



# *The* BANKRUPTCY OF CHRISTIAN SUPERNATURALISM

From the Viewpoint of the Bible



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BROWN'S  
DEFENSE

VOL. V



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## MY DOCTRINE

**M**ARXISM is correct in its opposition to religion if it be regarded as a belief in a supernaturalistic God, Bible, Church, Priesthood, Sacraments, Heaven or Hell. But none of these ancient superstitions have anything to do with modern, scientific religion and politics.

What is the religion of science? It is the natural desire, aspiration and determination to make the most of terrestrial life by having it as long, happy and useful as possible.

What is the politics of science? It is the natural effort to find out the way to the most abundant life and to walk therein.

What is the way? The way is truth.

What is truth? Truth is a fact so interpreted by experience, observation, investigation and reason that if it be regarded in conduct it will make life more and more what it should be.

What is a fact? The doings of matter, force and motion are so many facts, and there is no fact which is not such a doing.

What is the greatest of all known facts? The fact that man is a part of nature, evolved out of the image and likeness of a beast, not made in the image and likeness of the God, Jehovah; and, therefore, death as surely ends all for humans as for animals.

Can religion and politics be separated? No. They are the imaginative or aspirational and practical halves of the social realm.

What is orthodox Christianity? It is this two-fold social realm built on the supernaturalistic fictions of the Bible.

What is bolshevik Communism? It is this two-fold social realm built on the naturalistic facts of the sciences.

What is the world's most religious act? The imagining and formulating of the Five Year Plan by the Soviet Union.

What is the world's greatest political act? The Soviet effort to carry out this great scientific and most salutary plan.

Why are the forty odd nations of the Soviet Union advancing more rapidly towards the ideal civilization than others? Because they are building on service, not property, and banishing the gods from their sky and the capitalists from their country in order to replace a class, competitive world by a classless, cooperative world.

Can people be both Marxian Communists and Jesuine Christians? Yes. For the early dramatic (not the later theological) Jesus and Marx alike sought to secure to the world a more abundant life through a knowledge of the truth.

Did Jesus say anything to this effect? Jesus did not say things any more than Santa Claus does, but those who wrote the Christian version of the ageless and matchless drama of human redemption, creating and staging him as its central figure, put these two wonderful sayings into his mouth: (1) I am come that the world might have life and have it more abundantly, and (2) Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

What is the final religion and politics? Marxian Communism.  
—W. M. B.

# THE BANKRUPTCY OF CHRISTIAN SUPERNATURALISM

FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF THE BIBLE

BY

*WILLIAM MONTGOMERY BROWN*

VOLUME V

**"Printed pursuant to the direction of the late William Montgomery Brown as set forth in his Last Will and Testament and two Codicils and as directed by the Probate Court, Crawford County, Bucyrus, Ohio, pursuant to a Motion duly filed with said Court."**

P.O. Box 477, Galion, Ohio 44833



Bishop William Montgomery Brown's  
Fifth Appeal for Restoration  
To the House of Bishops

## DEDICATION

This little book on the Bible is gratefully dedicated to the greatest among American religious and political revolutionists, Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson, who were respectively the author and writer of the Declaration of Independence.

They were the teachers from whom I learned the rudiments of the communistic rights of man, and of the levelism which ultimately made it necessary for me to place the Old and New Testaments on a footing as to their entirely human origin with all other so-called sacred books as so many utterly ruinous forgeries and impositions by self seeking, prevaricating priesthoods; and, also, I learned from these great teachers to place Judaism and Christianity on a level with the other supernaturalistic interpretations of religion as so many totally blighting superstitions.

William Montgomery Brown

## ANNOUNCEMENT

The six little volumes in the series of booklets, entitled, *The Bankruptcy of Christian Supernaturalism*, are so many appeals by me to the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church for restoration to its House of Bishops. They are made from the important view-points of the trial, the sciences, history, philosophy, the Bible and sociology.

These appeals are based wholly upon science, for history and sociology are now as really sciences as geology and biology, and no professor of philosophy in any great university can hold his chair unless he is a scientific philosopher; even a theologian must be well acquainted with the field of science in which the phenomena of religion have been carefully investigated and compared, if he would command the attention of educated people by his sermons and books on Biblical subjects.

But while founding each one of my appeals on some rock of science, I realized that its effectiveness in the church as a plea for restoration to the house would be in proportion to its value to the world as an educator; and, therefore, I am doing all that in me lieth to make the booklets of the series primers for high school boys and girls and post graduate text books for collegians.

Let me call attention especially to the first volume of this series, because its Memorials to the Court of Review, to the House of Bishops and to the House of Deputies give a bird's-eye view of the whole field of scientific culture, and also constitute a most thorough-going introduction to the succeeding five volumes, throwing much light upon many of their representations.

The appeal of these little books is primarily to the General Convention; but, nevertheless, they will be found to be of equal or even greater interest to the rank and file of our church; also, to all orthodox and unorthodox Christians of every ecclesiastical name, indeed, to all the votaries of every supernaturalistic interpretation of religion, and even to infidels and atheists. I would not have sustained the trial with its labor, expense and turmoil, if I had not seen that the issue involved in it is of universal and momentous concern.

Every article of the whole arch of Christian doctrine is involved in that issue. But I will mention only its two basic doctrines, the Fall of Adam and the Blood of Jesus. Do these doctrines stand for literal realities, as the Courts and House of Bishops contended at my trial, or are they symbols of realities, as I contended?

Any man or woman who reads the first of this series of booklets will perceive with me the immenseness of this issue, at least vaguely, and if he goes on through the other five, he will see it as clearly as he ever saw anything by the light of the sun on a cloudless noonday.

Brownella Cottage,  
Galion, Ohio.  
September 4th. 1930.

WILLIAM MONTGOMERY BROWN

## THE CHURCH'S DOCTRINE

**W**HOSOEVER will be saved: before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholick Faith. Which Faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled: without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

First, it is to be noted, that all and singular the twelve Articles, contained in this (Apostles') Creed, be so necessary to be believed for man's salvation, that whosoever being once taught will not constantly believe them, or will obstinately affirm the contrary of them, he or they cannot be the very members of Christ and His Spouse the Church, but be very infidels or heretics, and members of the Devil, with whom they shall perpetually be damned.

Second, it is to be noted, that all true Christian men ought and must most constantly believe, maintain, and defend all those things to be true, not only which be comprehended in this (Apostles') Creed, and in the other two symbols or Creeds, whereof the one was approved by the ancient General Councils, and the other was made by that holy man Athanasius; but also all other things which be comprehended in the whole body and Canon of the Bible.

Thirdly, that all true Christian men ought and must not only repute, take, and hold all the said things for the most holy, most sure, and most certain and infallible words of God, and such as neither ought or can be altered or convell'd (contradicted) by any contrary opinion or authority; but also must take and interpret all the same things according to the selfsame sense and interpretation which the words of scripture do purport and signify, and the holy approved doctors of the Church do agreeably entertain and defend.—*The Doctrine of the Church of England.*

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## HERBERT SPENCER'S DOCTRINE

**O** LORD, you know that I do not believe in you as you are described in the Bible and believed in by the church. You know that I do not believe in the Bible as the word of God. If it be true, as affirmed, that you created the universe, it follows that you have created all that is in it. You have created evil as well as good, the devil as well as the angels, hell as well as heaven. If you have made men at all, you have made them as they are. If they are good it is because you have made them so, if they are wicked, it is equally your work. If you are omnipotent and universal, as you are said to be, there can be no evil thing or wicked deed that is not the result of characters and conditions which you have created. If there is a hell and men are to be burned, it is because you have wished it to be so. All things are possible with you; had you wished to make men good and happy, you would have done so. It has pleased you to make them evil and wretched. You are not, then, good, nor do you love your creatures. It is evident their sufferings give you pleasure or you would make them happy. Could I believe in you, I could not worship you except through fear, the meanest of emotions, but the only one you seem desirous to excite. We cannot love you for the good you have done, for it serves only to render us more miserable by contrast with the evil you have forced us to endure. And so, O Lord, if the Bible be truly your word, and you are as the Old Testament describes you, I can only hate you and be thankful that I do not believe. And now O Lord, if I am wrong it is because you have made me so for you can make me believe and do what you please. Created by you, I am a mere creature in your hands and am responsible for nothing. I have not the power to choose between good and evil, as I am told I should do, for I can judge of right and wrong only through the use of a brain created by you in the full knowledge of the conclusion it would lead me to; with you and not with me lies the responsibility. I can only be thankful that I am not cowardly enough to fear nor weak enough to worship so horrible a creature as the God of the church. Amen.

## INTRODUCTION

In the second and third volumes of this defense of the doctrinal position which I took up in the Anglo American (Protestant Episcopal) Church I showed that no man who has a proper knowledge of modern science and history can honestly stand in any other position.

From the gray dawn of time on this planet science conducts us to the beginning of civilization, and from that point onward to our own age we follow the story of life under the guidance of the scientific historian. It is a magnificent panorama that the scientists and historians have constructed for us, and from end to end there is not in it a trace of a supernatural power.

This is so far admitted that the more intellectual religious writers now warn their readers not to look for such traces. The old arguments from the order and beauty of nature are, they say, dead. The supposed proofs of design in nature and of providence in history are abandoned. They may still be used on uneducated people, though all philosophers condemn them, but there is what is called a "new theism," with new arguments, and writers of the Anglican churches openly represent it.

But I showed in my fourth volume that the new apologists who profess to grant all the claims of science and history, are entirely wrong. They chiefly find proof of the existence of a personal spiritual God in man's moral judgments and sentiments and science, the science of ethics, now offers us an entirely natural explanation of these. There is no reality, no idea even in the mind of man, which modern science does not explain or hope to explain. Many among the bishops must know this as well as, or better than, I do for

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they are college and seminary graduates and, to my great regret, I am not.\*

Many people have come to the conclusion that in our day a bishop is a man who is particularly clever at concealing what he knows or does not know and so, they say, I have no right to be a bishop. However that may be, the bishops, when they cast me into the outer light (I cannot call the world of science and history into which they have driven me an outer darkness) thought that the only way to avoid this terrible conflict with science was to appeal to the formularies of the church. Did I not profess, as a bishop of the American church, to stand or fall by its creeds and articles?

But it turned out that I was not so simple-minded as the bishops thought; or, if you prefer it, the bishops were simpler-minded than I thought. In the fourth volume of this little work, I took these creeds and articles and showed that in their literal sense they cannot possibly bind the modern mind or even the House of Bishops. They are formulations of truth by an earlier body of bishops in the light of their knowledge. But they were drawn up in an age of deep ignorance, often of very disturbing passion. They are notorious as the final agreements of bishops and theologians after years of very natural and very human dispute. The bishops of the Anglican churches in the twentieth century have as much right to make articles, if they care (but we do not want any more dogmas) or to interpret the old articles as the Anglican bishops of the seventeenth century had to tear up the older articles

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\* Those who care to find out why may do so by looking into my autobiography. If the public library of the reader's home town is without a copy, I will gladly send one.—W. M. B.



of the church and say that all the bishops had gone astray for thirteen hundred years.

So we get back from point to point until we reach the real standard of doctrine, the Bible. The formularies are to be respected, the bishops tell me; because, as they expressly say, their representations merely give precise form to the truths contained in the word of God. The reforming bishops did right in tearing up the articles of the Council of Trent (the Roman formularies) because these did not express truths contained in the Bible. If a Christian church means anything, it means, we are told, a church that holds fast to the teaching of Christ, and that teaching is found in the New Testament, which endorses the Old Testament. So, they say, we reach rock-bottom when, in seeking foundations for our faith, we come to the Bible; and, since it is the word of God, you need not mind how seductive, how perplexing, the word of all the united scientists and historians in the world may be.

It sounds very plausible, but it is not, and the bishops know it. They know that it is not possible for educated people to ignore or despise the established truths of modern science and history. They remain silent when hundreds of writers and preachers of their own church put meanings upon passages of the Bible which anybody in the world knows the writers never meant. Is there anything in the whole Bible so plain and emphatic as the teaching of Paul that death entered into the world by Adam, and Christ died to redeem men by his blood from the consequences of Adam's sin? But you are quite free in the Anglican churches to explain even that away—if you are not so misguided as to couple it with a defense of communism and science.

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In setting up the Bible as the ultimate standard of belief, as the bishops certainly did at my trial, they were, with deliberate vagueness, appealing to a popular belief on the strength of which, they thought, their action would be supported. For millions of people in America, men and women who show sound sense and practical judgement in the affairs of daily life, merely laugh when you tell them that all the scientific experts in the world are agreed that man was evolved from a lower animal. They say that the word of God says the contrary, and that justifies them in smiling at all the learned men in the world.

IS THE BIBLE THE  
WORD OF GOD?

A COMPARISON of all the religions of the world, in which none can claim a privileged position, will no doubt seem to many dangerous and reprehensible, because ignoring that peculiar reverence which everybody, down to the mere fetish worshiper, feels for his own religion, and for his own god. Let me say, then, at once, that I myself have shared these misgivings, but that I have tried to overcome them, because I would not and could not allow myself to surrender either what I hold to be the truth, or what I hold still dearer than truth, the right of testing truth. Nor do I regret it. I do not say that the Science of Religion is all gain. No, it entails losses, and losses of many things which we hold dear. But this I will say, that, as far as my humble judgment goes, it does not entail the loss of anything that is essential to true religion, and that, if we strike the balance honestly, the gain is immeasurably greater than the loss. All truth is safe, and nothing else is safe; and he who keeps back the truth, or withholds it from men, from motives of expediency, is either a coward or a criminal, or both.—Professor Max Muller.

## CHAPTER I

### IS THE BIBLE THE WORD OF GOD?

Most educated people can not imagine that any American bishop agrees with the foolish talk against evolution, but the fundamentalists among them do.

Yet the modernist bishops dare not quarrel even with their fundamentalist brethren. They dared not allow any discussion or defense in open court of the alleged twenty-three heresies of my booklet, Communism and Christianity, lest I should show that they have for years allowed similar expressions of opinion on very many points in the church's doctrine. The only just procedure they could have followed was to select words of mine which seemed to pass the bounds of the large liberty they have granted, and still grant, to modernists and hear how I defend them. But they did not want to hear my defense and would not allow it. They preferred to go back to the procedure of the Inquisition and bluntly declare that I was a heretic and must suffer ecclesiastical death.

I never had a trial. It is for a trial that I am asking. But they think that they can get the support of the church for their medieval acts by simply pointing out that my teaching is against the Bible, since that is the ultimate standard of belief. They say, in effect, that what I deny, in the literal sense, is in the word of God, and that suffices. I must say that statements on which all the learned men of our time agree are false. I must stifle all the humane and idealistic feelings which give some distinction to our age. I must ignore the message of heart and intellect and, with closed eyes, repeat in the literal sense the words of the creeds and articles.

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The truths they express are in the word of God, and there is an end of it.

No, my dear brethren, that is not the end. It is a new beginning. I am going once more into those depths of your own minds and will make plain to the whole church that you, being educated men, must have had ideas on this subject which you concealed behind this vague reference to standards and formularies. Not one of you believes, as do those who, you thought, would support you, that the Bible is the word of God, in the old sense, from cover to cover. Not six of you would agree as to whether particular passages which I could select are or are not the word of God. In preparation for the trial the Bible was read from beginning to end for the purpose of finding passages which could not be literally true. My official family agreed with me that over four hundred had been found, and they were offered to the Courts and House of Bishops for consideration, but they ignored them.

My brethren required that I should repeat in literal faith the claim of Article XX that the Bible is or contains "God's Word written," and they were afraid to discuss whether any particular passage, which I refused to accept literally, was or was not a revelation from God. They chose to rely on the vague popular belief that the Bible is the word of God.

Some among you are aware of the extraordinarily different story of the writing of the Bible as now taught in every reputable school of divinity in America from the version that was in the minds of those who framed the creeds and articles.

You know that this new version is the teaching, not of critics of Christianity, but of its most learned theologians and biblical scholars to-day.

You know that I would have brought out that fact if you had granted me a trial instead of summoning me before you as if you were so many Torquemadas, to listen mutely to an archaic sentence of yours which summons you regard as a profound disgrace.

You know that you were afraid: afraid of your own differences and of differences in the church. So, indifferent to justice, you deliberately chose vagueness.

You know that the mass of the members of the church understand that the Bible is still, in the old sense, the word of God and the standard of all religious truth.

You know that in all this you profoundly erred and did a grievous injustice to the less educated millions as well as to me. They have a right to know all truth, as I have a right to express it; and, here, I will tell the story of the compilation of the Bible as it is told by scholars, chiefly clerical scholars, in our own time. Some among the most distinguished are in the Anglican ministry. This is true of the editor of the greatest and most radical work covering the subject of the higher criticism of the Bible, *The Encyclopaedia Biblica*, edited by the Rev. Dr. Cheyne, Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture at Oxford.

## I

Bible simply means "the books," just as Scriptures means "the writings," and it was common in old times for a nation to have a Bible in the sense of a collection of ancient books to which a more or less sacred character was attached. The Babylonians had ancient legends about creation and the early earth and thousands of psalms, prayers and religious books. The Egyptians gathered together a very large amount of their ancient

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sacred writings in what we call the Book of the Dead. The Persians had a particularly sacred collection in the Avesta. The Hindus had their Vedas. The Chinese gave the sanctity of a human and national classic to the books which Confucius selected out of the older literature.

The modern theological view of the Bible is that it represents a collection of books written, like these, in different ages by different men. For the moment we leave open the question whether the Bible contains wonderful truths that the sacred books of other nations do not, but on the face of it the books of the Bible confirm this new view of its origin.

Open the book at random and compare one page with another.

On one page you will be pained by the bloodthirsty sentiments of some ancient Hebrew writer who exults over a ghastly killing or even wholesale massacre of women and children.

On another page you read humane and tender sentiments that are most admirable.

On one page you read some long and dry list of names, genealogical trees or names of cities, that are not of the slightest use to anybody.

On other pages episodes of court life or war that never had the least moral or religious significance.

The day has gone by when a man could persuade himself that at whatever page he opened the Bible he would read something that could be regarded as a revelation from God to man. The Old Testament, at least, is a vast collection of good, bad and indifferent things. War has been justified from its pages over and over again, and even black slavery, when it was set up a few centuries ago, appealed for justification to



the Bible. All sorts of crude little stories of pastoral life are told in the first part; and, throughout, the historical records contain narratives that not only do not edify but would be called repulsive if we read them in the annals of the Chinese. In its complete freedom from offensive passages the Chinese book, the King, is far superior to the Hebrew Bible, yet it is just as old.

Note particularly that this does not apply only to the early part of the Bible. You get near the end of the Old Testament before you come to the prophecy of Hosea, in which the speech of the Lord to the prophet is couched in such terms that if a preacher in the backwoods of Tennessee imitated it to-day he would probably be prosecuted for blasphemy and indecency. All the ingenuity of all the commentators cannot alter the fact. You may see any number of hidden meanings in the words, but the figurative expressions are repugnant. They are incredibly coarse when they are found in such a connection, or in any connection. Or take the extraordinary muddle of moral sentiments in the Psalms. The fiercest imprecations upon a man's personal enemies or the enemies of the Hebrew people alternate with chants of mercy and righteousness.

These things have always puzzled and troubled the commentators. They were quite unintelligible as long as men held that the Bible was wholly the word of God and not at all the word of man.

Did the same Jewish God inspire the anti-foreign sentiments of Ezra and Nehemiah and, about the same date, the pro-foreign sentiments of Ruth?

Did the same God inspire the various different, and sometimes contradictory, accounts of the same events?

Did this same God move a writer to express himself for a few sentences in the Hebrew language of the

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eighth century before Christ and then suddenly change into the very different Hebrew of the fourth or fifth century?

Did this same God reveal to the writers, in a hundred cases, names which are wrongly spelt and sometimes unintelligible?

Did the same God make a revelation to the effect that Belshazzar was the last king of Babylon and was slain by the troops of Darius the Median, when we know that Belshazzar was not king of Babylon and Babylon was taken, without bloodshed, by Cyrus the Persian?

We shall see enough as we proceed of these crudities, errors, duplications and contradictions. The story of the writing of the Old Testament (we will take the New Testament separately) that is now offered to us makes all this quite intelligible. It is that there was no Hebrew written language, or any other alphabetical language, in existence before about the year 1000 B. C., but that various popular war-chants and tribal stories were handed down from generation to generation. But the Hebrews were still very largely a primitive folk when these were written down and the first prophets appeared. Gradually the influence of older civilizations softened the manners and refined the sentiments of the Hebrews, and from age to age their literature improved. And finally, about the year 500 B. C., the priests of Jerusalem recast the whole of their writings, fitting documents of totally different dates into one narrative, and so we can perfectly understand the mixture of good, bad and indifferent; the duplicate accounts of events, the contradictions, the mixture of styles as different as the English of Chaucer is from the English of Washington Irving.

This is the view now taken by all the more learned biblical scholars. Chronicles were compiled in different periods. Records were kept in the temple and by royal secretaries at the court. Prophets arose now and again and claimed that God had moved them to write their messages to the people. In the end the priests fitted all the fragments together in something like a continuous history of the Hebrew people until the restoration after the Babylonian Captivity. This explains all the difficulties that had taxed the ingenuity of commentators. But in what sense was the Old Testament now the word of God? Was it not the word of man?

It is not in order to ask questions of bishops, but in view of the state of biblical scholarship in the church itself the members have a right to know something: This view of the compilation of the Old Testament is taught in Harvard and every other leading divinity school. The bishops, whether they share it or not, and I should like to hear one of them say that he does not, permit it to be taught to the clergy and preached by them to the laity. Then if each part of the Old Testament was written by some man on his own initiative, or in a general belief that God moved him to write it, and the whole was drily put together by the priests of Jerusalem, in what sense does it contain revelation or inspiration or is it the word of God?

Most of these biblical scholars reply that it was "inspired" only in the general sense that God directed the writers to produce their works. Does this apply to the compilers of the various chronicles, which take up nearly half the Old Testament? No, they say, these are not in any reasonable sense the word of God. They are like the chronicles of any other nation. It is the writers with a religious or moral message who may be

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said, in a broad sense, to give us the word of God. Then who is going to sort out for us the inspired and the uninspired sections, the word of God and the word of man? What authority or even qualification has a bench of bishops to do this? The biblical divines agree that there is no means of discriminating.

To put it still more forcibly let us take the first three chapters of Genesis. For doctrinal purposes they are certainly the most important chapters in the Old Testament or indeed in the whole of the Bible. The first chapter is supposed to be the basis, and the only basis, of the article of faith that God created the world and man. The third chapter is the only basis for the dogma of original sin, on which the doctrinal character of Christ is so largely based.

Well, are all of those parts of the Old Testament which Hebrew scribes wrote on their own initiative, or were some particular statements in them revealed or inspired by God? The bishops, who hold me up to censure for denying creation and original sin, dare not answer that question. The chief policy that they seem to have impressed on the official who represented them in court during my examination was to say nothing and admit nothing.

They were particularly reluctant to declare whether they did or did not demand adhesion to the literal interpretation of the creeds, articles and Prayer Book. Naturally. To pin me to a literal acceptance of the dogma of creation or of original sin, as found in the articles and the Prayer Book, would mean a declaration that the first three chapters of Genesis must be regarded as the word of God, and they would not dare to pronounce on them either way.

On the one side are the great body of Christian

believers who, having been taught that the Bible is the word of God, insist on literal submission to those chapters.

On the other side is practically all the scholarship of the church, maintaining that those chapters of Genesis have no more right than the speculations of Swedenborg to be set up as a standard of belief for us. In what sense, then, is the Bible the word of God? Or who is going to decide which chapters in it are the word of God and which the word of man?

## II

The more orthodox believers, possibly some of the bishops, say, that the only solution is to make no concession whatever to biblical scholarship.

In the second of these volumes I found the fundamentalists defying the whole of science.

In the third volume I found them on many points rejecting the united authority of historians.

In the fourth volume I showed that they snapped their fingers at, virtually, the whole of our philosophers, who drastically condemn their proofs of the existence of God.

In this fifth volume I am showing that the great majority of Christian believers go a step further and defy the larger part of the more learned theological and biblical scholars of the church itself.

This is the most surprising of all the paradoxes of our time. Here they are not rejecting secular knowledge in the name of religion. They are rejecting in the name of an utterly impossible orthodoxy an interpretation of religion itself which is put forward by the most learned and distinguished experts in the science of biblical interpretation.

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And the paradox is seen to be all the greater when we find that the religious belief which emboldens them to reject, not merely the unanimous teachings of experts in science and history and philosophy, but the teaching of very many (I think I may say the majority) of the most learned experts in religion, is the belief that the Bible is the word of God, which has feebler grounds than almost any other among the supernaturalistic doctrines of orthodox Christianity, not one of which will stand the test of an examination by science, history or philosophy.

I may seem to be talking paradoxes, but a little reflection will show that I speak the simple truth. The faith on which they take their stand when they almost contemptuously ignore what scholars and experts say is their belief that the Bible is the word of God. Let us get it quite precisely. They do not mean, as modernists mean, that the Bible contains the word of God somewhere and in some sense or other. They mean it so literally and comprehensively that a single verse of Genesis outweighs all the teaching of all the sciences about evolution. No one, surely, doubts that. The terrible and perverse energy of the fundamentalists has recently made it quite clear. And the bishops of the Anglo American Church have in effect taken up the same position, since they demand a literal acceptance of articles which expressly say that no man is required to believe anything that is not "God's written word" in the Bible.

Now, what is the ground of this belief that the Bible is, in this sense, the word of God? If any of my readers share that belief (and I hope that many such will read me) I courteously invite him to formulate his reasons in his own mind. If others doubt whether

the situation can be quite so strained as I suggest, I invite him to put the question to his orthodox neighbors. And I am certain that the great majority of those who in recent years in America have made a thunderous defense of the word of God, who have bullied and silenced teachers and derided science, have never asked themselves how they know that the Bible is the word of God. It is just as if the phrase itself had a hypnotic quality, as if merely repeating it, or hearing it in hundreds of sermons, soothed the mind and prevented questions from being raised and discussed.

Did you ever read one of those gently ironic fairytales of Hans Andersen about the crazy emperor's new clothes? He went out without any. But the word was passed round that he was wearing beautiful new robes. And all the ministers (of state, of course, not religion, for these would never compromise with the truth) broke into admiration, and all the crowds followed their example and said what splendid robes the emperor was wearing. This went on until at last a boy, who was too simple to be dishonest, broke the charm by exclaiming that the emperor had no clothes on.

Naturally I do not suggest that the orthodox believers are obeying orders in saying that the Bible is the word of God. They would not defy all the scholars of the world and then take orders from unscholarly people. But I think any person will find on inquiry that they have rejected the authority of all the most learned men of our time only to accept, without proof, the authority of a small group of the less learned or even of a single imperfectly educated preacher. They follow a baseless doctrinal tradition just as sheep follow a senseless leader.

In other words, the great majority of the people

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who demand the blood of professors who talk about evolution have never asked themselves the first and most natural question about the business. How do I know that the Bible is the word of God? What is more, as soon as you do ask the question, you find the truth of what I said, that this which seems to so many people the firmest of religious doctrines has really less ground than almost any other article of their faith. The crass nonsense which people will believe, practice and teach in the name of ecclesiastical orthodoxy and national patriotism is astonishing. It would be highly amusing if it were not extremely injurious to all the persons and interests concerned in the progress of man toward the goal of the ideal civilization where he will have the opportunity and cooperation necessary to the making the most of terrestrial life.

You cannot take the assurance of the Christian church that the Bible is the word of God, because the church has no authority for you until you have accepted the Bible as the word of God. A Roman catholic may delude himself into thinking that he can prove, as a matter of history, from the New Testament that Christ founded a church and gave it infallibility in teaching the truth, but a member of a protestant church must smile at that theory. He believes that the entire church went grievously astray for more then twelve centuries, that is to say, at least since it turned the Lord's Supper into the mass. So the Thirty-Nine Articles do not so much assert on the authority of the church that the Bible is God's word written as they assume that it is the Christian tradition.

You cannot believe that the Bible is the word of God because it claims to be. In point of fact, it nowhere claims to be the word of God as a whole. Each



writer has to speak for himself, and none can speak for the whole. And very few of the writers of the different books ever claim to give the word of God or a revelation. Except the prophets scarcely any writer claims this, and the prophets only claim it in the sense that God moved them to speak. They are obviously poetical when they give the very speech that God addressed to them, because the violence and often coarseness of the language would make it blasphemous if one literally attributed it to God. The chroniclers, who make up half the Old Testament, never claim that they are giving the word of God. They often show, on the contrary, that they are using old records and annals. When they give genealogies of the sons of Aaron and Levi, for instance, or the measurements and description of the temple, they plainly profess to be giving ordinary information. And certainly the wisdom books made no claim to revelation.

In short, if you begin at the first page of Genesis, you will read for a whole day before you come to any claim of inspiration or revelation. You find Moses claiming to have received a law from God, but the rest of the Pentateuch, and particularly Genesis, on which dogmas are based, do not in the least claim to give the word of God.

But I need not linger on this. All that you have in the Bible itself is the claim of a few of its writers that, in a general sense, they are repeating the words of God to them. They certainly believed this, but a man who would conclude that therefore what they say is the word of God must be very ignorant of religious psychology and religious history. The word of a prophet that the Lord revealed things to him proves nothing. So said Mohammed, when he dictated the

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Koran. So said the founder of Mormonism and many others but there is no need to insist. Even if you believe that what you read in Amos or Hosea is the word of God because the prophet says so, how can it possibly follow that Genesis also is the word of God? And if you read in Exodus that the Lord told Moses to write certain things in a book, how do you know that, in a fashion which was extremely common in the east, this is not merely a much later writer getting prestige for his book by ascribing it to Moses and divine inspiration?

No assurances by any writer that he is giving you the word of God can be the basis of a belief, and even if you accept those assurances, they apply only to his own work. People used to appeal to prophecies in the Old Testament which were later verified, but what we now know about the compilation of the Old Testament makes this argument of no value. They are either wrong translations, as when the word of Jeremiah "a young woman shall conceive" is translated "virgin shall conceive" (which all Hebrew authorities declare to be wrong) or prophecies after the event (later interpolations) or vague statements which are arbitrarily made to refer to Jesus. But let us leave this question until later.

What I want to make clear here is a point that everybody will admit, that even if you take these prophecies literally and the assurance of the prophets that they speak in the name of the Lord, it would not follow that the prophecies contain the word of God. Nothing would follow about the Pentateuch, for instance.

But it is by such books as Genesis that heretics are judged, not by the prophecies. The moral passages of the Old Testament are admitted by us all, and anybody

may say that they are inspired. But no dogma whatever rests on those moral passages. The catholic creeds, protestant articles and confessions are without exception based upon the anti-scientific statements of the Old and New Testaments. The morality of the Bible has nothing to do with the doctrinal standards of the churches.

Nothing in the Bible and nothing outside the Bible can prove that it is the word of God. There never was a religious claim more devoid of serious argument in its favor than the claim, which has shamed America by its effects on education, that the statements in Genesis are the word of God. The whole belief rests on nothing but a tradition, and that tradition has not the least evidential value.

At a certain date in Jewish history the priests told the people that the book which they produced was the word or the law of the Lord. You may remember that to confirm their own word the priests, in II Kings, XXII, 14, consulted a witch and left the last word with her. This book of the law, whatever it was (which we will consider later) was coupled with the writings of the few prophets who had appeared to that time (622 B. C.) and henceforth the Jewish people had "the word of God."

It is this belief, of very equivocal origin, as we shall see, that another body of priests about the year 500 extended to the whole body of old and new writings which they put together. It is this feeble tradition, and this alone, which can be invoked by bishops in modern America when they put me through an ignominious ceremony because I refused literally to accept doctrines the only authority of which is that they are supposed to be contained in the word of God.

No, my brother bishops, you had by no means

finished with me when you closed my lips in Cleveland and New Orleans and made me listen to your heavy censures. The church shall be reformed and readjusted to the great truths we have discovered, whether or not you shrink from the mighty task. And the first condition of liberty is to interpret our anti-scientific doctrines symbolically, so as to avoid this mischievous and undignified conflict with the learning of our time, is that we shall take a candid view of the Bible as it is luminously explained to us by modern biblical scholarship.

We must not even be satisfied with the modernist shibboleth, that the Old Testament is human when it teaches science and history but inspired when it teaches religious and moral truth.

This modernism would have been denounced as wicked heresy by the Nicene fathers and Reformation doctors from whom the churches have inherited the supernaturalistic doctrines which have constituted Christian orthodoxy through all the ages, even to this day.

The modernists know well that the chief "religious truths" which the orthodox find in the Old Testament are the creation of the world and man, the fall of Adam and Eve and the original curse, in Genesis, since these are the grounds of official Christian teaching more plainly than any other part of the Old Testament. Yet the modernists say that they are free to reject, and they do generally reject, these statements of Genesis. Let us begin with a plain and honest principle. There is no ground except a late and priest-made Jewish tradition for the belief that Genesis is the word of God.

### III

Most of my heresies are supposed to be sins against

the New Testament, which confirms my statements that the only important parts of the Old Testament in a doctrinal sense are in a book which does not claim to be the word of God and is, as we see with increasing clearness, very obviously not. But from the point of view of this introductory chapter there is very little to be said about the New Testament. It not only does not profess to be the word of God, but on the contrary it very plainly professes to be the word of man. At first sight it may seem strange to some to say that the part of the Bible which bears nearly the whole structure of Christian doctrine does not even claim to be "God's word written," but the point is easily seen to be true.

One has only to reflect that it is one thing for a writer to claim that he is correctly reporting the words publicly uttered by Jesus, whom he believes to be God, and quite another thing to claim that he is writing in the name of God or under inspiration. But no one, surely, doubts that this is the character of the gospels.

Luke opens his gospel with a plain statement that he and other writers of the gospels claim no inspiration whatever. Many men, he says, have written accounts of the sayings and actions of Jesus and as some of them are not accurate, he is going to replace them with a correct account.

Nothing could be further from the idea of inspiration which began in the church a century or two later and has been accepted in the Prayer Book. The Gospels are, and profess to be, the word of man. They profess to give what they, or their informants, heard with their ears and saw with their eyes. It is a legend of a much later date, of the time when the articles say, all the churches had gone astray, that God directed the

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evangelists to write. Luke very plainly says the opposite.

You may contend that the gospels may not be, in the doctrinal sense, the word of God, but they contain the word of God: that is to say, the words of Jesus. But there is all the difference in the world between these two things. You have the words and deeds of Jesus only on the authority of a man, and you have to find out what that authority is worth before you can accept the record and say that Jesus was divine. I tried to do this and reached the conclusion the record is worth nothing. We examine that question thoroughly in later chapters. For the moment let us add this fact to the preceding. The gospels do not claim to be the word of God, and the late tradition that they were inspired is contrary to the words of Luke, the only writer who tells us why he wrote.

The epistles also do not claim to be the word of God. We need consider only the epistles of Paul. His personality and human purpose are clear in every line. The churches are full of dissensions, and some take the word of Paul, some of Peter. Paul is, of course, a mystic and since he had never heard Jesus and could not say that he learned the truth from the other apostles, because he differed from them, he has to appeal to a vision or revelation. In other words, a small part of what he says is supposed to have been revealed to him, but the other apostles deny it. However that may be, the epistles, he very plainly tells us, are his own words—his own account of what he believes was revealed to him. Like the gospel-writers, he is reporting what Jesus taught. Neither he nor any other epistle-writer claims that his word is the word of God.

The book of Acts is just as clearly as the historical

books of the Old Testament the word of man (or, as we shall see, men). It is a human record, humanly written, without the least pretense of inspiration. As to the final book, Revelation, we had better leave that weird and very symbolical writing for a later chapter. The writer claims it is true, that visions were vouchsafed to him, but we must remember that we have, not the word of God, but only his own word for that, and it is the usual custom of mystic writers. How would any man in the world set out to prove that the writer of the book really had glimpses of another world and did not, like St. Teresa or Swedenborg, merely imagine it? Modern biblical scholarship, as we shall see, gives us a more reasonable theory of the book. In any case, it is so far from being a basis of doctrine that many of the visions and prophecies have had to be recognized as falsified by the facts. The book is of no importance to us.

Therefore we must conclude that the orthodox idea of the Bible as the word of God simply rests on a confusion of ideas and a very feeble and worthless late tradition. A hundred years ago biblical scholarship was torn by a passionate controversy as to whether the Bible was inspired in every verse, and what inspiration meant, and even whether the writer was left at least the choice of words and expressions. All that is, in serious scholarship, as dead as disputes about the deluge and the confusion of tongues. The only question is now whether the Bible is inspired in parts in the same sense as a particular fine hymn is inspired.

But there is no profit in these modernist plays on the old words. Let us have plain English. Are the bishops of the Anglo American Church going to tell the world that they agree with the Rev. Dr. Riley that the

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Bible is inspired, or is God's word. in such a sense that even the first chapter of Genesis is a rigid standard of doctrine? If not, why did they select as heretical my denial of creation? And, above all, how can they bid me give literal adhesion to the doctrines of creation and original sin in the formularies which are based only on Genesis? Let us have an end of this shilly-shallying and ask serious scholars what they now make of this collection of books which we call the Bible.



THE MISTAKES  
OF MOSES

**M**OREOVER we must know that God the Father is the first Person in Trinity, and Father of His only begotten Son, the second Person in Trinity: and that He did beget Him of His own substance by eternal generation, that is to say, by generation that never had beginning.

And I believe also and profess, that all and singular the words and sayings of this God the Father (be they laws, precepts, promises, prophecies, or threatenings), and all that ever was spoken of Him or by Him in the whole body and Canon of the New and the Old Testament, is most certainly true, and of such infallible verity and truth, that the same cannot be altered or convelled by any contrary opinion, power, or authority.

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scripture we do understand those Canonical Books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church.—The Doctrine of the Church of England.

