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THE ORIGINS OF SECULARISM IN EARLY

NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN

It is a commonplace in the Twentieth Century to deplore the decreased influence of Christianity upon society at large. One hears criticism of the commercialized Christmas, well exhibited by loud-speakers at a shopping plaza booming out "Come All Ye Faithful", long before the end of December. According to this point of view, our age compares unfavourably to the Victorian Age when everyone went to church or chapel. But veneration of a Christian yesterday completely ignores the existence of the secular environment of Britain which was familiar to many working-class emigrants who arrived in Canada. Secularism was so strong that this word, when capitalized, became the name of a faith that rivalled the influence of church or chapel.

The father of Secularism was George Jacob Holyoake. In 1829, at the age of twelve in Birmingham, Holyoake had his first doubt about the "utility of Church establishments". His family was poverty-stricken and his little sister lay on her death bed, when an Easter-due from the parish church was levied upon them with merciless severity. From this early experience developed his adult objection to paying church tithes, and a deep-seated antipathy towards what he termed "predatory Christianity". Before the age of fifteen Holyoake had tried, in turn, regular attendance at Congregational, Baptist and Wesleyan chapels. He became aware of denominational differences about the important matter of whether Hell existed, for while a Congregational minister struck fear into his heart with stories of children who had recently arrived in Hell, a Baptist minister was doubtful if such a place existed. Holyoake's most shattering experience concerned his response to an inspiring sermon on the all-sufficiency of faith. This sermon was based on the promise of

Christ that "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name that will I do". Later, Holyoake walked to a chapel meeting without his coat, in bad weather, relying upon this promise of heavenly protection. Upon contracting a cold he paid a visit upon the preacher, who parried by adding the qualifying phrase "if God thought it was for our good". Young Holyoake pondered this ambiguity as to whether God answered prayer in the nineteenth century, and concluded that preachers knew that the unequivocating promises of Jesus Christ applied only to apostolic times.

Robert Owen was responsible for Holyoake's emphasis on the importance of present, material things compared with future spiritual rewards. In 1817, the year Holyoake was born, Owen had stated that "all religions in the world are in error".¹ Owen felt that religion constituted a barrier against the social improvement of humanity, although logically as a theist he was wrong in condemning "all religions". Owen's establishment of Halls of Science to cultivate social science aroused the strong opposition of religious bodies, who resented competition in the field of morals. By 1840 there were 62 Halls of Science with an estimated 50,000 persons attending lectures each Sunday. Holyoake became one of the Social Missionaries who spread Owenite ideas, while the Bishop of Exeter led a counter-attack by urging the authorities to repress such activity.

The Owenites sought to defend their activity by calling themselves "Rational Religionists", but this led to the demand that all Social Missionaries should make a public confession, on oath, of the Protestant faith. Holyoake was appalled that many of his missionary colleagues became openly hypocritical, in 1840, when they took the oath, and leapt into the clerical ranks as licensed preachers. A schism resulted in the ranks of the Owenites which was reflected by the atheistical journal called the *Oracle of Reason*. An assault was mounted on the clergy which they could not possibly ignore:

They [the clergy] pour their poison of lies into the ear of cradled infancy—nay they debauch reason in the very womb, and only in the grave can their multitudinous dupes find repose from their terrified and exhausted sensibilitise.²

When Southwell was prosecuted and imprisoned in 1841, this proved for Holyoake to be "the cradle of my doubts and the grave of my religion". Holyoake took over as editor of the *Oracle* and his attitude became "I know nothing of Gods"; here was the starting point of Holyoake's philosophy.

Because of the apparent insincerity of many Socialist Missionaries swearing an oath, there was a fairly widespread contempt for socialist principles in

1841. The forces of organized religion appeared to have routed "socialist doctrines". With this background it is understandable why Holyoake took a determined stand on principle at Cheltenham, when like Southwell, he was accused of blasphemy. Holyoake had visited Cheltenham in 1841 as a Social Missionary to try to lift the flagging spirits of the local socialists. His activity was resented by a clergyman, Reverend Francis Close, who preached a sermon that was critical of socialistic doctrines. Following Holyoake's departure Close brought pressure to bear upon a school-teacher, who recanted his socialist views under the threat of dismissal. A local charge of socialist cowardice was now added to the dishonour which had resulted from the Social Missionaries swearing oaths.

