

ARTICLE V.

CAN SECULARISM DO IT?

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THE following statements will at once indicate the principles and positions which distinguish some of the schools of modern unbelief, and which have been advocated by a number of individuals around whose names no little fame has already gathered.

"To us it is conceivable that in some minds the deep pathos lying in the thought of human mortality—that we are here for a little while and then vanish away, that this earthly life is all that is given to our loved ones and to our many suffering fellowmen—lies nearer the fountains of *moral* emotion than the conception of extended existence."¹

George J. Holyoake, who passed away a few years ago, at the advanced age of eighty-nine years, and who was a recognized leader of Secularism in England for many years, declared, in his "Principles of Secularism," that "Secularism proposes to regulate human affairs by considerations purely human." And it is a primal tenet of the Secularistic school that, "whatever we do, our motives must be sought only within the circle of the present."

The late Mr. W. R. Greg, one of the class of so-called "serious skeptics" so characteristic of the present day, appeared to be in full sympathy with the foregoing sentiments,

¹ George Elliot, art. on "Worldliness and Other Worldliness," Westminster Review, January, 1857.

and in his "Creed of Christendom" he has the following remarks:—

"It is only those who feel a deep interest in and affection for this world, who will work resolutely for its amelioration; those whose affections are transferred to heaven, acquiesce easily in the miseries of earth, give them up as hopeless, as ordained, and console themselves with the idea of the amends which are one day to be theirs. If we had looked upon this earth as our only scene, it is doubtful if we should so long have tolerated its more monstrous anomalies and more curable evils. But it is easier to look to a future paradise than to strive to make one on earth; and the depreciating and hollow language of preachers has played into the hands of the insincerity and the indolence of mankind" (p. 251).

Some time ago, Winnewoode Reed, one of England's literati, died, and among the last things which he penned was the following:—

"I have given up the old Gospel, with its immortalities, and have accepted the religion of humanity, which is love virtuously, honor the planet on which you dwell, and then, first and noblest of animals, die, and go to the dust, and that is all."

In these selections, which could easily be multiplied, we have the representations and claims of modern secularism and materialism, and with one bold sweep of the hand, that religion which has been the chief source of all beneficent civilization, basis of true culture, cause of refinement, foundation of morals, and the one great spring of comfort and happiness to mankind, is ignored, set aside, or snuffed out like some insignificant candle, as something belonging to the shadows of dreamland, or as being worse than useless when confronted with the needs, the sorrows, and sad conditions which mark the struggling human world in which we live!

The chief purpose of the present article is to call in question these positions and claims, so loudly announced by the leaders of the Agnostic and Materialist schools, and to point out the

fact that the renowned hypothesis of a pure worldliness, for which so much is predicted and claimed, has never borne the goodly fruit so confidently promised by its famous chiefs; but, on the contrary, its historic career has been distinguished by failures of the most humiliating and undeniable kind. When fairly tested in the "mad farce of this wicked world," and the actual deplorable conditions which so largely prevail, it has demonstrated not only its almost utter inability to inaugurate a single grand reform, but has constantly been letting loose certain elements of social disorder and moral ruin, the sad monuments and proofs of which remain until this day. To represent Christianity, with its sublime teachings respecting another state or world, as unfitting men for the present by making them indifferent to its pursuits, duties, obligations, miseries, and claims, is a statement so glaring in its falseness as to be unworthy of a calm and serious reply. To base an objection against the Christian religion on the monastic, gloomy asceticism and unfaithfulness of some who have professed to be its disciples, is to involve its advocates in a theory which, in its logical application and execution, would be destructive of all the noble callings, professions, and institutions which are to-day the world's benediction and its distinguishing, unfading crown. That system of unbelief which is compelled to occupy such ground as this is certainly reduced to the most pitiable straits, and it is an unconscious confession of the erroneous and indefensible foundations on which it rests. The impotence and inability of all systems which repudiate a supernatural religion to work out the world's regeneration and secure for our million-peopled earth nobler and happier conditions is evident when the following considerations receive the attention and recognition which they constantly demand:—

THE CONFESSIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS OF MODERN
UNBELIEF.

In the *Nineteenth Century* some years ago, is found an article on the "Agnostic at Church," written by a professed member of the Agnostic school, and containing some confessions, at once indicating the helplessness of this system of negations, about which so much has been said and prophesied in the present day. In answer to the question, whether one who believes nothing can be known of God should join in a worship which is based on the assumption that He can be known and that He is known, this writer arrives at the conclusion that he should join in such worship; and the chief reasons adduced are, first, "that the teachings of the Church do more good than harm, directly and indirectly," and he acknowledges "the enormous influence for good that every one of us must have seen arising from the teaching of religion now as in all past ages."