## CHAPTER II

### THE MISTAKES OF MOSES

Nearly seventy years ago Bishop Colenso, of the English Church, set the theological world aflame by a work in which he proved that the books of the Pentateuch were so full of errors that they could not possibly be the word of God or even the writings of Moses. What is called the science of biblical criticism was by this time well known to scholars and divines, but the general religious public knew so little about it that there were three hundred replies to Colenso in England alone.

At that time the evolution of life was not more than a theory held by a few scientific men, for Darwin's book, *The Origin of Species*, had been published only three years earlier, but astronomers were already in great part accepting the evolution of our solar system and of the universe. Some of the most distinguished geologists were maintaining that the earth had been gradually formed during millions of years. Already it was proved by flint implements that man was at least tens of thousands of years old; and, from several view-points of science, it was seen that there had never been a confusion of tongues or a universal deluge.

On the other hand, as Colenso and his friends could point out, there is not a word in *Genesis* to suggest that Moses wrote it or God inspired it, and even the later books of the Pentateuch suggested rather the opposite. Oriental writers are not accustomed to writing in the third person, as Moses must have done if he had written any part of the Pentateuch. There was nothing but an ancient Jewish tradition, which no man could prove to have existed until many centuries after the

time of Moses, to support the orthodox belief.

But the vigor of the language of orthodox believers is always at its best when the evidence is feeblest, and the majority even of theologians vowed that they would never surrender the belief that the statements of Genesis about the origin of the earth and man and early history were revealed to Moses; which, with singular modesty, Moses had never said.

Yet at the 1930 session of the Lambeth Conference of three hundred and seven bishops, representing every branch of the Anglican Communion of National Churches it was officially declared that, where there is a conflict between Genesis and science as to the origin of the world, we are free to follow science. In this declaration we have the fulfillment of the prophesy of an illustrious contemporary of Colenso, Professor John Tyndall, a renowned Victorian mathematician and physicist who violently shook the orthodox world with this assertion: We claim, and we will wrest from theology, the whole domain of cosmological theory.

Science marched inexorably on, and within another twenty years what Ingersoll playfully called the mistakes of Moses were in large part definitely proved. On the one hand science worked out and proved so completely the evolution of the solar system and the earth and its living inhabitants that the last scientific doubters were convinced. As no one is condemned to-day in the Anglo American Church for believing in evolution, we will not linger over this. In the second volume I have pointed out the broader effect of the truth of evolution on the belief in a personal God and human immortality with the result that if the universe in general and terrestrial life in particular were evolved, the Christian doctrines of the being and doings

of God and of the origin, history and destiny of man must be abandoned eventually by all, as they now are by every man of science or scientific philosopher.

It is hardly necessary to say here that the few half-hearted attempts that are still made to show that the first chapter of Genesis, if understood in an evolutionary sense, harmonises with the teaching of science are entirely unsuccessful and can be entertained only by people who do not know science.

It is sheer waste of time to try to put any scientific meaning into the statements that the firmament and even light were created before the sun and moon, and that the firmament divided the waters which were above it from the waters on the earth. It is just as bad to say that vegetation could in any sense exist on earth before there was a sun, or that the first plants were grasses, seed-bearing plants and fruit-bearing trees, which took vast periods of time to develop.

The record in the first chapter of Genesis becomes fantastic the moment you try to represent it as a record of facts, and it has little value as poetry.

The only harmony with science is that the earth was created before the plants which it was to bear; and the plants were created before the animals which were to feed on them. If any man thinks that could not be known without a revelation he is very simple-minded.

But in the meantime, the science of archaeology had made rapid progress, and the stories of Genesis began to appear in a new light. From the mounds which enshrouded the remains of the once great cities of Mesopotamia the spade brought to light the literature of the ancient Assyrians and Babylonians, and as early as the year 1876 it was found that they had stories of creation and early history with a strong resemblance

in some details to those of the Hebrews. Although this ancient story was preserved on hard clay tablets, some of these, after being scattered in the ruins of palace-libraries and buried underground for more than two thousand years, were naturally missing or broken.

The Babylonian story, as it was originally put together, was an absurd long account of the origin of gods and the terrific conflicts they waged with each other. It spoke of the making of the heavens (or firmament) and the earth, but then the greater part of a tablet or section of the story was missing. However, within the last fifty years tens of thousands of these hard clay tablets have been found, and some of them fill the gaps in the Babylonian story of creation.

Since, as I said, the early chapters of Genesis have a particular significance as the basis of Christian doctrines, we may begin our study of the Bible with a short account of these discoveries. Any man who now insists that these chapters contain revelations of what actually happened, and can therefore be sound foundations of religious doctrines, must ignore the teaching of science, history, philosophy and sociology.

## I

The historian, naturally, says nothing about Genesis. It is his business to construct out of the material provided by the archaeologist a continuous account of the Babylonians and Assyrians and not to compare it with what the Bible says. But the historian has to describe for us the literature of these ancient peoples as well as their customs and their wars, and in doing this he has to tell us about a long poem which he calls, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Most of it is rhapsodical nonsense about the gods, but at one point

it becomes interesting. In the beginning, it says, there were two beings, and from one of these came the gods. The other was a terrible ogre or dragon called Tiamat, a symbol of chaos and all that is ugly and disorderly.

The point of interest is when the gods decide to put this Tiamat (it is nearly the same word as the Hebrew word which is translated "the deep" in the second verse of Genesis and obviously means chaos or a chaotic mixture of land and water) in order. They send the shining God, Marduk, to fight Tiamat, so that in the Babylonian story it was easy to have light before the sun was made. From the monster's body, Marduk, slitting it in halves, made the plain of the earth and the arching firmament above it. "Half of her," says the poem, "he set up and made the heavens as a canopy." To the Babylonians, of course, the sky was a very real and solid structure. It had to support the sun, moon and stars, and it rested on a circular range of mountains which entirely surrounded the level circular plain of the earth.

The Babylonian poem goes on to say that the God who was fixing up the universe made this solid firmament divide the waters into upper and lower. They knew nothing of evaporation from the seas, and it was only by supposing that there were great reservoirs in the sky that they could explain the tropical rains that fell in certain seasons. Next the God made the stars, the sun and the moon and set them in the firmament. The stars are thrown in rather casually because the Babylonian priest-astronomers believed that they were very small luminous bodies fixed in the canopy at no great height above the earth. They thought that the birds might fly to them. The moon was supposed to be about as large as the earth, and it was even

more important in early Babylonian religion.

Our copies of the long poem here become defective, as nearly the whole of the fifth tablet or book is missing. But in the sixth book we have the God addressed as the creator of grains and plants and the maker of man. Moreover, we have found short accounts of creation which give the making of plants, animals and men. It is agreed that representations of scenes in this epic go back to nearly 2000 B. C., and that the Babylonians among whom we find it at that date had adopted it from a more ancient people, the Sumerians, who founded civilization in Mesopotamia.

The only writer who is learned in these ancient tongues and refuses to agree that the story in the first chapter of Genesis is directly or indirectly borrowed from the Babylonian epic is Mr. A. T. Clay ("The Origin of Biblical Traditions," 1923). But what Mr. Clay says gives no encouragement whatever to the orthodox. He simply says that the Hebrews, as well as the Babylonians, borrowed the stories from another people, the Arameans of Syria. He admits that nobody agrees with him, and more recent exploration in Mesopotamia, which I described in an earlier book, shows decisively that the oldest civilization in that part of the world was that of the Sumerians. It is an ancient chant of theirs, going back certainly more than four thousand years ago, that has been expanded in this Babylonian poem or epic.

As Professor Langdon says in the preface to his translation of it, we recognize in it "a solar myth, intimately connected with the spring sun." "The chief significance of the epic and of the ritual of the spring equinox," he says again, "consisted in the return of the sun from the regions of winter darkness." It is, in



other words, a combination of the solar myth with a series of simple guesses at the way in which nature came into existence.

Here, then, is the situation. One of the oldest civilized peoples on the earth, the Sumerians, had a legend that one of the gods made the heavens and the earth, and the procedure was that he put in order some terrible chaotic thing (in the Babylonian language Tiamat, in the Hebrew Tehom) and formed the solid sky (supporting the waters above it) and the plain of the earth out of it. He separated the land from the water, made the sun and moon and stars, and then made the plants, the animals and man. Such was the universal belief about the origin of things in the great cities that dotted the plains of Mesopotamia in the third millenium before Christ.

At that time, admittedly, there was no Hebrew people. If we accept the Bible story, and there is no reason why we should not accept it to this extent, as a tribal tradition, the family or group from which the Hebrew nation afterwards developed was about the year 2000 B. C. living in or near Ur, one of the greatest of the Sumerian cities. As no serious person now believes in the long ages of the patriarchs, the only definite human meaning we can give to the story is that, like so many other groups of the wandering Arabs, this small ancestral group moved slowly, expanding as time went on, from eastern Mesopotamia to Syria and settled there.

Over the entire region from Ur to Syria these ancestors of the Hebrews would be familiar with the Sumerian story of creation. The entire region was influenced by Sumerian culture or by, as they would say, the wisdom of the people who had built such

marvellous cities and temples in Mesopotamia. Hence, if some centuries later, we find the Hebrews in possession of this creation-story, we cannot have the slightest hesitation in recognizing its origin. If it were merely a story of God creating the heavens and the earth, then the plants, next the animals, and finally man, we might think it possible that a people would independently come to imagine it; though, since the story already existed in their region, even this supposition is quite superfluous.

But when we see that the Hebrew and Sumerian stories agree in such peculiarities as the existence of a primeval, and apparently eternal, watery waste (chaos or the deep) and the placing of vast reservoirs of rain water above a solid firmament, and when we recall that the Hebrew writer himself says not a word about any revelation made to him and gives not the least sign that he regards the story as peculiar to the Hebrews, it is beyond all reason and common sense to hesitate, in recognizing the truth of the theory, that the first chapter of Genesis is the creation story taken from the ancient Sumerian epic.

It has always been recognized that there are details in the Genesis story that suggest that it was not directly borrowed from the Babylonians. Here, no doubt, we can recognize the work of the Arameans. Their chief city, Damascus, would modify the culture it borrowed from the higher civilization of Mesopotamia, especially as it has different gods and must ascribe the creation to the Syrian gods. From Damascus the modified story would spread all over Syria and what is now called Palestine, and the Hebrews, when they began to be civilized, would adopt it, just as they

were always adopting even the gods of the Canaanites and Phoenicians.

In what form the Hebrews held the story originally we do not know. The oldest writer that we can recognize in the composite first chapter of Genesis as we have it to-day belongs to the middle of the ninth century, when Jehovah was officially fixed as the national God. So the work of creation was attributed to Jehovah, and all the polytheism of the original poem had disappeared.

Thus by one of the strange chances of history the gifted and obscure people whom we recognize in the very dawn of history, the Sumerians, were enabled to lodge their primitive hymn in the literature of the world and get it accepted as literal truth for nearly two thousand years by Europe and its American extension.

What an irony that some ten million Americans should in the twentieth century reject and despise the crowning achievement of modern science in the name of verses which Sumerian priests chanted in the dim temples of Ur, and Syrian priests chanted in the temples of Damascus, four or five thousand years ago! What a stigma to a church which considers itself high in culture that it should demand a literal adhesion to formularies that are in part based upon this ancient solar myth and try, condemn and punish one of its bishops for not yielding to this demand.

But the bishops may want to remind me that there is one luminous truth in the Hebrew story that is not found in the Sumerian: the doctrine of creation in the literal sense. The Babylonians had held that the chaotic mixture of elements which they personified as the monster Tiamat was eternal, older even than the gods themselves. The Hebrew writer, we are told, passed

leagues beyond them all in declaring that God alone, the one God, was eternal, and of such mighty power that he made everything out of nothing.

But did the Hebrew writer say this? I pointed out in the second volume that what theologians call the sublime conception of creation out of nothing seemed to every one of the great Greek thinkers and seems to all the leaders of science to-day to be an utter absurdity. We might let this ancient Hebrew scribe have the credit of it. But in point of fact he does not say that God made the material of the universe out of nothing. The word "created" is Latin, and it is only Christian theology that has given it the meaning of "making out of nothing." You will notice that in the first two chapters of Genesis both the words "created" and "made" are used, and there are two different words in the Hebrew text. But the words are used indiscriminately. God is said to have "made" the sun and moon and "created" the whales. There is no distinction of meaning.

The plain reading of the first verse, as Hebrew scholars point out, is: Once upon a time God made the heavens and the earth. And the second verse implies that the chaos was eternal while the seventh verse says that he did not make the heavens until afterwards. It is simply a story of the shaping of a primitive chaos into a toy universe: a level plain, the earth, with a solid dome and great reservoirs of rain water above it. The story ought to have been relegated to the category of ancient folk-lore three thousand years ago. Some of the Babylonian tablets discovered by the Philadelphia Exploration Expedition show that the more learned Babylonians so regarded it and held a theory of evolution, especially of the evolution of man.

## II

It ought not to be necessary in the fourth decade of the twentieth century to discuss the story of early man and the Hebrew people as it is told in the remaining chapters of Genesis. Bishops wonder why even our children are falling away from the Christian faith in modern times, yet they continue year by year to impose on them stories from Genesis, as serious historical fact, at which the whole educated world smiles. It is a crime and disgrace to impose them even upon the simplicity of the most backward colored folk in the south.

The fundamentalists who still dominate the churches expect men educated for the ministry to profess to believe literally in such doctrines as the garden of Eden; the cursing of the race because a specimen of some fruit was plucked from a forbidden tree and eaten; the existence of a race of giants in the time, and apparently within the territory of the ancient Babylonians; the deluge and the tower of Babel. This explains why our educated people begin to wonder whether the atmosphere of a church does not really stupefy the judgment.

When such fictions of the Bible are represented as constituting a real historical chronicle which was specially revealed to Hebrew prophets, no one can wonder that the breach widens between the Christian body and the modern world.

When Christian doctrines like original sin and atonement seek their justification in this tissue of childlike primitive fairy-tales, the whole structure is surely doomed, unless the bishops boldly say that the doctrines may be taken symbolically and that Genesis no more binds us than do the legends of the Iroquois.

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There is no longer any ground for hesitation, since biblical scholarship and archaeology have now given us a complete explanation of the strange narrative, and science has entirely destroyed the sophistry with which it was defended in the nineteenth century. One reads sometimes in apologetic writers that the trouble was caused by the elder, learned and influential Bishop Lightfoot, who declared that Genesis located the beginning of the world at nine a. m. on October 23rd in the year 4004 B. C.

Lightfoot was quite right in saying that Genesis assigns the beginning of history, or the appearance of Adam and Eve, to that year. A precise chronology from the creation of Adam to Noah is given in the fifth chapter. It is continued as far as Abraham in the eleventh chapter, and as far as Moses in later chapters. Genesis certainly restricts the whole life of man on earth to about four thousand years before Christ, six thousand to date.

But this is a trifle in comparison with the version of human history which it gives. Compare with it the modern science version of prehistoric events and of the founding of civilization. Setting aside every speculation about the origin of man, we have flint implements and now (in the recently discovered Peking man) human remains which, according to some of the highest authorities, go back to about a million years ago. Make every allowance you like for differences of opinion, but we still have human remains and vast quantities of stone implements covering the story of the race for at least the last half million years.

The writer of Genesis had not the slightest idea of the truth about early man. Yet every doctrine of the Christian Bible, Catholic Creeds, Protestant Confessions

of Faith and Anglican Prayer Book concerning the origin, history and destiny of man ultimately rests upon his representations. The teaching of science and of scientific history utterly discredits his story, and renders it impossible for any man who knows this teaching to believe literally in the fall of Adam, the doom of the race to hell and its redemption to heaven.

Every branch of scholarship that is directly or indirectly concerned with this record of Genesis tells a consistent story. The generations of men to the time of Noah given in Genesis are pointless myths for the most part with almost no relation to early history as we now know it. But with Noah we again come to familiar ground. The story of the flood is as obviously borrowed from the Babylonian epic as is the story of creation.

Judge for yourself. The recent explorations in Ur have taught us the interesting fact that early Sumerian chronology was based upon a great flood and counted events as happening so many years after the flood. Scholars conclude that there must actually have been at some early date an inundation in Mesopotamia so terrible as to stand out for centuries as a landmark in history, though it was confined to Mesopotamia, since the Egyptians took no account of such an historical flood.

However that may be the semi-sacred epic, from which I have already quoted the story of creation, gives at a later stage an account of a flood so closely identical with that of Genesis that the origin of the latter is certain. Readers of G. A. Barton's *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916) or any good work on Assyrian literature can make the comparison for themselves.

The Sumerian story is that a time came when the god

Ea was so angry at the sins of men that he decided to destroy the race; and, as this divinity is one of the very oldest deities of Mesopotamia, this fact would of itself suffice to show the vast antiquity of the story. But there was one just man, Ut-Napishtim, and Ea warned him to build a large boat in which he and his family and pairs of all the animals could be preserved. Then the god let loose the great reservoirs of water that were above the firmament and destroyed every other living thing. We may at least plead for the ancient Babylonians that they knew of only a limited number of species of animals, not the million species that we know to-day, that they regarded the earth as a flat plain of limited size encircled by a range of mountains, that they knew of no mountains higher than the Persian hills except the imaginary mountains that supported the firmament and that they believed there were unlimited supplies of water above the solid sky. We do not, of course, know that educated Babylonians believed the story, for these things were not dogmas of their religion, but the story was not violently opposed to their idea of the universe.

For any man to repeat the story of the flood seriously in modern times, or to refer us, as a living standard of belief, to a Prayer Book which solemnly endorses such legends, is an outrage. Semi-modernist speculation to the effect that the flood may have been only partial is ridiculous. The Bible expressly says the contrary. We are therefore asked to believe that at a time when, as we now know, great civilizations existed in Crete, Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia, India and China, a man and his sons built a boat that would carry a million animals and their food for six months—collected from the ends of the earth, tropical and arctic, that rain



fell until the waters were, all round our globe, more than four miles deep.

The vanguard of the world did not wonder much even as long ago as 1863 that Colenso was a disbeliever in many such representations of the Bible, and it did not wonder at all recently, 1925, two generations later, that I avowed disbelief in all such representations not only of the Bible but also of both the Catholic Creeds and the Prayer Book, if they must be interpreted literally. But the leaders of the world in the way to scientific culture and civilization who had meantime grown immensely in number and influence, were amazed and dazed because of my trial, condemnation and punishment. I want to be restored to my rightful place in the House of Bishops, but not half so much on my own account as upon that of my dear brethren. By restoring me they would restore themselves, and they are in far greater need of restoration than I am.

One who is abreast with the times would not think it possible for any normal man to believe the supernaturalism of Christian orthodoxy to-day. Yet advantage is taken of our scandalous neglect of the education of the workers to impose this belief on ten or twenty millions of them, and even the bishops of the Episcopal church demand of me a literal acceptance of old formularies that endorse the legends of the Bible, Creeds and Prayer Book.

To such absurdities are men driven by their reluctance to meet new truth frankly. We must not even open our eyes to the plain lesson of Babylonian literature. Let me put side by side some verses of the Sumerian epic about Ut-Napishtim in his boat and verses of the eighth chapter of Genesis:

## Ut-Napishtim

I brought out a dove, and let her go free. The dove flew away and came back; because she had no place to alight on, she came back. I brought out a swallow and let her go free. The swallow flew away and came back; because she had no place to alight on, she came back. I brought out a raven and let her go free. The raven flew away; she saw the sinking waters. She ate, she pecked in the ground, she croaked, and she came not back.

## Noah

And it came to pass at the end of forty days that Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made, and he sent forth a raven, which went forth to and fro, until the waters were dried up from off the earth. Also he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the ground. But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot . . . And again he sent forth the dove out of the ark. And the dove came into him in the evening, and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf plucked off.

Does anybody seriously ask us to believe, because of the trifling differences between these two extraordinary narratives, that there is no connection between them? Are we to suppose that all over the region which the ancestors of the Hebrews had traversed men had believed for two or three thousand years in this legend of a punitive flood, a boat with one family and the animals, and even the sending out of birds, yet the Hebrews learned it, like the creation of the world, by a revelation? These facts are concealed from the people and even from uninvestigating theological students.

In the Babylonian epic Ut-Napishtim and his wife were, when they came out of their boat, put in charge of the garden of the gods, where they lived in perpetual idleness and bliss and immunity from disease. There was one tree the fruit of which they were forbidden to eat, but the devil tempted them, and they fell. They and all their descendants were punished by expulsion from the garden and the beginning of an era of pain and labor. Again, are we seriously asked to believe that because the Hebrew writer (who in any case is not

supposed to have borrowed directly from Babylon) put his paradise or garden before the flood instead of after it, we must regard his story as revealed history?

Why, even the ancient peoples, with their scanty and wrong ideas of science and history, did not consider themselves bound to believe these stories. In the New York Times of July 12th, 1925, Dr. Chiera, Professor of Assyriology of the University of Pennsylvania, which has for years maintained a company of explorers in Mesopotamia, told how copies of the Sumerian epic of about the year 2000 B. C. were found in the ruins of Nippur, but in the same library were found other tablets which described the first men as walking "with the four limbs" and eating grass; in other words, as evolved from lower animals. Four thousand years later certain states of enlightened America declare that evolution is heresy and everybody must respect the more ancient Sumerian story!

### III

Such absurdities must be expected when men take up an attitude of defiance in the face of the united experts on any branch of modern knowledge, and in this case those who speak of Genesis as the word of God defy the experts of a dozen branches of knowledge. They defy nearly the whole of modern culture. They spurn the astronomers, the wizards of modern science with their wonderful instruments, for the evolution of worlds is now a settled part of astronomy. They defy the geologists and run after tenth-rate teachers in Second Adventist colleges who say they have founded a "new geology," because all are not convinced of the evolution of life and of man. And now we have them defying the archaeologists, the historians who describe

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the real course of ancient history, and they even defy the more learned biblical experts.

For the story of the compilation of Genesis which is now offered to us solves every difficulty and removes every absurdity. Literary experts, who work out their problems without any reference to religious matters, are now agreed that the alphabet was only developed, probably by the Phoenicians or the Syrians, about the year 1000 B. C., and therefore the Hebrews had no written language before that date. What we call Hebrew was then the common language of Palestine. They had, as we will see later, some national war-songs and chronicles, which were handed down orally, and no doubt they were already acquainted with these Sumerian legends. Between 1000 and 900 B. C. they then became civilized by learning the art of writing, and their songs and tradition began to be written down. Then about 850 B. C. some religious men wrote out the legend of creation, Eden, and deluge, in terms of the Hebrew religion, with a sketch of history from Noah to Joshua.

About a century later another writer, in northern Palestine, wrote a slightly different version. Even in the English Bible one sees clearly how a second version of creation begins at the fourth verse of the second chapter of Genesis, and one notices how the first writer speaks of God and the second of the Lord God. In the Hebrew the difference of language is quite marked. But each of these accounts became popular in its own region, and when the northern kingdom fell in the year 722 B. C., the southern kingdom inherited its literature. Neither document could be suppressed without giving offense, and so the two were combined but unskillfully with frequent duplications and this is how

the Hebrews came to possess a crude priest-made history from the day of creation to the seventh century.

We shall see in the next chapter how this slender early history was rewritten, falsified and enormously expanded with fictitious narratives nearly a thousand years after the supposed time of Moses. Here I want to point out a further debt to Babylonia. It goes without saying that we have another borrowing in the legend of Babel. Bab-El means the Gate of God, or gateway to the heavens, and it plainly refers to one of the lofty Babylonian temple-towers some of which rose to a height of four hundred feet. The legend of the confusion of tongues could only be entertained in a world which did not know, as we do, how the languages of the earth form related families and indicate an age-long evolution.

But a much more important debt is the older part of what is called the Mosaic Law. We may ignore the Ten Commandments, which are quite foolishly represented as a revelation, seeing that there were few savage nations that had not laws against murder, theft and adultery. The real primitive code of the Hebrews begins in Exodus XX, 22 and, with some interpolations, runs to XXIII, 19. This code is as plainly based upon Babylonian law as the story of the flood is based upon the Sumerian poem, though in both cases we have variations that we expect to find when we know how they passed through other civilizations before reaching the Hebrews.

In the third volume of this series I explained that in the year 1901 the archaeologists found a complete copy of the Babylonian code of law of about 2000 B. C. inscribed on a stone column, and they were astonished at the thoroughness with which it sought to apply

the principles of justice. It even laid down a legal wage for every class of worker in Babylonia. The so-called Mosaic code, which had until recent times been regarded as the highest of the ancient world, falls short in justice of the Babylonian code which it generally follows. Each code deals with the free man, the slave and the "stranger," or between the free and the slave in legal rights. The Babylonian law is much more just to the stranger than is the Mosaic.

In both codes a native may become a slave, generally for debt, but while the Mosaic code has been praised for limiting the period of slavery to six years, the Babylonian code limits it to three, and the later alteration of the Hebrew law greatly extended the period. The Babylonian code further declared that children were free if at least one parent was free. In Babylon a son who struck his father lost his hand: in Judea he was put to death. Generally the clauses of Exodus XXII followed the Babylonian code so closely that there cannot be the least doubt that the legislator has in effect copied the Hammurabi code, and in very many cases the Hebrew falls below the Babylonian standard.

In both the Mosaic and the Hammurabi codes the owner of an ox that kills a man is acquitted, but in Exodus the ox is regarded as accursed; it must be stoned and no one shall eat its flesh. But in the Mosaic if the owner knew that the ox was vicious he is put to death, or must ransom his life from the dead man's relatives at whatever price they fix: whereas, in the Hammurabi code a reasonable fine is imposed on him and it is reduced if the owner of the ox is a slave. Where crude old laws, surviving from barbaric days, are included in King Hammurabi's code, the Hebrew, a thousand years later, faithfully reproduces them.

Thus the law of "eye for eye, tooth for tooth," which has always shocked commentators on Exodus, is taken bodily from the Babylonian code.

On the one hand, clauses of the Babylonian code in which the rights of woman are scrupulously respected are omitted by the Hebrew legislator; who, on the other hand, includes laws for the defense of the cult and the priests that are not in the Babylonian law.

This "Book of the Covenant," which is the oldest and original part of the Mosaic law, has always seemed to those who fancy they can test the qualities of the Bible by reading it to bear every mark of a law dictated, as it professes to be, by God to Moses. Its crudities were explained away on the ground that it was accommodated to the primitive condition of the Hebrews. Its insistence on justice was held to be a moral revelation in a benighted world.

Well, any person can now compare those chapters of Exodus (XXI to XXIII) with one of the many English translations of the Code of King Hammurabi of Babylon, who lived ages before even the supposed time of Moses. and he cannot have a shadow of a doubt that the Hebrew laws are based upon the Babylonian, or at least some other code that had copied the Babylonian. The "word of God unto Moses" is by one single archaeological discovery converted into the word of King Hammurabi of Babylon, just as the supposed revelations to Moses about creation and the early history of man become fragments of a Sumerian sacred romance.

The writer of Exodus constantly represents that God spoke to Moses and directed Moses to do so and so, but this is a familiar style of oriental writers. Hammurabi himself, though a very prosy administrator of

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a kingdom, and a legislator who takes credit for his own laws instead of ascribing them to a God, invokes his gods in a somewhat similar manner at the end of his code. Bel and Merodach (Marduk) have appointed him to be "the Shepherd of Salvation" (the first good Shepherd) to his people. Zamama and Ishtar have given him "mighty weapons" to do his work. Nowhere in the Pentateuch does the actual writer assert that he is giving the word of God or that he received any information by revelation or inspiration.

And now we have the real story of that strange compilation of impossible myths, legendary history, genuine tribal traditions and ancient laws beautifully explained by the combined labors of archaeologists and Hebrew scholars. What sense, what dignity, is there in resisting or evading this modern knowledge and making vague appeals against it to medieval formularies and baseless Jewish traditions.

One would think that the bishops are anxious to keep the doors and windows of the church sealed and curtained against the light of the new knowledge that floods our age, and the moment a man asks, as I asked, that the curtains be torn down and the doors and windows flung open, he is taken into the ancient crypt for torture and official execution. No wonder that many recall the ancient saying: "Whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad." But the bishops merely play for time and put off the readjustment to another generation. It is a profound error, and we must spread the light of knowledge even to the workers from whom it is at present so unjustly withheld.



THE TIMES OF DAVID  
AND SOLOMON

**I**N this sixth article three things be specially to be noted and remembered. First, that in the person of Jesus Christ there was and is conjoined and united together inseparably both the nature of God and the nature of Man. And that by reason of this indissoluble unity of these two natures, Holy Scripture useth sometimes to attribute and give unto the same person of Christ those things which do appertain unto His humanity, although the same cannot be verified in Him, as touching His Godhead. And therefore, although Christ, as touching His Godhead, was ever present in heaven, and was ever equal in glory with His Father; yet forasmuch as concerning His Manhood He was never in heaven, nor did never sit there endued with such power and glory, before this His ascension, therefore it is said truly in this Creed, that Christ ascended into heaven, and that Almighty God the Father did, at His said coming thither, set Him there upon His right hand.—  
The Doctrine of the Church of England.

## CHAPTER III

### THE TIMES OF DAVID AND SOLOMON

It is usual in a modern work on the Bible to tell the story of the real successive order of appearance of such literature as the ancient Hebrews possessed. The authors tell us how some of the Hebrews learned to write between 1000 or 900 B. C., and how in the course of the next century or two the popular stories of creation and early man, the tribal traditions about earlier patriarchs, the folk-lore and the early law were written in very small books in the new script that had come into use all over Palestine (we have a Moabite inscription in it) and is now called the Hebrew language. This story of the rise of the Hebrew literature has very little correspondence with the Old Testament as it is used in the churches.

You may take the story as it is presented by a very conservative divine like Dr. S. R. Driver ("An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament") or, still better, in Professor J. A. Bower's "Literature of the Old Testament" (1922). These are clerical biblical scholars who are very far removed from heresy or radicalism.

I must say, in fact, that Professor Bower (of the Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University) sometimes amuses me with his strained efforts to be polite to the writers of the Old Testament. He wants us to think (we are just as much entitled to judge this as the learned professor) that Genesis is, apart from the *early legends which he admits to have been borrowed from Babylon*, a "superb History" to which no other civilization could furnish a parallel. But these strange and indeed astonishing amiabilities give us confidence

that biblical scholars like Professor Bower are, when they do give us facts, scrupulously careful not to go beyond what is now established.

This story of the rise of Hebrew literature is, as I said, vastly different from what the actual order of the books in the Old Testament suggests. Its pieces, as we have them, were put together in the fifth century before Christ, and whole books of even its earlier part (a very large part of the Pentateuch) were written then.

As a literary study it is much more interesting to consider the Hebrew writings in their actual order of appearance, as these scholars do, but I have a different task. I am confronting the official teaching of the church, as put to me by the bishops at their trial of me and the beliefs, not of an intellectual minority but of the imperfectly educated millions from whom the revolutionary truth is concealed. Our scholars ignore this official and popular belief about the Bible, and I am simply telling here how their discoveries make an end of it as the Word of God and as a standard of belief for us and converts the Old Testament into a really interesting and quite intelligible book.

## I

In the preceding chapter I selected parts of Genesis and Exodus for a preliminary study. Those parts are the sections in which a reader of the Bible who has not been taught what modern scholars say is most apt to recognize a revelation of God to Moses.

Let me remind him again that the early chapters, especially the first two chapters, of Genesis which he is so convinced must be such a revelation do not profess to have any connection whatever with Moses.

Let me ask him to find out on what precise ground

those who are responsible for his education say that Moses wrote Genesis or the Pentateuch, and he will find that it all goes back to a Jewish belief that arose many centuries after the supposed days of Moses, who probably is not an historical personage. It was, in the ancient east, quite possible for any man at that time to ascribe his books to a popular hero, just as wisdom books were attributed to Solomon and Psalms to David.

However, I have now shown that there was no Hebrew language in which to write until centuries after Moses, and that the parts of Genesis and Exodus which are particularly claimed as revelations are the easiest to trace to their real source, the Babylonian civilization.

If this is clearly the character of the most important parts (the passages about the creation, fall and doom of man, without which Christian orthodoxy could not have come into being) of the earlier section of the Pentateuch, we need not linger long over the historical sketch which fills the remainder of Genesis after the story of Noah or Ut-Napishtim. In the earlier portion, before Abraham, it merely shows that the writer had not the slightest idea of the real history of the world as we now know it. Five great civilizations, those of Egypt, Crete, Babylonia, India and China had occupied the stage for millenia, and the writer knows nothing of their great achievements. At the most he has heard a very little about some of the nearer and inferior civilizations—the Hittites, the Arameans, the Philistines and the Assyrians. It is a sheer waste of time to read his lists of names and the fabulous ages he gives to men.

The real history, which is just a domestic history of the Hebrew people, seems to begin with Abraham. How much historical fact there may be in this no man

can tell, and one has to read it as simply the record of tribal traditions written down centuries after the events and very much adulterated by a later writer who was determined to make Jehovah play a great part in the story and to exalt him above the gods of the other nations.

Popular writers of the orthodox type occasionally hear that the historian or the archaeologist has discovered that some king or city mentioned in the story of Abraham really did exist, and they raise a cry of jubilation. They, of course, take no notice whatever of archaeologists and historians when they make discoveries that contradict the old-fashioned estimate of the Bible. All this is foolish. We all admit that the Hebrew writer who put together the first version of this early history drew upon the memory or tradition of the tribes and possibly on the knowledge of the more advanced peoples of Palestine. In this there would be a recollection of some real victory won in the days when the Hebrews were fighting their way into fringes of Palestine, and that the name of a king or city should be remembered here and there is not surprising. What surprises us is that anybody finds any importance in it.

That the history is very largely myth is seen at once in the name Abraham, which is said to mean "a father of many nations." It does not, as Hebrew scholars assure us. Part of the word (the "ra" which changes Abram, which means great father, into Abraham) seems to have no meaning. On the other hand, students of the Hebrew language, which changed a little from century to century like other languages, give us interesting evidence that some scraps at least of this part of the Bible is genuine native tradition. One such fragment, which they say is recognizable is the lamentation

of Lamech, Genesis IV. A more important piece is the song of Miriam, Exodus XV. Another old fragment is in Numbers, XXI, and the song of Deborah is still another. Some of the proverbs and riddles in later books and the blessings bestowed on their sons by some of the patriarchs are believed to be in the same way fragments preserved from old time by oral tradition and song—just as, let us say, the Scandinavians or the Irish handed down traditions in song for ages before they could write.

But how much, if any, real history there is in all this cannot be determined, and it hardly seems worth while to attempt it. The story of Noah, who is, as we saw, certainly a myth, is just as realistic as the others, and so style tells us nothing.

Some of the passages are so crude that there have always been misgivings about putting the Bible in the hands of children. It is more mischievous than ever to-day, for the modern child does not listen so reverently as children once did to stories of patriarchs wrestling with angels or giving them refreshments, of ladders reaching up to heaven and young ladies stealing the peculiar household gods of their parents.

Taking this section of Genesis as a whole, it is a collection of grotesque stories about the primitive development of the Hebrew people which has been touched up by a later priestly writer who wanted to show that the God, Jehovah, was the greatest of all gods and that he took an exceptional interest in the Hebrews and for some mysterious reason chose them out of all the peoples of the world and adopted them as his children. If the story were a reliable account of life in the pastoral stage of an oriental people, it would be interesting. Unfortunately we never know where

fact ends and fiction begins.

At last we come to the immortal story of the Hebrews in Egypt, and the biblical moralist says that finally we have reached firm ground. Alas, it shakes under our feet at every step. In the story of Joseph probably one of the best known and most frequently reproduced anecdotes is that of Potiphar's wife, and we now know positively that this is fiction. The ancient Egyptians were very fond of what we now call novels or short stories, and they often put some of these, with other books, in the tomb of a dead man, just as they put a child's toys with its mummy.

"Sinbad the Sailor" was one of these popular stories on the banks of the Nile ages before it got into the "Arabian Nights." But one of the most popular of all was a certain "Tale of Two Brothers," in which the wife of the elder tempts and then denounces the younger. It is clear that the writer of Genesis borrowed this story from Egypt and applied it to Joseph, just as he borrowed the Sumerian story of Ut-Napishtim and applied it to Noah or the Sumerian legend about the infancy of King Sargon and turned it into the story of Moses in the bulrushes.

The whole coloring of the Genesis story, in so far as it relates to the Egyptian court, is out of harmony with what we know to-day and some details are absurdly wrong. When, for instance, the king exalts Joseph, the officials who precede him in the streets are said (XLI, 43) to cry out to the people: Bow the knee! Now it has always been known to Hebrew scholars that in this expression the translators of the Hebrew text gave a fanciful translation of a word that they did not understand. Was it an Egyptian expression? Egyptologists did not know it, but we have it at last.



It is a Babylonian title of honor, and Moses is supposed to put this into the mouth of officials addressing an Egyptian crowd, a most absurd supposition.

It is to-day very doubtful, Egyptologists for the most part say, whether the Hebrews were ever in Egypt. The Egyptian remains are so complete that it seems impossible that such an event should not be recorded in them, yet not a single positive trace of it has ever been discovered. The only reasonable suggestion that is put before us to explain why the Hebrews started the tradition that their ancestors were once in Egypt is that, as they wandered in the desert, in the fashion of the Bedouins, some of them may have, in a time of weak government, entered the fringe of the kingdom and settled for a time in or near some of the frontier cities.

Not only Joseph, but Moses also, is relegated by many scholars to the realm of myth. This is not merely, as is often said, because of the air of magic and miracle that surrounds the whole story. The solid reason is that traditions or stories that are written down five hundred years after the supposed events, and by writers who, as we have just seen, represented fiction as actual fact in the life of the Jews, are no basis for historical records. We have no idea how many grains of historical fact there may be in this great heap of fictions, the Old Testament.