Therefore in 1842 when Holyoake returned to deliver a lecture on "Home Colonization" at the Mechanics' Institute, the stage was set for a test concerning the sincerity of socialist principles. Inevitably, one of the Reverend Closes's supporters remarked that while there had been a great deal of talk about their duty to man, "What about their duty to God?" Holyoake evoked applause and general laughter by referring to Charles Southwell in Bristol jail, and the "tender mercies of Christians who placed him there". Then he met the question head on, by declaring his disbelief in God's existence, and of abhorrence for religion as poisoning the fountain of morality. In his view, because of the distressed state of the people, he considered that the people were "too poor to have a God; and the Deity should be put on half-pay".³

Reverend Close realized that Holyoake's proposal implied devoting half the revenues of the church to secular purposes. He mounted a furious clerical attack in the *Cheltenham Chronicle* upon "Holyoake, The Blasphemous Lecturer", and urged the local clerical magistracy to take action. The result was the last successful conviction in England of an individual upon a charge of blasphemy. Holyoake was committed for trial at the Gloucester Assizes by Cheltenham magistrates who, considering that they were clergymen, could hardly be impartial. Local police entered into the spirit of things by parading the handcuffed "blasphemer" through the town.

At Gloucester Assizes in August 1842, Holyoake conducted his own defence, as he reasoned that a lawyer would not dare to defend his principles, but would be inclined to plead for mercy. The indictment described him as "a wicked, evil disposed person", and in order to emphasize his lack of social status he was described as a labourer. Holyoake defended his conduct in a nine-hour speech, which basically rested on these points; there are no valid

arguments for the existence of a God; that it is impossible to blaspheme against what one does not believe in; that he had the Englishmen's right of free speech, and finally religious persecution ought to be discontinued. Judge Erskine brushed all this aside as "irrelevant", and directed the jury to note that the language used by Holyoake brought contempt upon religion. The judge was obviously ill at ease in handling the case, and tried to distinguish between the right of an individual to hold irreligious opinions, and the way they are expressed:

You may answer sober arguments, but indecent reviling you cannot, and therefore the law steps in and punishes it.⁴

This opinion had no legal foundation, as neither the Common Law nor Statute Law made any distinction between decent and indecent attacks on Christianity. In later life Holyoake humorously related how Judge Erskine admitted the honesty of his answers, and gave him six months' imprisonment as an encouragement to youthful candour.

Holyoake returned to his work as a Social Missionary, but the days of the Owen brand of socialism were numbered. Holyoake doubtfully observed the efforts made to establish communal centres like Queenwood, and was not surprised when this settlement failed in 1845. He summarized the significance of this phrase of British Co-operation:

All the fervour . . . of the early Co-operative Societies was . . . about communistic life. The 'Socialists' so frequently heard of were Communists. They hoped to found voluntary, self-supporting, self-controlled industrial cities, in which the wealth created was to be equitably shared.⁵

While Holyoake was unenthusiastic about what he termed "world making", he considered that there was hope for a revival of co-operation on the basis of "self-help". He lectured on self-help to a little gathering of weavers at Rochdale, in 1843, and when they subsequently commenced a new phase of Co-operation, he became an avid propagandist on their behalf. During the time that this new concept of Co-operation was getting over its teething problems at Rochdale, Holyoake was active in launching the Secularist movement.

In 1846 Holyoake took up residence in London and started a paper called *The Reasoner*. The paper countered the then current cry of "No Popery!" with "No Poverty!", and displayed a medallion portrait of the Utilitarian Jemery Bentham on the front page. Holyoake was determined, however, to avoid a frontal assault on religion and sought to draw up a broad programme which would embrace as many free thinkers as possible. During

those early years of *The Reasoner*, Holyoake found difficulty in applying an appropriate name to his views that would not have a negative connotation against religious beliefs. The word atheism was not suitable and, in turn, Holyoake rejected names like Netheism, Nontheism and Limitationalist. Finally on December 3, 1851, *The Reasoner* used the word Secularist for the first time. Secularism now became the official name of the beliefs Holyoake advocated, with the word being derived from the existing word secular, defined as implying those issues which can be tested by the experience of this life.