In addition to this confession, contained in the paper referred to, another admission is made, which carries with it a force and significance which we do well to note. This writer frankly recognizes the fact that Agnosticism does not possess that "moral lifting power" which the vast masses of men need to arrest the downward tendencies within and without, and elevate them to lives of truth and righteousness. He remarks that "the Agnostic, with his abstract ideas of Deity and Humanity, is powerless to affect the masses of mankind." And yet these applauded apostles of modern negation would practically ignore and undermine and eventually destroy that faith which has ennobled and blessed the thronging multitudes of men during the sixty generations of the past!

Professor Huxley has correctly said "that we live in a world that is full of misery and ignorance, and the plain duty

of each and all of us is to try to make the little corner he can influence somewhat less ignorant than it was before he entered it." With this sentiment we will not find fault, for ignorance and misery, vice, sin, and immorality, abound on every hand; and the plain duty of all is to remove this sad condition of things as far as they possibly can. So far, then, most all are agreed, but the grand question is, How is this desired and beneficent result to be accomplished? On this point Professor Huxley says: "To do this effectively it is necessary to be fully persuaded of only two beliefs—the first, that the order of nature is ascertainable by our faculties to an extent which is practically unlimited; and the second is, that our volition counts for something as a condition of the course of events."

However plausible this proposed method or remedy may appear to be on paper, when brought into the countless ranks of our fellow-men, who are the subjects and victims of social and moral degradations, and confronted by the broad world of human want and actuality, it will be seen that these two vague beliefs are utterly unable to bring about the great social and general reformation which the case demands. Frederic Harrison, a follower of Comte, in an article in the *Nineteenth Century*, for October, 1880, frankly avowed that

"the physical speculations usually called Science, Materialism, Evolution, Agnosticism, Free-thought and all other schemes in fashion to-day, do not touch the problem of man's moral and social basis at all, and in spite of philosophy, from Hume to Spencer, the old theology maintains its social authority, if not its mental sway, alike in a materialized England, in a Voltairean France, and in a sceptical Germany."

He goes on to say that "Science gives no unity to life, no rule of conduct, no support of the soul. Together modern science and philosophy, stopping helplessly where they do,

have chilled, paralyzed, and almost killed the spirit of Devotion, of Veneration, of Self-abasement, of Self-surrender to a great, Over-ruling Power." "Philosophy and Science," he admits, "have given us priceless things, but we say they have given us no Religion, no Providence, no Supreme Centre of our thoughts and of our loves." They answer, that they have never assumed so high a mission, and that it is no part of their function. "Unworthy answer," he exclaims, "in which your present impotence is written! Inasmuch as, year by year, for centuries, they have been taking away this supreme basis of all human life, they were bound to supply the true basis when they took away the false." This writer, though far away from the ranks of orthodoxy, and endeavoring to find satisfaction in Positivism, believes that faith in a personal God, and a religion based upon this faith, is absolutely necessary to a true, peaceful, and noble life, and he ridicules those who hold to nothing else but a mere Humanism as the regenerator of society, and the ennoblement of the world. "This Humanism dreads discipline; it has no moral stamina; it passes into scepticism, impotent capacity to come to a decision and thence on to effeminency, grossness, unnatural passion, or ignoble dreaming." With reference to the speculations of men of the Matthew Arnold type, who are perpetually talking about the "Eternal" (not ourselves) "that makes for righteousness" and the idea of God being defecated to a pure transparency, he declares that all such theorizing is mere words. It will hallow no life and enlighten no spirit. Let who will, be it in piety or utter bewilderment, or the mere wish to say something, erect altars to the "Unknown God, . . . a Grand Perhaps is not God; to dogmatize about the Infinite, to guess, to doubt, to fear, to hope there is a future life—that is not to have a religion whereby to live and die."

Mr. J. S. Mill, the apostle of modern utilitarianism, whilst ignoring the means and remedies proposed by Christianity for the moral elevation of the race, has propounded various methods for the social reformation of society and the world, and he was permitted to live long enough to see that many of his grand theories were little more than the broodings of a prejudiced imagination, and the legitimate fruit of so many splendid but unsubstantial and baseless dreams. After watching the effects of his teachings upon the practical, everyday life of the multitudes around him, he makes the following suggestive and significant confession:—

“In England I had seen and continued to see many of the opinions of my youth obtain general recognition, and many of the reforms in institutions, for which I had through life contended, either effected or in course of being so. But these changes had been attended with much less benefit to human well-being than I should formerly have anticipated, because they had produced very little improvement in that which all real amelioration in the lot of mankind depends on, their intellectual and moral state; and it might even be questioned if the various causes of deterioration which had been at work in the meanwhile, had not more than counterbalanced the tendencies to improvement. I had learned from experience that any false opinions may be exchanged for true ones, without in the least altering the habits of mind of which false opinions are the results. . . . I am now convinced, that no great improvements in the lot of mankind are possible, until a great change takes place in the fundamental constitution of their modes of thought.”¹

Is there not here an indirect recognition of the need of a moral regeneration which the teachings and influences of Secularism have been utterly unable to effect? And is there not something like an unconscious orthodoxy, which contemplates a spiritual transformation before the world can reach those conditions of peace, progress, and happiness of which the leaders of Materialism had done little else than