## II

These things matter very little except to the bishops who asked me to believe in a personal Jehovah because of the miracles recorded in Genesis and Exodus, and such men are out of touch with the spirit of modern times. The Jews started their legend to the effect

that they were chosen for special treatment by God at a time when they knew very little about the world and history. It is the kind of idea that one may expect to find in a half-civilized people constantly at war with other small and imperfectly civilized peoples and knowing nothing of the great civilizations. In the modern cultural atmosphere such an idea looks as strange as the late Sir A. C. Doyle's belief in fairies, while the evidence for it is weaker even than the evidence of modern spiritualism.

We can understand those masses of uneducated New York Jews, cut off by stubborn fences from all modern knowledge, still seriously discussing the dreams of Joseph, and the ten plagues of Egypt, the magic of Moses, and the parting of the waters of the Red Sea, but that modern Americans, trained in even primary schools, should take these things as standards of belief is almost unintelligible. They are told, of course, that we refuse to believe them because we say that miracles are impossible, so they take no notice of the opinions of even learned theologians. What we do say is that common sense forbids us to pin our faith to records of any events that are put together by unknown writers, and writers who place edification before accuracy, centuries after the events are supposed to have happened. There are plenty of miracles in, let us say, Livy's History of Rome, but no one in the world now believes them or believes that a great God, Jupiter (who, if gods exist and do anything for their votaries, did far more for the Romans than Jehovah ever did for the Jews) chose the Roman people above all others as they also claimed. Now we do not even know who wrote these Hebrew narratives. We do know that there was no Hebrew language to write in until centuries after

the supposed Exodus.

But behind the highly-colored story, a story further embellished by fraudulent priests of the fifth century, as we shall see, of a miraculous escape (with as much stolen property as they could carry) out of Egypt, a romantic wandering with all sorts of impossible adventures in the desert, and a supernatural victory over the Canaanites (whose harlots are spared for sheltering spies, while all other women and children are foully massacred at the command of Jehovah) we see a plausible story. All the history of the east is full of cases of Bedouins multiplying in the Arabian and Syrian desert until the means of subsistence fail, and then attempting to push into the fertile cultivated lands. In this way the Hebrews and related peoples from the desert (for example the Moabites) entered Palestine. But the Hebrews were the last and weakest group of tribes to arrive, and they had to settle on the rocky mountainous fringe of the country and fight hard for that. It was very far from being a land of milk and honey where they settled, and they became marauders, making constant raids upon the more prosperous and more civilized lowlands. The general note of savage fighting that characterizes their annals from Joshua to David is a reflection of this life of raids and retreats, and no doubt the story of many a hard fight was handed down for generations.

If we had the first version of these adventures, which was written in the ninth century, it would be interesting, though we are well aware how far stories of fights can be changed and how any story changes in the course of centuries. Even in modern times reports of victories in war are not regarded as models of truth.

But we need not confine ourselves to probabilities

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The whole narrative betrays itself. Read for instance, Genesis XII, 6, which some people still say was written by Moses. It says that "the Canaanite was then in the land." We read the same in the next chapter. If there is any meaning in words, this means that when the passage was written the Canaanites were no longer in the land, yet every Bible-reader knows that the Canaanites were in the land for centuries after the date assigned to Moses.

In Genesis XXXV, 31, we read a list of kings who reigned in Edom "before there reigned any king over the children of Israel." There was no question whatever of kings of Israel until centuries after the time of Moses. The narrative was obviously written, as I have suggested, after the time of David. In Numbers (I, 46) we have a particularly audacious illustration. The adults of the Hebrew nation, even in the desert, are said to have numbered "six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and sixty."

There still seem to be people who can imagine this colossal population living for years in the desert (I am not sure whether it is one of the things my dear brethren, the bishops, required me to believe, but I am certain that not one among them believes it) but let me assure them that this is not one of the mistakes of Moses. The explanation is very neat. In the Hebrew language the letters of the alphabet are used as numbers, and the letters in the Hebrew words for "the sum of all" amount in value to 551, while the letters in the rest of the sentence, "the children of Israel" express the sum 603. So the priestly editor of the word of God at a later date glorified Jehovah and his people by putting in the text the sum of 603,551.

All sorts of tricks can be detected. Thus the

original writer was merely poetic when he wrote that even the sun stood still while Joshua smote his enemies, but a later priestly editor absurdly turned it into a literal miracle.

We shall see plenty of this in the later historical books. These are just a few illustrations of what we find when we read the Pentateuch as we would read any other book. And the facts are the same in Joshua and later historical books. The writer of Joshua, for instance, pretends to be the hero himself, but he occasionally (IX, 27, XV, 63) forgets and says that a thing lasts "unto this day," showing that he wrote long after the time of Joshua. In XXIV, 31, he speaks of Joshua and "the elders that overlived Joshua" as ancient personages, who had lived long before. In Numbers XXI, 27, Moses is supposed to lay down the law about the division of the spoil after a battle; but, unfortunately, in I Samuel XXX, 24, this is forgotten and David is represented as the author of it.

I could fill this little volume with illustrations, but there is no need. All these things are quite intelligible when we follow the distinguished scholars who put together for us the literary history of the Bible. Later compilers, men who had not the critical faculty of a modern scholar and wrote for audiences who were uncritical, made a narrative out of records of different dates and took all sorts of liberties with them for the glorification of Jehovah. In a "word of God" these duplications and wild inaccuracies would be unintelligible. Even David who is supposed to have reigned from 1055 to 1015, died long before any Hebrew could write nor is it in the least likely that Solomon had a single scribe in his court, unless he borrowed one from Phoenecia. Anyhow, the whole of the historical

matter that fills the Old Testament to the time of David is suspicious. There were not even fragments of written record to compile it from.

Many biblical scholars now suppose that the first written work that the Hebrews had was an account of the reign of Saul, David and Solomon. The reason for supposing even this is not very convincing, and in any case we no longer have the chronicle or know what was in it.

The old-fashioned believer even takes the account of David and Solomon in I Chronicles to be the word of God but we shall see later what an audacious fabrication it is. The priestly author is one of the boldest jugglers with facts and figures in the whole of the Old Testament. In telling of the money which David is supposed to have collected for the temple (XXIX, 7) the Hebrew text counts part of it in "darics," that is to say, coins of King Darius of Persia, who did not begin to reign until five hundred years after David. The few fragments of these early historical books which experts believe they can recognize as ancient have no serious moral or religious interests and very little historical interest.

Thus the adventures of David, which the writer of Chronicles monstrously perverts, and the glories of Solomon and his temple, which are taken literally in the Prayer Book and in so much modern historical literature, are regarded by all the leading biblical authorities as a mixture of fact and fiction, in which the facts might be likened to the currants in a pudding if they were not so much more difficult to detect. Whether there ever was a Moses it is hopeless to speculate, as the earliest writer embodies an oral tradition that is many centuries old, but we feel that, if the Hebrews

began to write, as seems probable, in the tenth century, B. C., the very popular stories about David and Solomon may have been based upon fact, though there are distinguished biblical scholars who dismiss the entire narrative as fictitious.

Let us be liberal. If we set entirely aside the account of David in Chronicles and take the earlier accounts on broad lines, we get an impression of a very robust fighter, with the usual defects of a leader of guerilla troops, who does bring a good deal of Palestine under the Hebrews. Then we have a son who settles down, in a familiar way to enjoy the new wealth of his little state, is flattered with alliances by more advanced states which now find a good market in Judea, imports craftsmen, and raises buildings which seem palatial in comparison with the hovels of Jerusalem.

Unfortunately the attempt to lift the Hebrews to the level of the rest of Palestine did not last long. In the year 930 one of the Solomon's sons rebelled and set up a northern kingdom, with Samaria as its capitol, and the country was weakened and impoverished.

### III

But what do all these things matter to us moderns? Why should we take such pains to ascertain just how much, if anything, is true in the story of David or the description of Solomon's temple? And why should we tell children, with portentous solemnity, these very disputable stories about life in Palestine three thousand years ago instead of teaching them how to live in America to-day? As an historical record, the whole biblical narrative from Abraham to the prophets ought not, even if it were substantially correct, to be of the least interest to any one but a Jew, and culti-

vated Jews now acknowledge that it is impossible to fish the few genuine facts out of that sea of fiction.

It is mere playing with words to say that you find inspiration of revelation in all this. It is a dull, contradictory and in many respects unpleasant account of the domestic affairs of a small and very imperfectly civilized people who would not now be mentioned in the general history of the ancient world if it were not for the adoption of their books as part of the Christian Bible.

A liberal, though not modernist, theologian who recognizes the largely fabulous character of their narratives says that nevertheless, they may be said to be inspired because the writers have such a very strong consciousness of God. If such men would frankly tell the world that they merely hold the Bible to be inspired in the same sense as the Persian Avesta (in which there is generally a far purer and equally strong consciousness of God) or the writings of Luther, we might not trouble to quarrel with them, but they are not strictly attentive to the facts.

It is an essential part of the literary history of the Old Testament that it was entirely edited or rewritten in the fifth century by priests who altered and interpolated freely to make the God, Jehovah, and his priests, play a greater part in the life of the Hebrews. We have no reason to suppose that the original writers of the narratives thought more about God than medieval chroniclers did, and we do not exactly call them inspired. And we are certainly not going to call it inspiration when a few priests outrageously falsify the history of their nation to make it seem that the people are the more indebted to them and to the God the priesthood represents.



The modernists, on the other hand, write much about the Old Testament as a unique account of the religious development of a people and of its poetical superiority to the sacred books of other ancient nations. The first point is seriously misleading when it is put to the general public. The story of the religion of Jehovah as it is told in the actual Old Testament (that is to say, the story with which the general public is familiar) is, according to the modernists themselves, quite false. It is precisely in order to give a false version of their religious development that the priests of the fifth century edited the existing books and fabricated such books as Chronicles. It is the story of the religious development of the Hebrews which the critics have extracted from the Bible that is interesting, and when we try to tell this and similar truths to the general public we are denounced as heretics.

That, on the other hand, there is a great deal of fine poetical writing in the Old Testament we all agree. I would not say that it is in any way unique, for the chants in the earlier part of the Hindu Vedas are equally poetic and for the same reason. When they were composed the Aryan invaders of India were in the same robust and uncultivated condition as the Hebrew invaders of Palestine. It is, as Homer reminds us in the case of Greece, the age of poetry.

It is important to note here that the Bible was fortunately translated into English at a time when the English language still remained poetical and vigorous, while the other Sacred Books of the East were only translated in the nineteenth century, and by oriental scholars who were more intellectual than imaginative.

But let us be reasonable even when we are liberal. The great bulk of the Old Testament is not in the

least poetical or in any sense "great literature." Half the book consists of historical narrative and, though a powerful piece of poetry is introduced into it here and there, it is on the whole very prosy stuff.

What we may say is that the Bible contains far less obvious nonsense than most of the other sacred books, or even the Talmud and the Koran. The Chinese classical books, which were written at a time when the nation was far advanced in civilization and therefore (apart from a selection of ancient poems) not poetical, contain much that is completely devoid of interest for us. All that is true, though it is not usual to put a book on a pedestal because it does not contain quite as much nonsense as some others.

But we must not fail to call attention to the fact that there is another side of the matter. There is no other sacred or classical book in which the facts have been so extensively and deliberately perverted as they are in the Old Testament. We may or may not choose to say with the biblical scholars that the writers had virtuous intentions, but the truth that there has been a most extensive manipulation of the facts contained in the earlier books and a great deal of fiction represented as fact is admitted. We shall see later how and why this was done, but it is quite clear that it would be wiser of the church to abandon the idea that the Old Testament is the word of God and just select from it the sections which really are fine poetry or edifying moral literature and let the rest be forgotten.

The only points to which we need pay attention here are, first, that the Hebrews seem to have had a very low moral standard until the later prophets; and, secondly, that as soon as they began to adopt some culture from their more advanced neighbors, from the

time of Solomon onwards, they resisted to a very remarkable extent the belief in a spiritual monotheism which is supposed to have been their unique privilege among the nations.

It suited the later priestly editors to leave in the Chronicles all the accounts of the backsliding of the Hebrew people. Great political calamities were to fall upon the nation, and what better explanation could be given, from the priestly point of view, than the apostasy of the people from Jehovah? So we may trust the general picture of Hebrew life from the time of Solomon onward.

Christian priests now tell their faithful exactly the same thing that the Jewish priests then told theirs. It is a way priests have in all ages. They speak a word for their God and two for themselves. Only in these days they commend the God by condemning materialism.

There are remarkably few figures in the long chronicle who command our entire respect. I need not enlarge on the sins of David and the voluptuousness of Solomon, for we have no idea how much at this early date is historical, but both before and after their time the heroes and heroines are rarely saints. Women rise to the height of fame by driving a nail through the head of a sleeping soldier whom they have deceived, but ordinarily they occupy a position far below the splendid position women had occupied for two thousand years in all the rest of the civilized world.

Polygamy and concubinage are universal, though the little land was bursting with population and there was no need for either.

Swords flash and blood pours out on every page. Could anything be more barbarian than the fate of the princess Jezebel of Tyre, and the savage exultation

over it, whose chief vice was merely that she clung to her own religion? It is a horrid narrative in book after book—a story of treachery, murder, spoliation, ambition and rebellion.

We are equally impressed on every page with the difficulty that the priests have in compelling the people to combine to believe in one spiritual God. Their kings and statesmen and merchants have entered into relations with the cities of the Syrians and Phoenicians, which were to the Hebrews what the cities of the United States are to the Mexicans. But instead of the Hebrews passing on to their neighbors what is said to be their unique privilege, the revelation of spiritual monotheism, they borrow the whole paraphernalia of heathen worship, especially the cult of the goddess of love. This is exactly what the Christians ultimately did in the case of the pagans.

It is a remarkable illustration of the obstinacy of orthodox believers that they constantly repeat the charge which is now discredited, about women in temples of Babylon, yet never reflect that Kings and Chronicles represent Jerusalem as having men as well as women of that type in or about the temple from the ninth century almost continuously to the reign of Josiah, or during nearly three centuries.

Except for an occasional moral lesson, like that of Naboth's vineyard, the Old Testament is on the whole a long and dreary record of vice and half-savagery. Word of God indeed! The Persian sacred writings shine by comparison like an arc-lamp compared to a smoky lantern.

How this apostasy even of the priests led to the appearance of prophets, and what kind of men they were, we shall see in the next chapter. Whatever

success they had, and whatever reforms were made, the people returned to the Phoenician and Syrian gods as soon as the pressure was removed. We tire of reading how a pious king rose and "removed the high places and brake the images, and cut down the groves," and how they reappear in the next chapter. What kind of worship the Jews really favored in these centuries has to be corrected for the modern reader of the Bible by translating the Hebrew into such vague words as "high places" and "groves."

And the late priestly editor slips in at the end of each reign a few words about how Jehovah punished the bad kings or rewarded the good, even inventing an imaginary plague or angel of the Lord who in one night slays a hundred and eighty five thousand of the Assyrian soldiers who were besieging Jerusalem. We must, of course, bear in mind the possibility that the author of Chronicles, who was so determined to find the action of Jehovah everywhere, may have exaggerated the apostasy in some cases in order to explain why particular kings suffered.

But the prophets fully confirm the general picture. During several centuries the Hebrews were only with the greatest difficulty held to the religion which is so often represented as a unique and priceless possession of theirs. The customary picture of them as a privileged people in a world of darkness, a people with a treasured belief in a God who was to them a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day, is false to the Bible itself. It shows us that from the time when culture reached them, in the days of Solomon, to the days when terrible national calamities raised up a new and more zealous priesthood, most of the Hebrews did not want monotheism and had to be bludgeoned into accepting it.

**T**HE visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same. As the Church of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch, have erred; so also the Church of Rome hath erred, not only in their living and manner of Ceremonies, but also in matters of Faith.  
—The Articles of Religion.

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**I**T is to be noted, that this ascension of Christ into heaven was not only very necessary, but also much profitable for all true Christian men, and that for many causes. One is, for that Christ declared thereby very manifestly, that He was not only Man, but that He was also very God. And therefore it followeth in this article, He sitteth on the right hand of His Father, not as inferior in Godhead, but as equal unto Him. Another is, for that He hath been ever since that time our continual advocate and solicitor unto God His Father, according to the saying of St. Paul, writing unto the Hebrews, where he saith in this manner: Christ ascended into heaven, to the intent He should ever appear and ever be present in the sight of God, as a Mediator and Intercessor for us. And in another place also he saith, Jesus the Son of God did penetrate and ascend above all the heavens, to be our great Bishop: wherefore let us firmly and stedfastly believe that we have a great Bishop in heaven, that is to say, a great and a perpetual Mediator and Intercessor for us: and that the same our Bishop is not only of such infinite might and power, that He is fully able to save all them that will invoke and believe in God the Father by Him, but also that He having perfect knowledge of all the infirmities of our flesh and mortality, and having tasted by experience in His own body all the temptations of the same (sin only excepted), He will also gladly and willingly have pity and compassion of us, and will be always ready to save us: wherefore let us put our whole trust and confidence in Him.—The Doctrine of the Church of England.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS

The Jew has always spoken of what we call the Old Testament as the Law and the Prophets. In that phrase you have a summary of the religious history of the Hebrew people as it is usually understood.

The true God, Jehovah, is supposed to have concealed himself during all the tens of thousands of years of man's laborious preparation for civilization. He is supposed to have looked with complete indifference on the great civilizations which covered the earth from Egypt to India from about the year 3500 B. C.

Then Jehovah is supposed to have at last revealed himself to a minor Arabian sheik, named Abraham, who wandered with his family over Mesopotamia and Syria.

No one in the long history of Judaism and Christianity saw the essential childishness of this idea until modern times. For some inscrutable reason, scarcely anybody even speculated what the explanation may have been. No one seems to have thought it strange that God kept the knowledge of himself to this family, which was neither more pious nor more virtuous nor more wise than the peoples with other gods; and, at last, when it had grown into a people, dictated a lengthy law, civic and religious, to its leaders. Again for some inscrutable reason, the Hebrew people regarded their law and religion as inferior to those of their benighted neighbors which they preferred, and God inspired a series of prophets to stand out and bring the people back to obedience.

This is the essential outline of the story of religion

as it is told in the actual Old Testament, endorsed in the Prayer Book of the Anglo American (Protestant Episcopal) Church, and enforced on less educated people by bishops who expelled me from their ranks for telling it.

This is the baseless and senseless story which popular writers and preachers have in mind when they repeat the assurance of the modernists that the Bible is a priceless and unique record of the religious development of an unique nation.

This is, as we are showing in this booklet, the exact opposite of the truth as we know it to-day.

The Hebrew writings would be (if they had never been falsified and if they were arranged in their proper order, under the general heading of the Prophets and the Law, not the Law and the Prophets) an interesting collection of folk-lore and fairy tales.

Half of the whole is, of course, neither Prophets nor Law. It is an absurd and impossible legendary history. But this history would, if it were purged of all its adulterations, show how a simple belief in Jehovah as the national God inspired a long series of prophets, and these at length prepared the people to accept the law which the priests composed.

Now that we have put aside the very obvious legends of Genesis and glanced sufficiently at the mixed and unattractive history of the Jews to the time of Solomon, we pass on to consider more interesting developments.

# I

When we say that the law came after the prophets, we obviously refer to the law as it is given at great length in the Pentateuch. It arose, as we shall see, in three chief stages. The first of these we have already

seen. One of the first things to be written at Jerusalem seems to have been the short code or law in Exodus (XX, 22 to XXIII, 16) which we clearly traced to clauses of the Babylonian code. It is almost entirely a civil code.

The religious introduction is as completely at variance with the religious code which follows it in the Pentateuch as if it belonged to a totally different people, and it is as primitive as the religious code of a simple African tribe.

The children of Israel are told to sacrifice to Jehovah, wherever they like, not get priests to do it, and the Lord will be there.

Jesus like Jehovah started his votaries off without priests or houses of prayer. He disallowed sacrifices and public prayer. When his followers prayed each was to offer his own prayer in his room apart from the world. If the Jews had not borrowed very extensively from the worship of the Gentiles and the Christians from that of the pagans, we would know nothing about synagogues and churches and of the ceremonial worships which are conducted in them.

The altar of the Jews must be simply a mound of earth or at the most a pile of unhewn stones. For some unknown reason which is obviously a superstition of the barbaric days it will "pollute" the stones of the altar if they are shaped with tools. Steps to the altar are forbidden for a reason which is connected with the phallic superstition of the primitive Semites.

This valuable fragment of early tradition and practice shows us how little religious law there was long after the supposed days of Moses and Aaron, and probably after the Hebrews had settled on the frontiers of Palestine, which seems to have been between 1200

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and 1100 B. C. The tribes of Arabia had no great deities but a great crowd of local spirits. Each group had a little god of its own. The ancestors of the Hebrews cherished a mysterious Jehovah the original nature of whom is totally unknown, even the meaning of the word has been lost.

Much in the story suggests that Jehovah was originally a mountain-spirit, a spirit of thunder and lightning, but it is all very obscure. What is as certain as anything of the kind can be is that the gods of both primitive Jews and Christians are descendants of different nature gods of the old magical interpretations of religion. In both cases the God was, so to speak, stripped and washed as clean as possible of a great accumulation of superstition: and, then in the course of time, he was redressed more and more elaborately out of all semblance to the Gods which left the hands of the founders of Judaism and Christianity. Jehovah is in all probability a cleansed and redressed lightning and thunder god, and Jesus is certainly such a sun and vegetation god.\*

However, after the settlement in Palestine, the Jewish cult would be more or less organized. If we suppose that the Hebrews lodged themselves on the hills somewhere about 1150 B. C., as we may estimate, and allow a century and a half for raiding and establishing a sufficient territory to live on in comfort, we come to the time of Solomon (if there was a David who had a son Solomon) when peaceful intercourse is opened with neighbors.

In the cities of the coast were the Phoenicians, then at the height of their civilization—the greatest craftsmen,

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\* See my lecture-sermon, *The Human Meaning of Christian Doctrine*. A free copy is available.—W.M.B.

merchants and navigators of the time. Inland were the cities of the Philistines, who are now believed by many scholars to have come from the island of Crete, which had been as civilized as Egypt for two thousand years before that. In the north were the Syrians or Arameans with a fairly ancient civilization centered in Damascus. In fact, there were advanced civilizations, all over the region, and the Canaanites, who had settled in Palestine before the Hebrews, had adopted this higher culture.

The story told in Joshua and Judges of the victories of the Hebrews over these (even of taking fortified cities and resisting Assyrian armies with great numbers of armor-plated chariots or tanks) is quite absurd. It is part of the later pious fiction that Jehovah had always wrought miracles for them.

All that we know is that the Hebrews did gradually gain ground, especially when the terrible armies of the greater powers had weakened their neighbors, and formed a little kingdom. Then there happened just what has happened all over the world in modern times. The older nations became friendly with the new kingdom because they saw an opportunity to trade.

We have in this, as in all such cases, an illustration of the truth of the Marxian doctrine of the materialistic determination of all history by economic conditions. A middle class of merchants and land-owners now arose in Judea. The contrast of wealth and poverty began. Education and travel were introduced. Jerusalem must have fine buildings to show visitors that the Hebrews were really not barbarians.

We must suppose that a temple arose as part of this development, which began round about the year 1000 B. C., and that the cult of Jehovah was organized.

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But what it all amounted to we simply do not know.

Aaron and Levi are as mythical as Moses, and all the crowds of priests and levites that are given in Chronicles as living in the time of David are among the most obvious fabrications of that book. What we shall see presently about the appearance of Deuteronomy in the seventh century seems to make it certain that there was no written religious law until then.

There was a temple and there were priests, but the dazzling introduction of art and culture from the cities of the plains brought also new Gods and rival temples. It is often said that the Hebrews adopted these Syrian and Phoenician deities because they tended to encourage rather than check their passions. But if we trust the narrative at all, the cult of Jehovah had not hitherto had much effect in restraining their passions; and, on the other hand, one of the new deities adopted was Moloch of Phoenicia, who actually required and received human sacrifices.

The plain truth is that spiritual monotheism no more seemed to the Hebrew a superior religion than it seemed to the Greeks when Plato, and later Paul, proposed it to them.

In so confused and unreliable a narrative it is difficult to ascertain the situation definitely, but the entire literature suggests that the Jews habitually worshipped the gods of their neighbors from about 1000 to nearly 600 B. C. There was no official worship of Jehovah, no organized performance of sacrifices and services. As the prophets denounce these sacrifices and services, we must conclude that there was still no "law" of the kind we have in Leviticus. It would be impossible for the prophets of Jehovah to appeal so confidently to the people with the plea that he desired mercy and not

sacrifices, if there were any recognized religious law to the contrary.

Hence the prophets were simply the zealots for the exclusive worship of Jehovah, the puritans who denounced the foreign deities with all the vigor of their age. In one place we read (I Kings, XXII, 6) of four hundred of them being brought before the kings of Judah and Israel. In other places we read of troops of them wandering about the country with wild chants and musical instruments, tearing off their clothes and throwing themselves naked on the ground, wearing horns of iron and doing all sorts of fantastic things to gain attention. They loathed the entire foreign invasion of Hebrew life; and, as it naturally showed its influence chiefly in the houses of the rich, they denounced the rich with particular vehemence. The rich and the priests retorted with spirit, and the prophets often became wild men of the woods and hills, fugitives from the police, descending occasionally to pour out their bitter and picturesque denunciations.

## II

From this crowd of popular fanatics, who occasionally found such powerful leaders as Elijah and Elisha and waged a veritable war against the priests of the foreign gods, the literary prophets of the Old Testament alone come individually before us. We saw that the first literary work to appear in Jerusalem was apparently a fragmentary chronicle of the early court of justice which has been incorporated in Exodus, and the second the earliest collection of creation-legends.

Nearly all the authorities agree that the next writings were the prophecies of Amos and Hosea, and these are probably the oldest of the actual books included

in the Old Testament. They are believed to have appeared about the middle of the eighth century, and they give us some idea of the condition of the Hebrew people at that time.

To the modern biblical scholar a prophet is, as the word itself means, a man who courageously speaks out against religious and political evils, not a diviner or man who foretells future events. The rearrangement of the books of the Old Testament in their proper order and the careful study of each verse in the Hebrew text have made an end of the old idea of prophecy. Time after time we can see that after a great event like the fall of Tyre or the fall of Ninevah or Egypt a later writer has coolly inserted a passage in one of the older prophets falsely making him foretell the event.

It would require a volume to deal with all these supposed prophecies, and it must suffice here to say that there remain to-day to biblical experts only a few shrewd forecasts (the idea of a supernaturalistic revelation has been abandoned) of political developments such as a man like Jeremiah might be expected to make occasionally without any necessity for divine inspiration. No authority in the field of scientific criticism of the Bible now holds that it contains any supernaturalistic foretelling of a future event. Indeed all such authorities have given up the doctrine of Christian orthodoxy that the Old and New Testaments contain revelations made by God to man. Man has no knowledge of anything which he did not discover for himself by his own experience, observation, investigation and reason.

The prophets are now said by the modernists to give a unique value to the Old Testament among the sacred books of the world as men, not literally inspired,



but of quite exceptional religious genius and moral fervor. Let us here offer one reflection which the modernists do not find it convenient to make. It applies, in fact, to the whole of the Old Testament in so far as any man regards it as containing a revelation. It is the simple fact, which none can dispute, that neither revelation nor religious genius ever told the Hebrews that their souls would at death pass into a world in which they would either be rewarded for their virtues or punished for their vices.

It is wrong, or at least misleading, to say, as some do, that the Hebrews did not believe in the immortality of the soul. The story of the witch of Endor shows that they believed that the spirits of men continued to live. Yet from every reference to death in Hebrew literature until the fifth century we gather that they had no idea of happiness beyond the grave. It is clear that they held the same idea as the Babylonians about the state of the dead. They passed to sheol, which was so obscure and unattractive that some writers have contended that sheol merely meant the grave.

It is however much more likely that the Hebrews believed, like the Babylonians, that there was a world of disembodied spirits, but it was a world without either rewards or punishments, without division into places for good and bad classes or any definite features. Repeatedly it is said that Jehovah has no interest in men when they have died. Death was an unrelieved evil. If it did not end all, it at least ended all the joy of life.

The book or poem of Job, which in its original form was written about the year 400 B. C., plainly shows that even at that very late date the Jews had not discovered that the solution of the problem of evil

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was to say that God rewarded the good and punished the wicked in another world. The idea had by that time appeared among the Jews and was spreading, but the book of Ecclesiastes shows that as late as the year 200 B. C. it was an open question, and some, like the writer of it, held that there was no proof that the dead survived the grave in any form and certainly no hope of happiness.

Many reasons are given why the Jews began in the fifth century to believe in a definite future life, but there seems to be a great deal of reluctance to entertain one of the most obvious of reasons. They could not possibly after the year 540 remain ignorant that the Persians, whom they now regarded as the most enlightened of all peoples, very strongly believed in the reward of virtue in a future life. They must, indeed, have known long before that the Egyptians had a very vivid belief in the judgment of the soul and its reward or punishment after death. It is one reason why I am inclined to doubt that the ancestors of the Hebrews were ever in Egypt. If they had been there, surely this most characteristic of Egyptian beliefs would have made some impression on them.

The absence of the doctrine of reward and punishment in a future life is really important in judging the claim either of a revelation to or a profound religious genius in the Hebrew people. They were mediocre, not unique. This strange doctrinal defect is almost enough of itself to discredit both the orthodox and the modernist theory. In the opinion of both these Christian schools the belief in a future life is as fundamental and vital a religious truth as the existence of God, yet they have to admit that, while the Egyptians had discovered it thousands of years earlier, and the Persians quite in-

dependently cherished the belief before the time of Isaiah, no Hebrew prophet ever knew it.

Abraham walked with God, and Moses spent weeks in communion with him, according to the Bible, without the least suspicion of it. Not a single one of the great prophets had an inkling of it: for the sole reference to it in Isaiah is a late interpolation. The only possible conclusion is that religious belief was a matter, not of revelation or intuition, but of environment and tradition. If the perception of its fundamental propositions is a mark of a specially high character, the Egyptians and Persians were high above the Hebrews, who remained on the level of the Babylonians and Assyrians.

When, on the other hand, it is claimed that the Hebrews were unique at least in announcing the existence of one spiritual God, we must make several reserves. Even if it were true, we should still have to explain why the one fundamental religious truth, the existence of this God, was revealed to them and not the other, human immortality, which would have spared them all their anxiety about the ways of providence, not revealed to them. But what little truth there is in the statement that the Hebrews were the great preachers of monothesim is not difficult to understand.

On the one hand, as I showed in the third volume, it is extraordinarily false to say that the Hebrews were the first to preach a God of righteousness (the Gods of Egypt and Sumeria were highly ethical three thousand years earlier) and that in Egypt at least monotheism was familiar centuries before the Hebrews are even supposed to have visited it. I will show later that one of the finest of the monotheistic psalms in the Bible is very clearly based upon the Egyptian worship of Aten. In China also, before Confucius persuaded the

educated class to ignore religion, Heaven was the one God. In Persia, at least from the time of the prophet Zarathustra, there was only one God, Ahura Mazda, with a great (but not infinite) evil spirit and some other finite spirits that corresponded rather to the archangels of later Judaism and Christianity.

On the other hand, the Hebrews were indeed very peculiar monotheists. That they came into Palestine with one God only is natural enough. They were not, like the Egyptians and Babylonians, a great mixed nation and formed originally out of tribes with very different Gods. In such cases, where different gods have had to be put on a common level, where each has a powerful priesthood and temples, it is, as King Ikn-Aten found in Egypt, almost impossible to suppress the plurality of Gods.

It is not a question of superior intuitions, for the priesthoods of the greater Gods of Egypt and Babylonia always wanted monotheism, which would mean a monopoly for one priesthood. It was a question of politics. The real difference between the Hebrews and the Egyptians was that the race had not been formed out of very different elements with different gods.

However, the Hebrews were, as I said, peculiar monotheists. During all this time they seem to have merely considered, at the most, that Jehovah was stronger than other gods, or that Jehovah was the only God for them. When they were loyal to him, they did not want to share him. Judaism was not a missionary religion. But the Jews seem, once they became fully acquainted with higher peoples and their gods, to have been loyal to him only under compulsion or at intervals.

### III

Thus we may cordially admire the fire and the

poetry and the fervor and the demand of justice. of the Hebrew prophets, but we must deny that there is the least supernaturalistic significance in them. They were very far from being the first to announce a God of righteousness or even a monotheistic God, and the fact that not one of them ever discovered that there is a future life in heaven for the virtuous and in hell for the wicked ought to make a modern orthodox person regard them with very limited respect, and to wonder why Jehovah did not make a revelation to his chosen people of the important and salutary fact (if it is a fact) that there is to be a life beyond the grave of bliss for the holy believers and of woe for the unholy disbelievers. For one I do not think any less of them because they never embraced that particular superstition of the Persians. Next to the Christian doctrine of a conscious personal God that of human immortality is the most impossible of all the supernaturalistic doctrines of orthodox Christianity.

But the prophets are humanly interesting in another respect, and they again show the untruth of the present arrangement of the Old Testament. You get near the end of the book before you reach the prophecy of Hosea. Before it are all the fine sentiments of the later part of Isaiah and the other major prophets, the books of Esther and Job, with their advanced ideas, and the Psalms. In fact, as we read the Bible to-day we find admirable sentiments quite early in it. A great American physicist, Dr. Millikan has, in his recent defenses of religion, made a special point of the formulation of the Golden Rule by Jesus. But a still more emphatic moral sentiment is the command, *Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*, and that goes back to the Pentateuch. Then, when we come to Hosea, we read the coarsest imagery

and the vilest curses on the enemies of the nation formulated by a man who evidently strikes the highest moral note of his barbarous period.

The explanation of this glaring inconsistency is found in the fact that reference to the chronological order would have awarded the honor of opening the Old Testament to Amos instead of to Moses. A similar misleading mistake is found in the arrangement of the books of the New Testament. The so-called Epistles of Paul (or possibly the oldest parts of the equally unauthentic Revelation of John) should have preceded the spurious Gospels.

It is one of the many ways in which we see the falseness of the actual Old Testament even without calling upon the learning of the expert higher critics and the archaeologists. Clearly Hosea belongs to a very primitive stage of moral development. He has a robust sense of justice, but it is the kind of justice which demands rights not the kind that compels a man to give them, and it has very narrow limits. He calls upon the Lord to give the inoffensive mothers of enemy nations "miscarrying wombs and dry breasts," and to destroy their children if they have any. It is remarkable that all this, and more of the kind, should be in the word of God, and many centuries after a supposed full revelation of Moses.

To us, with our new literary view of the composition of the Bible, there is no difficulty. Clearly the civilization of the rough, semi-barbaric Hebrews by the introduction of foreign culture about the year 1000 B. C. had only a very limited effect. The disorder of the two kingdoms that followed fostered the savage primitive instincts of the people, and all this ferocity was enlisted in the great fight of the early prophets

against false gods and false ideals. Professor Bower, who atones for his heresies by paying heavy compliments, as is usual, to the Old Testament writers, sees a "moral nature finely developed" in Amos and describes Hosea as tender and gentle and affectionate. Another professor says that the prophets are "the heart-throb of the lawful religion of Jehovah."

The truth is more interesting. It shows us, not the rapid and remarkable development of moral genius in Judea, but a very slow advance of moral sentiments keeping pace with the improvements of economic conditions and the consequent changes in the cultural environment. It shows, in other words, that, however much you may esteem the monotheism of the religion of Jehovah, the Hebrews had to be educated in moral sentiments by other nations.

That must sound like a dreadful heresy or even a paradox. But let us patiently examine the matter for ourselves. You do not need any scholarship, and you have merely to learn from scholars that, as you would suspect, Amos and Hosea are the two earliest literary prophets, though the last eight verses of Amos are a late addition.

Amos is fairly moderate, especially for a shepherd-poet of so backward a people. Just occasionally we get references to indelicate outrages which it is useless to ask us to overlook on the ground of oriental atmosphere or something of that kind. The plain fact is that even the moralists of Judea were at the time very far from delicacy of sentiment.

One is surprised to find liberal divines saying that these prophets "ushered in the spiritual history of mankind." There was fine moral literature both in Egypt and Babylonia long before that time, and the writers of

it do not find it necessary to tell the sinner that they hope his wife will become a harlot and his daughters be murdered, or talk about the ripping open of pregnant women. All this is plain evidence of an inferior moral nature, not "a moral nature finely developed."

In point of fact the one moral sentiment that is strongly developed in Amos is justice, and in such form that if he were to appear to-day in a New York pulpit the bishops would promptly extinguish him. People would call him a bolshevik. He is the spokesman of the poor against the rich. Justice is always justice, whether it is in the poor man who demands his rights or in the rich man who gives from a feeling of principle, but it is much easier to cultivate it if you are a poor man.

Let me frankly admit that, while we admire the language of the prophet on the whole, it was not calculated to do any particular good. He fiercely denounced the rich for having ivory beds and bowls of wine while other people were poor. And not knowing anything about the later idea, that God would punish the unjust in another world, he simply calls upon the Lord to burn their houses and rip up their daughters. It is a very elementary measure of virtue.

Hosea is far worse. His mind is so steeped in sexual imagery that one wonders why the book was not excluded several centuries ago from the printed Bible, which is given to young women and children to read. There is not even the clear sentiment of justice that we find in Amos. Because the Hebrews built temples and fenced cities, for instance, the Lord is implored to send fire and burn them up.

Mainly Hosea is concerned about the worship of strange Gods, which was obviously quite general in his time, the eighth century B. C. But he lets us see



plainly that zealots for Jehovah like himself know nothing of any law ordering the Jews to build a temple and sacrifice animals in it.

There is the same note of contempt of the sacrifices and services in the temple in the earlier Isaiah, who seems to have been a contemporary of Hosea, but in his work we rise to a higher level. We have, however, to be careful in reading quotations of Isaiah, for the book, as we have it, is very far from being the work of one man. A very large part of it was written by a second Isaiah, in totally different conditions, two centuries after the time of the first Isaiah (738-700 B. C.) and even as late as the second century B. C. anonymous writers were still adding to the famous book. Most of the sentiments which are quoted in proof of the tender humanity of Isaiah really belong to these later Isaiahs of an age after the Jews had felt the influence of several higher civilizations.