The great appeal of Secularism to the industrial worker was that it articulated sentiments already held. Many observers testified to the innate secularism of the masses. Friedrich Engels who studied in Lancashire in 1844 claimed that "there prevails almost universally a total indifference to religion".⁶ Edward Miall, the Congregationalist, recorded that "the bulk of our manufacturing population stands aloof from our Christian institutions".⁷ For a similar reason, Jabez Bunting, the uncrowned king of the Wesleyans, urged the cultivation of the country areas, as their faith was originally a rural belief.

Nonconformist leaders appear to have adopted the view that religion was not for the industrial masses. Thomas Binney, the Congregationalist, declared "Our mission is neither to the very rich or very poor, but to that great middle section of the community".⁸ Workers in industrial areas were often inclined to scoff at the attempt of representatives of the middle class to acquire respectability by church or chapel attendance. A note of bitterness resulted from the fact that many of the "nouveau riche" had recently climbed from the working class. In view of this underlying antagonism, it is readily understandable that at Wolverhampton in 1891, the Secularist lecturer, F. W. Foote, could easily raise a cynical laugh by suggesting that advice "sell all thou hast and give to the poor" was not followed by the leading Congregationalist minister in the town, or by the rich in his chapel.

The workers had to survive in a world where the capacity to work meant economic salvation, and where there was no time available for the niceties of social etiquette practiced at church. A plumber who wrote to the *Methodist Times* paraphrased the call of Christians to the non-worshipping masses:

We want you, the working 'classes' to attend our church; but you must not forget that you are the working 'classes', and you must not on any account presume to be on an equal footing, with ourselves, as you don't belong to our 'set', and you should be grateful to us for our condescension in asking you to come at all.⁹

Concern over the social acceptability of the masses in the church or chapel was reflected in a great deal of discussion about deterrent factors, such as pew rents, styles of dress and the appointment of church officials. At the same time there was a tendency for wealthy Nonconformists to ascend the social ladder by joining the Church of England, and this probably increased the suspicion of the workers. This suspicion had a solid basis because the established church has always been closely identified with the governing strata of society. The Anglican clergy were predominantly the product of Oxford and Cambridge; their motives were often mistrusted, and it was often assumed that their interest was "purely pecuniary or official duty".¹⁰

At mid-century the government decided to investigate church and chapel attendance upon a particular Sunday, which resulted in the Religious Census of 1851. This official survey conducted by Horace Mann concluded "the masses of our working population . . . are never or but seldom seen in our religious congregations".¹¹ Mann's study tended to confirm the opinion of a clergyman who felt that, "Among the working classes there is a feeling that they compromise themselves in some way by going to a church". This view reflected a wide-spread conviction that middle-class church-goers were snobs, and parsons hypocrites. Horace Mann analyzed the estrangement of the worker from religion as not only due to "social distinction", and a feeling that "religion . . . (was) a purely a middle-class luxury" but, also, as "attributable mainly to a genuine repugnance to religion itself".¹² What was particularly relevant was the statement that the working class could be best described as "unconscious secularists".¹³

Workers could readily appreciate Holyoake's view that while Christian concern for the future of the soul was preached as the supreme object, his experience taught him "that human welfare of others was a more honourable solicitude, and more profitable to them". The working classes were conscious of the fact that those who attended church on Sunday did not necessarily exhibit Christian virtues the rest of the week. In other words there was a difference between church attendance and behaving as a Christian. Not unnaturally, the working class agreed with St. Paul that Charity rated above Faith and Hope. The popular story of Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* illustrated the case of an employer who eventually acted with Christian charity towards an employee and his family. Scrooge's miraculous conversion had nothing to do with regular attendance at church. Bob Cratchit's family judged Scrooge on the way he behaved, and Charles Dickens was an acute observer of working-class attitudes in the nineteenth century.