¹ *Autobiography*, pp. 238, 239.

speculate and dream? The late Mr. Greg was in full sympathy with the same view, and wrote as follows:—

“In truth, those only can safely and serviceably encounter social evils who can both watch, and in some measure imitate, God’s mode of dealing with them. . . . Few, we believe, will ever effect real, radical, permanent social amelioration, who endeavored to cure evils by direct enactment; whose feelings are too keen and sensitive to wait the time of the Most High, and to contemplate with unflinching faith and patience the sufferings continued through, or by reason of, the remedial process, sometimes even aggravated by it.”¹

In modern heresy, with reference to the mingled splendor and shame of human nature, the old rose-colored pictures of humanity, as drawn by many of the earlier skeptics, are here laid completely aside, and unlooked-for confirmations of the Christian religion in reference to man’s true condition are found in secularistic literature on almost every hand.

The representations of the actual state and history of mankind in the various and prolonged ages of their existence, as given by Mr. Greg, are like so many quotations from that book from whose teachings so many have sailed away into an ocean of doubt and uncertainty with no grand outfit to guide them on their cheerless and stormy way. “Man is such a ‘pie-bald miscellany’ with his

“‘Bursts of great-heart, and slips in sensual mire;”

the discrepancy is so vast between our highest actual and our most moderate ideal; the follies of men are so utterly astonishing, to one who has seen them close; their weakness so profoundly despicable, their vices so unspeakably revolting; their virtues even, so casual, halting, and hollow; life such a comedy to those who think, such a tragedy to those who feel, its pages are so sadly and incomprehensibly grotesque! And he says that—

¹ *Enigmas of Life* (4th ed.), pp. 160, 161.

"Our greatest thinkers have lived and died in sorrow because they could arrive only at conclusions, both in speculations and in actual life, from which it was impossible to escape, yet in which it was impossible to rest. Grand capacities, which seemed adequate to the mightiest achievements, inwoven weaknesses which dishonored those capacities and rendered those achievements hopeless and unattainable; germs and specimens of virtues approaching the Divine, and promising a glorious future, yet dashed with imperfections and impulses which seem to hint of a low origin and a still lower destiny; vast steps forward to a lofty goal,—recreant backslidings towards the bottomless abyss; ages of progress and enlightenment, followed by ages of darkness and retrogression; unmistakable indications of a mighty purpose and an ulterior career, undeniable facts which make those indications seem a silly mockery; much to excite the fondest hopes, much to warrant the uttermost despair; beautiful affections, noble aspirations, pure tastes, fine intellects, measureless delights, all the elements of Paradise,—

"'But the trail of the serpent still over them all.'"

And now come the sad, sad confessions and lamentations of all true men who have looked at the race from an unchristian standpoint:—

"And, as from their watchtowers of contemplation, the wise and good have brooded over these baffling contradictions, what marvel that one by one they should have dropped off into their graves—sorrowing and wondering if peradventure behind the great black veil of death they might find the key to the mysteries which saddened their noble spirits upon earth."¹

Stuart Mill was profoundly conscious of the insufficiency of his own theories to meet the deep wants of life, and provide for him a friendly abiding shelter from the storms of life. In the tenets of his philosophy there was an absence of those mighty motives which present an inspiring influence and power to men amid the trying and arduous duties of man's life and work. Working for mankind on the principles of a pure, brief worldliness, he felt that something more was needed to sustain him till his plans were accomplished, and

¹ *Enigmas of Life*, pp. 137, 138.

his long-applauded and cherished work was done. Here is his confession, which carries with it a force and significance which we do well to note: "I became persuaded," he says, "that my love of mankind and of excellence for its *own sake* had worn itself out." In the moral crises of his early manhood, living in an atmosphere of Atheism, chill and dreary as the grave, we find him turning to suicide as its natural resource. "I frequently asked myself, if I could, or if I was bound to go on living, when life must be passed in this manner. I generally answered to myself, that I did not think I could possibly bear it beyond a year,"¹

And a fitting conclusion to one of the most disappointing and dreariest of Autobiographies is found in the epitaph which this man of worldly fame selected for his tombstone; viz. "Most Unhappy."

Though the individuals who form the ranks of modern negation and unbelief stoutly rebel against what they are pleased to call the "east wind of authority," and the "sloppy talk of sentimentalists," they cannot but acknowledge the incompleteness of all their speculations and hypotheses to reach and cover all the great wants connected with our existence in the manifold stages of its wondrous development. The cold heights of metaphysical abstraction, the "Utopian dreams of socialism," and the "airy nothings" of prejudiced, unlicensed, and unbridled imagination, cannot meet the deeper wants of the human heart, or provide any substantial and satisfying answers to the deeper questions which have pressed themselves upon mankind in all ages, generations, and climes.