Yet the first or original Isaiah is a finer moralist than the contemporary prophets. It is true that even he is very far from the refinement of an Egyptian moralist like Ptah-Hotep, who had lived long before him. He invokes a horrible and indelicate punishment on the young ladies of Jerusalem (III, 17) just because they go about in fine garments and jewelry.

However, this note is rare in Isaiah; and, though the moral anger takes a form that we do not esteem to-day, we read most of his chapters with admiration. Isaiah was no shepherd or rugged poet of the fields or mountains. He was an educated man of the city, a man whose gaze looked out from Jerusalem as far as Egypt and Assyria, who took a profound interest in the politics of the time.

We must admit, however, that what we admire in

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Isaiah, the original Isaiah, is chiefly the magnificence of his language. His chapters are a sustained curse against the whole world. His one idea of morals is that sinners of every description shall "be cut up, burned and afflicted with scab." The whole world is evil and the Lord must make it suffer.

Of tenderness, refinement, delicacy, affection, there is not a single note struck by this Isaiah. His one idea of persuasion is to threaten terrible punishment. We shall find quite different sentiments when we come to the second Isaiah who wrote most of the later part of the book; but, if we ignore the many interpolations, as they are pointed out by students of Hebrew literature, we find the greatest Hebrew moralist of the eighth century far inferior in sentiment, if far superior in diction, to the moral literature of Egypt, Babylonia and Persia.

Micah is the fourth prophet of this early period, and his note is just the same. Certainly he loves justice and righteousness, but he has not the remotest idea of persuading people to be just and righteous. The people he denounced would probably denounce him as a savage who ought not to be permitted to speak in public. Whether these prophets wrote in the form of poetry or not is disputed, but it is the poetry of their curses that fascinates us. The idea that they brought any new moral sentiments into the world in the eighth century before Christ is preposterous. They are unique only in the fierceness of their indignation against offenders, and that is not a moral note that we greatly admire in modern times.

### IV

I have pointed out how each of these four prophets

speaks with contempt of the sacrifices and incense that are offered in the temple and some times even of the seasonal festivals. They make it quite clear that they do not merely mean, as is often said, that the Lord would rather have justice and mercy than sacrifices. They repeatedly and emphatically asserted that God does not want the sacrifices, they more than once ridicule the festivals. This would be enough of itself to discredit the belief that Moses had given the Hebrews a lengthy code of laws concerning these matters. The prophets ignore Moses. One would almost suspect that he was in little esteem in their time. Fortunately the Old Testament itself confirms all this and lets us see how the law arose and was attributed to Moses.

The famous passage in II Kings (XXII and XXIII) which describes certain sensational happenings at Jerusalem in the reign of the good king Josiah, or about the year 621 B. C., has always troubled thoughtful readers of the Bible. We are told that half a century earlier there had been another good king Hezekiah, and he had cleansed Judea of the worship of false gods (which is very doubtful since this is just the time when the prophets were calling down fire and brimstone on everybody) but his son Manasseh restored all the abominations. He seems to have been one of the most resolute worshippers of foreign gods among the Hebrew kings, yet, to the great trouble of the prophets, the Lord permitted him to reign prosperously for fifty-five years. His son Amon followed in his footsteps and, when zealots murdered him, the people slew the zealots.

Then Amon's son, Josiah, was put upon the throne, and he is described as quite orthodox. But the chronicler is very brief about him until the eighteenth year of his reign, when he gave orders that the temple, which

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seemingly was in a shockingly dilapidated condition, must be repaired. Altogether the two kingdoms seem to have been busy worshipping the gods of all the nations they knew for the best part of a century, or even (as it is doubtful if Hezekiah really reformed the religion) for the best part of several centuries.

But the remarkable thing is that the writer admits that during all this time there was no code of religious law known to the Jews. His story is that the high priest Hilkiah found a copy of "the book of the law" in the temple during the restoration. Knowing, as we do, the little weaknesses of the Hebrew priests, we may be disposed to believe that the order to repair the temple really followed the "finding" of the book, and that it had just been written and found in the interest of the priesthood and their temple worship of Jehovah.

However, the story is remarkable enough. There was only one copy of the law which was supposed to have been dictated by God to Moses, and this one copy had disappeared for some indefinite period and nobody knew what its commands were. Hilkiah suddenly produced a book, which he said that he had found in the temple, and it was read to the king. Then Josiah sent the priests to consult some sort of wise woman as to whether this really was the word of the Lord; and, when she confirmed it, they gathered all the people "both small and great" of the entire kingdom into the small and dilapidated temple and read the book to them, and then purified all Judea of its false gods.

How any person can regard this as serious history it is difficult to understand. The suggestion that so important a book had been lost for ages is bold enough, but for the king or any other person to read it out to the

whole population of Judea is an impossibility into which we cannot read any sense.

The strangeness of it all increases, from the orthodox point of view, if you turn to the prophet Jeremiah, who appeared in the next generation. From him we learn that there was not the least change in Judea as regards the worship of foreign gods. There is the usual comprehensive curse of the entire nation for its perfidy and idolatry. Moreover Jeremíah (VIII, 8) refers to the boast of the priests that they have the law of the Lord and (according to the Hebrew text) he roundly accuses them of lying.

The only sensible interpretation of what happened in the reign of Josiah is that the priests then compiled the first edition of a religious law and persuaded the king that it was an ancient work of the time of Moses. The law as we now have it in the Pentateuch was certainly composed at a later date, for a book that could be read by a scribe to the king and read to a vast crowd of people was clearly not the Pentateuch. The book was not even Deuteronomy, for that is far too long to read in the manner described. On the other hand, it could not be simply the Book of the Covenant to which I referred in an earlier chapter, for that forbade them to make any altars except of earth or undressed stone and did not in the least contemplate the building of a temple and performance of priestly ceremonies.

We are therefore compelled to suppose that the self seeking priests of the time drew up the first sketch of the law which defined all their duties and privileges. What they had done up to this time it is difficult to see. The prophets speak of their sacrifices and ceremonies in the temple, but the author of II Kings puts

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before us a vague picture of even the temple having altars to foreign gods, of temples to these gods, some of which were attributed to Solomon, rising on every side in Jerusalem, of human sacrifices to Moloch, and the worship of the heavenly bodies and all the deities that were known at the time.

We need not press the matter, for the pious Josiah, again to the dismay of the prophets of Jehovah, fell in battle after a comparatively short reign, and before long the land was stricken by the Babylonians and all worship suspended. The first attempt to make a law of Moses was premature, and how it was eventually composed we shall see later. But it is already clear that we must put the prophets before the law and recognize a very imperfect moral and religious culture in Judea to the middle of the seventh century B. C., and even later. At this time, however, the history of the world was entering upon a new and stirring development, and we shall see how the Jews at length receive a more serious education.

THE GREAT PROPHETS  
AND THEIR TIMES

THE truth is, that God constituted and ordained the authority of Christian kings and princes to be the most high and supreme above all other powers and officers in this world, in the regiment and government of their people, and committed unto them, as unto the chief heads of their commonwealths, the cure and oversight of all the people which be in their realms and dominions, without any exception: and to them of right, and by God's commandment, belongeth not only to prohibit unlawful violence, to correct offenders by corporal death, or other punishment, to conserve moral honesty among their subjects, according to the laws of their realms, to defend justice, and to procure the public weal and common peace and tranquillity in outward and earthly things: but specially and principally to defend the faith in Christ and His religion, to conserve and maintain the true doctrine of Christ, and all such as be true preachers and settlers forth thereof, and to abolish abuses, heresies, and idolatries, and to punish with corporal pains such as of malice be the occasion of the same.—The Doctrine of the Church of England.



## CHAPTER V

### THE GREAT PROPHETS AND THEIR TIMES

Many of the people who distrust what is called the higher criticism of the Old Testament overlook one simple but very important fact. The book which they read, the English Bible, was all translated into English in a few years, and it therefore shows a great uniformity of style. It is a great advantage that the more poetical books of the Old Testament were translated in an age of poetry, but we must remember that it is not this English text which scholars study when they tell us that they trace one chapter of the same book to the seventh century B. C., and others to the fifth, and fourth, or even the third, as they do in the case of Isaiah.

In order to understand how they came to these conclusions we must imagine that we have before us an English book in which were put together pieces that had been written in different centuries. Let me try to give you some idea what it would look like. Here is, in English, a verse of a song that was very popular in England in the tenth century:

Summer is i-cumen in,  
Llude sing cuccu;  
Groweth sed, and bloweth med,  
And springth the wde nu.

A few centuries later the great poet Chaucer, who certainly knew better how to write English than any other man of his time, wrote in this fashion of a noble of the day:

He was a lord ful fat and in good point,  
His eye stepe, and rolling in his hed,  
That stemed as a forneis of a led,

Two centuries later Sir Thomas Wyat was singing thus:

May chance thee lye withered and old,  
In winter nights that are so cold  
Playning in vain unto the moon.

And less than a century later Shakespeare and the English Bible were written in the English that we know well, though no man chooses to write the same English to-day.

This shows how a language can change during the few centuries between the earlier and the later Hebrew writings, and no one will doubt that literary experts can identify the peculiarities of the style of each age in spite of later editing, just as other experts can identify the architecture or the costumes.

But the higher critic does not attend to the language alone. He finds in what are supposed to be early books, as I have already pointed out, phrases which betray that they must have been written long afterwards. He finds historical mistakes that could not have been written by a contemporary of the alleged events.

Thus even a critic of the higher critics like the Rev. Professor Sayce proves that beyond question the book of Daniel could not have been written before 200 B. C. I have given many illustrations, and we shall see as many more.

Now when we arrange the books of the Old Testament in their proper order, as it is settled by these tests, we begin to understand the prophets much better than the ordinary Bible-reader does. We see three chief stages in the development of the moral sentiments of the prophets. As the book is actually arranged we should be hopelessly puzzled to understand how the

very broad humanitarian sentiments of some of the psalms and proverbs come long before the narrow and fierce principles of Amos and Hosea, or how one prophet, like Isaiah, expresses quite different sentiments in different chapters. On the theory of a common inspiration all this is unintelligible, but on the theory that there was a natural development of ideals, as the historical circumstances entirely changed the contacts of the Hebrew people age by age, it is all clear and satisfactory.

On this theory I must call the reader's attention again to the fact that when the Bible is thus understood as a slow development, the ground is taken from under the feet of orthodox Jews and Christians who claim that the Old and New Testaments are divinely inspired.

On this theory Jews and Christians have manifestly no more right to make such a claim for either part of the Bible than the votaries of other interpretations of supernaturalistic religion have to make it for their sacred books.

Where all can be fully accounted for, as is the case with the messages of the prophets and apostles, by natural developments, there is no need for, or even possibility of, bringing in the supernatural to explain it.

We can easily distinguish the following three stages of the idealism of the prophets:

The first stage is chiefly characterized by the feeling that Jehovah is the God of the poorer members of the Hebrew race. The rich are truculently denounced and, as the priests are in alliance with them, they are involved in the same terrible curses. Biblical writers used to say that this was the first magnificent dawn of the conception of justice in history, but the literature

we have now recovered from the ruins of Egypt and Babylonia has taught us how wrong this old idea was. In a sense there is a higher type of justice in the older literary monuments, because it is in the mouths of princes and nobles that we find it, acknowledging that they have duties to the widow, the orphan and the poor.

The second stage of the prophetic literature is chiefly characterized by the note that Jehovah is the God of the whole Hebrew people, but has little if any interest in other peoples. The sentiment is still fierce, and imprecations and prayers for vengeance are found on every page. But it is now the sufferings or perils of the entire nation that concern the prophet. Its national enemies are to be ground into the dust by Jehovah. Justice within the nation is still, naturally, urged, but there is much less of the class-war and much more of the war against the false gods and their worshippers. Nationalism might be called the note at this stage. Jehovah made the whole race, of course, but he is supposed to be curiously indifferent to the idolatries and vices of other nations. They are his enemies because they are the enemies of his chosen people.

The third and last stage is a modification of the narrow and really absurd idea that the Hebrews alone were selected for the favors of Jehovah. The age of the prophets was now over, for the priesthood was rigorously organized, and there was no room for these irresponsible moral guides of the people. So in the course of this third stage of the development of the Old Testament literature the prophets were overshadowed by the high priests, or bishops, of the Jews. From that on the Jewish church had orthodox and heretical preachers. The prophets became so many representa-

tives of heresy and the high priests of orthodoxy. It has always been so in every religious and ecclesiastical development, never more than in the Christian religion and church.

One whole book, *Jonah*, represents this stage and is included among the prophets. There had been a real prophet named *Jonah* at one time, and it used to be thought that he was the author of the book. The experts, however, can easily show that it was written in the third century B. C. Its theme is foreign to the prophets, for it represents *Jehovah* as concerned about the spiritual salvation even of the *Assyrians*. It was at this time also that the last additions were made to the book of *Isaiah*. We read, for instance, in *XXV*, 6-8:

And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.

And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations.

He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth, for the Lord hath spoken it.

Such texts are interpolations that are at variance with the general gospel of the writer of the first part of *Isaiah*. They were added in the third century. The education of the Hebrew moralists was now complete.

# I

This gradual improvement of the moral and humane sentiments of the Hebrews is, as has just been observed, quite inconsistent with the old idea that they had special gifts or privileges or inspirations. On the other hand,

it brings the history of the Hebrews and their ideals into line with the general history of the world. It is a very clear illustration of the law of the materialistic determination of history which the bishops have rebuked me for holding. Each of these stages of moral development which I have traced in the prophets corresponds to a distinct stage in the material and cultural condition of the people. They are, of course, not sharply distinct from each other, for it takes time to bring about important changes of environment and of political conditions, but the general stages or phases can easily be recognized.

I have occasionally spoken of the sentiments of the earlier prophets and of certain still older pieces like the song of Deborah as fierce or truculent, but I mean this chiefly to point out how impossible is the old idea that they are literally the word of God. They are the word of man in very primitive surroundings. It is difficult to find parallels in modern times to anything that happened in that ancient era, but if you have ever read anything about the life of the fully civilized Hindus, you get a very fair idea.

The mountaineers are in many ways admirable folk but their isolation has given them what seems to us very weird moral ideas. There are some tribes who would not in any circumstances countenance a lie, yet the man who has not at least one murder to his credit is more or less despised. Among themselves they are most generous, and to a peaceful stranger, they can be very hospitable and courteous; but, if the soldiers did not carefully protect the people of the plains, these wild mountain people would rob and exterminate them with the greatest cheerfulness.

In that stage the Hebrew people lived, on the rocky

fringe of Palestine, for several centuries. The greatest virtues were those which made for the self-preservation of the tribe, justice and generosity to each other and deadly aggressiveness against every foreigner. The man or woman who could gloat most eloquently over a victory in which they had savagely killed men, women and children, and so taken in a new piece of territory, seemed to them inspired by Jehovah. That is natural enough, but it is very unnatural for bishops to ask us in modern times to believe that it really was in any serious sense the word of God that they uttered.

I illustrated this phase particularly from Hosea. By that time the Hebrews had already lived in their frontier provinces for about five hundred years, but they were still sufficiently isolated from civilized people to speak in the coarsest imagery, and to approve of the murder of women and children of a hostile people. They were, however, civilized in spots, so to say. Since about the year 1000 B. C. they had passed from the purely pastoral to the partly commercial stage. Jerusalem was a large town, if not a city, and there were other towns or market-centers. They were richer and more organized and their rising civilization depended wholly upon their wealth and organization, not at all on the word of God.

This growth in the church and state, which were one, meant, as usual, the rise of priests, officials, merchants and army-leaders; and, also as usual, these accumulated wealth at the expense of the agricultural folk and poorer workers and imported luxuries of dress and furniture from the great cities of other nations.

This explains the second note of the early prophets, the class-war. They lived among the agricultural folk, as a rule, for under most kings they were regarded in

the cities as wild and dangerous agitators. They became the spokesmen of the weak and lowly. These prophets were the bolsheviks of those days; and, as the patronage of the fine foreign cults was most conspicuous among the wealthy in the cities, and old orthodoxies always survive best outside the cities, they combined the attack on wealth and the attack on idolatry.

All this explains the peculiarities of their messages which have always puzzled religious people who thought them literally inspired of God. It is just the kind of poetry that a modern prophet would use, in the name of Allah, among the Riffs who lately attacked Spain in north Africa or among the Pathans to the north of India.

After the year 680 B. C. there was a long silence of the prophets, which means that the aristocratic forces in the cities won and the "agitators" were nearly exterminated. But there was at the same time a considerable change in the circumstances of the Hebrew people. The Assyrians, the most ruthless conquerors of ancient times, had risen to power in the eighth century and had spread over Syria and Palestine. They had destroyed the northern kingdom and enslaved the people, and they now threatened the kingdom of Judah. It was no longer a question of protecting themselves against Edomites or Moabites or Philistines. It was a question of whether an alliance with one of the rival imperialistic powers against the other would save Jerusalem from the ruin that had fallen upon Samaria. About 500 B. C. a stronger nationalism was born, and the people were implored to see that Jehovah must be the center of the national hope and all false gods must be abandoned. It was then that the first legal organization of the worship of Jehovah was compiled and re-



presented as a revelation by Jehovah to Moses. The orthodox church grew with the patriotic state.

The prophets of the new line reflect these circumstances. Some curse Assyria, some curse Egypt, some glory in the fall of Babylon, which the Assyrians destroyed. The thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of Isaiah are not a prophecy of the fall of Babylon, which was not so urgent a matter in the time of Isaiah, but an addition by a later writer after Babylon had fallen, and apparently after the Jews had suffered so severely at the hands of the later Babylonians. Jeremiah was the great prophet of the time. The Lamentations of Jeremiah, as they are called, which make people think of him as a dismal prophet, were not predictions of woe by Jeremiah. They were written long afterwards by one of the Jews who had remained in Jerusalem during the captivity and shared the cruel misfortunes of that time.

Jeremiah and Zephaniah, the two chief spokesmen of the time, were educated men with political views. Jeremiah came of a priestly family, Zephaniah of a wealthy one. Their books are widely separated in the chaotic arrangement of the Old Testament, which chaos is as far from inspiration as possible, but they were contemporaries and shrewd citizens who told the Jews that they were making a very serious mistake in their political affinities. Zephaniah merely told them that they richly deserved the chastisement that would fall on them for their corruption. It is a later writer who has turned him into a prophet by adding a sort of prediction of recovery in the end.

The Assyrians had been brought down and Nineveh leveled to the ground in the year 612. It is here that the short prophecy of Nahum should be placed. It is

a cry of exultation, with some very indelicate language that is discreetly toned down in the English translation, over the actual fall of Ninevah, which was one of the most ghastly destructions of that savage age.

But the Chaldeans had united with the Babylonians, or had made a new power of Babylon. King Josiah who had been inspired to accept the new law of Moses, had a very wrong political inspiration. He prematurely chose the Babylonian alliance, and he perished in the battle of Armageddon, which has become proverbial as a symbol of great social conflicts. There was a battle at Megiddo, and it brought down the scale of fate against the Jews.

Thus it is again in the light of history, not on the lines of a false and misleading theory of inspiration, that we have to read the greatest of the prophets, for we cannot give that title to Isaiah, since half the book that bears his name was not written by him; the prophecies attributed to him were interpolations added long after his death and the events to which they relate.

Though Jeremiah was the son of a provincial priest, he strongly opposed the priests of Jerusalem and their idea of an alliance with Egypt, and they hated and persecuted him. He fled in fear of his life from Jerusalem and continued to prophesy woe. Hence his freedom in denouncing even the priests and scribes of Jerusalem. As I said in the last chapter, he seems in one place to denounce their new book of the law as a forgery. He is a poet-politician, an advocate of the Babylonian alliance, who rightly believes that the newly organized civilization of the Chaldean-Babylonians will win in the struggle with Egypt. Though his own family and townfolk turned against him, he was right, and Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. But Jeremiah

declined the honorable offer of the Babylonians, and to the end of his prophecy he reflects the bitter struggles and miserable experiences of the Jews who remained.

It is no word of God but a very natural and pathetic word of man that we have in Jeremiah. In short, and in truth, there is not one word of the Jewish God anywhere in the Old Testament, and this is equally so of the Christian God as to the New Testament. The Jewish-Christian Bible is as wholly the word of man as the Mohammedan Koran, or the box containing the golden plates of the divine printer who obligingly set up and stereotyped God's revelations to the founder of Mormonism. The gods and their words of revelation are so many symbols of nature and its doings else they are just superstitions. The belief that the gods have handed down from their celestial abodes the truths upon which the salvation of the world depends is being supplanted by the belief that man has discovered for himself on the floor and in the ceiling of his terrestrial abode every salutary truth by which he ever has been influenced to any good.

## II

Since the days of Solomon (1000 B. C. if he is an historical personage) the isolation of the Hebrews had been, in the intervening five hundred years greatly modified. Their merchants and officers would visit the cities of the plains, and the general adoption of Syrian, Palestinian and Phœnician gods would give them more contact with their neighbors. But we must remember that their nearer neighbors were very small states of an inferior culture. The poetic fire of Jeremiah and Zephaniah reminds us that Judea was still mainly a pastoral country, and that the idealism embodied in their religion is not very elevated.

Jehovah is still the God of the children of Abraham alone. Other gods are all false, but false only to the Jews. They were still regarded as true gods for their respective votaries, as much so as Jehovah was for his. These nations may keep their own gods. No one has the least idea of announcing the true God, in the later missionary fashion, to them, because Jehovah is not supposed to take the least interest in them. Jeremiah alone hints that Jehovah is interested in the new Babylonians, but it is only in the sense that he will use them to deliver the Jews from the menace of Egypt.

Many thousands of the educated were (in 597 and 596 B. C.) deported to Babylonia. This was the greatest event that had yet happened to the Jews. No doubt most of them were planted on the land, but very large numbers of them would now become acquainted with the greatest city of the world, which the Chaldeans had beautifully rebuilt, and the greatest literature and scientific culture of the world. Even Baal and Astarte of Syria would look very small in comparison with the great gods of Babylon and their mighty temples and elaborate priesthoods. From this time (say 400 B. C.) onward we must expect a new note in the Hebrew literature.

The new note would not at once be struck. The Babylonians would despise these conquered Jewish rebels and would be bitterly hated by them. We get for a time nothing but cries of misery. Lamentations often beautifully expressed the poignant sufferings of those who remained in Judea, harassed and despised by their neighbors, despairing and divided among themselves. Ezekiel, on the other hand, expresses the feelings of those Jews who clung to their national traditions

in Babylonia and still so strongly believed in Jehovah that they were sure he would yet raise the dead bones to life. He was the son of a priest, settled in provincial Babylonia, and brooding over the traditions of his race led him to describe, in gaunt language the visions of a final recovery which he felt that he had received by divine revelation.

Some of the Psalms (for example "By the rivers of Babylon") seem to come from the same pious Hebrews who clung to their faith in Jehovah in the foreign land. Jehovah alone could save them, they felt, now that they saw the mighty power of their enemies, and thus on this side the religious nationalism of the Jews was confirmed. But it was a long wait; and, as we shall see later, the great majority fell away from Jehovah and melted into the population of Babylonia. They were not slaves. Most of them became farmers like the bulk of the Babylonian people, and rejoiced to find themselves on a soil that was far more fertile than that of Judea. Others entered the professions in the cities and may even, as the historical romance called Daniel represents, have penetrated into the service of the court.

The most important effect of the sojourn in Babylonia was to give the priests and scribes a very much larger ambition. The sixth century, the century of misfortune (for the deportation was completed in 596 B. C. and it was a century and a half later, 450 B. C., before a modest temple had been built) was the time of greatest production of Hebrew literature. The historical part of it, which gives an entirely false framework to the whole, was very largely put together then. How this was done, and how so many biblical students can insist that it was not done until the third century, yet ask us to regard it as in some sense the word of

God, it will be better to postpone to the next chapter. Here let us complete the true story of the prophets.

By the middle of the sixth century the Babylonians themselves were speaking with anxiety about a certain King Cyrus who had made the Persians on the northern mountains a formidable military power. Babylonia, Egypt and King Croesus (so famous for his wealth) of Asia Minor, formed an alliance against him, but by 540 he had swallowed up King Croesus and all his wealth and territory, and the Babylonians began to fear.

Naturally, the fear of the Babylonians meant a new hope to the Jews of Babylonia who had remained faithful to Jehovah, and their literature passes from the somber stage of Lamentations and Ezechiel to a new outburst of sanguine prophecy. Was not Jehovah showing that in a totally unexpected manner he was preparing to deliver his faithful people? So the writer who is known as the second Isaiah (which is the polite way of the critics of saying that someone forged prophecies in the name of Isaiah) began his work.

This Isaiah's prophecies begin with chapter XL: Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people. In eight beautifully written chapters (with many later interpolations) he prepares his fellow exiles for redemption. It is not possible here to show in detail how the biblical experts have dissected his message out of the eight chapters, but if any reader cares to see this in the authorities he will recognize just the voice of a cultivated Jew who is closely watching the steady progress of Cyrus and anticipating the fall of Babylon.

The second Isaiah would, however, scarcely write out such a prophecy until the city was actually taken by the Persians, which occurred in the year 539 B. C.

Orthodox folk would put the book of Daniel here, which professes to have been written at the time, but it is inaccurate in such important points that, as we shall see, it has to be placed nearly four hundred years later. The last king of Babylon was Nabonid, not Belshazzar; and, as his army had been beaten on the plains, there was no siege of the city.

The religious note of the writer of this part of Isaiah (when it is separated from, for instance, the adulterations—XIV. 9-20, is a prose-passage that has been interpolated in his poetry) was the highest yet struck in Hebrew literature. In this we see the first effect of the contact of the Jews with Babylonian literature. I showed in the third volume that the prayers and hymns then in use in Babylonia were often much higher than those of the Hebrews. Here, for instance, is part of the prayer which king Nebuchadnezzar had addressed to the god Marduk when he ascended the throne, only ten years before the Jews were deported:

O eternal ruler, Lord of the universe!  
Grant that the name of the king whom thou lovest,  
Whose name thou hast mentioned, may flourish as  
seems good to thee . . .  
According to thy mercy, O Lord, which thou be-  
stowest upon all,  
Cause me to love thy supreme rule  
Implant the fear of thy divinity in my heart . . .

Contact with the priests of this cult, which was virtually monotheism, tended to broaden the ideas of the Jews. Then came the friendly contact with Persia, and the Jews not only found themselves praising a heathen monarch as a servant of Jehovah, but they learned of a new monotheism that was purer than

their own. I have explained that it is probably through this acquaintance with the Persian religion that they began to entertain the idea of a future reward in heaven, which all the previous relations of which they boasted had not ever suggested to them. But the adoption of the idea that there is to be a life beyond the grave would mean a revolution in Jewish tradition, and the priests and scribes who were preparing the new organization of the religion did not accept it. They were bent on restoring the old religion, they said, though they took advantage of the long period without a temple to re-write and further falsify the sacred books. Their chief interest was to make *Jehovah and his priests* supreme.

### III

The only prophets which occupy their proper place in the Old Testament are those of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. King Cyrus took over Judea as part of his conquest, but he had seen the evil of the policy of interfering with the religion of subject-provinces and he gave the Jews permission to go home. The great majority refused to leave the prosperous land to which they had become accustomed, and the few zealots who first arrived at Jerusalem found a dispirited and poverty-stricken population.

We shall see in the next chapter how the return of the Jews is most atrociously exaggerated in *Ezra*. The contemporary prophets are Haggai and Zechariah, and they represent the poor and despondent population of Judea as resisting all their efforts to induce them to rebuild the temple. If, as many think, only the first part of Zechariah is the genuine work of that priest and prophet, a rare combination, we see that as late



as 520 B. C. the Jews wearily refused to take the trouble to begin the rebuilding of the temple and the descendants of the exiles generally refused to return from Babylonia and Persia.

In fact, there were prophets who still opposed the priests and their designs. There are passages of the remarkably complex book that bears the name of Isaiah, especially in chapters LVI-LIX, which seem to have been written about this time. The writer scourges the priests as "dumb dogs that cannot bark," and as "greedy dogs which can never have enough." He slights the fasts of the Jews, and (ch. LXVI) attacks the practice of sacrifice. It is mercy and justice that the Lord requires. They must clothe the naked and feed the hungry.

In this unknown writer we find the first great breach with the tradition that Jehovah belongs to the Jews alone. Against the priests he insists that Jehovah has revealed to him that he will receive "the sons of the stranger," and "the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths." We are leagues away from the spirit of the age of the original Isaiah when we find (LVI. 7) Jehovah represented as saying: "For mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people." This is the broadening effect of contact with the great civilizations of Mesopotamia and Persia not of divine inspiration.

The temple was built and the priesthood strongly entrenched on the forged law of Moses. The age of the prophets was over, not merely because the new condition of life did not tend to produce these fiery poets, but because the new orthodoxy became too powerful. Joel, a composite book, and Malachi and Obadiah were the only complete works that were added to the collection of the prophets. Probably the names are

fictitious. In any case their supposed prophecies are unimportant. Judea fell upon worse days than ever, but the word of the Lord raised up no more great prophets to guide it.

The defeat of Persia by Alexander the Great and the founding of a new world-empire merely moved various writers to add interpolations in the various books. At this time were written many of the verses in chapters XXIV to XXVII of Isaiah, which reflect the new moral conception of Jehovah as the father, not merely the creator, of all men. It had taken even the prophets five hundred years to rise to that height.

This later Isaiah for the first time looks out upon the whole earth as the earlier Isaiah had looked upon Judea. All men are responsible to Jehovah for their actions. "From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs, even glory to the righteous." It is about the year 300, when the Jews are deported from Syria to Egypt (XXVII, 13) that these passages were written, not in the time of Isaiah, four hundred years earlier, when they would have been pointless.

So the Bible really tells its own story when you read it without the falsifying spectacles of the old idea that it is the word of God; and, at least as far as the prophets are concerned, it is a very interesting story. There is no revelation made to prophets in successive centuries. It is difficult to understand why orthodox folk do not think it blasphemous to impute to a revelation from God, or connect in any way with their God, the crude sentiments and coarse ideas of the earlier prophets. What we really see, when we examine them in the light of contemporary history, as I have done, is the older civilizations gradually educating a backward race. The Jews brought no great light into a

dark world. They first appeared with the sentiment of justice narrowly restricted as it is among all lowly peoples and an appalling callousness about the fate of their enemies. From that point to the humanity and broadness of the last contributor to Isaiah we have a five-century course of moral education, a materialistic determination of the history of the ideals of the Hebrews as of all other peoples.

**O**RIGINAL sin standeth not in the following of Adam. (as the Pelagians do vainly talk;) but it is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the off-spring of Adam: whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the Spirit: and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation. And this inflection of nature doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated; whereby the lust of the flesh, . . . . (which some do expound the wisdom, some sensuality, some the affection, some the desire, of the flesh.) is not subject to the Law of God. And although there is no condemnation for them that believe and are baptized; yet the Apostle doth confess, that concupiscence and lust bath of itself the nature of sin.—Articles of Religion.

THE REAL ORIGIN OF  
THE OLD TESTAMENT

**I**T appeareth well that this pretended monarchy of the Bishop of Rome is not founded upon the Gospel, but it is repugnant thereunto. And therefore it appertaineth to Christian kings and princes, for the discharge of their office and duty toward God, to endeavor themselves to reform and reduce the same again unto the old limits and pristine estate of that power which was given to them by Christ, and used in the Primitive Church. For it is out of doubt that Christ's faith was then most firm and pure, and the Scriptures of God were then best understood, and virtue did then most abound and excel. And therefore it must needs follow, that the customs and ordinances then used and made be more conform and agreeable unto the true doctrine of Christ, and more conducing unto the edifying and benefit of the Church of Christ, than any customs or laws used or made by the Bishop of Rome, or any other addicted to that *see* and *usurped power since that time.*—The Doctrine of the Church of England.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE REAL ORIGIN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

It is not the object of this little work either to tell the history of or to analyze the literature of the Bible. I am doing this only in so far as it is necessary for the purpose of examining whether we can in any sense regard the Old and New Testaments as the word of God or an inspired book. It is my aim to show, as in the other books of this series, that the formularies or standards of faith which assert that the Old Testament is or contains the word of God cannot now be accepted literally. Christian writers began to find this out even in the eighteenth century by carefully rendering the text.

One might ask why, if the text itself so plainly shows its human origin and its inaccuracies, it was not found out long before. The answer is, of course, that it had been discovered, but in those days it was serious heresy and very dangerous to find out such things.

During the Middle Ages (450-1550) the Bible was little read, except by monks and priests in the course of their duties, and they read it, being compelled to read so much every day, as speedily as their lips could form the words.

The Reformation made the Bible the basis of the Christian religion, and within a century writers were pointing out its inconsistencies and inaccuracies. The sect of the Deists, or men who believed in God but rejected the Bible as the word of God, appeared in England, and had very distinguished representatives. Thomas Paine's famous critical analysis of the Old Testament is only the last stage in the Deistic examination of it.

The science of biblical criticism which developed in the nineteenth century is called the higher criticism because it took up this work on more scholarly lines. Its masters, distinguished divines, were all familiar with the Hebrew tongue and they made a literary analysis of the text on the lines which I described at the beginning of the last chapter.

Then began the excavation of the sites of ancient Egypt, Babylon and Assyria, and we got a far more extensive and accurate knowledge of the old world in which the Hebrews had occupied such a very modest and altogether ordinary position.

History and archaeology have literally poured a flood of light upon that ancient world, just as the careful study of the Old Testament itself has made it known to us as it was not in the least known in earlier ages.

It is therefore quite foolish to try to compel us to repeat the old phrases as if we knew no more about the matter than men did in the days of Luther. That the Bible is the word of God, that any part of the Old Testament was dictated or even in a more general sense revealed to the writer, was never more than a tradition, first in Judaism, then in the Christian church. The Bible is, as we have seen, a human book of very human interest.

With the new meanings of such phrases and terms as word of God, inspiration and revelation, which the modernists offer to us I am not concerned. If they say that the authors of our formularies meant what the modernist means to-day, they are obviously wrong. But if they merely claim that our modern knowledge compels us to put a new meaning into those phrases, we prefer to take them as mere symbols



of a truth that had not yet been fully discovered.

I have shown that the books of the Old Testament which I have so far examined cannot for the most part be described as the word of God in any sense, and that even the finer moral literature could only be so described in the symbolic sense that the authors were fired by the highest idealism of their time.

But I have been selecting books here and there out of the sacred collection and it is time to say something about them as a whole. I have said very little about the historical matter which fills so much of the volume and gives it the fallacious appearance it has to-day. We have come to the time when this historical narrative was put together, from Genesis to Ezra, and we shall find that the true story dissuades us more strongly than ever from calling the Old Testament the word of God.

## I

It will now be useful to repeat a few points and summarize the story of the early development of Hebrew literature as it is told by the modern literary historian. Experts on the alphabet assure us that it was developed out of the older written languages, which have no letters of the alphabet (as Chinese has not to-day) until about the year 1000 B. C. We may be certain therefore that no one wrote anything in Hebrew, because a Hebrew script did not exist, before that time. This view is strongly confirmed when we learn that, though Palestine has been searched and excavated by archaeologists very thoroughly, only two fragments of Hebrew inscriptions have been found.

Unless therefore a man wishes to make the desperate suggestion that perhaps Moses had thoughtfully taken a large supply of papyrus and the painting material of

a scribe into the desert with him and wrote the Pentateuch in Egyptian hieroglyphics, the whole story of a giving of the law on Sinai and of the writing of such books as Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy must be surrendered.

But we have seen that this story has to be given up for other reasons. The legends of Genesis are now clearly traced to their real source. Until the year 1000 B. C. the Hebrews had no literature, but among the people old stories were repeated of heroes and battles and wise or witty forerunners, and in the towns many were acquainted with legends about the making of the world and the early history of man which had spread from Babylon all over Syria and Palestine.

About that time the Hebrews imitated their neighbors and appointed kings; and, when these men won more territory and prestige, friendly relations were entered into with the Syrians and the Phoenicians, whose merchants were then developing the new form of written language. This was introduced into Jerusalem as part of the general advance, and in the tenth century the story of Saul, David and Solomon in its original form and a short code of laws copied from that of Babylonia were written down. To these were added in the course of the next century the stories of Elijah and Elisha and of the kings after Solomon.

They were not in any sense sacred writings, but when, in the ninth and eighth centuries B. C., two writers, one in the northern and one in the southern kingdom, compiled a little series of the creation-legends and myths about early man that they found circulating in the district, the writings assumed a semi-sacred character.

It was necessary to omit all the nonsense about the

fighths of the Babylonian gods and ascribe everything to Jehovah. The God of the Hebrews thus became the maker of heaven and earth and man, and the book that described his work could not be regarded in the same light as a mere human chronicle.

Yet in none of these books was there any claim of revelation. When the northern kingdom fell to Assyria, 722 B. C., the southern kingdom took over its creation story; and, as the conciliatory but unskillful priests could not suppress either version, they clumsily blended them. But the two sets of stories, the Jahvist and Elohist, are so distinctive that they can be picked out of the text to-day, in spite of this and later blendings. The writers merely give us statements about the making of the world and man, and they make no sort of claim to give the word of God.

Jehovah had, in fact, become merely one God among many, but there were zealots who brooded over the record, in the Jahvist-Elohist narrative, of the exclusive relation of Jehovah to the patriarchs and the conquest of Palestine, and who were also disgusted with some features of most of the other forms of worship. Their leading spokesmen or prophets began to write down, or to have written down by others, the fiery language in which they scourged the fine folks of the cities who were mainly responsible for the innovations.

Each prophet in oriental style (the practice is very common to reformers in all times) began by saying that the Lord had called him to speak, and that the Lord had told him what he must say.