One of Holyoake's strengths was his journalistic skill, which enabled him to make a telling point for Secularism without enraging religious leaders. For example, there is a dash of humour in his story regarding the assumption that the Deity personally watches over all human events:

The curate rescued from a wreck who reported to Archbishop Whately that he had been 'providentially saved', was asked by the logical prelate 'Do you intend to say that the lost have been 'providentially drowned?'¹⁴

Holyoake contended that only scholars were capable of judging the authenticity or genuineness of the Christian Scriptures, and therefore any controversy over scripture must be confined to the ranks of scholars. But this consideration did not affect the real question, which for Holyoake was "Do the Scriptures contain clear moral guidance which will increase our certainty of aid of God?" This emphasis upon the material benefits to be derived in this present life, had the great merit that for purposes of ethical criticism the worker could bring the priest to a discussion at the working-class level. Educational and social advantages of the clergy were thus minimized in this type of discussion.

Holyoake expanded the statement of Tom Paine, who wrote in the *Rights of Man*, "My religion is to do good". Secularism taught that "doing good was being good . . . others would profit by it . . . no mode of doing good (was) open to us so certain as material means".¹⁵ Allied to this simple creed was a negative position on the benefits of Christianity. If there was a future life then those who had done their best to assist their fellow man in this world would get their reward. On the other hand, if there was no future life, then it was foolish not to enjoy oneself while one could. There was a certain amount of fatalism in such a position, but Holyoake's central point of the need for human charity was a simple but powerful moral code. The working classes agreed with St. Paul that charity was greater than faith or hope, and in effect Holyoake was giving a rational basis for the concept of Christian stewardship. It is therefore hardly surprising that Holyoake was to count many personal friends among the clergy.

Dr. J. Martineau, the prominent Unitarian, considered that articles in *The Reasoner* were "always shrewd, and other thoughtful and helpful".¹⁶ Holyoake's aim was to appeal to both Christians and disbelievers, so as to foster an intelligent interest in the affairs of this world. This broad, idealistic appeal implied, however, that Holyoake's followers could only be contained in a loose form of organization. An old Owenite friend tried to give a friendly warning:

By trying to include so much within your walls you are risking the whole slipping from your grasp; you desire to make Secularism so elastic as to include everybody and everything . . . you conquer worlds and seek other worlds to conquer, and all by the force of a term.¹⁷

Holyoake was urged to make his aim negative and destructive, as a preliminary to new construction. But he was too tolerant to adopt such a position, and tried to distinguish between the broad aim of Secularism and his personal beliefs. There is little doubt that the efforts made to draw such a distinction tended to confuse his public.

In 1850 Holyoake undertook a missionary tour of the North of England. At Bradford fifteen hundred people crowded into a hall to hear him debate with the Reverend John Bowes, in what the *Bradford Observer* described as "the religious boxing match". His audience was interested but perplexed, as they could not tell "what yon man wur loike: he wanna loike a Christian". The *Newcastle Journal* reported that "this cockney atheist and his sham opponent" produced a "shameful exhibition". Holyoake adopted the tactic of bearding critical editors in their dens, and usually convinced them of his sincerity. He explained that the reason he refused to debate atheism was that it would lead the public to confuse atheism with secular principles. For Holyoake the question was one of priority, that Secularism should be concerned with this life, rather than another which we do not know. This contact with fellow journalists was beneficial not only in publicising his views, but Holyoake was also made conscious of the fact that his thin voice was not suited to platform debate.

The courteous, gentlemanly manner of Holyoake gained him many admirers, who did not necessarily share his beliefs. In 1851 a Unitarian admirer, Reverend W. H. Crosskey, created a furor in the Unitarian body, when he made the following dedication in his book *Defence of Religion*:

To George Jacob Holyoake, a man who, notwithstanding his inability to share the theist's faith, must permit a theist to regard his brave sincerity and reverence for truth and justice as acceptable worship at the altar of the Holy of Holies, this brief essay is respectfully inscribed.¹⁸

Dr. Martineau took the Reverend Crosskey to task in a letter, and seemed to be most concerned that respect for Holyoake should not be exhibited publicly; but concluded, "However, it is a generous impulse to appear as the advocate of a man whom intolerance unjustly reviles",¹⁹ thus implying his own respect for Holyoake's position. Holyoake was also gaining recognition in

the political field, as he was very active in the campaign against the "taxes on knowledge". He was picked by the organizing council to lead one phase of the journalistic assault, and it is rather interesting to note the reactions of Richard Cobden and John Bright. Quaker Bright feared, "We might be described by the enemy as a society of atheists"; but Anglican Cobden was ready to "accept the assistance of the devil in a justifiable enterprise".²⁰