Tyndall himself has said that "no Atheistic reasoning can dislodge religion from the heart of man. . . . The logical

¹ *Autobiography*, p. 140.

feebleness of physical science is not sufficiently borne in mind." Again he says, "Behind and above, and around all, the real mystery of this universe lies unsolved, and, as far as we are concerned, is incapable of solution." In his first preface, in which he seems to give expression to true and genuine feeling, he says :—

"I have noticed, during years of self-observation, that it is not in hours of clearness and vigour that this doctrine [that of material Athelism] commends itself to my mind; that in the presence of stronger and healthier thought, it ever dissolves and disappears, as offering no solution of the mystery in which we dwell, and of which we form a part."

Huxley, on a certain occasion, said: "Have I not given my testimony that the religious sentiments are the noblest and most humane of man's emotions?" On another occasion he surprised his hearers by saying, "I, individually, am no materialist, but, on the contrary, believe materialism to involve grave philosophic error." Darwin, too, acknowledged that the question respecting the existence of a Creator and Ruler of the Universe has been answered in the affirmative "by the highest intellects that ever lived."

Herbert Spencer has also frankly confessed that the "Atheistic theory is not only absolutely unthinkable, but, even if it were thinkable, would offer no solution of life, and the universe in which that life is found." The language of George Holyoake, in spite of his downright unbelief, admits his strong yearning for another life. In one of the most touching passages in his writings, he speaks of his strong desire for a future life, in which he should again enjoy the society of his daughter, lost to him—according to his theory—forever. His words are :—

"'My dada's coming to see me,' Madeline exclaimed on the night

of her death, with that full, pure, and thrilling tone which marked her when in health. 'I am sure he is coming to-night, mamma;' and then, remembering that that could not be, she said, 'Write to him, mamma, he will come to see me.' And these were the last words that she uttered; and all that remains now, is the memory of that cheerless, fireless room, and the midnight reverberation of that voice which I would give a new world to hear again."

"Yes," he says, "I shall be pleased to find a life after this; a future life, bringing with it the admission to such companionship, would be a noble joy to contemplate." But his position of unbelief slays all such expectations, and shrouds them in the habiliments of a despair dark and dreary as the very regions of the death.

Thomas Cooper, when his mind was under the malignant dominion of a godless infidelity, penned the following lines as he contemplated the gloomy land of annihilation to which he fancied himself moving. He exclaims:—

"Farewell, grand sun! How my weak heart revolts
At that appalling thought—that my last look
At thy great light must come! O, I could brook
The dungeon, though eterne! the priest's own hell,
Ay, or a thousand hells, in thought, unshook,
Rather than nothingness! And yet the knell,
I fear, is near that sounds—To Consciousness, farewell."

The insufficiency of this merely *earthly* theory to accomplish its oft-repeated predictions of blessing and of good is seen in the

MORAL IMPOTENCE AND INDOLENCE WHICH IT CONSTANTLY
DISPLAYS.

The do-nothing, and unbeneficent character of modern unbelief is at once suggestive of the humiliating inability of its principles to help forward this great, struggling, suffering, and needy world in which we live, move, and have our being.

If the brevity of man's life on earth is calculated in itself to move society to warm and pathetic feelings for our fellows, surely that class of men who are wearing the livery of unbelief, and are evermore proclaiming what they call the gospel of utilitarianism, are giving some practical expression of their profound human sympathies in some grand endeavor to heal the multitudes of the needy, and are blended in some far-reaching alliance whose special object is to scatter the rose-leaves for man's bleeding feet, and bear away the woes and miseries of a bruised, tear-bathed and suffering race!

Surely that school which professes such dislike for the "drum ecclesiastic" is enthusiastically engaged in hushing "the sob, the sigh, the low-tone throbs of heart-chords snapping." For such efforts and institutions, however, we look almost in vain. The long-neglected and degraded races, forming, as they do, such a large section of the population of the globe, are, so far as modern unbelief is concerned, left to care for themselves as best they can; and this means the perpetuation of an existence over which there reigns a worse than Arctic gloom, and a darkness deeper than earth's darkest night. For the hospitals and asylums erected by the agnostic school so much affected by the fact of man's existence, and the teachings of a pure worldliness, we look, but, alas! we look in vain. Those who magnify the tenets of Secularism have strangely failed to provide a place where human suffering and pain may find a friendly shelter, and a couch upon which it may lean its wearied form in the times of its helplessness and crying need. As the ancient Greek and Roman worlds appear to have been utterly destitute of all institutions of a humane and merciful kind, where the poor and maimed in life might find a place to live and die, amid the consolations and sympathies of their fellow-men; so, even in this twentieth

century, the world is almost unblessed by a single institution constructed on materialistic principles for which so much has been promised, and so much has been so loudly and boastingly claimed! Confronting this "gospel of the flesh," this theory which ignores the Christian's faith and the Christian's Heaven, we may, in the language of another, interrogate it and see what answer it has to give:—

"Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Rase out the troubles of the brain,
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?"

The reply of an atheistic secularism, as written in the memory of many of its votaries, is found in the language of a deepened sorrow, a thicker, heavier gloom, and a grim and dark despair.