This idea of the divine mission of prophets was not taken so solemnly at first. Many a young preacher or missionary even in modern times overcomes his difference by a conviction that he is called by the Lord

and that he will tell him what to say when the time comes, but even pious folk who in a general way believe this do not exactly believe that what he says is the word of the Lord and must be a standard of faith forever.

The prophets freely contradicted each other and the priests chose very indelicate and sometimes repulsive language; and, as we saw, both were quite ignorant of what all religious people now regard as the most important religious truth, a world of rewards and punishments after death.

Yet from this fashion of claiming that "the Lord said unto me" began the tradition that the prophecies contained the word of God. This was still held only in a loose sense until, in the reign of King Josiah in the seventh century, the priests wrote and imposed upon the king and people as "the law of the Lord" a series of commands about the power of the priests and the practice of religion which were of more vital consequence. The book was, no doubt, an enlargement of the Book of the Covenant, or the small code of civil law now contained in Exodus (XX-XXIII) but it was explicitly and fraudulently said that these laws had been dictated by Jehovah to Moses and were sacred standards of belief and practice for the entire nation.

## II

The destruction of the northern kingdom, which could so plausibly be represented as a punishment for disloyalty to Jehovah, and the removal of the Assyrian threat to Jerusalem, which easily assumed the character of a miracle performed by Jehovah in favor of his worshippers, prepared the way for this reorganization

of religion. The Jahvist-Elohistic narrative was combined with Deuteronomy, expanding the story of the giving of the law in the desert, and the whole history of the Hebrews was rewritten (I and II Kings) from the days of Solomon to the days of Josiah, making the fortunes of the people depend more clearly on their loyalty or disloyalty to Jehovah. Other writers worked over again the stories of Joshua and the Judges.

The alteration of the record so as to make Jehovah the commanding figure in Hebrew history from the start was done so crudely that, as we saw, all the earlier books, Exodus, Joshua, Judges and Kings contain the most obvious misstatements and abound in proof that they were written far later than the alleged dates. I need not go further into these, as we shall see plenty of new illustrations when we come to the later historical books.

Some people wonder how an ancient Jewish writer could be so crude as to give duplicate and contradictory narratives of the same event, how he could pretend to be writing as Moses and yet occasionally say that it is "true to this day," but these people are merely thinking of the conditions of modern history-writing.

Moreover, very few could read in Judea. The priestly scribes whom the prophet Jeremiah criticized so severely were not writing books which would be multiplied in hundreds of copies and put into circulation. They were writing them for the library of the priests only or for zealous folk who would not notice a few inconsistencies provided the story glorified Jehovah sufficiently and clearly showed how the people suffered or prospered just in proportion as they deserted or were loyal to him.

Professor Bower says that it was a "grand idea"

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and a "magnificent work." Well, you can please yourself as to what you think about that. He and the other scholars admit that the story of the Hebrews was most violently squeezed into an entirely new frame, and that in its new form the story scandalously deceived the people into believing that all the new power and privileges of the priests and levites had been dictated to Moses by Jehovah six or seven centuries earlier. It was a mendacious outrage which from the view-point of civilization is seen to have had melancholy consequences. No other religious literature except, as we shall see in later chapters, the Christian only, is at all comparable to the Jewish for its ruinous fraudulency.

You may or may not think that this wholesale deception of the Jewish priests was justified in order to get rid of Baal and Moloch and Astarte, and that therefore they were quite unselfish. That is a matter of opinion, but on the facts all the leading biblical scholars are now agreed, and in these six booklets, covering the various fields of culture in order to justify the doctrinal position for the taking of which my brethren in the House of Bishops tried, condemned and punished me, I am giving the facts so far as the experts in the several relevant fields of culture are agreed, or at least the majority of them. In this age of science only such facts count with educated people. Both the Old and New Testaments are doomed by all who know the facts to rejection as the words of the Gods, Jehovah and Jesus, if for no other reason, because of the utter disregard of the truth by the unscrupulous priesthoods who fraudulently imposed them upon the faithful adherents of the Jewish and Christian interpretations of supernaturalistic religion.

It was a very hard blow for the Jewish priesthood

when the purification of the land by Josiah and the concentration of the people on the worship of Jehovah were immediately followed by the defeat and death of the king; and, soon afterwards, by the appalling catastrophe of the Babylonian Captivity.

It is, however, quite clear from the contemporary truth telling prophets, Zephaniah and Jeremiah, that the account of the reform by Josiah which we have in Kings and Chronicles is very largely untrue. Whatever he succeeded in doing, the people clung to their Baals and Moloches in large part, so it was always possible for the priests to represent the affliction as due to the remaining idolatry. The zealots could easily follow the priests rather than the prophets; and, as we saw, the triumph of the Persians gave them new life and hope, and the second Isaiah and other prophets poured out a final flood of inspiring oratory.

In spite of all their difficulties and their poverty a sufficient number were inspired to rebuild the temple, sword in one hand and trowel in the other, and the services and sacrifices were resumed. For a hundred years the tradition had been broken, and the new generation of Jehovah's votaries knew about religion only what the priests told them.

It was decided to complete the work that had been begun a century earlier and recast the whole early history of the Hebrews in the interests of a still more false priestly propagandism. The Jews had no longer any political interests to distract them. Judea was a peaceful province of Persia. So the priests sat down to write the famous story of the wandering in the desert in a form that would make every rule of worship and every arrangement of the ministers of the temple the word of God in the strictest possible sense.

Thus came into existence the distinctive Hebrew code and cult of Jehovah that is described in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The writers of this Priestly Code, as the biblical authorities call it, worked over the existing records from the first chapter of Genesis.

Creation was arranged in six days of labor, and the rest of the Lord on the seventh day was made the sacred foundation of the Sabbath the greatest of all Jewish institutions—an institution borrowed, directly or indirectly, from Babylonia, where it was the custom, though not embodied in law.

Circumcision was introduced in the days of Noah. Men were described as living to prodigious ages in the times of the patriarchs, so as to show how Jehovah rewarded the superior virtue and loyalty of his children those days.

The Passover was justified by a new and thrilling story about the Israelites in Egypt.

Then the existing fiction of the giving of the law was enormously expanded.

By a later combination of this Priestly Code with the Jahvist-Elohism-Deuteronomy book, the Pentateuch was, except for a few still later interpolations, completed. It would be difficult indeed to find five other books comparable to these for the number of falsehoods contained in them.

All this about the Old Testament is much easier to work out than to settle which parts of Shakespeare's plays were not written by Shakespeare or which novels of Dumas were not written by Dumas. People who laugh at the work of these higher critics, as they are called, when they have not even an elementary knowledge of how such experts work are very foolish. Our farmers



would shake with laughter if some professor of Hebrew from the city were to come down and tell them that their methods of raising cattle or growing cabbages and carrots were all wrong, yet many of the farmers think their own ideas about evolution or Moses are far superior to the ideas of men who spend a life time studying the Hebrew text and comparing these anonymous and faulty Hebrew records with the truth as it is revealed by archaeologists and historians. The result is that they make an elementary blunder from the start. They accept without proof the statement that the Old Testament is the word of God; whereas, obviously, this conviction, if it is to be of any value, ought to be at the end of a long and careful inquiry.

The truth about the compilation of the Old Testament is a matter for literary experts, not for either bishops or farmers. It is to be ascertained only by a very laborious and learned study, and the equipment includes a knowledge of Hebrew and ancient history and a careful consideration of archaeological research as it progresses. In this we have the great advantage that nearly all the biblical experts who put the story together for us are Christian divines, holding places of honor in their various churches.

So for once I am in highly respectable company. I am not repeating in this booklet what skeptics or secular scholars say. I am giving a simple outline of what (I think this may be said safely) the great majority of the more learned Christian experts on the Old Testament say to-day. What will the bishops say to me now? What I wrote in earlier books they said, might or might not be sound science or sound history, but it was opposed to the Prayer Book and the Creeds.

I admit that the bishops were right in this but

nevertheless insist that the representations of the Prayer Book and Creeds are not literally true unless the Bible is literally the word of God; and, so far as the Old Testament is concerned, I moreover insist that I have now proved its words to be those of men, and that they were priests who did not tell the truth.

In the preceding little volume our chief concern was with the Catholic Creeds, Protestant Articles and Prayer Book and I showed, so I believe, fully and clearly, that they have authority only in so far as they reproduce the word of God from the Bible. The sixth article expressly says this.

In this book we turn to the Bible, and find that it does not claim to be the word of God in any doctrinal sense, that it cannot possibly be the word of God because of its errors and crudities, and that in point of fact it is very plainly the word of men.

And in all this I am merely repeating the assurances of experts whom the heads of the various churches do not expel for heresy but, on the contrary, put in educational positions of great honor and influence!

### III

To this point we will return in the end, for we have not yet nearly finished with the compilation of the Old Testament. The work of falsifying (the critics say, more politely, redacting) the record which I have just described went on more or less from about 500 to 300 B. C.

The book of Joshua was next "redacted," or falsely made to show that there were priests and levites and all the intricate paraphernalia of the temple right from the start and it was then misplaced between Deuteronomy and Judges.

Then I and II Samuel and Ruth (which was not yet in existence and is entirely out of place) were likewise redacted and edifying touches and even new stories were added to Kings.

In the year 445 B. C., when all this falsifying work had been fairly completed there came to Jerusalem a zealous Jew, Nehemiah, who had remained in Persia and had even been a favorite minister of the wine-cup to the Persian king. Nehemiah got permission to retire to Judea and stir up his countrymen, who were still in a state of great listlessness and despondency, to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, complete the new temple and concentrate on the worship of Jehovah. So at least we read in the book that bears his name, but most of the experts regard it as a much later forgery and imposition of the priesthood or at least an adulteration of the actual memoirs of Nehemiah.

Thus, while the book is supposed to have been written about the year 433 B. C., we find in it (XII, 1-26) a list of names of priests and levites which, historians say, reaches to the days of Alexander the Great, a century later, yet the list ends with an assurance that all lived in the days of Nehemiah.

It seems, at all events, to be historical that a zealous and influential layman named Nehemiah returned from Persia to Jerusalem and stimulated the work of reconstruction. A few years later came the priest Ezra, and under his energetic lead the priests soon made Judea what it never had been before—a land wholly consecrated to Jehovah, with one temple and a formidable priesthood at Jerusalem. How it was done we cannot say in detail, because the experts tell us that the book of memoirs that bears the name of Ezra was redacted very heavily afterwards, in plain words outrageously

falsified. Redaction seems to have been the most flourishing industry in the new Jerusalem. We have not yet reached the end of it.

Ezra certainly requires some sort of explanation. The book opens with the statement that King Cyrus the Persian, immediately after he had taken Babylon, which happened in 539 B. C., made an extraordinary proclamation. Just listen to this. Cyrus is made to say in a royal decree that God, Ahura Mazda, had directed him to send all the Jews back to Jerusalem, and they were all free to go and to rebuild the temple; that the Babylonians were to load them with gold and silver; that from the royal treasury Cyrus handed over to them the great gold vessels of the temple which the Babylonians had appropriated; and, so, off they started with five thousand four hundred vessels of gold and silver and a marvellous pilgrimage of Jews, with priests, levites, singers and all the rest complete, numbering 42,360 Jews, with 7337 servants and a thousand horses and mules, 435 camels and 6720 asses! What do you think of anyone who can call this the word of God?

How any ordinary Bible reader, with such things set down in plain English before his eyes, can talk about the Bible being the word of God and refuse to admit any errors and fabrications in it is past comprehension.

That a devout follower of the purely spiritual Persian god, Ahura Mazda, should help to build a temple to a false God, Jehovah, a God whose worship consisted largely of animal sacrifices, is in itself incredible.

But that the few thousand Jews who had been deported in the year 596 should have increased tenfold

in fifty years, in an age when a population scarcely doubled in a century, is too large a demand on our faith. In every detail the story is preposterous. After loading the camels and mules with their colossal loot, they would have only seven thousand horses and asses to transport fifty thousand people across about five hundred miles of a waterless, burning desert.

Two years later, it is said, they laid the foundations of the temple, but wicked neighbors, who could, one would imagine, have easily been brought to order by fifty thousand zealots, intrigued and impeded the work, so there was a long delay. Once more the thoughtful reader notices the glaring defects of the story. Ezra clearly puts the gorgeous return of the fifty thousand in 538 B. C., while the more reliable prophecy of Haggai tells us that the people had not begun to build the temple, and refused to begin, in the second year of Darius, or 520 B. C., eighteen years later. It is said to have been finished at the end of six more years. Even the older biblical students make the zealous Ezra or his fathers remain in Babylonia until 444 B. C. and we now know that it was about that date when Nehemiah thought fit to leave the Persian court.

According to the Bible record it was six years later when Ezra and a large company of priests, levites, singers and scribes (who had mysteriously remained in Babylon while their religious brethren were in full swing in Jerusalem) decided to move to the temple of Jehovah. And Ezra reproduces an "authentic" letter of King Artaxerxes which authorizes him to take a further immense sum of silver and gold from Babylon for the express purpose of doing something that must have been repulsive to every pious and refined Persian—the purchase of an enormous number of animals which

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were to be sacrificed to Jehovah. The letter further authorizes Ezra to draw any money he thinks fit from the provincial treasuries of the kingdom. In form and substance these supposed decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes are the most impudent forgeries in the Old Testament. Every expert on Persian history smiles at them.

Next Ezra describes how he finds another five or six thousand Jews (since he enumerates some fifteen hundred males) who still linger in Babylonia and can be persuaded to go with him, and they depart with another miraculous load of gold and silver. They find that all that has yet been done is of so little avail that "the people of Israel, and the priests, and the levites" are all just as idolatrous as ever and mixed up disgracefully with the non-Jewish population; and, to complete the fairy-tale, Ezra summons the whole Jewish people to Jerusalem, and makes them all stand in heavy rain while he chastises them and condemns an enormously long list of priests to divorce the foreign wives they had married. Nehemiah adds that Ezra the scribe produced the book of "the law the Lord had commanded by Moses" and read it to the whole nation from a pulpit.

It is a tissue of improbabilities and indeed impossibilities. The extraordinary feature is that, just when the priests and scribes persuade the Jews that the new collection of books is "the word of God" (which is the only real reason why people say so in America) it is the word of man in a sense that one finds it difficult to defend.

All scholars admit that the Old Testament is a very largely arbitrary and fictitious account of the history of Israel put together by the priests during and after the

Captivity. They beg us to recognize the pious purpose. But some critics roundly attribute it to the ambition and cupidity of the priests. Priesthoods have always been the greatest grafters in the world.

You may believe as you like, but I have given the circumstances in which the Old Testament, as we call the older and larger part of the Bible, was written and came to be regarded as the word of God.

If we are tempted to justify this falsification of history by its virtuous aim, we shall at least expect that, once the cult of Jehovah is established, all this very questionable procedure shall cease. Very far from it. The Jewish writers seem by this time to have lost all sense of what we call historical accuracy. They wrote almost anything that would help the worship of Jehovah and attributed it to anybody whose name carried weight. The end justifies the means, seems to have been the first principle of these ancient, unscrupulous Jesuits.

#### IV

Of the pious romances and wisdom-books that appeared in the next century or two I will speak in the succeeding chapter. Here let us finish with the historical books, and we shall finally realize what appalling liberties these late writers took with the facts to glorify the religion of Jehovah and to increase the power and gain of his priests.

There were still many difficulties that the pious Jew felt when he tried to reconcile the new historical record with the teaching of the priests, especially about the prosperity of bad kings and misfortunes of good kings in the idolatrous days. Priests and prophets alike were still quite opposed to the doctrine of a future life which would, one imagines, have offered them the

easiest solution. So the record of facts had to be further falsified, and there appeared a new "Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel."

But this new version was still unsatisfactory, and the material of it was worked up fresh in I and II Chronicles. The writer, who lived about 300 B. C. or later, opened his story, after a singular mass of genealogies from Adam downward, with the fictitious story of Saul and David and, seeing that a totally different version already existed in Samuel, he made an audacious romance of it. In the twelfth chapter he gives David, a guerilla leader, about 300,000 armed warriors, and he coolly writes that there were already 3722 priests and 4600 levites, performing duties that are unknown to Samuel. David's vices are prudently omitted, but his virtues and accomplishments are so resolutely exaggerated that the fifty shekels he pays to Ornan the Jebusite are changed into six hundred. His taste for dancing in scant attire before the ark is made the excuse of representing him as the creator of music and ritual for the temple.

Then we have worse and more of these absurdities in the glorification of the career of Solomon. His extensive harem and his complaisance to foreign gods are suppressed. Where the Chronicles find him represented as ceding twenty cities to Hiram, he changes it into Hiram ceding a score of cities to Solomon. When he comes to the building of the Temple he fabricates all sorts of new details to make people believe that the ritual which was concocted by the priestly writers of the fifth century already existed in the days of Solomon.

This writer of the Book of Kings whom the orthodox believe to have been inspired shamelessly falsifies point after point in the later record of the kings to



prove that all the wicked kings went after false gods and that all the good kings who suffered had done something wrong to deserve it.

Ahaz is made to raise an altar to the gods of Damascus, whereas in II Kings, Ahaz is merely described as seeing a fine altar in Damascus and having a similar altar built in the temple at Jerusalem.

Ahaz again is said in Kings to have withdrawn from Syro-Ephremitic war, but the chronicler is determined to load punishments on the idolator and he describes a victory over him in which the Israelites kill 120,000 and capture 200,000 Judeans!

When he finds the good king Uzziah afflicted with leprosy, he invents the reason that the king offered incense in the temple with his own hands when the priests forbade him, and it was against a law that did not exist until centuries later.

For the wicked Manasseh he invents a capture by the Assyrians, but as Manasseh reigned peacefully for fifty-five years, he converts him to Jehovah, describes him as destroying the foreign cults in his kingdom. Jeremiah shows he did nothing of the kind.

When the most pious Josiah falls in the battle of Megiddo, he explains that the Lord had sent him through the king of Egypt an order not to fight.

He makes Nebuchadnezzar capture the wicked young king Jehoiakim and sent him in chains to Babylon, whereas it was his son who suffered that fate.

All sorts of reasons were invented by this brazen liar in the old days to explain why the Old Testament contained two works (I and II Kings and I and II Chronicles) covering the same ground and so frequently differing. Even the most plausible of these reasons was

fatal to the view that there was the word of God in either of them.

The Kings and Chronicles were, at the best, supposed by orthodox Jews and Christians to be two very ordinary historical works by different writers who used generally, but not always, the same material. But we now know, as I showed in an earlier chapter that even Kings does not go back in its earliest version to within four centuries of the supposed time of David. The genuine chronicle of the early kings, which probably was greatly exaggerated in the oriental manner, has been hopelessly lost. The priestly writers of the sixth century reedited Kings, but it was still not strong enough, and so we get the audacities of this fourth and final version of the doings of the Kings of Judah and Israel until the time of the Babylonian Captivity.

How absurdly strange it is that God had to have so many widely differing versions of his inspired word! Every book of the Old Testament proves the utter impossibility of the orthodox doctrine that this part of the Bible either is, as the fundamentalists contend, or even contains, as the modernists say, the word of God; and, as we shall see, this is equally true of all the books of the New Testament. Speaking broadly, we are not going too far when we plainly represent that the whole Bible is a forgery by priesthoods in the name of two fictitious gods—the God of the Jews, Jehovah, and the God of the Christians, Jesus.

Such is, apart from the psalms and a few late books which we have still to consider, the genuine story of the writing of the Old Testament as far as all the resources of modern scholarship can put it together for us. Surely it would be juster and wiser to say in plain English as I am doing what these conclusions mean.

The entire estimate of the Old Testament according to the old type of the orthodox believer, of some tens of millions of people still in America, is based upon the Pentateuch, or upon at least the version of early Hebrew history which begins in Exodus and continues to the end of Joshua. We might contrast it still further and say that the idea that the Bible is the word of God is based principally upon the story of the communications of Moses with God in the books of the Pentateuch. What precedes and what follows this, as far as the prophets, is just ordinary oriental chronicle, and the assurance of the prophets themselves that God told them what to say ought not to mislead any person who is familiar with mystic literature.

Now those who believe that this story of Moses must be taken literally, as a record of revelations from God, seem always to forget that they have to prove their case. They have, on ordinary historical principles to prove that whoever wrote the narrative was well acquainted with the facts and is a reliable witness to them. Those are not merely the elementary principles of history but the elementary dictates of commonsense. They are, in fact, so elementary that the modernists will smile at our simplicity in recalling them. Who, they ask in their literature, now takes seriously the supposed direct communications of Moses with the Lord? But those modernists then have nothing to say when they see the bishops basing a charge of heresy on such documents as the Catholic Creeds, the Protestant Articles and the Prayer Book, which do take the story literally.

The modernists are, however, quite right in supposing that no one ought to consider the story seriously to-day. The very first step in the matter, the proof

that the Pentateuch is the word of God, is never taken. Preachers and religious writers whirl their people over the difficult ground with gusts of emotional rhetoric or with the atrocious fallacy that because the Bible is the word of God there must be no argument or inquiry about it.

There cannot be any internal evidence that the Pentateuch is the word of God, and there is a mass of internal evidence that is not. The early chapters of Genesis and such chapters of Exodus as the summary of the Babylonian code, show this without appealing to all the improbabilities, impossibilities and anachronisms. At every turn we find little human weaknesses. God is made to speak of unclean animals (which really means tabooed animals because dedicated to the gods of other peoples) to recommend such a ceremony as circumcision, to permit concubinage and polygamy, to recognize the magic of the scapegoat and purification by the ashes of a red heifer.

And now that the whole subject has been scientifically studied and the meaning of it all has been luminously explained to us in the literary history of the Old Testament, no properly informed person can hesitate in rejecting the claim that the Bible is the word of God.

The Bible is no longer a stumbling-block. It is a profoundly interesting human book for the man who likes to read records of ancient times. It is neither a true record (in its actual form) of the religious development of a nation, as the modernists say, nor have four-fifths of it the interest and use for modern men and women that fundamentalists claim.

And it is outrageous to claim it as a standard of doctrine, as the bishops did in their trial of me.

But it has a new and deeper interest, when we read

it in the light of biblical science, and I very decidedly cling to my "heresy" in following many of the most distinguished divines of the churches and thus preserving my respect for the historical and archaeological experts.

**A**S we confess that vain and rash Swearing is forbidden Christian men by our Lord Jesus Christ, and James his Apostle, so we judge, that Christian Religion doth not prohibit, but that a man may swear when the Magistrate requireth, in a cause of faith and charity, so it be done according to the Prophet's teaching. in justice, judgement, and truth.—The Articles of Religion.

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AS touching the Sacrament of Matrimony, and the institution thereof, you shall understand, that Almighty God, at the first creation of man, considering of His infinite goodness and wisdom how necessary it was to couple and conjoin man and woman together in marriage, as well for their mutual aid and comfort, and for the preservation and continuance of mankind in lawful succession, as also that the same generation might, after the fall of man, be exercised perpetually unto the world's end, without sin and offence towards God, did conjoin Adam and Eve together in marriage: and then instituted matrimony, and consecrated and blessed it by His holy word, as appeareth in the Book of Genesis, where is also described the virtue and efficacy of the same, by the mouth of Adam; who, being inspired with the Holy Ghost, when he was by God conjoined in marriage with Eve, spake these words following: Now this bone is of my bones, and this flesh is of my flesh; and therefore the man shall leave his father and mother, and adhere and cleave unto his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh and in one body. By which words it is meant, that by the virtue and efficacy of matrimony, rightfully and by the authority of God contracted, the man and woman, which were before two bodies, be now united and made one body during their lives.—The Doctrine of the Church of England.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE PSALMS AND WISDOM BOOKS

It is useful to keep in mind how vague and loose the Jewish attitude toward the books which now compose the Old Testament was for ages. Before Josiah in the seventh century prior to the Christian era there were obviously no sacred writings, and the temporary acceptance of a "law of the Lord" as such was soon suspended by the Babylonian captivity.

Ezra and Nehemiah then make it clear that as late as 440 B. C. no collection of books was generally regarded by the people as sacred and binding.

The narratives here are so confused and unreliable, just when an education in Babylon ought to have made the Jewish scribes more reliable, that it is very difficult to say what really happened between the conquest of Babylonia by Cyrus and the return of Ezra. Let us say that some time in the fifth century the priests wrote and succeeded in imposing upon the people as the word of God the strange books which we know as the Pentateuch. You see what becomes of the orthodox belief that much of the Pentateuch was written rather more than a thousand years earlier by Moses under the inspiration, if not the dictation of Jehovah. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Pentateuch is a sheer forgery by an unscrupulous and prevaricating priesthood.

We do not know much about the attitude of the people toward this "word of God." Certainly recent writings like the memoirs of Nehemiah and Ezra, assuming that they did write memoirs at that time, would not at first be regarded as in any sense inspired, and we may safely assume that this applied also to the

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"historical" works generally. They did not in any sense claim to be the word of the Lord, even where Moses and the prophets did profess to repeat the words of the Lord.

So to the Jews the sacred deposit was simply the law and the prophets, not the word of God. During the next century and a half Jewish writers continued to put forth books, many of which claimed to be the word of the Lord or to have been written by prophets, and people were hopelessly puzzled as to whether they were or were not inspired.

People were very dogmatic and imaginative in ancient Judea, but they were in this regard not half as dogmatic as the millions of Americans who now, more than two thousand years after the events, form absurd Bible Leagues and Four Square Gospel movements and Fundamentalist Associations. These people will almost tell you that they can smell the word of God, whereas the ancient Jews, who lived in the conditions under which the books were produced and could read the books in the original, were very uncertain.

Hence we find a hopeless divergence of opinion between the three great churches, the Jewish, the Catholic and the Protestant, as to whether a large number of Jewish books are or are not the word of God. It is regarded by many scholars as a fiction that Ezra and his colleagues set up the great synagogue and settled the canon of the sacred writings. The story of the rebuilding of the temple by Ezra and his colleagues, with the assistance of the Babylonians, is a transparent myth, like the "finding" of the book of the law in the days of Josiah, and a pretext of the priests for introducing new and fictitious literature.

However, the Jewish leaders had to secure a sacred

character for the new books, and so they declared the revelation at an end. A later generation added the writings of Ezra and Nehemiah. All books written to that time had a character of inspiration which no new book could possibly have.

But what was the right of any synagogue to declare this? It only revealed once more the hopelessness of trying to decide whether any book was or was not the word of God. The Samaritans scornfully rejected all except the supposed five books of Moses and their own version of Joshua. The Palestinian Jews clung to the idea, which the Ezra school had imposed in their own interest, that the fount of inspiration dried up with Ezra and Nehemiah.

But Ruth, Proverbs, Esther with others appeared after this time, and the more independent Jews of Alexandria said that they seemed just as much inspired as the earlier. In fact even the Palestinian Jews were still ready to admit useful books like Chronicles and interpolations in the prophets.

This confusion naturally continued in the Christian church. Few could read Hebrew, which was already a dead language in Palestine, and the Greek translation of the Old Testament was followed, so that what the purer Jews rejected as apocryphal, the Christians accepted after considerable controversy as the word of God. The authority of learned Hebrew scholars like St. Jerome was tossed aside, and the matter was settled by very unlearned bishops, who flattered themselves that they had a fine scent for the word of God; and, besides, they claimed that they had through the apostles, who had ordained them to be their successors as the representatives of Jesus the divine right to settle all such questions as to what books were, or were not,

divinely inspired. This claim puts the bishops on a footing with the writers of the Pentateuch and of Ezra and Nehemiah as forgers and grafters. If anybody thinks that my language is too strong, let him read Professor McCabe's, *The Bible in Europe* and Mr. Joseph Wheless' book, *Is It God's Word*.

Apart from such books as *Ruth*, there were fourteen books or sections of books which were very much disputed. Rome dogmatically laid down in the Council of Trent that they were the word of God. The Greek church ruled that they were not. The English reformers compromised and said that, as one reads in the sixth Article of the Anglo American Church, these books were particularly edifying but not standards of doctrine; but in the course of time the Church of England and America ceased to print them as a supplement to the Old Testament.

The millions of people who think that they need no proof whatever that any book of the Old Testament contains the word of God are blissfully ignorant of the facts against the claim. Wisdom is at least as edifying as Proverbs. Ecclesiasticus is more edifying than Ecclesiastes. Tobias is certainly more edifying than the so-called Songs of Solomon. Yet all Jews and protestants reject the former in each of these cases, as being the word of man, and all catholics are sure that they are the word of God. Such facts ought to warn any man that it is quite impossible to say by reading a book whether it is inspired or not. We must leave all questions of authorship and date and (in the case of historical books) credibility to proper literary experts, and we may now complete the story of the Old Testament by learning what they have to say about the remaining books.

## I

The Book of Psalms or the Psalter has never been the subject of much dispute. To the later Jews themselves it was a collection of sacred hymns that were sung in the temple and very largely composed by David. This gave the book a character on a level with that of the prophecies, and all sections of the Christian church have accepted the Psalter as inspired. It is not a doctrinal work, and we need say little about it here, but a few of the remarks which modern biblical experts make on it will be found interesting and instructive and to have a general bearing upon my contention that the fundamentalists cannot support their claim that the Bible is the word of God. Nor can the modernists do this for they claim only that there are some words of God scattered here and there throughout the Bible but admit that the rest is the word of man.

A few years ago there was an influential movement in the church of England to persuade the bishops to expunge certain psalms from the collection printed in the Bible. The accents of hatred, even of ferocity, that were heard during the European War were repulsive, and many then realized that just such phrases, or even worse, were given as the word of God in some of the psalms. Quite a large number of them are simply invocations of vengeance on enemies, not merely curses in the conventional sense, but fervent hopes that the Lord will send the most savage punishment on the writer's personal enemies or the enemies of his nation. Others expressed a hardly less repellent gloating over the terrible misfortunes that had befallen the enemies of the Jews, as one empire rose after another and brought its predecessor to the dust.

It is very poor sophistry to say that the Lord

might inspire such sentiments in one set of national conditions and higher sentiments in later and better conditions. It corrupts judgement when people are taught to play fast and loose with moral principles in this way. From the orthodox point of view it ought to be declared blasphemous to associate these vindictive psalms with the name of God. They should have been excluded from the Bible at the end of the Middle Ages. It merely shows how blindly people bow to traditions, how desperately they pervert facts in order to support the tradition, when we find these psalms defended as the word of God in our own age.

The book of psalms is a compendium of the moral evolution of the Jews but it is a book in which all the chapters are misplaced. We have to look to the most careful scholarship to arrange the chapters in some sort of chronological order. It is not enough to put the coarser psalms first as the more ancient. The moral ideal of the Hebrews remained very imperfect to the end, and in a time of national struggle, as when Antiochus was trying in the second century before Christ to destroy their religion as well as their political status, the Jews used all the old language in imploring the vengeance of Jehovah. Thus you cannot quite date the psalms by their sentiments, but critics have found the date of many.

A few experts still remark that probably many of the psalms go back to David, but a tradition which is only found many centuries after the time of David is not of much value. Historians take no account of such traditions. Most people are quite reconciled to the supposed authorship of David because I Chronicles represents him as particularly active with music and the liturgy, but we have seen that the life of David in

this book is largely fictitious. The bare statement in the earlier books that David played the harp is said to be an interpolation, and it is probably on the strength of this unhistorical statement that later composers of psalms so often ascribed the authorship to him, just as others made Solomon the author of their proverbs and aphorisms. The Jews themselves disputed very freely whether David was really the author. Some psalms (XXI) in fact, are obviously written about the king by some other person, and they very incongruously describe themselves as written by David and addressed to musicians.

Other psalms (XLV, for instance) are clearly secular, not religious, chants, and were probably composed to be sung at a royal wedding. Some are taken almost word for word from the book of Samuel, while others are clearly based upon Egyptian or other Hymns. In the third volume I gave a sample of an Egyptian hymn to Aten and the 104th Psalm, and it is obvious that the Hebrew chant was copied, with modification, from the Egyptian. If this suggests a great age for some of the psalms, we must remember that we do not know whether this hymn may not have been preserved to the end in one or another form of Egyptian worship. All that we can say with confidence is that most of the psalms seem to have been composed, for use in the temple, between 500 and 300 B. C. centuries after the time of David. The collection was closed in the second century B. C. David is supposed to have flourished about eight hundred years earlier.

We need not here repeat the inquiry whether the psalms can in any sense be regarded as the word of God. The quality and sentiments are so varied that to speak of the entire collection as inspired is absurd.

Many are quite unworthy of retention in a book of religious instructions, and a large number are more or less mechanical imitations of classical models. If we take only those which are fine religious poems and have high moral sentiments (and they are numerous) we have to compare them with the finest hymns of the Christian or any other religion, and it would then be clear that they are simply part of the higher religious poetry of the world. The fact that the 104th Psalm, which in sentiment and often in the very words, follows an ancient Egyptian Psalm, the hymn had, until this discovery was made, been selected by many commentators as one of the finest in the Psalter, is very significant. Let me repeat that there is no suggestion of a reward in heaven in any one of them. On the theory that the Bible is the word of a God who inspired both the Old and New Testaments, the fact that the former has so little, if anything, to say about man's immortality and the latter so much is inexplicable.

## II

Such Psalms as No. 79 were clearly composed during the Maccabean War, in the second century B. C., yet have found their way into the sacred collection. On the other hand, the dispersion of the Jews which began with the deportation of so many to Babylonia, while numbers of others fled to Egypt brought foreign influences to bear upon the Jews in a very different manner from the influence of the surrounding people who had given the Jews their Baals and Molochs. The influence of foreign ideals and literature now began to affect the ideas of the Jews and correct the narrowness of their patriotic devotion of Jehovah.

That the Hebrews had always had a very firm



conception of justice, especially to the poor and weak, we fully recognize, but any person who seriously suggests that in this respect they taught the world a new virtue must be singularly ignorant of the literature of other ancient nations.

The Egyptian's moral code, in the Book of the Dead, insists very emphatically on the necessity of justice and even the tomb-inscriptions of nobles boast, two thousand years before the prophets, that they recognized and fulfilled that duty.

There is more than a recognition of the virtue in Babylon. Justice is enforced with quite exceptional fidelity in the Babylonian code of law.

Apart from this, however, let us say that justice was a familiar moral precept in every civilization and was probably violated, as far as the poor and the workers were concerned, in them all. The best witnesses to the Hebrew code of morals, the prophets, are also the best witnesses to the chronic and flagrant violation of it.

In sexual matters also the moral code was the same as the Hebrew in all the greater civilizations of the ancient world. It was from the Syrians and the Hittites, worshippers of a goddess of fertility, that the Hebrews constantly adopted the worst practices which the prophets and historical books denounce.

Such things were totally unknown in Egypt; and, while there are faint traces of them in parts of Babylonia, they must have been rare and local survivals of a precivilized era. Babylonian laws from the year 2000 B. C. onward, and probably Sumerian law before that, imposed a sentence of death for adultery, rape and incest. It even condemned a retired priestess to be burned to death if she were seen in a wineshop.

In no respect was the moral feeling of the Jews or

Israelites superior to that of the great ancient civilizations from Egypt to China. On the other hand, the difficult circumstances of the Jews kept them until near the Christian era morally inferior in many respects. They were to be just and generous but only within the national frontiers; and indeed even within the bounds of the nation the repeated fiery demands of vengeance on a personal enemy do not suggest a high degree of mercy or generosity. Against all who did not belong to the very small and imperfectly civilized Jewish nation and to the religion of Jehovah their sentiments were, as we saw, atrocious. Their writings gloated over the ripping up of alien women and the dashing of their children against the wall. In the latest priestly revision of the law and the prophets these sentiments were not modified.

Moreover, though all men were dogs and idolaters who did not worship Jehovah, there was not the least eagerness to extend the knowledge of him to them.

It is necessary to point out these very narrow limitations of the Jewish idealism when so many still insist that in the realm of morals the Hebrew literature is seen to be the word of God in a sense in which, let us say, the Persian literature is not.

Now, contrary to this the truth is that the new literary story of the Old Testament is chiefly interesting because it shows the gradual moral education of the Hebrews by surrounding peoples. The Hebrews did not receive revelations above the level of the culture of those peoples—revelations which, strangely enough, they are supposed to be forbidden to pass on to other nations.

All the claims about the moral superiority of the Jews are childish. The literary experts on the Bible

are too fearful of bishops and other backward folk to say so candidly, but their work clearly brings out the moral education of which I am speaking. It is especially seen in the remaining books of the Old Testament.

But before passing to those books I must say that the effort to sustain the myth that the Christian Bible owes its existence to the inspiration of the God, Jehovah, on the ground of its unique morality is as futile as the effort to do this on the grounds of doctrinal and institutional uniqueness. The experts in the science which is concerned with the origin and evolution of the interpretations of supernaturalistic religion are overwhelmingly agreed that neither the Old nor New Testament contains a single precept, doctrine or institution which was not in existence for centuries and, in most cases, even milleniums before the Jews and Christians came upon the stage of history. There is no claim to supernaturalistic uniqueness of either Jews or Christians which can stand in the light of this science.

Christianism and Judaism are just two interpretations of the superstition which supernaturalists call religion, and they are on exactly the same footing as to their origin, development and utter worthlessness to civilization with Mohammedanism, Buddhism, Eddyism, Spiritualism and Theosophism. The whole conception of things which the world has in the supernaturalistic representations of its many Bibles is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. It has no future.

The effort of the priestly party of the Jews to cut out all foreign influence, as illustrated in Ezra's drastic treatment of foreign wives, and build up a purely theocratic state (a state supremely subject to Jehovah; and, therefore, ruled and fleeced by his priests) met with

strenuous opposition from many among the Jews who were broadened by the contact with Babylonia and Persia and saw through the far reaching and ruinous scheme which would prevent the nation from rising in the scale of civilization.

The book of Ruth, which is so incongruously put among the early historical books, is an expression of the feeling of this group. It is a pure romance, as the language and historical blunders show that the writer lived centuries after the events he imagines, and simply aims at correcting or protesting against the narrow nationalism of the Ezra group.