During 1852 a formal organization called the National Secular Society was founded, and in the following year a Conference of Secularists was convened at Manchester, with delegates from as far away as Scotland. Secularism boomed in the early fifties as it was virtually the only prominent free thinking organization in Britain. By the end of 1855 there were eight Secularist societies in London, and seventeen in the North, from Birmingham to Glasgow. Another year saw five more groups added in London, and six more founded elsewhere. Thus within five years Holyoake had inspired the formation of thirty-six clubs, with the strength of the movement centred in London and the major cities of Lancashire and Yorkshire. While this formal structure of clubs showed an impressive rate of growth, this was only a partial indicator of the extent of Secularist appeal to working-class sentiment.

Other working-class areas, which were ostensibly religiously-minded districts, showed a keen interest in Holyoake's ideas. The main example was the areas in which the Primitive Methodists were strong, as their leaders were acutely conscious of social injustice. George Edwards, the leader of the Norfolk farm labourers, articulated a widespread attitude:

I soon began to realize that the social conditions of the people were not as God intended they should be. The gross indignities meted out to my parents and the terrible sufferings . . . (of) my boyhood burned themselves into my soul . . . I vow(ed) I would do something to better the condition of my class.²¹

As Holyoake had had similar youthful experiences, it is readily understandable that his lectures received a good reception wherever the Primitive Methodists were strong. The itinerary of Holyoake's provincial tours frequently included annual visits to Norfolk fishermen and farm labourers, and North country miners. One suspects that Holyoake did not really expect sweeping conversions to secularism in these areas, but rather that the "enthusiasm" of these non-factory workers had a refreshing effect upon the lecturer. Contact with a breed of working men who had not been subjected to factory discipline must have provided a welcome change. Certainly in his memoirs Holyoake dwelt at length on the pleasure he derived from visits to friendly village communities,

such as the fishermen of Cromer in Norfolk, and his respect for their proud independence.

Holyoake did not spare himself in continual lecturing to expand the influence of the movement. For instance, in the month of December, 1855, he ranged from Plymouth in the South-West up to Glasgow, delivering twenty-two lectures in seventeen locations. The programme he advocated showed an appreciation of the workers' needs, and an excellent example was his proposal for Two Sundays. This idea suggested a forty-eight hour week, with Saturday being termed a Secular Sunday and devoted to recreation. As Holyoake pithily explained: "Had Moses foreseen the manufacturing system, instead of saying 'six days' he would have said 'Five days shalt thou labour'." Holyoake gave two reasons for stopping work for two days, the first being that one day did not suffice to clear away the "pandemoniums of smoke and blast furnace fumes". Anybody who has seen the appalling industrial smog of the Midlands will heartily endorse this opposition to continuous air pollution. Similarly, his main reason was linked to the health and happiness of the worker, and comprised the need for recreation. Yet agitation in favour of opening museums and arranging excursions met with violent opposition. When the Newcastle Secularists proposed a modest excursion one Sunday, a neighbouring preacher erected a huge sign announcing his intention to preach on this "Trip to Hell".²² Possibly the workers' point of view was that such a trip comprised a few hours escape "from Hell".

There is little doubt that the opposition of many church leaders to permitting recreation on Sunday helped to increase the popularity of the Secularist movement. Although no unanimity existed within various denominations, there was a tendency for Nonconformists to be to the fore in opposing the idea of the working class using Sunday for pleasure. Many Nonconformists supported the closing not only of public houses but of other possible alternatives to worship, such as the opening of museums, art galleries, and libraries. The energy of the Working Men's Lord's Day Rest Association and the Lord's Day Observance Society was largely supplied by Nonconformists.²³ Congregationalist millionaire Samuel Morley was for many years a vice-president of the latter society, which led the campaign against allowing the working classes to have public, secular temptations on Sunday. This stand of the Sabbatarians, which hinged upon the evils that could ensue from the introduction of a Continental, or French Sunday, was vigorously disputed by Holyoake's *Reasoner* and the *Westminster Review*. From 1856 onwards Holyoake was very active in promoting the cause of the newly founded Sunday

League. The fact that the Secularists strongly favoured Sunday recreation for the worker was bound to win them a good deal of working-class support.