The leaders of the different departments of unbelief in the current age have talked about the sufferings of the unfortunate and poor, and, "dressed in a little brief authority," have spoken, as Carlyle has said, "big, staring, empty words,"—

"Full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."

The reforms, beneficent changes, and the present practical endeavors for humanity's good, inaugurated by the chiefs of the materialistic philosophy, are strangely absent from to-day's world, and in this do-nothing policy we see at once the impotence of those principles which characterize the schools now under review.

And yet, in spite of the almost utter helplessness and indolence of modern secularism, those men keep on dreaming

about a golden age, a grand millennium, which is yet to dawn upon the world, and to be ushered in by the operation of those principles, which, after centuries of trial, have been distinguished by failures of the most humiliating kind, and, instead of realizing the golden predictions uttered respecting them, have produced a vast harvest of results which are in downright antagonism to all that is elevating, progressive, and pure.

Notwithstanding all this, the advocates of the "New Religion of Humanity" are full of assumptions, and assure us all that great things are still in promise. But, as one has well said, the secularistic philosophy which is to harmonize all contradictions, change citizens into saints, create a golden age of peace and plenty, and make the world bright and blessed, is still on paper:—

"The New Church, which shall have no problems in its creed, no prejudice, no priestcraft, no corruptions, is on paper; the New World, which science and materialism shall create—all knowledge, freedom, wealth, virtue and happiness—is on paper! Paper saints; paper resolutions; paper paradises; paper everything!"

Is it not time that the keen insight and practical turn of this later age should at once pierce this dazzling vision, scatter to the winds the flowing, empty words of this utilitarian dream, and recognize the unveiled delusion of which this glittering mirage of skepticism is principally composed?

PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS.

Is it not painfully suggestive of the unsoundness and immoral tendencies of the many forms of unbelief which are abroad, when the characters of the acknowledged and influential representatives of those unchristian speculations are passed in review? In controversy, as an admitted and general

rule, personality ought to have no place. Exceptional circumstances, however, may justify a suspension of that rule. Such circumstances, we claim, exist in looking at the subject now before us. Those individuals who have been widely recognized as the leaders of ancient and modern doubt and denial may surely be supposed to illustrate, in a practical manner, the general tendency and results of positions and theories they sought to promulgate and maintain. Condillac, Diderot, D'Alembert, Rousseau, Voltaire, and Paine were not fit models after which to copy a pure and noble life.

Hobbes, as one has said, "presents a curious mixture of boldness, cunning, and cowardice." This man, quoted with applause by the secularists of to-day, says: "It is lawful to make use of ill instruments to do ourselves good. If I were cast into a deep pit, and the devil should put down his cloven foot, I would take hold of it to be drawn up by it." And when this valorous man came, with pitiful reluctance and dismay, to face the inevitable, he said, "I shall be glad to find a hole to creep out of the world at."

David Hume advised a skeptic to preach Christianity, and not to pique himself on his sincerity. He also taught that "there could be no evil in setting free a few ounces of a certain red fluid called blood, when the possessor of it stood in the way of one's interest"; and, further, that "adultery must be practiced, if men would obtain all the advantages of life, and that, if practiced secretly and frequently, it would cease to be scandalous; and it would, by degrees, come to be thought no crime at all." And yet, in view of these shameful statements, this young man is held up by Professor Huxley in his lay sermon, on a Sunday evening, in Edinburgh, as "the most acute thinker of the Eighteenth century," and "one of the greatest men that Scotland has ever produced."

Dr. Johnson said of Bolingbroke, that he was "a scoundrel and a coward; that he loaded a blunderbuss against Christianity, which he had not the courage to fire during his lifetime, but left to a hungry Scotchman a legacy of half a crown, to draw the trigger after he was dead."

Mr. Lecky, in his "Leaders of Public Opinion in Ireland," describes the moral character of Lord Bolingbroke as follows:—

"He plunged with reckless impetuosity into the life of dissipation that opened before him, and, in an age of libertines, was conspicuous as a libertine. . . . The chief cause of his failure was his own character. It was the restless spirit of intrigue, which led him to plot against his colleague, and to enter into relations with the Pretender. It was the notorious dissipation of his private life, and the laxity of his opinions which deprived him of the confidence of his own party, and of that of the great majority of the English."

Many more representative names might be easily cited, showing the demoralizing influence of skeptical teachings upon the lives and conduct of those who have placed themselves under their dominion and power. And the melancholy hopelessness and gloomy outlook as to the future, and the sad undertone of sorrow permeating much of the agnostic literature of the time, carries with it a painful significance and unconscious confession of its impotence in the affairs of the world. In making this personal attack, we do not wish, for a moment, to keep out of sight the inconsistencies and moral failings of many who have professed the Christian faith. All that can be fairly said with reference to the moral failures of many Christian men and women, we frankly acknowledge. But the difference between Christianity and modern unbelief, in reference to the immoralities practised under their names, is as wide as the poles asunder. In no system under heaven can we find such condemnations of wrong-doing, hypocrisies, and crimes as Christianity presents; so that, in the very faith

he professes, the Christian meets with no palliation for his sin, but his inconsistencies and iniquities are in direct and shameful contradiction to his professed beliefs, and against the vehement protests and infinite displeasure of Christianity itself. Now the exact contrary, as to morals, may logically and consistently be the case with a thorough believer in what is commonly known as materialism.

