world-plan; that the great design of creation, the reason for which the world exists, is, that goodness may come to its full realisation. And this certainly can be gained only

from the conviction that the moral law of human life has its source in the very same power which called the whole economy of the world into existence, and which is conducting it to its goal. If, then, the moral law be necessarily derived from a personal Being, even from Him who created and governs the universe, then is the source of the moral law none other than the living, the personal God."

Again, religion may be admitted not to be the foundation of morality and yet maintained to be a sanction of morality, which supplies to it motive and inspiration. In this respect its moral value may be immense. What do all men stand so much in need of as motive power to love and do what is right? Our moral theories may be unexceptionable, while our moral practices are inexcusable. We may have a clear and accurate apprehension of the whole moral code, and yet not the heart or will to execute aright a single precept of it. To know the moral law is not enough; to do it—in all its length and breadth—with the whole heart, strength, and might, is what is required. Whence are we to get power to do it apart from religion? The best men the world has seen have confessed in all ages that they could not find this power in themselves, and were even certain that it was not in themselves. The more I interrogate consciousness and history, the more

convinced I become that they were not deluded, and that if we feel differently it is not because we are better or know better than they, but because we are worse and know ourselves worse. It is only through a power above nature that nature can be raised above itself, and that morality can be "lighted up with the emotion and inspiration needful for carrying the sage along the narrow way perfectly, for carrying the ordinary man along it at all." And how can a man fail to draw strength from faith in God? How can he believe in a God of perfect justice without being encouraged and strengthened to do justice? or in a God of love without having a powerful inducement to love all the creatures of God, and to perform works of love? Is there no power to arrest and restrain from evil and ruin, in the dread of the Divine displeasure against sin? Can a desire to do wrong even exist along with a vivid realisation of His presence in any heart? The saintly Leighton spoke from experience, and so as to give expression to the experience of thousands of the most excellent of the earth when he said: "One glance of God, a touch of His love, will free and enlarge the heart, so that it can deny all, and part with all, and make an entire renouncing of all, to follow Him." Now, if I am to defer to experience, to facts, to induction, I cannot disregard this experience, especially as it is

just what reason would lead me to expect. The secularist may tell me that he has no such experience. Of course he has not; he could not be a secularist if he had. But that one man lacks is no evidence that another man does not possess; the absence of experience is not counter-experience. I may even be free to think that secularist worth at its best—and I have no wish to disparage it—falls greatly short of saintly excellence, and that the want of the experience mentioned is precisely what explains why it does.

Atheism—secularism—shuts out, then, some of the most impressive motives to virtuous conduct by relieving men from a sense of responsibility to a Supreme Being, and excluding from view His universal presence and infinite perfection; whereas religion leaves all secular motives to morality intact, while it adds to them spiritual motives of vast efficacy and of the most elevating and purifying character.

The alliance of secularism with utilitarianism has not, I think, strengthened the former in any way, but merely narrowed it. Utilitarianism is one of several doubtful and disputed theories in the philosophy of ethics which can only be independently and intelligently estimated by specially disciplined students. Ordinary men, secularists included, must leave theories as to the foundation of morality to philosophers, or take them on trust

from philosophers. The mass of secularists can be utilitarians merely by electing on very insufficient grounds to be led by Mr J. S. Mill and Professor Bain beyond their depth. They would be wiser to keep on the bank, or at least to keep in shallow water.

Neither the theist nor the Christian is called upon to refute utilitarianism, because neither theism nor Christianity commits its adherents to any theory as to the foundation of rectitude. Utilitarianism in itself is neither atheistical nor unchristian. It is clear that if there be a God and a future life, utilitarianism cannot afford to omit them from its calculations. If there be a God, utility must be the indication of His will, and it must be useful to attend to His will. If there be a future life, it must be a very absurd kind of utilitarianism which, while resting all morality on pleasure and pain, yet overlooks in its reckonings those pleasures and pains which are far the greatest of all. At the same time, utilitarianism is, I hold, a speculation which no person has yet proved, which has only been supported by reasonings in which causes and consequences have been strangely confounded, which proceeds from narrow and erroneous conceptions as to the constitution of human nature, and which presents no adequate barrier to the most unworthy views of morality. It starts from the supposition that

pleasure is the sole end of life, the one thing desirable ; yet if such were the case, the selfish system, not utilitarianism, would be the correct system of ethics, and there would be no real morality at all. If pleasure be the one thing a man naturally desires, that pleasure must be his own, and he can only seek the pleasure of others so far as that may be conducive to his own and for the sake of his own,—he can never do good to others for their sake and have as much regard to the pleasures of others as his own. Of course, utilitarianism, notwithstanding this, inculcates disinterestedness, bids us sacrifice our individual interest to the general interest. But in the name of what does it bid us do so? Is it in the name merely of interest? If interest as such is the chief end of man, why should I sacrifice my own to that of others? If the supreme good of life is happiness, why am I not to conclude that the supreme good of *my* life is *my* happiness? Utilitarianism has no satisfactory answer to these questions. Mr Mill, on whom chiefly secularists rely with unreasoned confidence, did not even venture to attempt to answer them, but contented himself with merely telling us, what nobody denied, that utilitarianism inculcates disinterestedness. I must not embark, however, on the *mare magnum* of utilitarianism.

Enough has now been said, perhaps, to show that secularism has nothing true to offer to any

class of men which they may not find elsewhere, dissociated from the errors, the negations, which characterise this phase of unbelief. This would probably not fail to be almost universally seen and acknowledged if those who in the higher ranks of life make profession of religion would display a heartier and a manlier interest in those who are in the lower ranks, so that no man might be tempted to believe that religion is one of the things which stand either in the way of his personal happiness or of justice to his class.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix XXIV.