One other major facet of Holyoake's work, which was closely linked to Secularism, was his ardent propaganda on behalf of Co-operation. His paper, *The Reasoner*, ceaselessly urged the substitution of co-operation for competition and his appeal to the worker was an earthy one:

The political economy of Rationalism asks why . . . our labourers must die, why be trampled down in competition's races? Shall we pave the highways of commerce with toil worn bones?²⁴

Co-operation accepted the capitalist system, and sought equality of opportunity for the worker by means of a new form of commercial organization. What particularly appealed to the intelligent worker was the concept of the profits created being equally distributed among the participants. The weavers to whom Holyoake had lectured in Rochdale had prospered by the foundation in 1844 of the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers. Holyoake wrote the story of this remarkable movement in *Self Help By The People: History of Co-operation in Rochdale (1858)* which was translated into many languages and spread the co-operative idea throughout the world. Furthermore, this idea tended to draw in the housewife, and Holyoake was a lifelong advocate in the cause of emancipating women. The durable appeal of Co-operation can be readily seen today with the concern of British housewife with her "divi from the Co-op". Holyoake's encouragement of a few Rochdale weavers launched the Co-operative Society which is the largest food retailer in modern Britain.

In the plan of Co-operation the key word was honesty, as otherwise the scheme could have sunk into an organized form of fraud. Holyoake's advocacy of self-help, on a moral basis, was a tacit recognition that the worker could not count upon help from religious or political agencies. He warned his listeners that:

People have been . . . taught to depend upon mendicant supplication. When the evil day comes; when the parent has no means of supporting his family . . . the churches can render no help. The State . . . accords nothing but the contemptuous charity of the poor law.²⁵

Holyoake's appeal to the labourer was a direct message to unite in self interest:

Labour! Co-operation is thy sole available path of independence. It puts here and now into the workers' hands the means to cancel their captivity. It waits

for no future—its field of operation is the present. It needs no conversion of the world for the commencement of change—it needs but self-help and concert.²⁶

The prosperous development of the Rochdale form of co-operation into a national organization exceeded the wildest dreams of the early pioneers. Reverend W. Molesworth, as vicar of Rochdale, paid a tribute to the important contribution of the "Gospel of Secular life". At the same time, however, it must be noted that the Rochdale principle of no credit restricted Co-operation to a responsible minority of the working class, and was not a general panacea for all working-class problems. Co-operative principles were mainly important because they helped to bridge class differences, by gaining approval from influential members of the upper and middle classes.

The development of Co-operation in the sixties tended to be along lines that had a definite secular overtone. Henry Pitman's "Co-operator's Catechism" illustrated a commercial creed which was preoccupied with the affairs of this world. Similarly, Holyoake expressed working-class sentiment about the advantages of material benefits in this world:

The alienation of the people from church and chapel was not founded . . . (on) spiritual grounds . . . The absentees . . . alleged that no relief came of belief, and never had since the days when manna fell in the Jewish wilderness, and loaves and fishes were miraculously plentiful on the hills of Galilee. There was no sense or profit in adopting a faith which had been unproductive for nearly 2,000 years.²⁷

This anti-religious tone demonstrates the personal views of Holyoake demonstrated in lectures, which were, in the eighteen-fifties, frequently confused with Secularism. A number of prominent heretics were sympathetic to Holyoake's views, and in 1853 gifts from admirers were used to found the British Secular Institute of Communists and Propagandism, with the shareholders including Robert Owen and Harriet Martineau. This new organization was located at the bookshop that Holyoake ran in London. John Stuart Mill also made known his regard for Holyoake, who had tirelessly backed his campaign for justice to women.