Joel is a poetical outburst from the side of Jewish orthodoxy. Incidentally it shows that by about the year 400 B. C. the Jews had already become lax once more. "Gird yourselves and lament, ye priests," he cries, "Howl, ye ministers of the altar."

They have been neglecting the sacrifices and fasts and the vengeance of the Lord is about to fall on them. It is the old tone in all its somberness and all its poetic fire. "Beat your plow-shares into swords," he cries. Many people now turn the phrase the other way (a fine sentiment, though it would not be easy to make a plough out of a sword) and think that they are quoting the Bible.

The new liberal school next found expression in the book of Job and Proverbs. Job is entirely out of place in the middle of the Old Testament. Even to raise the question seriously whether the experience of life did not belie the doctrine of a providence that rewarded the just in this life would at that time have been regarded as blasphemy. The book as we have it moreover, is very much weaker than the original. Some doubter of the fourth century, or about the year 400

B. C. invented the debate between Job and his friends as a safe way of throwing suspicion on the prevalent belief. He left the problem without an answer, and it is later orthodox writers, scandalized at the skeptical tendency of the book, who added the triumphant closing speeches of Elihu, the words of the Lord, and the final repentance and reward of Job.

Notice, again, how as late as the fourth century the Jews are totally unaware that the solution of all their difficulties is that the Lord will reward the just and punish the wicked in a future life. They learned this doctrine from the Persians as well as the Egyptians, yet they were strangely reluctant to receive it. One ought to say, from the point of view of the present day or of Christian orthodoxy, that instead of receiving religious truths by revelations that were not granted to other nations, God was trying to tell them a most important religious truth through these other nations and they refused to accept it. It is a very singular word of God in the Old Testament, seeing that it, by implication, flatly denies the second most important truth of the Christian religion, the doctrine of human immortality.

Proverbs is a mixed book to which writers of very different moods contributed. Probably the original small collection of aphorisms (which were attributed to Solomon because in the fictitious narrative of Kings he was represented as a man of great wisdom) began at what is now chapter X and continued to chapter XXII.

We smile at the referring of the sayings of even this section to Solomon, when we find that one of the first is "Treasures of wickedness profit nothing." The general atmosphere which the sayings suggest is rather

that of the bleak study of some austere thinker than that of the spacious harem and very heathen and luxurious court of Solomon.

In the later chapters of Proverbs, kings are very rudely treated at times, and riches, sensual pleasure and all that Solomon is supposed to have enjoyed is despised. The first ten chapters seem to have been prefaced to the old collection by some Jew of the Greek world.

In short, the Book of Proverbs is a very unequal and inconsistent collection of the sayings of various writers who were often shrewd and penetrating, and whose poetry is for the most part well worth reading.

During all this time, as I said in the fifth chapter, fragments were being added to Isaiah and other prophets. The Jews had come to regard the Persians as oppressors, and the victories of Alexander the great brought out new poetic rejoicings, which were coolly inserted in the older prophets and fraudulently said to be predictions of the future. Fragments (as in chapter XIV) were even added to Genesis. But the chief interest is still in the books which show foreign influences on Jewish ideas.

A very strange word of God belonging to this period is the book of Esther of the third century. Professor Bower says that the author was well acquainted with Persia and merely altered details to suit his purpose, but that is not the opinion of experts on Persian history. They say that the proper names and other details could only have been invented by a man who knew very little about Persia and must have lived after the Greek conquest.

However that may be, one is surprised that the book and the name of the heroine have been so popular in the modern protestant world. It combines the charm,

the sensuality and the cruelty of some of the tales in the Arabian Nights. Esther, a woman of the harem of King Xerxes, is supposed to have not merely saved her Jewish people from a massacre but to have turned the massacre upon the Persians for the fault of one Persian minister.

That a Persian monarch should, at the request of a pretty woman of the harem, allow the Jews in his kingdom (supposing that they were numerous enough) to murder about a hundred thousand of his subjects is a wild suggestion, but the ethics is worse than the history. It is a bit of the old-time Jewish vindictiveness worked up in a not very edifying piece of fiction and ought to have been rejected from the Bible at the Reformation. Certainly now that the facts are known the elimination of this "word of God," and several others, should be accomplished at once.

A very different book of the same fourth century, yet just as free from Greek influence, is the so-called Song of Solomon. Experts decided long ago that, as one requires little expert knowledge to see, it is a collection of very human songs not words of God. They are, in fact, very free-spoken songs such as are sung at the prolonged wedding-feasts of the orientals. The songs may have been quite ancient in Judea, though the ascription to Solomon is purely fanciful. But the inclusion of them in a collection of sacred, not to say inspired, writings, is one of the strangest adventures of literary history.

Some broody student of Jewish literature seems to have persuaded himself and others that the bride and bridegroom of the songs were, in the profound wisdom of Solomon, figures of the marriage of Jehovah and his people. There was much opposition, for the Jews

used to have the songs sung, as purely erotic poetry, at their boisterous private festivals, but the liberal Jews of Egypt kept the book and handed it on to the Christians who strangely decided that it was a prophetic allegory of the marriage of Christ and the church, and under the spell of this extraordinary illusion the most pious and strict Bible readers have continued to this day to read it, with great reverence, as the word of God. Yet these songs breathe in every verse the well-known license of Asiatic wedding-feasts. Some of the songs contain Persian and Greek words, so that part of the collection at least belongs to the fourth or third centuries B. C.

The book of Jonah belongs to the same period and is a protest against the narrowness of the new priestly religion. Bible readers of the old type are curiously accomodating. They see the word of God in Ezra and his demand of strict seclusion from foreigners, and the same word of God in Ruth and Jonah, which are attacks on the principles of Ezra.

The legend of Jonah itself belongs to the days when people could believe with equal ease that a man swallowed a fish or a fish swallowed a man, if the Lord willed it. Later Jews and Christians learned of the existence of whales, and it was popularly supposed that it was quite possible for a whale to swallow a man and house him for three days. Priests did not then know, as bishops ought to know to-day in America that, though the front part of a whale's mouth is very large, it narrows at the back to a remarkably small gullet.

On the site of Ninevah to-day the Mohammedans, who have a great respect for the prophet Jonah, exhibit with great pride a tooth (whales have no teeth, of course) of the very whale that housed him for three



days. It is just as childish to take this short story as history. The writer of it probably never gave a thought to the anatomy of the business. Its details were no more seriously meant than the details in Sinbad the Sailor, or Aladdin.

There had been a prophet Jonah away back in the eighth century, and the writer rather mischievously put into the mouth of this man the theory that Jehovah was as much concerned about the Assyrians as about the Jews. Such a doctrine is inconceivable among the Jews, in Judea or out of it, until after the Babylonian captivity, and it is contrary to the whole teaching of the Old Testament, except in the two small books, Jonah and Ruth. It is fortunate that they were preserved, as it shows that in the fourth and third centuries some at least of the Jews were learning from their neighbors a higher religious and moral idealism.

The very strange word of God which we have in the book of Ecclesiastes (strange, I mean, in its company in the Old Testament) shows foreign, and particularly Greek, influence in a more advanced form. It expresses the philosophy of life of a mild and aged Epicurean Jew of about the year 200 B. C. We do not need to be experts in these matters to see that the pious expressions which occur here and there, like the two concluding verses, are interpolations. They are opposed to the whole message of the writer; and, as we now know that the habit of interpolating sentences in older books was so common among the Jews, we cannot hesitate to regard them as such. Scholars have carefully traced these later additions to the text, such as III, 16 and 17, VII, 18, 26 and 29, VIII, 11 and 13, and many others, which contradict the preceding and following verses.

When we set these interpolated verses aside, we see from the view-points of orthodox Judaism and Christianity that Ecclesiastes is the most extraordinary word of God in the Old Testament, after the Song of Solomon. The author quite plainly rejects the belief, which was then gaining ground among the Jews, that the just will be rewarded and the unjust punished in a future life. He goes beyond every other Hebrew writer and throws doubt on the immortality of man in any form.

On the other hand, this writer is too wise and candid an observer to admit the desperate belief of his fellow-Jews that the justice of Jehovah is vindicated because he punishes sin and rewards virtue in this world. It is, in fact, extraordinary, if you reflect, that such a belief could have been maintained for a thousand years by a whole nation in face of the facts of life and history. The wholesale falsification of Jewish history was required to weaken at least the force of the objections to the orthodox theory.

There must, at this time, have been a great deal of skepticism among the Jews of the dispersion, seeing that the Book of Ecclesiastes was evidently so popular that it has survived, and even the orthodox had to adulterate it rather than suppress it. The author does not deny the existence of Jehovah. One would not expect any Jewish book to survive in which atheism was preached, even if the author lived in free Alexandria. But he quite clearly denies the Jewish dogma that God punishes and rewards. He no doubt believed, as Aristotle and the Epicureans did, in a God (or gods) who took not the least interest in the actions of man. You must make your own philosophy of life; and the best rule is, attend seriously to your work, injure

none, and then enjoy life to the full. Like Omar Khayyam among the later Persians, or like some of the Chinese, Greek and Roman writers, it is an anticipation of what is called the modern spirit, which is the Holy Ghost of this age of science from whom we have the only word of God by which we are influenced. If there are any words of God in the Old Testament surely some among them were uttered by the great unknown preacher and recorded in the utterly anti-Jewish and anti-Christian book of Ecclesiastes.

### III

The books and parts of books which are named in the Articles of the Protestant Episcopal Church as not belonging to the Bible proper but good for "example of life and instruction of manners" really show how preposterous it is to attempt to prove that one book contains the word of God and another does not. In referring me to those Articles and the Prayer Book as standards of literal belief the bishops ignored the whole of modern biblical scholarship. These books are, as I said, included in the Roman Catholic version of the Old Testament and several among them are more fitting to be a part of it than some that have been given a place in the Anglican version.

The books of Tobias and Judith are of course romances, not words of God, but the former is at least as respectable as Jonah.

The books of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus (or of Jesus the Son of Sirach) are of the same type as Ecclesiastes but much more correct from the orthodox Jewish or Christian point of view.

The historical books of the Maccabees are more moral than some of the earlier historical books and

much nearer to the truth than Chronicles.

But we must be content here to point out that these uncanonical books entirely discredit the belief that one can recognize the word of God in the canonical books. If the uncanonical books are not divinely inspired as both the fundamentalists and modernists say, there is not the slightest reason for regarding nine-tenths of the Old Testament as inspired, and this is almost as true of the New Testament.

The protestant bishops threw out the so-called apocryphal book merely because they took the side of one theological group against another. Few things, as I said, are feebler in theology than the attempt to prove that the Bible is the word of God, yet no standards of belief have any authority outside the Roman church which do not profess to be based upon the Bible as the word of God.

The chief Hebrew book produced after the year 200 B. C., the book of Daniel, will serve finally as a confirmation of all that I have said about the Old Testament. It professes to have been written by a Jew, Daniel, who shared in the deportation to Babylonia in the year 586 B. C. and who represents himself as on rather familiar terms with the kings of Babylonia and Persia yet was still living in the first year of Darius, or 520 B. C. No one ever doubted his word until modern times. He said that he was Daniel, an eyewitness of the strange events which he described and, in defiance of all the canons of history, his unsupported word was accepted. The prophet Daniel (for he pretends to make remarkable predictions about the coming of the Persian and then the Greek kingdoms) became one of the most familiar figures in both "divine" and human literature. After the Reformation the Book

of Daniel was more widely read than that of any author in or out of the Bible. Sir Isaac Newton's admiration for it was unbounded and he wrote a commentary on it.

Yet not only literary critics and archaeologists but fairly conservative writers like the Rev. Professor Sayce (in his "Higher Criticism and the Monuments") proved long ago that the book is a romance without the least historical value. The baked clay inscriptions of the period itself have been recovered, and we can check the historical statements of the fifth chapter. Belshazzar (or the person whose name is wrongly so spelled) was not the king of Babylon and was not the son of Nebuchadnezzar. The last king was Nabonid, who is unknown to the writer, though he professes to have been living in Babylon when it fell. Belshazzar was the son of Nabonid and commander of the armies. He was away in the provinces in the final stage, not holding a fantastic banquet and putting scarlet robes and gold chains on prophets who told him he was going to die. The Persian armies he opposed were not under King Darius, who was not a Median and not the son of Xerxes but under Cyrus. The Persians won the battle and they entered Babylon without bloodshed. The writer is wrong in every word. Surely we have no divine inspiration here.

All the other details, as far as we can check them by history or archaeology, are equally false and fantastic. We have to look for some much later date in the history of the Jews when a man might have a purpose in writing such a book, and we find such a period in the second century. The Greek princes of Syria, heirs to that portion of the empire of Alexander the Great, took over Palestine, and in their eagerness to establish Greek

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culture everywhere they aroused a fierce hostility on the part of the Jews. The sacred books were sacrificed before an altar of Zeus in the temple. Stung by these cruel atrocities, the orthodox Jews flew to war, and they had to face the formidable royal armies.

It was in these circumstances, about the year 165 B. C. that some writer, probably a priest, wrote the last book, Daniel, which has found its way into the canon of the Old Testament. The critics are lenient when they remark that he merely had the virtuous aim of edifying and encouraging the struggling Jews. As God had cared for Daniel and his friends when they resisted a sacrilegious king, so he would assist the rebels of the second century. But there could be no encouragement in the book unless the writer represented as a fact, recorded by a contemporary, that those who defied the tyrant Nebuchadnezzar were preserved in the fiery furnace, while the king himself was smitten with insanity: which is, of course, totally unknown in Babylonian history. The book was meant to be taken as history, and was so taken; and, in spite of the complete exposure of it in modern times, we are still asked to regard it as history and as the word of God.

This was the origin of the last book of the Old Testament, though passages continued to be interpolated in older books. The last chapters were added to Zechariah, and apparently the thirty-third chapter was inserted in Isaiah. For two or three hundred years actual historical events had been described in prophetic terms and inserted here and there in the old prophecies to give them the air of foretellers of remote future events. But nothing could now save the Jewish people. From the power of Greek princes they passed to the suzerainty of Rome, dreaming more and more of the Messiah

whom Jehovah would one day send to deliver them. Of the development of that Messianist hope we will speak in the next chapter.

#### IV

The Old Testament as it is presented to us in the Bible is an inconsistent, inaccurate, puzzling and, in many places, painful account of the history of the world and of the Hebrews to the time of Ezra. The Hebrew literature as it is now presented to us by the great biblical scholars is a quite intelligible development in complete harmony with all the rest of our historical knowledge.

We understand even its many contradictions, and we are no longer bewildered by the mixture of primitive and advanced moral and religious sentiments.

We are no longer perplexed that the same book shall give the crudest version of the moral law that is found anywhere in religious literature, the Decalogue, and as well the highest moral sentiment, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

We see why a spiritual monotheism is mixed up with superstitions about animal sacrifices and scape-goats, red heifers and circumcision, questionable feasts of tabernacles and passovers of atrocious memory.

The book is intelligible but it has ceased to be in any sense, except the symbolic, the word of God. The last authors, the priestly editors who have written whole books and given a general impress to the whole, acted in the interest of the worship of Jehovah of which they were the ministers.

We need not ask in what proportion they consulted the moral interest of the people or their own interest or power.

We need not speak of forgeries or falsifications, though we may at least object to the feeble claim that because these things were common in the ancient east people were not deceived.

We see that the whole Jewish and Christian world has been deceived ever since then about important historical facts from the time of Joseph to the time of Ezra. According to the orthodox biblical chronology Joseph and Ezra lived about a thousand years apart. Ezra flourished in the fourth century before Christ.

It is of little use to ask the bishops whether or not we are free to accept this literary reconstruction of the Old Testament. Far be it from me to say, in biblical language, that they are dumb dogs that cannot bark (they can even bite, as I well know) but they prefer to leave these things as pitfalls and speak only when we tumble into them. It is a new idea of guidance the bishops have.

However, seeing that this literary reconstruction of the Old Testament is endorsed with impunity by writers and preachers of the Anglo American Episcopal Church, I conclude that one may without heresy accept it. To use plainer English, the bishops would not dare to condemn any man for accepting this version of the story of the Old Testament. It is taught in their own schools of divinity. Yet if this teaching be true the orthodox doctrine that the Old Testament is the word of God and a standard of doctrine is unmitigated nonsense.

Let us see, then, in what position we find ourselves when we have accepted this story of the biblical experts. Many of the great biblical scholars who have done or endorsed the work say that the Old Testament as a whole or part of it may still be regarded as "inspired,"



or as "the word of God." Since in this they are notoriously putting new and figurative meanings on the words, I am not concerned. I am willing as they are to repeat the formularies of the church in a symbolical sense.

But how far does it take us? I repeat, for the last time, that from the point of view of an orthodox Christian of any denomination the absence of a practical belief in a future life from cover to cover of the Old Testament deprives the words inspiration, revelation and word of God of any serious meaning, and that this and the moral limitations and falsifications of history in its books show a purely natural, moral and religious development. But can we admit all this and still literally accept those standards of doctrine which we are commanded to accept literally?

Certainly not. It is enough to refer to the first three chapters of the Old Testament. On the literal acceptance of those, and on that basis alone, rests the doctrines of creation and original sin, and by implication Paul's doctrine of the atonement. But there is scarcely any part of the Old Testament that is so palpably the word of man, and not even of a Jewish prophet, as those three chapters.

The bishops of the Anglo American Church I take it, do not want to be regarded as occupying the same heroic position with certain less dignified and less cultivated religious leaders.

The bishops are not, I presume, going to tell me that I must not believe in the evolution of man or prehistoric man (that they will not even read the scientific evidence for these things) because the word of God says otherwise.

The bishops are not going to forbid us to read

English translations of the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh, or to compare its stories with the early chapters of Genesis, or to consider whether the Hebrew stories are not modified copies of the Sumerian.

But if we do all this, we are bound to conclude as every scholar does, that the least authoritative part of the Old Testament is just the part on which the doctrinal formularies of orthodox Christianity are based.

I am done, at all events, with the first part of my work on the Bible. I was referred to Creeds and Articles and Prayer Book.

I find the one authority which they invoke, since the compilers of these doctrinal standards at my trial for heresy had no more personal authority than we have and immeasurably less knowledge, is the Bible.

I have examined the Old Testament. In view of this examination I am prevented from taking its doctrinal statements literally. In doing this I am relying on Christian biblical scholars.

I shall be told, of course, that Christian scholars are not agreed on the matter, but the reply is that the preponderant weight of scholarship is very heavily on the side of the view I have adopted. I have therefore fully vindicated my position and as fully discredited that which the bishops in effect adopt, as far as two-thirds of the Bible is concerned. Let us see what biblical scholarship has to say about the remaining one-third.

THE TRANSITION TO  
CHRISTIANITY

**B**ECAUSE all men be born sinners, through the transgression of our father Adam, (in whom as the Apostle saith) all have sinned, and cannot be saved without remission of their sin, which is given in Baptism by the working of the Holy Ghost, therefore the Sacrament of Baptism is necessary for the attaining of salvation and everlasting life, according to the words of Christ, saying, No man can enter into the kingdom of God, except he be born again of water and the Holy Ghost. For which causes also it is offered and pertaineth to all men, not only such as have the use of reason, in whom the same, duly received, taketh away and purgeth all kind of sins, both original and actual, committed and done before their baptism; but also it appertaineth and is offered unto infants, which, because they be born in original sin, have need and ought to be christened: whereby they being offered in the faith of the Church, receive forgiveness of their sin, and such grace of the Holy Ghost, that if they die in the state of their infancy they shall thereby undoubtedly be saved.

All men are conceived and born in sin, and our Saviour Christ saith, None can enter into the kingdom of God, except he be regenerated, and born anew of water and of the Holy Ghost.—The Doctrine of the Church of England.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE TRANSITION TO CHRISTIANITY

We have now seen that the moral and religious development of the Hebrew people was just as natural, as normal, as the religious advance in any other part of the world.

If we are reminded that the Hebrews did not, like most barbaric peoples, which moved on from barbarism to Christianity, pass from polytheism to monotheism, the answer is not difficult and it is threefold.

First, we have no documentary evidence of the life of the Hebrews before about 1000 B. C.

Second, if we, with the most liberal of the learned experts, consider that certain songs (the chants of Miriam and Deborah, for instance) go back in oral tradition before that time, and they show that Jehovah was even then the God of the Hebrews, we must remember that it was quite common for isolated Arabian tribes to have one special deity. The tribe of Mecca, for instance, had virtually one god (or goddess) before the time of Mohammed—the divinity that dwelt in the famous black stone.

Third, the Old Testament itself represents the other Semitic peoples of Palestine as having, like the Hebrews, one particular God for each people (for example Dagon) and if, as many historians think, the Philistines came from Crete, they came from a civilization that had only one deity for two thousand years.

The moral development is now free from any obscurity and rid of all legends. First we have the primitive morals of the pastoral or patriarchal stage. Read a good book about the Bedouins or the Tauregs or some other desert folk to-day, and you will find that,

behind the profession of Mohammedanism, they have just the same morals. The defects of the early Hebrews (savagery against enemies and restriction of justice and benevolence to compatriots) are just the tribal or social virtues of that stage of human evolution.

The rest of our story was easy enough, once we arranged the books of the Old Testament in their proper order. The first conspicuous advance is in the fiery preaching of justice by the early prophets. It is quite superfluous to speak of inspiration. The settlement of the Hebrews in cities, the growth of commerce, and the increased wealth of the priests, officials and royal court had brought about the inevitable contrast, for the first time in Hebrew history, of wealth and poverty, and as the wealthy sinners were also the most prone to take foreign women and worship foreign gods, the ardent poetry of the prophets is quite natural.

During the remaining centuries of the Jewish era it is a story of contact with greater civilizations, with a high moral and intellectual culture. But these more powerful nations more frequently fight and oppress the Jews than cultivate friendly relations with them, and so the education of the Jews is naturally checked. Injustice or hostility constantly throws the Jew back into the old attitude of ferocity. The sacred books they have help in this reaction, for they represent Jehovah as having the same vindictive sentiment and sanctioning the barbarous treatment of enemies.

Nevertheless, in the course of the centuries that lie between Hosea and the second Isaiah the Jews make progress, as is inevitable, and we find traces of a new spirit, though it is not general. We get the tenderness of the second Isaiah, the broad humanity of Ecclesiastes, the universalism of Ruth and Jonah. The Persians and

Greeks had completed the moral education of at least some of the Hebrews.

It is surely better to drop all pretense of special revelations to the Hebrews and accept all this in the spirit of the modern science of the comparative interpretations of religion.

But we have now a new task. It is a world-wide tradition, deeply rooted in all our literature, that, whether or not the Hebrews received supernatural help, there appears in the literature of Christianity, in the New Testament, a moral idealism so much higher than that of the Jews that, if it is not supernatural in origin, it implies a wonderful moral prophet.

In other words, orthodox Christians tell us that, if Christ was not God, he must have had a very special and exceptional relation to God. So, whether or not we speak of the word of God in the Old Testament, we certainly have it in the New; and, after all, it is on the gospels and epistles that the doctrinal formularies are based.

Now we are going to examine this claim with the same simple candor with which we examined the orthodox belief about the Old Testament. And let us first reflect that there seems to be something wrong about the traditional belief in itself. It supposes that, supernaturally or naturally, according as you take it on fundamentalist or modernist lines, God gave a certain measure of inspiration to the Hebrews at one stage, a larger measure at a later stage, and a full measure in the teaching of Christ.

Why this installment plan? Especially why, if moral and religious knowledge is the most profound and most urgent requirement of the human race?

Naturally theologians have brooded over this

problem for centuries, but what I want to make clear here is that all the suggestions, they have made to enable us to understand it have been made useless by our new knowledge of ancient history.

Here again you see why the bishops prefer to remain silent. They dare neither reject our modern knowledge nor speak about its bearing on the old doctrines. They find it easier to use their clubs, or croziers, when they think, poor men, that the victim will quietly retire and the world will soon forget him.

It is no longer possible for any educated person to say that moral or religious truth had to be given in installments because only thus were men prepared to receive it. The Jews of the fifth century, whose educated minority knew the advanced religious and moral ideas of the Babylonians, Persians and Egyptians (the Persian religion at least was purely spiritual, monotheistic and very ascetic) were just as well or ill prepared to receive what is thought to be the teaching of Jesus as were the Jews of the first century of the Christian era.

Parts of Isaiah (the second Isaiah) which they had at that time are, in fact, so close to the teaching of the gospels that theologians have always regarded them as a supernatural anticipation. We now know the contrary is true. We know, thanks to the experts in history and archaeology, that far away in Asia a man, Buddha, had quite humanly reached the same sentiments, of tenderness and purity long before, and that even Buddha was no moral genius but a votary of an existing philosophy of life—the Sankhya philosophy.

The Jews of the third century, to whom Greek culture also penetrated, were still better prepared to receive the gospel of Jesus. There used to be a tradi-



tion in the church that Plato learned moral idealism from Jeremiah. He is far higher in many ways than Jeremiah.

Our larger knowledge of the ancient world, especially of its moral and religious qualities, has removed the foundation of all supernaturalistic theories as to the origin of either the Jewish or Christian religion. These interpretations of religion were no more due to the revelations of Jehovah than the Mohammedan interpretation was to the revelations of Allah. For the educated world the phrase, divine revelation, is just a symbol of the phrase, human discovery.

The authorities on the comparative interpretations of religion, on ethics, even on ancient history and archaeology, smile at the claims of Jews and Christians on behalf of the Bible. There are no supernaturalistic jumps, like those suggested by Mendelist biologists, in the moral and religious evolution of the race. It flowed on from age to age. In the light of the marvelous new knowledge we now have we trace the stream very satisfactorily.

Twenty million people in the United States, the fundamentalists, would at once exclaim, if they read this, that they can trace no such stream. These contend that Jesus rises suddenly and miraculously above all previous moralists. Naturally they cannot trace it because they will not read the books that would enable them to do this.

We have now excellent works on the religion and morality of the later Babylonians and Egyptians, the Hindus and Chinese, the Persians and Greeks. Did you, my fundamentalist friend, ever read one? Did you ever ask what the Jews themselves were doing and thinking in the four centuries between Ezra and Jesus? I wager

you did not, though historians can tell you a great deal about it. You stick to your Bible and, as it jumps from prophets like Zechariah and Malachi, of the fifth century, to Matthew, you exclaim: What a miraculous leap!

Let me try in the remaining chapters of this booklet, to explain the perfectly natural transition from the last Jewish prophets to the first Christian teachers.

## I

The first point to appreciate, though this is known to most people, is that there was after the Babylonian captivity a continuous dispersal of the Jews over the lands of surrounding nations. Compare the scattering of the Irish people in modern times. In the year 1801 there were 5,500,000 people in Ireland. The population of Great Britain has, without much immigration from Europe, increased four-fold since that date. so there ought to be at least 20,000,000 people in Ireland to-day. There are only about 5,000,000 and the Irish are a fertile race. There is no mystery, of course. Ireland is a country of poor natural resources, and its people are scattered over the English-speaking world. That is the chief reason why the Roman Catholic church seems to have made progress in the United States and Great Britain.

There is a very close parallel with Judea. When Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, large numbers of the educated people were deported, and a large number fled to Egypt. The reliable, or rather the little less unreliable, books of the Old Testament, such as Zechariah, show that the majority remained there. They found finer and more comfortable cities and larger incomes to compensate them for the expatriation. From that time

there was a continuous migration to Egypt, Babylonia and Persia.

When the Greeks conquered the old world, there was an increased emigration, especially to Egypt. The Greeks founded the new city of Alexandria, and the new line of kings, the Ptolemies, were, at least for a few generations, very liberal-minded men, the greatest patrons of science and letters in the world, indifferent to men's religion and anxious only to secure men of energy and ability. While the Syrian kings pressed the new policy too far and persecuted the Jews because they would not change their old ideas for Greek culture, the great Egyptian city was wide open to them, as were also the cities of Mesopotamia, Persia and the coast of Asia Minor.

The world had at this time entered upon the most cosmopolitan era it had yet known. There had never before been so much travel and international communication. Ships, sometimes of several thousand tons, carrying hundreds of passengers, filled the western Mediterranean, plying from Egypt to Palestine and Syria to Asia Minor, to Greece and on to Italy, Carthage and Spain.

Great international roads crossed Palestine to Syria, and branched to Mesopotamia and Persia in the east and Asia Minor and Greece in the west. A dozen tongues were heard in every city. A dozen religions had their legends and temples. And now half a dozen Greek philosophies were taught in every large city.

I have already said that the Christian church includes in the Old Testament more books than the Jews of Jerusalem ever did. This was because it took over the Hebrew writings in the Greek translation which is called the Septuagint, or "The Seventy." There is an ancient

legend which nobody but an uneducated Jew now believes, that the Egyptian king Ptolemy Philadelphus shut up seventy-two learned Jews in the island of Pharos for seventy-two days, and that they, with supernatural assistance, translated the Old Testament into Greek. We may admit that the Alexandrian ruler, about the year 260 B. C., being a great patron of scholars, encouraged or assisted the Alexandrian Jews to translate their sacred book. Hebrew had already ceased to be spoken, and most of the Jews born abroad did not even read or speak the Aramaic language which displaced Hebrew in Palestine.

This enterprise was part of an attempt to keep the scattered Jews faithful to Jehovah, and it was difficult. The new religion, founded, as we saw, by Ezra and the priestly writers of the Pentateuch, permitted only one temple, at Jerusalem, and a synagogue, for prayer and reading, was a poor substitute for a temple. Moreover, it was difficult to keep the Sabbath and the fasts and feasts in strange lands. The Jews were not then segregated by the Gentiles as they were by the Christians of a later age. They were often wealthy merchants, officials and scholars. The book of Daniel, written in the second century before Christ, probably exaggerated their position in Persia, but it gives us some idea of what it was in most countries.

The liberality of the Septuagint itself, as compared with the Palestine Book of the Law and the Prophets, is proof enough that, as we should expect, these scattered Jews had their minds very considerably broadened. The translation not only included books of remarkable liberality but it toned down the coarseness of much of the language of the earlier books, which fortunately has been further modified in the Latin and English

translations. The modern police would not permit the publication of a literal translation of many passages of the Hebrew Pentateuch, the prophets or the Song of Songs. It would be painful to literal believers in the word of God theory and shocking to cultured disbelievers.

The trouble which the Jews of the dispersion gave to the orthodox leaders in Palestine is well known. In Alexandria, particularly, though it applies in greater or less measure to other cities (Tarsus, Antioch, Ephesus) there were great departures from orthodoxy.

Some took to Greek philosophy, and the writings of Philo the Jew show how far they departed from strict Judaism.

Some adopted the mystic views which were then circulating freely in the Greco-Roman world.

There is a famous poem of the Roman poet Vergil which says: "Now the virgin returns, and the age of Saturn comes again, and a new progeny descends from the high heaven." Vergil certainly wrote this more than twenty years before Jesus was born, and in the Middle Ages it was believed that he had received a revelation in advance of the birth of Christ. That is why he is so honored in Dante. But modern scholars see that the idea could easily be taken from mystic writings, like the Sybilline Books, which partly contained Jewish ideas. The Septuagint had, as I say, wrongly put "virgin" instead of "young woman" in the passage, "Behold a virgin shall conceive."

Other Jews adopted elements of later Egyptian religion and blended them with Judaism. A very remarkable illustration of this is found in the Jewish sect of the Therapeuts (healers) whom Philo describes as being established in many parts of Egypt before there

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could be any question of the influence of Christian ideas. There was, in fact, a somewhat similar sect in Judea which was a century or two older than the time of Christ. The Therapeuts may have been inspired by these, but there were at that time very ascetic communities attached to the Egyptian temples, especially of Serapis and Isis, and it is more likely that they borrowed from them.

They lived in monastic bodies, some male and some female, wore white garments, and led lives of austerity and of service to the sick. They had to abandon their property when they joined the community, could not marry, and were so humane that they were the first body in the world to condemn slavery. They were real monks and nuns, and any man who still believes that the gospel ideas were novel ought at least to read the account of these Therapeuts in some good encyclopaedia. I find them well described in encyclopaedias of even sixty or seventy years ago, so there is little excuse for not knowing these Jewish anticipations of Christian ideas.

We shall, however, see those more clearly when we consider the Essenes of Palestine in the next section. The Therapeuts are one of many indications that the Jews made considerable progress, of which one gets no suspicion from the Bible, between Ezra and the beginning of the Christian era. They found themselves, when they quitted Palestine, in a world of rapidly changing ideas, and the change was toward monotheism of a very austere type.

I described this in the third of this series of six booklets which is written from the view-point of history. Two new religions had developed from the Persian religion much as Christianity would develop

from Judaism. The austere old Persian religion, as reformed in the seventh or eighth century B. C. by Zarathustra, had been severe on human nature. A supreme devil has made matter: therefore the body sin, darkness and ugliness; and, if the spiritual soul contaminated itself with these things there was eternal punishment in store for it.

After contact with Babylonia, which seems to have had an obscure saviour-god called Esmun, and at all events paid great honor to sun-gods (Jesus as a Saviour-God is a symbol of the sun) the Persians began to consider their ancient sun-god Mithra as a saviour or mediator for men. He "the Ram of God took away the sins of the world" (that is a bit of Mithraic liturgy) and men were baptized with blood in his name and had to live very strictly. This religion traveled right across Asia Minor and Greece to Italy before the birth of Christ.

Soon after the beginning of the Christian era Manicheism spread over the Greco-Roman world after it. In Egypt there were, as I said, the very rigid religions of Isis and Serapis. Even Buddhism was brought by the missionaries of the Hindu King Asoka at least as far as Syria and perhaps farther.

Then there were the saviour-gods of vegetation whose birth or resurrection and death were very dramatically celebrated in every city before Christ was born. But I have dealt with this aspect of the matter in the third volume and also in a lecture-sermon on the Human Meaning of Christian Doctrine. A free copy of both these publications is available to readers who would like to go further into this subject.

There were at the same time many moralists and philosophers who wandered from city to city, or settled

in a city, preaching very rigorous ideals of conduct.

The Stoic philosophy, which was a religion in so far as it believed in one God (a material God) and called the moral law his will, was taught in every city from Alexandria to Rome, and it was not only a very severe but a very effective code of morals. Slaves were attracted to it, as it insisted on the brotherhood of men.

The teaching of Plato also was revived, or modified, and its teachers had crowds of pupils in all the cities. The Jewish writer Philo is more a Platonist than a Jehovist.

Besides these there were wandering moralists, who simply preached austere conduct without any particular philosophy or religion. It is an important part of my contention with the bishops that the Jews of the cities outside Palestine had long been familiar with all the doctrines and institutions of the so-called revelation of Jesus when the Christian message was first put before them.

## II

But the advance in moral and religious ideas was by no means confined to the Jews of the dispersion. It is impossible that the Greeks abroad should not influence their brethren in Judea, and there were Greek and Roman officers, civil servants and foreign merchants, in all the cities of Judea. There is, however, no need to study causes. The gospel account of the state of thought at Jerusalem is, as we shall see, misleading in many respects, but it does indicate certain facts to which Bible-readers have paid remarkably little attention.

It says, for instance, that besides the Pharisees, there was a sect called the Sadducees, and these men said, "there was no resurrection." This means that they did



not believe in a future life, and that in this they were distinguished from the much larger body of the Pharisees.

Let me say at once that the Pharisees were the bulk of the Jewish people. So the Jews as a body now believed in rewards and punishments after death; and, therefore, Christ is not supposed to put that before them as a novel doctrine, but right to the last we find hardly any mention of such a belief in the Old Testament.

Any thoughtful reader of the Bible must appreciate from this that there had been a remarkable advance of religious thought in Judea between 400 B. C. and the beginning of the Christian era, yet there is not a single "inspired writing" to account for it. At least half the difference between the last prophet and the gospels had been obliterated by the general acceptance of the doctrine of rewards and punishments after death.

If you believe the gospels at all, you must believe that in the time of Christ all but a few skeptics believed that after death the good would pass to a state of bliss which they figuratively called Abraham's bosom, the Christian heaven, and the wicked would go to an eternal fire, the Christian hell. None but the Sadducees are represented as questioning this.

It is only because commentators are silent or sophistical about the absence of such a belief from the Old Testament that orthodox people do not realize that what they would call the greatest truth of the Christian religion after their belief in its triune divinity, Jehovah-Jesus-Holy Ghost, seems to have been learned by the Jews without a divine revelation.

But as a matter of fact they were taught the doctrine

of human immortality and of future reward and punishment in heaven or hell. The teachers were the priest-hoods and people of the two nations, Egypt and Persia, which are so commonly, and now, since we know the truth, so foolishly, described by preachers as sitting in darkness and the shadow of death.

This is only one of the advances made by Jewish religious thought in the unchronicled period of about 400 years intervening between Ezra and Jesus. As the book of Ecclesiastes reminds us, though it was probably written by a Hellenistic Jew, there were extremely liberal men in Judaism after this date. What had happened was that, during the hundred years of light Persian dominion the Jews had prospered and fully accepted the Ezraist ideas and books. The canon of sacred books was closed, but there was an immense amount of disputing and commenting on them, in the course of which different schools were bound to arise.

However, all this was suspended by the fierce struggle with the Syrian princes in the second century. Indeed, Ptolemy of Egypt had, when he conquered Jerusalem in 301 B. C., taken away a hundred thousand Jews to Egypt, so it is said, but take it with a grain of salt. It was about the middle of second century B. C. when the Jews won self-government from the Syrian princes, and the discussions on the sacred books were resumed.

The chief parties were now the Pharisees and the Sadducees, but the latter were much more orthodox than is generally supposed, and the Pharisees were no clique of proud and wealthy Jews but the zealous majority of the people. At least two of the leaders or kings (predecessors of Herod) of the Jews who ruled from 120 to 80 B. C., were Sadducees, and even in the time of Christ they were often members of the

Council. Their chief quarrel with the Pharisees was that the latter claimed divine authority for a good deal of unwritten, as well as the written, law. To prevent any tampering with the sacred book it was forbidden to write down later teaching, and so there is a great gap in Jewish sacred literature between the last prophets and the Talmud.