Given a man who rejects all ideas which Christians attach to such words as "God" and "Spirit"; who believes that, so far as his own existence is concerned, there is no world but the present; that there is neither life nor judgment after physical dissolution; that our relation to the universe is exhausted by our present sensation and consciousness,—let him believe these things without a doubt, and commit himself to them without a fear, and the difficulty which other men would feel under certain moral conditions vanishes, and it is easy to see that such opinions must result in precisely the conduct which has characterized the majority of the champions of skepticism, and of the multitudes who have surrendered themselves to their pernicious influence and degrading power.

The plain result is, that, whilst the materialist may be a bad man, without violating his strictly materialistic doctrines, whilst the Christian professor is bound, by every principle of his faith, to be consistent, pure, and beneficent, and to be all this continually, no matter how unkindly the circumstances may be, he is to despise shame and persecution, and, if need be, to sacrifice his life for his moral and spiritual convictions.

"The conclusion," as a distinguished writer has said, "is that no doctrine can be morally good which ignores morals, and no doctrine that ignores morals can be supported by men who are morally good."

DESTRUCTIVENESS OF SECULARISM.

Not only does the theory of a worldly life utterly fail to accomplish the beneficent results of which some prominent skeptics have dreamed; not only have these purely earthly considerations and speculations demonstrated their impotence and immoral tendencies in the lives and conduct of those who have been the public representatives and champions, but on the broadest scale such teachings which ignore the future life and the authority of the Christian revelation have proved destructive of all those elements which make for the peace, prosperity, and well-being of the individual, society, and the world.

When a certain class of men have declared that the "great Companion is dead," that the Christian heaven is only a myth, and a future life an empty dream; and would confine man's attention only to time, and teach constantly that in this world alone we have the genesis and the utter consummation of our existence, we can readily imagine what effect such teachings would have on the common, practical life of mankind when generally and thoroughly received.

If the theory of George Eliot and many others were true, that the pathos of a brief mortality is more calculated to move the sympathies of human hearts than the teachings of the Christian revelation respecting a future life or world, then, in this case, one of the tenderest periods of human history should have been the period of the French Revolution, when death was voted an "eternal sleep." Was human life then regarded with the deep, broad sympathy, when religion was publicly ridiculed, and the principles of the most unblushing and reckless infidelity obtained a national support? Was man's life then regarded with universal feelings of sanctity, when each morning furnished its new supply of victims for

the guillotine, and the "red rain" of human blood fell in showers all over that fair and sunny land? Whatever this theory might do in a world altogether differently constituted from the one in which we live, it is not ours to judge; but when confronted by the conditions and actualities which distinguish our present abode, it breaks down in a manner the most absolute and complete. The story of all unchristian ages and nations is on this very point one of cruelty, sadness, and woe. The records are crimsoned with human blood and atrocities, which make one shudder as we read. The Greeks and Romans and the nations of antiquity traded in human life as if it was nothing more than so much blood and bone, and its value was decided by the price it would bring at the public mart. Thousands were cruelly murdered and slain, merely to gratify an emperor's whim or furnish amusement "for a Roman holiday."

It would not be difficult to fill up pages of horrors which are sickening to contemplate, but which, almost without exception, have marked the career or history of those peoples who have been uninfluenced by the teachings of the Christian faith.

And yet, in full view of all those facts, which cannot be disputed, we are told by the apostles of materialism that human life will retain its worth undiminished; that it will lose none of its dignity, its higher aspirations, its beauty, or its poetry, when recognized to be wholly of the earth earthy. We are convinced this position is capable of a refutation of the most conclusive and overwhelming kind. The facts of ancient and modern history are utterly opposed to such a statement and cannot bear the investigation of intelligent and unprejudiced minds.

The language of Prince Bismarck on this subject is timely

and to the point; he will not be suspected of any sickly idealism or mawkish sentimentality of any kind: "It is incomprehensible to me," says the German Chancellor, in a letter to his wife, "how any human being, who thinks about himself at all, and who is ignorant or chooses to remain ignorant of God, can live under his load of self-contempt and *ennui*. . . . If I had to live now as I did then . . . I really do not know why I should not throw off this life like a dirty shirt." And as one has remarked, this was written by him in the prime of life, with every affection gratified, with the magnificent career he has since run opening unclouded before him; and he specially begs his wife, to whom the letter was addressed, not to suppose it written in a particularly dark mood, but that on the contrary, his health and spirits are good. Writing to his wife ten years later, and speaking of the brevity of life, even in the happiest case, and when prolonged to its fullest space, he says: "It would not be worth while to dress and undress if it were over with that."

