

SECULAR MORALITY

Many persons, who know nothing whatever about the teachings of Secularism, appear to imagine that it is purely destructive, and offers no home in which man may dwell, after it has pulled down the crumbling edifice in which he now resides. Destructive it is as regards the religions of the world; you cannot plant flowers in ground which is full of weeds, until you have pulled up and destroyed the weeds; and since the whole garden of the world is full of the poison-plants of superstition, and there is no ground outside to plant our fair blossoms in, we must pull up, and root out, and dig a portion of the earth around us, till we have cleared a space wherein to set our flowers. God claims the whole world as his, and builds his churches everywhere; we claim the whole world as Man's, and we must pull down the churches to make room for the schools; so we drive the God-idea back from off the ground we have won, and keep the sword point ever towards it with the one hand, while we till the ground with the other. Still we have won a plot of ground, men's and women's hearts and brains, from which have been pulled up the weeds the Churches sowed in them, and which need culture and planting. To them Secularism has a message; to them it brings a rule of conduct; to them it gives a test of morality, and a guide through the difficulties of life. We test morality by utility; whatever ensures and increases human happiness is *right*; whatever destroys and injures human happiness is *wrong*; a moral act is a useful act; an immoral act is an injurious act; beyond this we have no meaning for the word morality. Our morality is tested only—be it noted—by utility in this life, and in this world; with any other life, with any other world, we have nothing whatever to do. If our conduct promotes human happiness in this world, it is moral and right, and any consideration which induces us to act so as to decrease in any possible way happiness enjoyed upon earth, is immoral and wrong. Asceticism, in any shape, is immoral; it decreases the amount of temporal happiness; and whether it please God or no, whether it give a seat in heaven or no, whether it bring happiness in a future life or no, it is equally immoral, it is equally wrong. It is moral to give every natural feeling free scope, provided only that no other person is injured, either directly or indirectly: but if the action done would, if generally done, tend to the unhappiness of society, that action is wrong, because the happiness of all is more important than the happiness of one; and the utilitarian rule is, that only those actions are moral which tend to increase the amount of happiness possible. In many points the Christian and the Secular moralities coincide, although springing from different roots; in some they directly clash. Both would agree that lying is wrong. Why? "Because," says the Christian, "it offends against God." "Not so," answers the Secularist; "but because it brings about mutual distrust, and, if generally practised, would render society impossible." Thus, each reprobates the same act, but does so on a perfectly distinct ground.

Christian morality is itself unconsciously Utilitarian, and when the precepts of its founder would be injurious if carried out, it very quietly drops them out of its code. No Christian regards it as moral to condone a theft by giving the thief more than he had stolen, or to encourage brutality by non-resistance: utility is too strong for the philosophy, and moulds it into conformity with the needs of society. But Christian morality is shaped and coloured by the endeavour to secure happiness in a world other than this; many actions are done which decrease temporal, because they are supposed to increase eternal, happiness. To the Secularist all such actions are distinctly immoral, and deserve stern reprobation.

Further, the morality which commands the Secularist to do all which tends to increase the temporal happiness of mankind, lays upon him duties which it is criminal to neglect. Education is necessary to human happiness; it increases the sources of happiness, and quickens, and sharpens the power to enjoy. To promote education in every possible way becomes then a duty incumbent on every Secularist; a Secular Society which does nothing to educate its members is neglecting one of its chief duties: it is morally bound to care for the education of its children, to give facilities for continued education to its adults, to agitate in favour of every Parliamentary proposition which makes education more easily attainable by the people, and against

everything which narrows or degrades it. A parent who professes Secular principles, and who does not insist on, and provide for, the due schooling of his children, at whatever personal sacrifice, is committing a distinct breach of Secular morality. A citizen who neglects political study, and the discharge of political duty, also sins against morality: human happiness is increased by every improvement in law, and is decreased by State injustice and State tyranny; to be indifferent to that which affects the happiness of the whole country is a crime. The Secularist has duties to himself as well as to his neighbours. It is immoral to neglect the laws of health, that is, to fail to profit by the observed sequence, according to which some acts promote, and others injure, health. Drunkenness is immoral; it weakens and destroys both physical and mental powers, and is therefore wrong, even when it is not further aggravated by public riot. Obedience to physical law is incumbent on every Secularist, and impurity of life, uncleanness, excess of any description, are all sins against Secular morality. Discharge of duties—personal, social, political—is sternly required from all who take our name: courtesy in daily life, mutual respect and reverence, willing assistance to any who need aid, ungrudging exertions for the good of others, bold resistance of evil in every shape, unshrinking defiance of every form of tyranny, unchanging patience in the reformation of the froward and the evil, unflinching tenderness with the weak and the aged, untiring kindness to all alike, these are all required by Secular morality from those who range themselves under the banner of Secularism. Nothing less than this must be the ideal which we strive to realise; and to this we must add every grace and every beauty of character which can add to the brightness, and increase the happiness, of human life.

ANNIE BESANT.

TEACHING A SECULAR CODE.

The Minister of Education of New South Wales has sent the following reply to the Secularist deputation, headed by Mr. T. Walker:—

"Sir,—I am desired by the Minister of Public Instruction to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of July, 1884, asking that the 'New South Wales branch of the Australasian Secular Association may be permitted to send its representatives into the State schools to instruct the children of Secularists in their duties to themselves, to society, and to the country in which they live,' and submitting that clause 17 of the Public Instruction Act of 1880, gives the Secular Association that right.

"2. In reply I am directed to state that the Minister has considered the points raised in your letter, and particularly in the code of instruction in morality dissociated from theology, proposed to be taught by the Secular Association, and indicated in paragraphs A (a b) B (a b) and I II III, and while acknowledging that the duties mentioned in paragraphs I II III are such as should be imposed on every colonist, the Minister is of opinion that the proposed code does not come within the meaning of 'religious instruction' (as distinguished from secular instruction) mentioned in clause 17 of the Public Instruction Act. Moreover he cannot see any necessity for such a code of instruction being imparted by special teachers from your Association in the way proposed by you, even if such a course were permissible, inasmuch as most of the subjects named by you are already prescribed in the ordinary teaching given in the schools under this department. Paragraph 30 of the 'Instructions to Teachers' runs thus:—

"It shall be the duty of all teachers to impress on the minds of their pupils the principles of morality, truth, justice, and patriotism; to teach them to avoid idleness, profanity, and falsehood; to instruct them in the principles of a free government; and to train them up to a true comprehension of the rights, duties, and dignity of citizenship."—I am, &c.,

"G. MILLER,
"Acting Under Secretary."

Lady Loch, the wife of the new Governor of Victoria, is the twin-sister of Lady Lytton, wife of the late Viceroy of India. She has a very tall though graceful figure, and her face always wears a pleasant smile, which gives one the impression that the owner has a kindly heart and a contented mind.