But my purpose in this booklet does not require that I should write the history of the Jewish sects or schools. It will be enough to make clear two points.

On the one hand, the Pharisees were as zealous for pure conduct as for pure doctrine; and, though what is said about them in the gospels (and not supported by Paul, who had been a Pharisee) is tinged with bitter hostility, we can believe that, as is usual, this zeal led to some hypocrisy and much pride.

On the other hand, it went so far that the extreme Pharisees, who were ultimately known as the Essenes, adopted monastic habits of the most austere description. That this sect existed long before the birth of Jesus no one disputes, and the Jewish historian Josephus, who is believed to have belonged to it at one time, gives us a full account of its teaching.

I gave a long extract from his book in the third volume and will here, to save the reader the time of referring to it, summarize a few of the points. Some of the Essenes lived a regular monastic life on the hills by the Jordan, as George Moore describes in his book, "The Brook Kerith," but others wandered through the cities in pairs, healing the sick and exhorting to virtue. Here are some of their tenets:

1. They regarded all sensual pleasure as evil, and they never married.

2. They loathed wealth; they had no money and

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held their few possessions in common.

3. They got new garments and shoes from the common stock only when the old ones were worn out.

4. They drank no wine and ate only the simplest food.

5. They were forbidden to take oaths, except the oath (or vow) of initiation, which bound them to love truth, virtue and justice only.

6. They particularly esteemed peace.

7. They were bound to help the poor and the sick.

8. They were ordered to respect the civil authority, and they served God with prayer, not sacrifices.

Several of the early Christian fathers, besides Josephus and Philo, speak about these Jewish ascetics, and we know that there were still several thousand of them in Judea forty years after the death of Christ.

The extraordinary silence about them of the writers of the gospels suggested to various scholars in the last century that perhaps Jesus was an Essene, and that the evangelists thought it better to suppress this natural explanation of the origin of his ideals.

But there are, as we shall see, many evidences in the gospels that the Greeks who wrote them, far away from Judea, were very poorly acquainted with the life of Judea, and thus they may not have known that it was common in the towns to see two of these ascetics, in worn white garments, healing the sick and exhorting men to repentance, justice and purity. As it is generally agreed among the authorities that we no longer have the earliest biographies of Jesus, some scholars who believe in the historicity of Jesus suggest that his Essene character may have been frankly described in these, and later writers, wishing to make the narrative more and more miraculous omitted it.

Whatever we may think of these speculations, the man who asks us to measure the distance from the later Jewish prophets to the teaching of the gospels and does not take into account these intermediate developments should be advised to read Josephus. Whether these Essenes borrowed ideas from the Persian religion or whether, like so many ascetics even philosophers, of that time, they brooded over the requirements of virtue until they came naturally to their ascetic conclusions, makes no difference to our story. It is a fact that before the beginning of the Christian era there were many thousands of Jews in Palestine, who embraced (as Jesus is made to have done) voluntary poverty and celibacy, served the poor and sick, and preached generosity, humility, purity and repentance to all. Whether there is anything in the teaching of the gospels that goes beyond their teaching we will consider later.

The main body of the Pharisees again was divided into a narrower and a more liberal school. No doubt there were Pharisees who correspond to the proud or hypocritical figures of the gospels. There are such in the religious world of America to-day (perhaps in the House of Bishops) though I suppose they would not like me to call them "a brood of vipers."

The Pharisees as a body had arisen out of the conflict with those who in the second century had tried to alter the features of the Jewish religion. They were essentially, not men who split hairs in interpreting the letter of the law, but zealous Jews who fought against those who would adulterate even the theism of the Jewish religion. They were simply patriots to Jehovah and Judea, and they were highly respected by the people.

One gets the impression from the gospels that they were a sleek and hypocritical minority upon whom it was perfectly safe to pour ridicule in addressing the people. This is entirely wrong, as Lyzynski and other scholars have shown in special works on them. They were the democratic leaders and championed the people against the priests and the rich. They worked very unselfishly for the religious education of the people, and it was through their efforts that provision was made that there should be daily prayers in the temple, and that deputies of the people should be present. Their phylacteries, or embroidered bands which are ridiculed in the gospels, were symbolic signs that their heads and arms were dedicated to the service of religion and the people. If we count with them all who supported them, they were the great majority of the nation, and it is now quite generally admitted by historical experts that, from the orthodox Jewish point of view, they were the greatest force in Judea in the first century before Christ.

Yet in such a body there were always likely to be a few men of the type caricatured in the Bible; though as the Pharisees, being zealots for the Jewish law, were the strongest opponents of the early Christians, we expect to find them unjustly portrayed. The group which the original Christian writers had in mind seem to have been the followers of Shammai, the vice-president of the Sanhedrim, a very narrow and somber type. They are censured even in the Talmud itself. Then the later writers of the gospels as we now have them, who were not well acquainted with life at Jerusalem, made the vituperation apply to the whole body of Pharisees. A Jewish crowd would not for a

moment have tolerated such language about the Pharisees generally.

But if Shammai was the vice-president of the Great Council, its president, Hillel, one of the most distinguished and most honored names in the generation before Christ, was a very different type of man. Dr. Robert Millikan has said in his works that the chief distinction of the unique message of Jesus was that he made the Golden Rule the essence of it. Men who are learned in some branch of science might be expected to reflect that before they set out to instruct the public on some point outside their own field of culture, it is advisable to study it carefully and so as to avoid the lending of their great authority to prolongation of the life of errors.

Any person who cares to look up the Pharisees in a good work of reference, say the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, will find that Hillel expressly declared, thirty or forty years before the alleged date of the birth of Christ, that the Golden Rule, in its extreme form ("Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself") was, in the words of the *Encyclopaedia*, "the fundamental principle of the Jewish religion," and the remainder of the law was only a development of it. Most probably the words of Hillel have been attributed to Jesus.

We shall come to these comparisons in a later chapter, but such development of Pharisaism as the Essenes and the more humane and practical followers of Hillel must be carefully studied by any man who thinks that the Jews remained at the level of Ezra.

Hillel was born in Babylonia and absorbed much of his culture there. When he came to study in Jerusalem he supported himself and his family by manual

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labor while he attended the school. But he rose to the highest position in Judaism, passed much sound legislation for the poor, and was so deeply and universally loved that after his death (probably about 10 B. C.) he was regarded in a supernatural light. He was very gentle, humane, humble and pious. No one could rouse his anger. He never used language like "brood of vipers." A man who made a wager that he would make him do so lost it. "Love all mankind and bring them nearer to the law" he said. He seems to have used parables, and one of his sayings, "He that increases not, decreases," reappears in a gospel parable. He taught men to esteem culture and refinement as well as temperance and gentleness. His ideal was social, not exaggeratedly ascetic. He said, "If I am not for myself, who is for me? And if I am for myself alone, what am I?" But he was against great possessions and luxury. "More flesh, more worms: more maids, more lust," he said.

When we find such a man the most respected and influential figure in Judea in the generation before Christ, we see how sadly astray is the estimate of the Jews held by people who confine their reading to the Bible and popular works on it.

Even the Sadducees represented a moral advance. What is said about them in the gospels has led to a common idea that they were Epicurean free-thinkers. The Jewish historian Josephus does not in the least give this as their difference from the Pharisees. They rejected the resurrection and the belief in spirits because it was not in the law. They were the fundamentalists among the Jews. They refused to entertain the expectation of a Messiah for the same reason. They were really sticklers for the purity of the law, and the high priest and his colleagues belonged to the group. But



they were the wealthier body and the more hospitable to Greek culture, so no doubt there were skeptics among them.

### III

I have said that the Sadducees differed from the Pharisees in rejecting the Messianic idea, and this is another point of importance to study in the period of transition which we have under consideration in this chapter. People who insist on reading the Old Testament just as it is, in spite of all its duplications and anachronisms, naturally find that it is a preparation for the New Testament. The connection between them is far from being as close as is popularly supposed.

The fundamentalists find in Genesis a vague statement that a woman shall crush the head of the serpent, and in Isaiah they find that a virgin is going to give birth to a son and it shall be called Immanuel. Then, they say, these prophecies grow and grow until the nation is fully instructed to expect a son of Man, of mystic origin, who will redeem the Jews; and, as the Jews reject him, he redeems the world.

But if we examine the so-called Messianic texts patiently we find nothing, until shortly before the Christian era, but a repeated promise that Jehovah will some day end all the troubles of the Jews, and many think that his agent will be a king of the line of David. The promise that David's line should rule forever necessitated this belief in a coming king, and as both kings and priests were anointed, or consecrated with oil, the coming agent of Jehovah is "the anointed one," which is in Hebrew the Messiah, and in Greek the Christ.

The development of this expectation is not without

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interest, and it is, of course, an essential condition of the rise of Christianity. We now know that many peoples believed that their gods would in time bring them to something like a golden age, just as many believed that the history of the race began with a golden age.

In the case of the Hebrews there was a particularly strong reason for entertaining the dream. It was an essential part of the religion that Jehovah rewarded the good and was particularly interested in the Jews, and that the reward must be given in this world. Yet century after century calamities fell upon the people, and the prophets could only hold some to the faith in Jehovah by promising, more and more loudly, that if they would turn to Jehovah he would save and reward them.

From the seventh century B. C. onward, when the great powers appeared menacingly on the horizon of the Hebrews, this expectation of a future national reward assumed a more dramatic form, having in the end much of the character of a frenzy. The strength of the Jews was puny in comparison with that of these mighty powers. Some half-miraculous act of Jehovah was needed, and the idea grew that a second David would come. When precisely it was written we do not know, but in II Samuel there was a divine promise that the dynasty of David would never become extinct:

And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established forever before thee: thy throne shall be established forever.

It was natural to suppose that, though the Babylonians had apparently destroyed the dynasty, a new anointed king or Messiah would arise and, with the

supernatural halo of Jehovah restore the country.

Any candid Bible-reader must admit that it is very singular what a small part the hope of a Messiah plays in the Old Testament if one supposes that the Jews had a clear revelation of his coming. It is useless to quote mere promises that the people will be redeemed from their enemies. Faith in Jehovah, in a people who did not believe in heaven, essentially implied this hope.

And, naturally, Jehovah must use some human instrument, a king, in the work. Yet even in this very natural form the Messianic expectation figures little in the Old Testament. Most of the prophets either do not notice it or, like Ezekiel, regard it as an unofficial popular belief. They introduce the belief abruptly and drop it just as abruptly. It is the general hope, which they feebly endorse, that the line of David will yet have a great representative. Micah, for some reason, predicts that he will be born in Bethlehem; and, of course, gospel-writers later have to place his birth in Bethlehem, to meet the supposed requirements of the Old Testament.

The priestly writers, who, as we saw, are mainly responsible for the fabrications of the Old Testament as we have them to-day, never entertain this popular expectation of a Messiah. Their theme is that the Jews deserve all they get for neglecting the sacrifices and the worship of Jehovah. Isaiah is the chief prophet quoted, and the two most famous passages in that composite book are wrongly applied to the Messianic expectation. If in the seventh chapter (verse 14) you change the word "virgin" to "young woman," as Hebrew scholars say that we must, the "sign" will be recognized at once as referring to the immediate, not the remote, future. The whole context demands this.

King Ahaz wants a sign in his own day. Very well, says the prophet, before some child that is not yet born comes to the age of moral discernment the Lord will keep his promise. The long second passage of Isaiah (by a much later writer) in chapter XLII plainly refers to the Jewish people, not to some individual in the remote future.

Thus all that we get in the Old Testament is reference to a widely held and very natural belief that Jehovah will one day be fully reconciled with his people and, by means of some powerful king, put an end to its afflictions. And it should be noted that this is entirely an expectation of a materialistic redemption, of a restoration of national independence and prosperity. When the books of the Old Testament cease, we still get references to the hope in the apocryphal books and fragments. When the Jews won independence in the Maccabean wars of the second century, many thought that the promise was fulfilled, and the Messianic expectation was put aside. Then the Romans came, and the expectation revived.

In the days of Jesus, admitting his existence but only for the sake of the argument, all expected a Messiah of some kind. The only question was whether Jesus could be the Messiah. But the mass of the people still believed that the Messiah was to be a victorious fighting king. Jesus is said to have left behind him only a dispirited handful of followers, but a few years later the pretender Theudas had a crowd of thirty thousand Jews massed on Mount Olivet to see him bring down the walls of Jerusalem by a miracle. Even during the Middle Ages pretenders arose, and the bulk of the Jews still expected the Messiah. It is, so to speak,

an article of their creed, though the educated Jews now smile at it.

There was, however, no sudden change when Paul began in the first century to proclaim a spiritual Messiah, born of a virgin, whose work was to redeem the world from sin. There is no authentic text either in the Old Testament or the apocryphal Jewish writings that speaks of a virgin-birth but, as I said in the third volume, the belief in a miraculous conception and virgin-birth was familiar throughout the Greco-Roman world by the time of Paul. Not only saviour-gods but men like Plato were credited with miraculous births. From Persia and Egypt there had, as we saw, spread a new asceticism in the few centuries before Christ, with a particular abhorrence of sexual relations. Hence there were the celibate communities of the Egyptians, Therapeuts and Essenes, the Mithraic and Manichean asceticism for the initiated, the ideas of the Neo-Platonists and the more rigorous Stoics.

This mystic-ascetic wave that spread over the Greco-Roman civilization affected the Jews, as we saw, and we find traces of an expectation of a new kind of Messiah and a mystic being, not born of flesh, but pre-existent and born in a mysterious and miraculous fashion. Such a story had arisen in very many places in connection with the birth of gods (for example, Horus). This mystic Messiah would not, of course, lead the Jews against the Roman armies. In the new ascetic movement material prosperity and national independence were matters of no importance. It was the salvation of the soul that mattered; and, as the belief in a future life became more definite at the same time as the sense of sin, the way was fully prepared for the teaching of Paul, especially as, we saw, many Jews

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were coming to believe that Jehovah was just as concerned about the sins of other nations as those of the Jews.

Such was the development of thought in the two or three centuries between the closing of the canon of the Old Testament about 400 B. C. and the appearance of the first Christian writings probably not much before 50 A. D. The few Jewish expressions of it (in some of the later Psalms, for instance) are put entirely out of place in the Old Testament, and the unfortunate type of Bible-reader who is persuaded to distrust modern culture and confine himself to "the word of God" has a totally false historical perspective.

The centuries between Zechariah and Matthew, which the fundamentalist imagines to have seen no moral and religious change, are about the most stirring and progressive in the whole of Jewish history. Clash of ideas is the source of progress, and there had never before been, and there has not been since until modern times, such a clash of religions, moralities and philosophies as during that period of transition. The world had become a melting-pot. Every city had a dozen rival religions and philosophies, and the Jews were found in every city and had their own scholars and writers endeavoring to adapt the old traditions to the new thought. Christianity is just one of many outcomes of this world-effervescence.

THE ORIGIN OF  
THE GOSPELS

**B**Y Baptism, wherein I was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.

Furthermore, that the effect and virtue of this Sacrament is forgiveness of sin, and grace of the Holy Ghost, is manifestly declared in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, where it is said, Do penance, and be baptized every one of you, and ye shall have forgiveness of sin, and shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Which effect of grace and forgiveness of sin this Sacrament hath by virtue and force of the working of Almighty God, according to His promise annexed and conjoined unto this Sacrament, as is manifestly declared by the Word of Christ, saying, Whosoever believeth and is baptized shall be saved. Which saying of our Saviour Christ is to be understood of all such persons as die in the grace conferred and given to them in Baptism, and do not finally fall from the same by sin.—The Doctrine of the Church of England.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE ORIGIN OF THE GOSPELS

So far as doctrinal standards are concerned, the acceptance of the modern view of the Old Testament matters very little except in regard to the reasons for the atonement, which we will consider in connection with St. Paul. I may say at once, however, that to seek a basis for that doctrine in the Old Testament is just the kind of procedure that the modern mind instinctively resents.

You take an ancient narrative which is admittedly, for educated people, compiled from ancient Sumerian legends and is drastically opposed to what we now know about the origin of the world and man. From this you select a childlike story of a man and woman in a garden who were naked and did not know it until they ate some forbidden fruit, and then they hid themselves from the Lord, and he spoke very angrily to them, and the man sneeringly blamed his wife, and the Lord turned them out of the garden.

The story is childish enough, but to make it the basis of a serious religious doctrine is far worse. The punishment which God is supposed to inflict consists solely in material changes. They have henceforth to work, to breed children in pain and travail, to die at the end of a few decades. Does any bishop or any educated churchman in America believe that labor, food-getting, the pains of child-birth and death really began as the effect of a curse and did not form part of man's heritage from his animal ancestors? If they do, they had better cease to talk about reconciliation with science and resign themselves to see the church perish. A literal

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belief in these things puts any man outside of the pale of modern culture.

Jehovah is represented as cursing the serpent at the same time as the human race. Is there anyone (I will not say any educated person but any man or woman in America) who holds that until that famous episode in the Garden of Eden serpents walked on four legs or that since then they have eaten dust? Or that the miraculous destruction of the serpent's legs, when it was turned into a crawling beast, was so curiously done that in some (the python, for instance) the skeleton of the legs and even well-formed claws are beautifully preserved?

"Now, now bishop," some of my friends will say, "you ought to know better than to talk like that. Not even the most resolute fundamentalist literally believes in that curse of the serpent family." Then, will you explain why the curse of the serpent in Genesis III, 14, may and must be taken symbolically, but the curse of the human race which immediately follows must be taken literally?

"No, no," you say, "we do not defy science in that childish fashion. Of course, men had always labored and women moaned in child-birth. It is a little allegory." Then how in the world do you read out of it everything that it does say and read into it the one thing which it most emphatically does not say? There is in it not even the remotest suggestion of an inherited sin. As to an inherited sentence of damnation, no Jew in the whole course of the Old Testament ever believed in such a thing as damnation. Yet you take this sentence of damnation as being almost the one doctrinal revelation in the Old Testament. There are only some ten lines of it which are never again referred to by any

writer from cover to cover of the book!

We will return to this extraordinary situation when we come to Paul and the atonement. The only other doctrinal formula adopted by Christianity out of the Old Testament is creation, and we have seen what to think of that. There is no such thing in Genesis as a doctrine of creation out of nothing. That chapter of Genesis is just a modification by some unknown Jew of a passage in an ancient Sumerian book of fairy-tales.

If there is other literature in the Old Testament that edifies and helps you, read it by all means. If you love the poetry of such books as are poetic, read it as admiringly as you like. But let us have done with this medieval talk about the Old Testament as a standard of doctrine. It is a collection of ancient Hebrew writings of very unequal value, chaotically arranged and largely modified by the prevarication of late priestly writers for the purpose of giving a false version of history in the interest of the priesthood.

So, as to my heresies, we clear the ground of the Old Testament which is irrelevant and immaterial and approach the New Testament. Those "heresies" which the bishops selected out of my booklet, Communism and Christianity, may be divided in three groups.

The first group of heresies alleged against me refer to philosophy and science. They are heresies about the existence of a personal, conscious, spiritual God and human immortality. The bishops know no more about this than I do and cannot refer me to the Bible. All that they can say is that the church teaches what I will not literally accept. I merely ask them to be just and consistent, not to get up a trial of one man but to say candidly to modern America: This church requires

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every man or woman who enters it or remains in it to believe literally in certain propositions about God and the immortality of the human soul and body which four-fifths of the men of science and scientific philosophers with their followers reject.

The second group of my alleged heresies relate to doctrines like the Trinity, which are contained in the creeds and articles. As to these, I showed in the last volume that they are just the interpretations which were put upon obscure passages of the Bible by ancient bishops who had only the same authority to interpret it as modern bishops have. And again I ask the bishops, in fairness, to put this notice over the doors of our churches: The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America requires every man or woman who would be a member of it to believe literally in certain propositions about the Trinity and the Holy Ghost which certainly nine-tenths of the leaders of modern culture and their followers reject.

The third and largest group of my heresies consists of statements about Jesus and redemption which show that I accept the words of our formularies on those points only in a symbolic sense. Now it would be quite possible for modern science to make a whole bench of mechanical bishops which would do as much as the bishops did to me at Cleveland, that is, just say that my teaching is not the teaching of the articles, creeds and Prayer Book. From live bishops in modern times one expects something more. And I assume that a real live bishop would say to me: I admit that the Old Testament has not the least doctrinal authority and that the creeds and articles have only the human authority of bishops who compiled them in an age of ignorance, but unless you are prepared to subscribe

literally to the substance of the teaching of the New Testament you really put yourself outside the church of Christ.

You see, I have to talk to myself when I want to hear a real live bishop talking, but I suppose that is what most of the bishops of the Anglo American Church would say to me. They feel that I have really "gone too far" (what a useful phrase that is) in doubting the historical reality of Jesus, and also in saying that the genuine redemption of the human race has scarcely yet begun and that the true Messiah is science.

And to all this I reply very firmly, and very courteously, that modern truth compels me to take creation, God and the soul, the fall of Adam and the blood of Jesus symbolically. I reply that churchmen ought to perceive the significance of the fact that they will get even fewer men of ability and learning to say that they literally believe in the divinity of Christ and the atonement and in a celestial heaven and hell than in a personal God. And I add that large numbers of ministers and writers of the churches of England and America openly reject the literal belief in those doctrines, and that biblical scholarship itself compels us to surrender that literal belief. Let us take separately the gospels and the Pauline epistles, and let us first of all consider the question of the historical value of the gospels as records of the acts and sayings of Jesus.

## I

One of the most recent books by a learned theologian on this part of my subject is the translation of Professor Adolf Deissmann's work, "The New Testament in the Light of Modern Research" (1929). The author is a professor of theology at Berlin University,

and in this book he is supposed to tell us, not what he thinks, but what is the general position of clerical biblical scholars to-day in regard to the origin and credibility of the gospels and epistles, chiefly the gospels.

Dr. Deissmann says some pretty and original things about the New Testament. He wins our admiration for it by comparing it to one of those beautiful old cathedrals of Europe. Jesus is the foundation stone and the first three gospels are the massive stones laid upon the foundation to provide a basis. The soaring columns of the cathedral are the epistles of Paul. Revelations provides in its gorgeous imagery the stained glass windows. The last addition, the gospel of John, is the tower.

But these prettinesses tend to distract the mind of the general religious public from the real effect of biblical scholarship in its analysis of the New Testament. And just as distracting are the constant exhortations to us to fix our minds on the moral teaching of Jesus. We will consider these presently, but what the church teaches and what the bishops humiliated (or meant to humiliate) me for not believing literally is that Jesus was God, and that he died on the cross to avert a sentence of eternal damnation from the human race.

Liberal theologians like Dr. Deissmann and men of science like Dr. Millikan and Dr. Pupin may say that it really does not matter much what the church teaches. On the one hand they urge us to support the church; and, on the other hand, they urge the church to soften its doctrinal rigor. It is a very loose and wholly unsatisfactory attitude.

The men of science and history who say that it does not matter a cent what the official teaching of the church is remain outside it. The men of theology who

really think the same thing remain in, but they use what we politely call a diplomatic language. I want the church to be a place in which diplomacy is unnecessary, and so I will make a plain, candid and logical study of the matter, avoiding all equivocations.

The church doctrine is based, if we leave the Pauline epistles for separate treatment, on the gospels as records of the acts and words of Jesus. They are said by the simpler Christians, indeed by all literal believers, to be the word of God, but even these good folk ought to know that the writers of the gospels and epistles make no claim whatever of inspiration. They reproduce what they say are words of Jesus, whom the earlier gospels vaguely, and the epistles explicitly, regard as divine, but the writers never suggest for a moment that anything was revealed to them. So the New Testament can be claimed to be the word of God only in the sense and to the degree that it is a correct record of the words of Jesus.

The first question we ask, therefore, is whether the gospels are a correct or at least a generally reliable record of the acts and words of Jesus. But the persons who ought to be the first to ask themselves this question, the fundamentalists, the catholics, the four-square and New Jerusalem people, in short all who repeat the words of Jesus every moment and want to regulate the whole of life by them, seem very rarely to ask it. As I said in regard to their belief that the Bible generally is the word of God, they would, if you asked them how they know that they have a reliable record of what Jesus did and said in the gospels, hesitate and stammer and admit that they had never reflected on the subject.

Now how shall we go about it if we really want

seriously to examine the question of whether the New Testament is the word of Jesus? We shall want proof that the writers of its books were well informed on the matters they describe and were likely to describe them truthfully.

Historians find works in every age which profess to give a record of the events of the time; but, as we saw in regard to the Old Testament, some of these are just pious fiction, some are (like Chronicles) a deliberate manipulation of historical matter for a specific purpose, the exaltation of the priesthood, some are by men so far away from events that we distrust their knowledge and some are colored by prejudice.

This applies to every age and every country. Take as an example, the French Revolution. The historian has a mass of contemporary or almost contemporary evidence, but the writers flatly contradict each other on important points and he has to study carefully the likelihood of each particular writer to know the facts and tell them candidly. Take Russia to-day and the mass of conflicting statements about it. Take the supposed Mexican outrages.

The historian has, therefore, to apply tests to the sources he uses, but they are just rules of common-sense. He wants to know if it can be shown from other literature that the author of a particular book was in a position to know the facts and was likely to tell them conscientiously. Thus when the Greek historian Herodotus tells us peculiar things about the life of ancient Babylon, we look for some sort of evidence that he ever was in Babylonia and find none; and, therefore, though he was a conscientious and honorable man, we see that he could be misinformed. When Plutarch writes, in Greece, the lives of eminent Romans



of a century earlier, we may distrust his information, but when Xenophen writes about the prominent Athenians of his own time and city we feel that we are on safer ground.

But there is no need of illustration. The reliability of the gospels for us is in strict proportion to our assurance that its authors knew the facts and correctly stated them. When the authors of books are unknown such an assurance is often difficult; and everybody must know at least that the writers of the gospels are unknown, that three of them bear forged titles for they were not written by Matthew, Mark and John. Whether someone named Luke did write the book designated the Gospel according to Luke, we will consider later. We will make every allowance for the special value of recollections among the followers of a great teacher, but we must make the same allowance for gossip and pious exaggerations.

Athens in the days of Aristotle would not seem to most people a good atmosphere for the growth of legends, yet it is an historical fact that Plato's nephew, Speusippus, started the legend at that time, within a generation of the death of the master, that he had been conceived by his mother without intercourse with his father and it was widely believed. Legends cling like barnacles to nearly every great Greek and Roman character.

To a protestant a warning to test the reliability of an ancient author ought to be superfluous. He rejects every one of the miracles attributed, often by contemporaries, to hundreds of saints and martyrs in the Roman church. For many centuries stories were deliberately fabricated by pious writers all over Europe. It is the same in the Mohammedan world and in Budd-

hism, in ancient Greece and Rome. The protestant flatly refuses to believe the countless miracles that are said to have happened.

In very many of these cases we know that there was deliberate fiction for religious purposes, as we found in studying the Old Testament, but we may now leave this out of account and consider the natural growth of legends. It is not many years since, during the European war, we saw spurious stories accepted on every side according to the disposition of those who heard them. The oriental world is far more disposed to receive such fictions.

At the present day efforts are being made to propagate in America a new Persian religion called Bahaism. In 1903 a New York lawyer, Myron H. Phelps, wrote the life of the founder of this religion ("Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi") and Professor C. G. Browne, who writes the introduction to it, guarantees its accuracy.

Now both writers tell a remarkable story about the beginning of this religion. In 1844 a Mohammedan Persian youth, Ali Mohammed, felt that he had a call from God to reform the received religion. He called himself the Bab (gate) of a new revelation and gathered great numbers of disciples. The Mohammedan priests and the civil government of Persia about six years later found the movement so formidable that they inaugurated a terrible persecution. Not only the Bab but thousands of his followers were executed in the year 1850. The estimate of the number of actual martyrs ranges from ten to thirty thousand, and these men had no belief that they would be rewarded in heaven. But the most instructive fact is that not only the original prophet, the Bab, and his successor Abbas Effendi never

claimed to work miracles but expressly disclaimed them, yet within thirty years of his death the Bab was credited with innumerable miracles in biographies of him.

If this could happen in modern times, in a religion of a very high type which won millions of followers in fifty years in spite of the most terrible religious persecution, how easily could it happen in the ancient east? However, that it could and repeatedly did happen we have the whole of ancient literature to testify. Therefore these questions arise quite necessarily in our minds: Have we evidence that the writers of the gospels, whoever they were, were in a position to know the facts about the supposed three years ministry of Jesus? Have we any guarantee that they are not men, writing possibly far away from Judea and long after the time of Christ, who have simply put together stories that were current in the scattered Christian communities, just as other writers collected similar stories about the contemporary prophet Appollonius of Tyana?

Now the earliest assurance we have that any of the writers of the gospels received their knowledge from eye and ear witnesses is a provincial bishop of much zeal but no learning who wrote more than a hundred years after the alleged events. He is Bishop Papias, whose date is put about 145 B. C. Moreover, he merely says that an obscure older man in the church named John told him that the apostle Matthew had written in the Aramaic language (about a century earlier, remember) a collection of "sayings of the Lord," while Mark, after the death of Peter, put together what that apostle had told him about events in Judea. We certainly have not the original compilation of Matthew (assumed in this tradition) and do not know what it contained, and there is no way of proving that even

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if a Christian named Mark wrote a gospel about the year 70 A. D., forty years after the events, it contained only what Peter is supposed to have told him or that it coincides with the gospel Mark to-day.

All admit that the gospels Luke and John are later than these two, so we perceive at once the feebleness of the evidence for the historical reliability of the gospels. Take the earliest Christian document that is spoken of. Papias says that a companion of Jesus compiled a collection of his sayings. This, of course, is not the gospel according to Matthew, which is very much more than a short collection of sayings. Moreover, no Christian writer until a hundred years after the death of Christ quotes any sayings of Jesus that are found in the gospels to-day. Paul seems to have known nothing of such a collection thirty years after the death of Jesus. Clement of Rome seems to know nothing about it forty years later. Such sayings as we find imputed to Jesus in Christian writings before 130 A. D. differ from those in the gospels.

And who is this Papias who tells the story? He was an elderly bishop of Asia Minor who is said in an ecclesiastical Chronicle to have suffered martyrdom in 163 A. D. He can scarcely have been born before the year 80 A. D., and the historian Eusebius quotes his own word that he got his information from the generation after the supposed eye-witnesses, the apostles. It must, in fact, have been later than 100 A. D. when Papias made his inquiries. But Eusebius also says that he "was a man of poor intellect," and extremely credulous, and that he collected "certain strange parables of Our Lord and of his doctrine and some other matters that were rather too fabulous."

That is the only Christian witness of any sort to

the credibility of one of the gospels in the first hundred years after the death of Christ, and his own authority is an obscure Christian named John who greatly puzzles theologians. Moreover Bishop Polycarp, friend and contemporary of Papias, writing between 110 and 120 A. D., can only advise those who are seduced by all the false teaching that is current at that time to "turn to the tradition handed down from the beginning" and to the Epistles of Paul. Why not tell his followers to read the Gospel of Mark of which Papias speaks as an authoritative document? He does not seem to know of any such written record.

## II

These, simple but significant facts ought to warn any person that a serious inquiry into the grounds for accepting the gospels as reliable historical records is going to be a very difficult and delicate matter. The simple-minded reader of the Bible who expresses amazement when he hears that several scholars of ability have in the last twenty years concluded that there never was such a person as Jesus ought really to reflect a little on the reasons for his own opinions. We will deal with this question of historicity in the next chapter, but I may say here that the New Testament has given biblical scholars even more perplexing trouble than the Old Testament. For a hundred years one school of theologians has fought with another school, and if they are somewhat nearer agreement to-day, the arguments on which they rely are not at all impressive to rapidly increasing numbers of educated people.

I will show in the next chapter that we have not in any non-Christian writer of the first century the least undisputed evidence that there ever was such a

person as Jesus, and that evidence of the second century is worthless. We therefore rely on the gospels and epistles, and we obviously cannot rely on them until we know at least that the writers were acquainted with facts, not merely with stories that were current in the church. The words of Eusebius which I have just quoted warn us that even a bishop who professed to have taken special care to learn the truth accepted a lot of stories which are "rather too fabulous." It is impossible to prove in the ordinary historical way that any of our gospels existed in the first century.

A commission of historians and theologians of Oxford University undertook a quarter of a century ago to scrutinize all the Christian literature before the year 130 A. D. to see if they could find in it a single quotation from the four gospels which we have. The Oxford Society of Historical Theology published the results of the inquiry in, "The New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers," 1905; but, as usual, the general public is not admitted to the secret, because the passages examined are given in Greek and Latin.

However, Professor Joseph McCabe analyzes the book in his "Sources of the Morality of the Gospels" (1914) and the reader will find it interesting to learn the conclusion of these very competent clerical scholars.

An historian of the same university, Dr. Conybeare, tried to reduce the significance of the results of this inquiry by reminding us that if we decline to believe in the existence of any book at a particular date unless we find other books to assure us of it we shall have to suspend our judgment about a great many books. Well, we should be quite willing to do so if the book had no great practical importance, if it were not imposed on us as a code of law and doctrine, but in the case of the

gospels the absence of supporting evidence is particularly important.

As I have just quoted from Polycarp, the early church seethed with false accounts of Christ's words and deeds and controversy about them. We know from Paul that this began at once, and it grew worse and worse, as I showed in the last volume. Surely any Christian teacher would appeal to an authoritative written record if there were one!

But are there any Christian writings of the century after the death of Jesus in which we could look for such references? I turn to this Oxford inquiry. There is first the earlier part of a little work called "The Teaching of the Apostles," which belongs to the first century. It does not reproduce a line of any one of our gospels. Next there is "The Epistle of Barnabas" which was written some time between 70 and 130 A. D. It never mentions the gospels or reproduces a single complete saying of Jesus as we have it in the gospels. There are just a few words here and there that we find in a different setting in the gospels. Then there is, about the year 96, the letter of Pope Clement of Rome to the Corinthians. It does not mention the gospels, and the sentences in it which are sometimes given as quotations from the gospels are rejected by this learned commission of inquiry.

Then, for the years 100 to 130 we have the second part of the "Teaching of the Apostles," the "Pastor" of Hermas, and a spurious second letter of Pope Clement. They are all three barren. We have also letters of the chief bishops of the time, Ignatius and Polycarp. There are a few sentences in these letters which more or less correspond with sentences in the gospels which are not mentioned and the inquirers conclude from this

that Ignatius (in 110 A. D.) probably knew the gospel of Matthew "in something like its present form," and Polycarp "probably" so knew Luke and John.

With this final conclusion of the learned professors we may quarrel. If a writer of the year 110 quoted four or five sayings of Jesus which fairly correspond with sayings in Matthew or Luke, surely no more follows than that some form of those gospels then existed. In strict logic we are not forced to this conclusion. All that we must conclude is that the sayings themselves existed, probably in some document, but this might be a small document which was later used by the gospel-writers.

So then all that this most painstaking inquiry by the Oxford Professors really proved is that no Christian writer before the year 110 A. D. ever quotes any gospel and none before 130 mentions the gospels or appeals to the authority of any written record.

The incompetent and obscure bishop, Papias, was the first witness to the existence of any gospels, those by Matthew and Mark but the far abler and better known bishop, Eusebius, a church historian, smiles at his credulity. All Papias says is that somewhere about the year 100 A. D. an elderly Christian about whom nothing is known, except his name, John, told him that fifty or sixty years earlier Matthew was said to have made some unknown collection of sayings of Jesus, and that thirty or forty years later Mark had written some gospel, but as to what this collection contained, Papias gives no idea. His gospel of Mark, whatever it may have been, certainly was not ours.

The next witness to the existence of some sort of gospels Justin, is still later. So his witness is if anything still less reliable than that of Papias; and, any-



how, we are as ignorant of the contents of his gospels as we are of Papias' Gospel by St. Mark.

Nearly every writer who refers to the theory that the Jesus of the New Testament never existed as an historical personage is so supercilious that I will press the matter a little further, partly because the holding of this theory is often said to have been the greatest among all the heresies for which I was tried.

Papias, the first witness, says, not before 100 A. D., that the earliest document was a collection of sayings of Jesus by no less an authority than Matthew. Now, we have already seen that no Christian writer until about 110 quotes any saying of Jesus that is, even substantially, in the gospel of Matthew.

Moreover in 1897 a new manuscript, which seems to belong to the second century, giving certain "Sayings of Our Lord" was discovered. Of these sayings only two correspond accurately with sayings in the gospels, four roughly correspond with the gospels and four are not found at all in the gospels. So we can only conclude that the existence of this supposed compilation by Matthew was strangely little known in the church for a century; and, worse, its contents never has been known by any person whose name is on record except a certain John about whom we know nothing.

Then Papias says that Mark collected information about the words and acts of Jesus from Peter and wrote a number of them down after Peter's death. But we have just seen that even Polycarp and Ignatius, about the year 110, do not quote anything from Mark. Nobody seems to know anything about it until the middle of the second century. In fact Papias says that Mark did not write the events of Christ's life "in order." But the actual gospel of Mark is such a composition, so

it must have been a different book, if indeed it was a book at all. More likely it was a very short document or even only a disconnected memorandum.

Of all this great and difficult controversy the general body of literal believers has no suspicion. The most they hear is that after a hundred years of disputing the biblical authorities are now "generally agreed" about the date and reliability of the gospels, so they may smile at the men who doubt if there ever was such a man of history as the Jesus of the New Testament, Creeds and Prayer Book.

You now see what grounds the experts have for coming to an agreement. What the literal believer calls the most important events of human history have not come down to us in a reliable record, but only in an utterly unreliable tradition, so late and so vague and so poorly supported, that no historian will even consider it, let alone the basing of a conclusion upon it.