"What poetry," asks one, "what art, what morality will long survive under the belief that man is only an earthworm of more differentiated protoplasm; his love and faith but atomic currents of the brain, or may be, as the French philosopher asserts, of the smaller intestines, and the power ruling all, not a God and Father, but a ponderous mill-wheel of perpetual motion, lower than himself in that it has not even a brain?"

If man is nothing more than the "apex of a pyramid" whose base is a worm; if he is but the outcome of blind, mechanical, physical force, and the helpless irresponsible victim of a cruel, iron necessity, then does he sink to a level with the animal creature around him, and such a thing as a noble, glorious freedom becomes an impossibility. To baptize him with high-sounding titles, if such teachings are true, is only a mockery of the cruelest kind. If his genesis is in some

far-off zoölogical garden, we may call him a "splendid animal," "the glorification of the brute," "the apocalypse of the beast," or the "crown and glory of the universe"; but all this would be but a poor compensation for those royal characteristics and legacies which our would-be teachers are willing to bury in the dust. When man's robe of dignity is torn into shreds, and the crown of immortality is snatched from his brow and dashed into ruins, and the theory of a brief animalism, or at best a "book-shelf immortality," is substituted in their stead, we can at once see that the effect of such a system could not but be of the most humiliating and degrading kind. Man's future becomes a thing of sadness and of gloom; the true "center of man's gravity" is no longer the larger world beyond, but the physical and bodily gratifications which the present scene may possibly supply; around his life is flung the "crape of a creedless gloom," and around his grave the darkness of a sad despair, with no hope that the eastern sky will ever redden with the fair promise of a resurrection morn. The important matter of human responsibility fares no better under teachings such as we are now reviewing. The solemn facts of man's moral freedom, and consequent accountability, are practically ignored, for he is declared to be the victim of his surroundings, and the distinctions between right and wrong are set aside, or divested of whatever force and authority they may now possess. No higher law than a mere human expediency is recognized, and all the motives, actions, and authorities by which men are to be moved and guided, are confined to the narrow arena of time, in which, for a while, they are found. By this theory of a mere earthly life, in which we are told the utmost possibilities of our existence are reached, the most cherished anticipations of the race, embraced by the noblest

of our kind, and clung to in millions of instances at great sacrifice and under life's most sorrowful and painful circumstances, are struck down into the ruin and desolation of an unending night. Tell us no longer of man's dignity and glory, but point him out to all coming time as the only bungle in creation and the very scandal of the universe itself. This utter debasement of humanity and this squandering of the "crown rights" of mankind are well illustrated by the story which one of the historians tells of a tame eagle he once saw in a butcher's shop. The royal bird, he says, "had forgotten the plains of heaven, the glories of sun and sea, and sky and storm; its plumes draggled in the ashes; and its eyes, once bathed with the light of noon, now twinkled in the kitchen fire." Sir I. F. Stephens, in "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity," has truly said, "that the facts of human life are the same on any hypothesis. A belief in God, and a future state, is the only faith which scatters any rays of light over the otherwise dark sea on which we are sailing."

But the results of this materialistic teaching on public and individual morality, if widely accepted, could not fail to be of the most serious and alarming character. When the only authoritative and acknowledged standard of morals in the world is repudiated and declared to be without foundation, we can at once imagine what flood-tides of iniquity would deluge society if this standard was cancelled or set aside. The screws of man's moral nature are loosened; the gambling spirit in man, which makes him ready to toss up for his chance and to believe that something good will happen, is encouraged, and, in ten thousand instances, men under the influence of Atheism have pawned away the costly possessions of being for a momentary gratification, and have dug graves in which their once cherished hopes have been buried. Strike

from the great common mind the motives and restraints which our divine and supernatural religion presents; and vital principles which hold millions within the bounds of a moral respectability would be cancelled, and the onrolling floods of vice and iniquity would spread themselves far and wide.

The most recent, and in some respects the most striking, confirmation of the positions which this article is seeking to enforce is that which is found in the *Wall Street Journal* of New York, which appeared in the issue for January of the present year. This very remarkable and significant editorial, under the caption "Is There a Decline in Faith?" awakened such general and eager interest that this particular issue was soon exhausted and the management of the paper had the editorial copied from the files to meet the urgent demands. If so reputable a journal, devoted (as it claims) wholly to the discussion of financial and economical conditions, problems, and interests, is thus concerned for the preservation of the Christian faith in its purity as the foundation and safeguard of the business of the country, how sensitive should be the concern of those directly responsible in a matter so vital and so wide-reaching in its influence and power? As the article is of exceptional value, we give it in full.