Holyoake's temperate conduct gained him friends from all social strata, and from around 1855 his attitude was that he was quite willing to accept "peers, priests and politicians as sincere co-workers in the cause of the people".²⁸ Holyoake, however, did not sidestep challenges from clergymen who attacked his views. In 1854, Holyoake debated with a Reverend Brewin Grant, a Con-

gregationalist minister. Towards the end of these debates, Holyoake summarized the abusive terms expressed by his clerical opponent:

Every error is 'wilful' and every incomplete statement an 'intentional falsehood' . . . I have not a motive that is pure, nor a sentiment that is just. My defences are described as 'lying', my silence as 'cowardice', my speeches as 'insolence', my explanations as 'evasions'. The opinions of my friends have been called 'canting'; my anxiety not to wound the Christian part of this audience (was) . . . hypocrisy . . . you deepen the conviction in my mind that the 'Glad tidings of the Gospel' mean Goodwill to those who believe as you believe, and ill will to all those who do not.²⁹

Grant's friend and adviser, the Reverend H. M. Barnett, wrote to Holyoake after these debates, "Brewin . . . may awake contempt but never conviction".³⁰ In view of the rather vituperative style of this clerical opponent, it is hardly surprising that a Glasgow paper commented, "the casual visitor would take Holyoake to be the Christian and Grant the infidel".³¹

There is little doubt that Holyoake lived by his creed of tolerance and consideration for others. An excellent example consisted in his relations with Bishop Colenso, Bishop of Natal, who later in the century was to become a storm centre because of his biblical studies. The Zulu who is reputed to have inspired Colenso to study the Bible in a search for truth had learned his scepticism from an immigrant Secularist. As early as 1858 this Secularist, who had obtained employment upon the household staff of the Bishop, was indiscreet enough to write an open letter to *The Reasoner* telling about Colenso's studies. Holyoake suppressed names, localities and details which could embarrass the Bishop, and Colenso subsequently expressed his thanks to Holyoake. On another occasion Holyoake found out that the Bishop was advertised to lecture at a Secularist Hall of Science in London.

He (Holyoake) at once wrote to him (Colenso) and pointed out the danger he incurred from his colleagues from the character of the place, and Colenso took the hint.³²

By the late 1850s Holyoake seemed to have won a position as a respected exponent of Secularism. Certainly his decision to refrain from attacking religious leaders or the Christian faith won him many friends. But Holyoake's broad tolerance was subject to increasing opposition within the Secularist ranks, many of whom desired an outright assault on religion, as a preliminary to

rebuilding society. This agitation brought to the fore another national leader of Secularism named Charles Bradlaugh.

NOTES

1. Holyoake, G. J., *Bygones Worth Remembering*, 1, p. 16.
2. McCabe, J., *Life and Letters of George Jacob Holyoake*, 11, p. 55.
3. Benn, A. W., *A History of English Rationalism*, 1, p. 405.
4. *Ibid.*, 1, p. 406.
5. McCabe, J., *Life and Letters of George Jacob Holyoake*, 1, p. 209.
6. Thompson, E. P., *The Making of The English Working Class*, p. 428.
7. Wickham, E. R., *Church and People in an Industrial City*, p. 118.
8. Inglis, K. S., *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England*, p. 15.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
10. Wickham, E. R., *Church and People in an Industrial City*, p. 12.
11. Inglis, K. S., *Patterns of Religious Worship in 1851*, p. 86.
12. Inglis, K. S., *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England*, p. 57.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
14. Holyoake, G. J., *Bygones Worth Remembering*, 1, p. 118.
15. Holyoake, G. J., *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, 11, p. 167.
16. McCabe, J., *Life and Letters of George Jacob Holyoake*, 1, p. 203.
17. *Ibid.*, 1, p. 295.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 219.
19. Holyoake, G. J., *Bygones Worth Remembering*, 1, p. 23.
20. McCabe, J., *Life and Letters*, 1, p. 262.
21. Hobsbawm, E. J., *Primitive Rebels*, p. 148.
22. McCabe, J., *Life and Letters*, 1, p. 284.
23. Inglis, K. S., *Churches and The Working Classes in Victorian England*, p. 77.
24. Briggs, A. and Saville, J. (eds) *Essays in Labour History*, p. 105.
25. Holyoake, G. J., *A Manual of Co-operation*, p. 63.
26. Holyoake, G. J., *The History of Co-operation*, p. 667.
27. Holyoake, G. J., *Bygones Worth Remembering*, 1, p. 86.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
29. Grant, B., and Holyoake, G. J., *What Advantages Would Accrue . . . (to) The Working Classes . . . by the Removal of Christianity and Substitution of Secularism*, p. 256.
30. McCabe, J., *Life and Letters*, 1, p. 225.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 341.