"He who believes in a future life is a citizen of two worlds. He moves in this, but his highest thought and inspiration are fixed on the future. To such a person, what takes place here and now is not unimportant, but it is infinitely less important than what shall take place hereafter. He looks upon his life here as but a preparation for the life to come. His experiences here, whether of joy or of sorrow, are of value to him only as they enable him the better to meet the everlasting demands of the life after death. He is not indifferent to the rewards which may come in this world to industry, endeavor and opportunity, but failure, illness, poverty, abuse—what do these amount to, to a man who believes he is to enjoy the sublime privileges of eternity? He measures everything by the infinite. Wealth, luxury, power, distinction—he may not despise these, but he looks

upon them as being but temporary, mere delights that are given as tests of his character.

“Faith in eternal life smooths out every inequality and injustice of the present life under the great weight of the infinite. It makes the poor feel rich, and gives to the unfortunate a sense of heirship to the Almighty. It makes the rich feel a sense of grave responsibility and trusteeship.

“Now it is not needful for this discussion to consider whether such faith is reasonable or not. The *Wall Street Journal* has no concern with theological discussions. It takes no part for or against any creed, but it is intensely interested in the economic and political effects of any change in the thought, the habits, and the lives of men. If there has been a marked decline in religious faith, that fact must be of profound, far-reaching significance. It alters the basic conditions of civilization. It becomes a factor in the markets. It changes the standards and affects the values of things which are bought and sold. It concerns the immediate interests of those who never had such a faith almost as much as it does the lives of those who have had the faith and lost it.

“The question, therefore, is of practical, immediate, and tremendous importance to Wall Street, quite as much as any other part of the world. Has there been a decline in the faith in the future life, and if so, to what extent is this responsible for the special phenomena of our time, the eager pursuit of sudden wealth, the shameless luxury and display, the gross and corrupting extravagance, the misuse of ‘swollen fortunes,’ the indifference to law, the growth of graft, the abuses of great corporate power, the social unrest, the spread of demagoguery, the advances of socialism, the appeals to bitter class hatred? To find out what connection exists between a decadence in religious faith and the social unrest of our time, due, on one side, to oppressive use of financial power, and on the other, to class agitation, might well be worth an investigation by Government experts, if it were possible for the Government to enter into such an undertaking.

“Whatever may be a man’s own personal beliefs, there is no one who would not prefer to do business with a person who really believes in a future life. If there are fewer men of such faith in the world, it makes a big difference, and if faith is to continue to decline, this will require new adjustments. There are certainly, on the surface, many signs of such a decline. Perhaps, if it were possible to probe deeply into the subject, it might be found that faith still abounded, but it is no longer expressed in the old way. But we are obliged to accept the surface indications. These include a falling off in church attendance, the abandonment of family worship, the giving over of Sunday, more and more, to pleasure and labor, the

separation of religious from secular education, under the stern demands of non-sectarianism, the growing up of a generation uninstructed as our fathers were in the study of the Bible, the secularization of a portion of the church itself, and its inability in a large way to gain the confidence of the laboring people. If these are really signs of a decay of religious faith, then indeed there is no more important problem before us than that of either discovering some adequate substitute for faith, or to take immediate steps to check a development that has within it the seeds of a national disaster."

Dr. J. W. Draper, of New York University, in the *Princeton Review*, for 1877, has set forth the political effects which the decline of faith in Continental Europe has brought about. He says:—

"Whence comes that black thunder cloud, Nihilism, now lowering over Eastern Europe? The most despotic of all civilized governments looks on with alarm. Whence comes that blood-red spectre, Communism, threatening Western Europe? In France they have had experience of what it would do. And Socialism in Central Europe! If it cannot have its way, it threatens revolution, civil war."

And it is a matter of undisputed history, that unchristian and unbelieving nations have always furnished the world with their "programs of misery and of blood."

And with the eclipse of faith, our noblest conceptions of the world we live in, of the Maker of that world, and of the human life are all slain and buried in one dreary grave. We are left to listen to the "dry, dead clatter of the universal machinery" around us, and it stands before us more like some huge and mighty skeleton than anything else.

"The magnificent drama of human life sinks into a puppet-show, without even a showman. We find ourselves drifting in piteous impotency over the stormy sea of time, mastless, chartless, sailless, we are driven along; man becomes a bundle of miserable contradictions; the world one gigantic paradox; the history of the race a confused and inexplicable conflict and struggle; life a troubled and

feverish dream; the world beyond a vague and dreadful fear; we are left to wander over a godless earth, and nothing seems real, even

“‘The pillared firmament is rottenness
And earth’s base is built of stubble.’”

In conclusion, we adopt the remarks of a writer in the *Modern Review*, for October, 1881. This writer says:—

“There is abundant evidence to prove that however lamentably religion may have failed to raise human conduct to its ideal standard of morality, the *absence* of religion, where it has been general in any society, has been accompanied by a fearful increase of immorality. Witness the morals of the later Roman Empire, of Italy, under the first pagan influence of the Renaissance; of France, during the last half of the eighteenth century. Witness the doctrines of the Nihilists, and of all the extreme Socialists, who would abolish the family, property, and social organizations, together with God, and with unconscious logic, call for absolute lawlessness as the only complete expression of Atheistic liberty.”