For fifty years these events of importance to Christian orthodoxy were left to oral tradition, and we have seen what oral tradition is worth. What is the explanation of this strange neglect? If Jesus is an historical personage it was quite natural, but our biblical experts do not care to press on our notice the reason for it. Jesus and his followers, if they existed, expected the end of the world soon, within the generation to which they belonged. So they had no new priesthood, or new church, or new sacraments, or new doctrine to offer to anybody in a new gospel such as we are supposed to have in the New Testament.

We owe the seed doctrines of the so-called Christian gospel to Paul who had not known Jesus in the flesh but only in the spirit. There were only two of these doctrinal seeds: (1) the fall and doom of the

human race as the effects of the disobedience of its first head, Adam, and (2) the redemption of the human race from Satan and his hell to Jehovah and his heaven as the effects of the blood of its second head, Jesus.

These seeds were planted and cultivated by the alleged successors of the hypothetical twelve apostles of Jesus, called bishops. They grew wonderfully. First there was the tender sprout, then the strong stalk, next the great ear, then the full corn of many grains on each ear under the husks of traditions.

The bishops ground the corn, leavened, kneaded, formed and baked it into the loaves of the New Testament, the Catholic Creeds, Protestant Articles and Prayer Book.

The bishops call this collection of loaves life giving bread. The reader will see exactly wherein my heresy consists when I tell him that I call this collection death dealing stones.

Yet I, too, make bread of these stones by transubstantiating them into symbolic loaves filled with the spirit of the real christ, science.

All this came after St. Paul appeared, if contrary to my conviction he did appear. Paul, not Jesus, was the real founder of doctrinal and institutional Christianity.

According to Jesus you just had to repent of your past sins, avoid future sin, be ready for the judgment and for the occupation of one among the many rooms in the Father's heavenly mansion. This was the gospel of Jesus. All the rest is the gospel of the bishops.

After all, then, what are the conclusions on which the modern experts (who, remember, are all divines of one or another church) are "generally" agreed?

First, they allow the very late and not very im-

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pressive statement of Papias, that Matthew wrote a collection of the sayings of Jesus. But it has not been preserved, and for all we know it may have been more like one of the manuscripts to which I have referred, than to the sayings in our actual Matthew. Does anybody seriously suggest that Jesus told Matthew of his conversation with the tempter in the wilderness? Or that Matthew took down the Sermon on the Mount in shorthand? But the experts say tut, tut, to all these questions. They merely mean that some of the original sayings of Jesus are, or at least may be, in our Matthew, but as to how many and which they are, there is not the slightest idea. Very useful, is it not? Yet this is all the proof there is of the historicity of Jesus.

Second, these experts endorse the statement of Papias that Mark wrote the first account of the life of Jesus; and, as this is said to have been after the death of Peter, they put the writing about the year 70 A. D. I say that they follow Papias, but it must not be understood that they rely on his authority.

There is a quite general agreement that the gospel of John was not written until the second century. Of the other three gospels Mark is, by nearly all the experts, regarded as the earliest, and Matthew and Luke, which may have been written any time between 70 and 100 A. D., probably nearer the latter date, made use of Mark. So, the House of Bishops said, it is all settled and we must try, condemn and punish the member who suggests we know nothing about Jesus.

But is it settled? If you ask these experts whether they mean that the gospel of Mark in the New Testament to-day was written about the year 70, they reply, certainly not. In fact, what Papias says about Mark shows this. Mark, a companion of Peter, wrote an

account of the doings of Jesus, and this was incorporated in the actual Mark. But what was in the lost original, and how much the later writer added and who he was, and what he knew about the business, nobody has the least idea. Very useful, is it not? And not very impressive when we reflect that the churches are supposed to have had this record, this account given by Peter himself to Mark, from about the year 70, but no Christian writer mentions Mark or appeals to any such document until seventy or eighty years later.

It really matters very little what men were writing about Jesus in the year 90 A. D., so we ignore Matthew and Luke, and we will take the witness of Paul separately. What does he say? Only that Jesus was God and man, born of a woman, crucified, after a last supper, in Jerusalem. and rose from the dead. We need not doubt that there were Christians, men who believed as much as that, by the middle of the first century.

Even a record written forty years after the death of Jesus is unreliable. It is not an historical document. I have proved from the life of the Persian Bab that a wholly fictitious life of a reformer can grow up among his followers in thirty years. And when we further learn that even this written document of the year 70 cannot now be recognized in Mark, when we read the twists and turns and subtleties of theologians who try to show that this or that verse of Mark may have been or probably was in the original. we just give up our faith.

The oldest gospel, Mark, is not an historical document. It may contain some historical facts but nobody can prove it. Even if you dissected out of it a simple biography of Jesus, without miracles, and said that this is probably the "original Mark," you have only

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the word of a very uncritical bishop of seventy years later, or a hundred and ten years after the events described, that this document was written by a man who got his knowledge from a personal companion of Jesus. That also is not historical.

### III

After all, says Professor Deissmann cheerfully, the date of the appearance of the gospels does not affect the reliability of the narrative. One suspects that he means that if the reliability did depend on the date theology would be in a very perilous condition as a science. The professor adds that lives of Alexander the Great, for instance, are much further removed from the events than the gospels are. But who cares a row of pins about fanciful details in the life of Alexander? Or would Dr. Deissmann seriously suggest that there is no evidence at all of the existence of Alexander the Great until thirty or forty years after he died?

No, no, he says: "What I mean about the gospels is that our estimate of their reliability really depends upon whether the inner probability of their whole character and of the details merits our belief." So we come to internal evidence, which the historian has to use when external support fails, as in the case of the gospels. Well, let us take the earliest gospel, Mark, and see how it strikes us.

In the prefatory letter to his literary drama, "The Apostle" (1911) Mr. George Moore, who is a first-class expert on style, tells us how he read the gospel of Mark with great admiration. Here, he says, the writing is so vivid and realistic that he "caught a glimpse of the real Christ, the magnificent young heretic who came up from Galilee to overthrow the priests in Jerusalem."

But does Moore conclude that therefore the narrative is probably true? Not in the least. He says that it is "true on paper" but "how far it is true in fact we shall never know." In fact, Mr. Moore seems to believe that Mark was written in the year 90 A. D. and is mainly legend. But, being a distinguished artist, he knows better than Professor Deismann what vividness of style proves! No amount of realism or explicitness in a narrative can show it to be a true account of facts. Mr. Moore's own romance about Jesus, "The Brook Kerith," is far more realistic than Mark.

The feeblest of all apologetic work is to try to cover up the complete lack of evidence for the reliability of the gospels by appealing to the impression they make on us. Not only is the argument fallacious, but it is not honestly worked out. The first chapter of Mark is as vivid as any other, yet Dr. Deismann would at once reject verse after verse: baptism in the name of the Holy Ghost, the ridiculous story of the temptation of God by Satan in the wilderness, the unclean spirit possessing a man and being told to hold his tongue. It is a tissue of improbabilities and impossibilities. It mixes up later Christian ideas (that "the Son of Man has power to forgive sins," and that the Sabbath need not be observed) with the most elementary stages of the ministry of Jesus. It is saturated with superstitions about unclean spirits which Jesus is supposed to share quite seriously. Where it does give realistic details, they are just the sort that no man would remember thirty years later. It gives verbatim reports of long speeches and strings of parables which could only have been taken down by an expert Roman notary or shorthand writer, and there were certainly none in the Galilean crowd. Such unwritten speeches could only be retained accurately for

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thirty years by a supernatural memory. Yet the Bible-reader is sure he has the very words of Jesus. They are so sublime that nobody else could have spoken them.

This internal argument breaks down completely. Take the story of the Gadarene swine. It is as vivid and realistic as all the rest, but who wants us to take it as a fact? The gospel of Mark is almost more full of miracles than the others, yet our modernists, who use this internal argument, reject them all. It talks about the Jews as a remote people of whom the reader is not likely to know much. It makes absurd mistakes about the opinions and actions of Pharisees. It pretends to give the very words that Jesus used in his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane after explaining that the disciples were asleep and so nobody heard him. And it ends with a naive, realistic story of a resurrection which these learned theologians say is a late and spurious addition to the narrative.

There is among all the feeble arguments in theology not a feebler one than this supposed internal evidence of the credibility of the gospels.

Any good novel is just as realistic. Any distinguished literary man can make his hero stand out as distinctly as you like. But there is no need to assume literary skill, of which the gospels give no evidence. The book of Daniel makes its hero stand out just as distinctly. Ruth and Esther and Jonah are as realistic. And the other gospels are worse. Who reported the Sermon on the Mount? How (in a private talk to his disciples) do the people come to be astonished at his words? What Jew could have said, or written, that the Jewish teachers did not forbid anger or coveting a woman?

One might write a volume on the errors about



Jewish ideas, practices and about the history of the time, but it has often been written. From first to last, for instance, the writers of the gospels have a wrong idea of the Pharisees as a small body who kept aloof from the common folk. A modern Hebrew scholar, Mr. Montefiore, has shown that in the time of Jesus the Pharisees were five-sixths of the Jewish people, and that their body included large numbers of the very poorest.

The rabbis and Pharisees whom the gospel writers treat with such scorn were the most worthy and self-sacrificing teachers of the people, doing and teaching (as regards morals) precisely what Jesus is described as doing.

As a picture of Jewish life about the year 30 A. D. the gospels are utterly unreliable; but, if the writer of the earliest among them was a Greek named Mark who wrote about the year 70 A. D. or later that is just what any reasonable person would expect. The gospels are compilations of current popular stories by Greek writers of the end of the first or beginning of the second century who had never been near Judea. These stories were contemptuously ignored by such Apostolic Fathers as Bishops Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp. They merely reflect the bitterness of their own quarrels with the Jews in Ephesus or Antioch or Alexandria. They do not know what a Pharisee is, and they repeatedly borrow the teaching of the rabbis and Pharisees, put it into the mouth of Jesus, and say: Behold, how superior he was to the Pharisees.

I will return to this point in the next chapter, when we shall see that some of the principal evidence that is relied upon when Jesus is represented as a "striking personality" or "unique teacher" historically belongs

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to these Scribes and Pharisees and has been transferred from them to Jesus.

But let us get one point clear at a time. Here I want the reader to realize that on the ordinary principles of historical science the gospels are unreliable documents. It is of no value to an historian to tell him that the document that lies before him contains, or may contain, some historical truth from an older document. He must know that a particular statement was in that older document; and if you tell him that even the older document was written from hearsay forty years after the events, he will tell you not to trouble about the matter. There is no external evidence that justifies us in regarding the gospels as even generally correct accounts of events; and the attempt to find internal evidence which will afford this justification is a complete failure.

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**W**E read in Holy Scripture how the Apostles, in the beginning of the Church, although they did certainly know and believe that all such as had duly received the Sacrament of Baptism were by virtue and efficacy thereof perfectly regenerated in Christ, perfectly incorporated and made the very members of His body, and had received full remission of their sins, and were endued with graces and gifts of the Holy Ghost; yet they went unto the people after they were baptized, and so by their prayer and imposition of their hands upon them, the Holy Ghost was given and conferred unto them. And the said people did speak divers languages, and prophesied: whereby not only they which had received Baptism, and professed Christ, were the better confirmed and established in Christ's religion, and made more constant to confess the same; but also other which were out of the Church, and infidels, might the sooner be reduced by such gift and miracle from their errors, and be brought into the right belief of Christ and His Gospel.—The Doctrine of the Church of England.

## CHAPTER X

### THE JESUS OF THE GOSPELS

In an article which he contributed to the Forum of October 1929 ("What I Believe") Dr. Robert Millikan said that the three greatest truths or discoveries of the race are the idea of the Golden Rule, the idea of natural law and the idea of evolution.

The first of these truths is the greatest of all, and all will admit, we are told, that Jesus was "the greatest, most consistent and most influential proponent of it." Dr. Millikan gracefully admits that Buddha, Confucius and Socrates mentioned it "now and then" (does he think there was ever a moralist in the whole of history who did not urge men to "do as you would be done by") but Jesus made it "the sum and substance of his whole philosophy of life," and this became "an event of stupendous importance for the destinies of mankind."

Thus is the fiction of the greatness of Jesus sustained by Professor Millikan. He made the Golden Rule the sum of his teaching. The Talmud tells us that the Rabbi Hillel had done this, as I have already said, a generation before Jesus was born, and the wise words of Hillel were known throughout Judea. Probably Dr. Millikan never heard of him and knows too little about the compilation of the gospels to realize that it was quite easy to borrow the sentiments of rabbis and ascribe them to Jesus. We shall see presently that this is just what they did.

Moreover, while Hillel literally did call love of one's neighbor the summary of the law, Jesus did not. In the earliest gospel, Mark (XII, 29) he says that the first commandment is the love of God, the second the love of man, then merely that there are no greater

commandments. And Hillel did not say as Jesus did, that sins against the love of one's neighbor would be forgiven, but a refusal to accept his teaching would never be forgiven and would receive eternal punishment (Mark III, 29).

Further, Confucius as well as Hillel expressly did what Dr. Millikan, on very doubtful authority, describes Jesus as doing. A disciple asked Confucius if he could put the sum of his teaching in one word. Yes, he said, "Reciprocity." Now reciprocity is the Golden Rule in both its positive and negative forms.

But Dr. Millikan shows still more clearly that even a distinguished man of science cannot learn things outside his own field of culture without adequate study when he goes on to say that his esteem of Christianity (he does not seem to believe a single one of its theological doctrines) would not be affected "if it should in some way be discovered that no such individual as Jesus existed." I had better give his argument in his own words:

If the ideas and ideals for which he stood sprung up spontaneously in the minds of men without the stimulus of a single great character, the result would be even more wonderful and more inspiring than it now is.

Now this is a very plain statement that there are certain ideas and ideals uniquely connected with the story of Jesus in the gospels which are so different from or much higher than the ideas or ideals of other moralists that we cannot conceive, let alone trace, their natural development. It would be a mystery, a sort of miracle, if those ideals appeared, and we had not the unique personality of Jesus to explain them.

That is a very common attitude of our time. Men

like Dr. Millikan who do not accept a line of the religion of Christian orthodoxy, men who smile at the idea of casting out unclean spirits and forgiving sins, men who reject the idea of heaven and hell and probably even of a personal God such as Jesus taught, join in the great chorus of praise of the unique personality, the superlative idealism, the supremely beautiful character of Jesus.

The orthodox welcome this because it is all that they can get from most of the leaders of culture.

The modernists welcome it because it distracts attention from the complete failure to prove that the gospels are reliable historical documents.

Historians and philosophers sometimes join in the chorus because it is the nearest approach to a Christian profession that they can make.

We are still Christians though God is dissolved into the nebulosity of the Absolute, though heaven and hell are handed over to the humorous playwright and though the divinity of Christ and the atonement are abandoned. Yet we are Christians because we believe in the unique personality and the unique moral idealism of Jesus.

Hence it is, I suppose, that one of the most innocent of my heresies, my doubt whether such a person as Jesus ever existed, was probably considered the most shocking of all. I say that it was really the most innocent because from the literalist point of view, the position of the bishops, the deadly heresy was to deny the divinity and redemption of Jesus. It does not make much difference doctrinally if you go on to deny his humanity. But as modernists already rejected the divinity and atonement, it was thought that if something were selected from my book which the modernists

did not say, the public might be vaguely led to believe that it was reasonable to condemn me as a heretic, yet give the usual fatherly benediction to the equally heretical modernists. At all events, the public was shocked to know that I even stood out against this cosmopolitan doctrine of the uniqueness of Jesus in which a large though decreasing part of the world, secular and religious, seemed to agree.

So I am repeatedly proving that this story of the uniqueness of Jesus is a myth. Let me do so once more.

Conceding again, for the sake of the argument, that Jesus is an historical personage, a very large concession, I nevertheless insist that he was not an unique person and that such a claim on his behalf is a product in equal parts of intellectual laziness and diplomacy. Some make this claim because it is respectable to make it, so they will not inquire. Others make it because they have been accustomed all their lives to repeat religious statements without inquiring into them. But in this series of little volumes I am making a thorough examination of every orthodox statement, fundamentalist or modernist, and we must now conscientiously inquire if any ideal to which expression is given in the gospels requires, as the modernist claims, for its explanation an unique moral personality, or whether, as I claim, it does not require any personality at all.

## I

Let us first have a few words on the various writers who question whether, or deny that, such a person as Jesus ever existed. In a recent work on the New Testament by a modernist we read of many confirmations of liberal tendencies, but we are told that the view



that there never was a Jesus has lost what little ground it had.

This is not a true statement for only a few years before the writer of the work in question made it, there had been published (1924) an English translation of Dr. Paul Couchoud's work, "The Enigma of Jesus." The author of this charming and learned book denies the historicity of Jesus.

Now Dr. Couchoud may not be well known to the general public, but Sir J. G. Frazer, author of "The Golden Bough," is, and in an introduction to the translation he speaks in the highest possible terms of Dr. Couchoud's "accurate and elegant scholarship." He is a thorough master of Greek literature, Greek archaeology and the Greek world generally.

Sir J. G. Frazer does not agree with the author in banishing Jesus "from the real world of men to the limbo of error and hallucination," but he very rightly rebukes the bitter or supercilious critics of the theory. Indeed he says that Dr. Couchoud has "laid his finger on a weak point in the chain of evidence on which hangs the religious faith of a great part of civilized mankind."

Within the last few years also one of the most eminent literary critics of Europe, Dr. George Brandes, has published his disbelief in the historicity of Jesus.

In Italy, in 1924, Professor Alfarc came to the same conclusion, and also the well-known and learned writer of "Zagreus" expressed the same opinion. This ought to be enough to check the frivolous remarks one so often hears about the eccentricity of people who deny the historicity of Jesus. Anyhow, to say that the denial of the historicity of Jesus has lost ground in the last ten years is the reverse of the truth. It has gained distinguished adherents.

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For the last twenty years the view has been ably represented by Dr. Jensen, an Assyriologist; by Professor Drews in Germany—"The Witnesses to the Historicity of Jesus," English translation, 1912; by the Right Honorable J. M. Robertson in England; and, last but not least, by the learned and brilliant Professor W. Benjamin Smith ("Ecce Deus," 1912) in America.

All these are men of high ability and remarkable learning; and it is only people who are quite ignorant of the situation who can speak of the theory that the Jesus of the New Testament and of Christian theology is not an historical personage as an eccentricity. I wonder, therefore, that my brethren in the House of Bishops regarded my acceptance of this theory as the chief among the twenty-three heresies which they alleged against me.

That the number of distinguished scholars who adhere to the theory and say so in their writings is not much larger is easily understood. Nearly all experts on the New Testament, as well as on the Old, are theologians, and the bishops have made it very clear that any divine who professes to doubt the historicity of Jesus will soon find himself in the pillory or the stocks. I do not suggest that any of these biblical scholars make an insincere profession of belief in the historicity of Jesus, but the evidence one way or the other is so scanty and elusive that it is easy for a man's education or interests to sway him.

Professional historians, on the other hand, seem to avoid the subject very nervously. One can easily imagine what the result would be if one of our university professors of history announced that he had made a personal study, on strict historical lines of inquiry, into the matter and had found that there was no

evidence to justify belief in the historicity of Jesus. Hence the silence of historians has no significance. I do not know of one modern historian of any distinction who has made such an inquiry. However, I am morally certain that no outstanding teacher of history in the world believes that the Jesus of Christian orthodoxy lived and walked the earth as a God-man.

One of the most learned and caustic critics of those who deny the historicity of Jesus is Dr. F. C. Conybeare ("The Historical Christ," 1914). He rejects "the hemming and hawing, the specious arguments and wire-drawn distinctions of divines," and refuses to try to put together even a simple account of Jesus.

Professor Roy Wood Sellars ("The Next Step in Religion," 1918) accepts the very broad outline of the story of Jesus; but, noticing with respect the opinion of "many scholars" that there never was a Jesus, he admits that "we can never be certain" and it merely seems to him "more plausible to give a relative credence to the older strands of tradition in the New Testament."

An increasing number of writers on moral and social questions leave Jesus out of account on the ground, that we have no reliable knowledge about him.

For all these writers, apart from those who deny historicity, the problem is not in the least whether the idealism of the New Testament is so unique as to compel us to believe in the existence of a unique personality. They are too well informed in comparative religion and ethics to recognize any such uniqueness. The only serious question is whether it is, in the words of Professor Sellars, "more plausible" to think that the existence of Christianity and its literature points to the actual existence of some sort of religious reformer.

Those who deny the historicity generally offer us

some positive theory about the belief in Jesus. To the learned Dr. Jensen he is a myth of Babylonian origin: to Professor Drews a solar myth: to Professor Smith an obscure Palestinian deity: to Mr. Robertson a character in a Jewish sacred drama. It is possible to be dissatisfied with their theories yet not admit that there is any proof of the historicity of Jesus.

Some of the critics also explain away as interpolations the references to Jesus in Tacitus and other Roman writers. One may reject this suggestion yet point out that a reference to Jesus in a writer of the second century, like Tacitus, proves no more than that there were as we know, men and women in Rome at that time who believed in the crucifixion of Jesus. On the other hand, the well-known passage in the Jewish historian Josephus is quite generally admitted to be an interpolation.

In fine, one may reject all the mythical theories, and one may say that the silence of Roman writers about an obscure Jewish sect has no significance, yet one may still insist that there is no proof of the existence of Jesus, that the gospels are historically unreliable and that we have only the belief of Paul (which we will consider presently) to examine seriously.

No historian could, on the ordinary principles of history, formulate a proof that Jesus actually existed or had a definitely known character. Hence my remark, in the passage selected for condemnation by the bishops: I doubt if he ever existed. I have distinguished intellectual company in my heresy.

## II

But the far more important question is whether or not it is true that there are ideas and ideals in the

gospels which so far differ from and surpass the ideals of the time, Jewish or other, that we are morally obliged to believe in the existence of an outstanding personality, Jesus. I say that this commonly expressed opinion is a product of intellectual laziness in some cases, of nervous reluctance in others to learn the precise truth and of parrot-like repetition of popular beliefs in others.

For it is quite obvious that no man has a right to say this unless he has made a serious comparison of the gospel-ideals with those presented in other literature of the time. Let us, for the sake of clearness, examine two points separately—the question whether Jesus had the wonderful personality that is commonly ascribed to him, which we will consider presently, and the question whether his teaching as a whole or in any part goes beyond other moral teaching of the time.

Let me put it a little differently, because we ought not to lose sight of the fact that these estimates commonly assume the reliability of the gospels and we have proved that they are not reliable history. The question here is, then, simply whether the gospels do depict a wonderful personality and give a higher moral idealism than any other literature of the time.

Let us first notice what we might call the pious fraud of the conventional opinion. It ignores every reference to Jesus in the gospels which does not reflect a high type of character and it goes into foolish enthusiasm about quite common human virtues. For instance, as I have several times recalled, Jesus is made to pour gross insults upon his opponents, the Pharisees, and to say in several places that any who hear his word and do not accept it will be damned forever. Cursing a barren fig-tree may pass as a symbolic gesture,

but the libel and the vituperation against the Pharisees and rabbis, because a few of them may be hypocrites, are not quite what an Emerson, or even an ancient Hillel, would perpetrate. On the other hand, such traits as the love of little children are absurdly emphasized. Surely most of us who are not at all exceptional as to our personalities love little children. Every normal man and woman does.

But we will return to this in the next section. Is the teaching ascribed to Jesus in the gospels higher than that of this time? I have already shown that even as far as Judaism is concerned there is no such superiority. There is not the least dispute about the authenticity of what Josephus tells us of the Essenes of Palestine or of what Philo tells us about the Jewish Thereapeuts of Alexandria. There is therefore not the least dispute about the fact that long before Jesus was born, and at the time when he is supposed to have been preaching in Judea, thousands of Jews cultivated just those ascetic virtues which are so often represented as peculiar to the gospels: voluntary poverty, celibacy, purity in thought and deed, meekness under opposition or violence, service and love of others, humility and tenderness to sinners.

The identity, in fact, of what are called the higher precepts of Jesus in the gospels and the ideas and practices of the Essenes is so pronounced that it is more reasonable to suppose that, if there was an historical Jesus, he was brought up as an Essene. I think it was the essayist DeQuincey who first made this suggestion, and the theologian is apt to toss it aside with the remark that Bishop Westcott (the learned writer of several apologetic books) refuted it long ago. Those who say this cannot have read Westcott, for his attempt to dissociate the teaching of Jesus from

that of the Essenes is one of the feeblest of his apologetic performances.

Let any able and trained historian take up this problem. Let him make a summary of what is said to be the higher teaching of Jesus and compare it line by line with the teaching of the Essenes as given in Josephus. Let him understand clearly that in the latter case we have an undisputed account of a body of men already existing in Judea at the beginning of the Christian era and long before, where as in the case of Jesus we have only anonymous documents written (as we have them) fifty years or more after the events. He will certainly say that, on ordinary historical principles, there is at least the strongest suspicion that it is the teaching of the Essenes that is reproduced in the words ascribed to Jesus, whether he was an historical personage or not.

For serious men, then, to tell the public, as Dr. Millikan does, that if we do not admit the existence of Jesus we have a quite unintelligible appearance of these ideals in the minds of those who wrote the gospels, is only another illustration of what irresponsible nonsense even scientific men will talk when they complaisantly try to help the theologians out of their many and great embarrassments.

But never will the scientists really help the theologians unless they profess and defend a belief in the Jesus who was the son of Jehovah who caused Mary to conceive Him by the overshadowing of his Holy Ghost, which Jesus was thus born in order to shed his blood for the enabling of Jehovah to become reconciled to fallen humanity and to its redemption from the woes of hell to the joys of heaven. Yet neither Dr. Millikan nor any man of science or scientific philo-

sopher or even any educated person believes one word of all this theological jargon.

I showed that we can trace the steady advance of moral idealism from the last prophet in the Old Testament to the first gospel writer in the new Testament, that is, from the year 400 B. C. to the year 30 or 70 A. D. Men like Professor Millikan who have, apparently, never read a line about the real state of moral idealism just before the supposed activity of Christ, who never heard of the Essenes or the Hillel school and would probably not know where to look for evidence of Jewish progress in morals, airily tell the world that in the discourses of Jesus new and unheard of ideals suddenly break upon the world, and our journals and weeklies and monthlies give honorable prominence to their utterances, because the names of the writers will "draw" and crush out of sight the efforts of other men to tell the simple truth.

If you want to know what the moral and religious teachers of the Jews were really saying to them about the year 30 A. D. you must read the oldest parts of the Talmud: or, as it is a very confused book and certainly contains a good deal of nonsense, consult summaries of its teaching or articles on the more famous early rabbis in the Jewish Encyclopedia, or in the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics. There are two Talmuds, one written in Babylon (the one now usually quoted) and one written in Jerusalem. It was not until the fourth century B. C. that either of them was written.

But we have very fair guarantees that the Talmud in its oldest part, which experts can easily recognize, gives us the genuine teaching of the early rabbis. The Jewish schools of Jerusalem and Babylon were very



severe institutions; and, as it was still not the custom for a teacher to write his comments on the law and prophets, the strictest precautions were taken to keep a pure oral tradition. Very extraordinary feats of memory are told of the pupils of those days, and one master or one school checked another master or school. Thus the teaching of individual rabbis was preserved, often verbatim, sometimes with the help of notes, until the rabbi Akiba and Meir were directed in the second century to prepare the whole body of tradition for a written version.

Nobody questions, at all events, that we have a generally trustworthy account of the teaching of the early rabbis, such as Hillel, and the man who wants to know whether the gospel of Jesus says anything new has obviously to compare what he says with what these Jewish rabbis had said before the beginning of the Christian era. He will then soon see how the contrast of the teaching of the rabbis and Pharisees with that of Jesus in even Mark, the earliest gospel (Ch. VII, for instance) is quite wrong. It is at the most only true of a small section. If the writer had put a follower of Hillel in place of Jesus, it would have been just as true. Judea was at that time still full of the memory of Hillel. On all sober moral principles Hillel was quite the equal of Jesus. Where Jesus goes beyond Hillel, he merely repeats the more ascetic sentiments of the Essenes.

In a book to which I referred on a previous page, "The Sources of the Morality of the Gospels," Professor McCabe\* gives in four parallel columns a comparison of the ideals of the Gospels with those of the Old Testa-

\* This very remarkable work may be secured from The Truth Seeker Company, 49 Vesey St., New York, N. Y.

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ment, the Talmud and the contemporary pagan moralists. This is the most complete study of the subject ever made, for the author takes every single moral expression that is attributed to Jesus in the first three gospels and finds exact or near parallels to them. The analysis fills nearly a hundred pages, and it proves that there is not one single moral idea or shade of moral idealism in the gospels that is not found also in the Talmud and nearly always in pagan moralists, as well and, I need scarcely add, no theologian and no man who still talks about the uniqueness of Jesus ever mentions this decisive and comprehensive proof, published in 1914, that there is nothing whatever unique in the gospels. All the precepts and institutions of the New Testament are much older than it.

I should like to borrow here the whole of Professor McCabe's very conscientious and convincing comparison, but that is clearly impossible for it would fill half this book, therefore I must be content to take only a few of the sentiments which are most commonly supposed to have been quite original in the mouth of Jesus. The texts from the Talmud are, the professor explains, translated for the most part from the works of German biblical experts, Dr. Nork and Rabbi Dr. Schreiber. Nork published his work in 1839, and Schreiber's book appeared in 1877, so that for more than half a century Jewish scholars have proved that there are in the Talmud or the Old Testament parallel passages to those in the gospels.

Take, for instance, the opening part of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. Here, the religious writer generally says, Jesus at once breaks upon the world with a voice the like of which had never been heard before. Yet Rabbi Schreiber gave fifty years ago about

five hundred parallels from Jewish literature to those first eight verses (the beatitudes) of the Sermon on the Mount! Did you think that Jesus was the first to exalt the poor in spirit? But we read in the Talmud, to say nothing of humility in Isaiah and Micah:

The law is not with the proud, but with the contrite in spirit. We find the law only in men of lowly spirit.

Wherever there is question in the Bible of the greatness of God, his love of the humble is recorded.

Was Jesus the first to praise meekness? The Talmud is full of praise of it:

When a man hath acquired meekness, then will he also acquire wealth, honor and wisdom.

He who offereth humility to God hath as much merit as if he offered all the victims in the world.

Remember that these are all sayings of rabbis and Pharisees, but I must confine myself to a few points. One is the belief which the Bible reader takes from the gospels themselves, that, while the Jewish religion had forbidden immoral actions, Jesus was the first to go farther and condemn even impure thoughts. But the Talmud repeats over and over again.

The school of Shammai (before Christ) says: Not only the open sin, but an unclean thought, maketh a man answerable to God.

The sinful mind is worse than the sin.

Whosoever regardeth even the little finger of a woman hath already sinned in his heart.

Whosoever looketh with lust on a woman's heel sins no less than if he had dishonored her.

One could quote pages of such teaching. In one place the Talmud says that a certain rabbi burned his

eyes out when the form of a beautiful woman seemed to him a temptation of the devil.

As to the idea that the Jews forbade killing but Jesus went further and forbade anger, the Talmud forbids anger as often as killing.

Anger kindleth a fire within a man, and causeth him to forget even the regard for God.

I have already said that Hillel could not be provoked to anger even by a man who tried to win a bet by doing so. Every word of the Sermon on the Mount at this point, where it pretends to differ from the rabbis, is ordinary Jewish teaching. The Talmud says:

It is better for a man to cast himself into a furnace than to make his brother blush in public.

If the offender were to offer for sacrifice all the sheep of Arabia, he would not be free until he asked pardon of the offended.

And it is of little use to say that possibly later Jewish rabbis learned the Christian ethics. These sentiments are no more than comments on passages in the later books of the Old Testament, when, as I said, the Jews were broadened by foreign influences:

I desire mercy and not sacrifices. (Hosea).

He that is slow to anger appeaseth strife. (Proverbs).

Thou shalt not hate thy brother . . . thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. (Leviticus).

Who shall ascend into the hill of the lord? . . . He that hath clean hands and a pure heart. (Ps. XXIV).

Well, at least, you say, Jesus was novel when he reminded his hearers that the Jewish law was "an eye for an eye," but his gospel was that they must turn the other cheek to the smiter. In point of fact, as we

have seen, the law of retaliation was Sumerian in origin, and existed only as an ancient code both in Babylon and Jerusalem. The Old Testament condemned it:

Thou shalt not take vengeance. (Leviticus).

He that taketh vengeance shall find vengeance from the Lord. (Eccles).

It even provided the writer of the gospel with the sentiment of passive resistance:

He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach. (Lamentations III, 30).

And the Talmud followed straight in the paths thus indicated:

They who bear injury without requiting it, who hear themselves slandered and reply not . . . it is of these the prophet speaketh when he saith: The friends of God will shine one day like the sun.

In another place this sentiment is actually described as "a proverb of the people:"

If any demand thy ass, give him also thy saddle.

The Stoic writers and even Plato have the same teaching. Epictetus says:

I found my lamp stolen. I considered that he who took it away did nothing unaccountable.

Even when the teaching of Jesus seems to culminate in the counsel to love any enemies and return good for evil, there is nothing new. The Old Testament often speaks thus, in spite of the general sanction of vindictiveness which mars it:

If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. (Exodus).

If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat;

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if he be thirsty give him water to drink; for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head. (Proverbs).

Let them curse, but bless thou. (Ps. CIX).

It speaks only of the bitter passion of the later struggle of Jews and Christians when we find the writer of the gospel selecting a text (eye for an eye) from the very oldest literary fragment of the Old Testament, written nine centuries B. C., and making Jesus talk to a Jewish crowd as if this were the actual law. Nowhere in the Old Testament is there an injunction to "love thy friend and hate thine enemy," as Jesus is made to say. The rabbis of the time of Jesus in any case followed the humane later texts:

If thy enemy and thy friend both have need of thee, aid first thine enemy, as it is a greater victory over thyself.

How is it possible for one that feareth God to hate a man and regard him as an enemy.

Thou shalt not hate, not even in thy mind.

It is better to be wronged by others than to wrong.

When the angels wished to sing a chant of joy because the Egyptians were drowned, God said to them, my creatures are drowned and would ye sing?

Harbour not feelings of revenge, not even against a heathen, not even against a snake.

So say all the pagan moralists, from Lao-tse in China to Seneca in Rome who wrote a whole book against anger.

It is the same with every sentiment of the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus is made to contrast his teaching with that of the teachers of the Jews. They are not to be like the Pharisees; they are to give alms and pray in secret and let not the left hand know what the right hand does. And the real teaching of the rabbis was:

He who giveth alms in such wise that all men know it, the gift is indeed good to the poor, but it is bestowed that the giver may be praised.

What pious gift saveth a man from eternal death? That which is given to one whom the giver knoweth not.

It would not befit that lowliness of mind which prayer should inspire to stand on a lofty place and pray.

Who are they that will not behold the face of God? First hypocrites, then liars.

When thou prayest to God, let thy words be few.

As to the Lord's Prayer read these passages of the Talmud and consider whether you have not its real origin:

On whom do we rely? On our Father who is in heaven (which is a common formula in Jewish prayers).

Magnified and sanctified be his great name in the world which he hath created according to his will. May he establish his kingdom (part of a very old Jewish prayer).

What is a short prayer? Rabbi Eliezer said: Thy will be done in heaven, and peace to those who fear thee in earth.

Blessed be God every day for the daily bread he gives us. (Hillel).

Whosoever is ready to forgive shall have his sins forgiven.

Lead me neither into sin nor into temptation.

So, to the very end of the Sermon on the Mount, the Old Testament in its later developments provides the germ of every sentiment, and the commentaries in the Talmud in every case give the complete parallel. You are to watch how God feeds the fowl and clothes the lily. You are to take no thought of the morrow. You

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are to "remove the beam from your own eye" and not judge your brother. You are not to "cast pearls before swine." And all the rest. It is all in the Talmud. And it is all summed up, as I have already quoted, in the words of Hillel twenty or thirty years before the supposed birth of Jesus:

What thou dost not like, do thou not to thy neighbor. That is the whole law: all the rest is explanation.

And the crowning irony is that the men who assure each other that it was Jesus who said this, and that it was a grand and unique thing, never reflect that it is just the quintessence of the naturalist or social ethics of our time which they so greatly distrust!

On an earlier page I said that the Sermon on the Mount is of itself enough to discredit the views that the gospels are historical records. It is bad to ask us to believe that somebody overheard and made notes of the conversation of Zacharias and an angel or of the impromptu chant of Mary in the first chapter of Luke, that a careful record was kept of the conversation of John the Baptist or the devil in the desert before Jesus had a single follower, and that fifty years later somebody collected these manuscripts that were treasured in Galilean huts, where no one could write, and worked them into a story. But it is still more preposterous to ask us to believe that the long collection of disconnected thoughts in Matthew V-VII is really a discourse; that somebody in rustic Galilee had brought a stenographer who took it down; and that it then mysteriously disappeared until about the year 100 A. D. After what I have quoted from the Talmud we see clearly that it is a collection of rabbinical sayings slightly modified



by repetition in the Greek cities. So it is with all the sentiments attributed to Jesus. There are no ideas or ideals that are not part of the general moral culture of the ascetic sects of the time.

### III

Those who so lightly speak about the wonderful personality of Jesus are mainly thinking about his supposed words. If we set these entirely aside we find in the New Testament, not the historical portrayal of a definite personality but the very clear growth of a mythical personality during several decades. Paul, as we shall see, has nothing whatever to say about a wonderful personality. Jesus was born of a woman and died on a cross. That is all that he knows about him as a personality. He is entirely absorbed in the divinity and the divine mission of Christ. This is Christian literature of the sixth decade of the first century. It is the only knowledge we have from that time of the personality of Jesus. The other apostolic letters add nothing of importance to it, nor does Acts.

Some time after 70 A. D., in fact, since we can only discuss the gospel of Mark which we actually have, some time near the end of the first century, the first biography appears. Does it reflect a wonderful personality?

Well, examine it. Set aside the discourses and miracles, which the biblical critics do not ask us to believe, and what is left? A Jew, character and person left without a word of description, is baptized in the Jordan, tempted in the desert, and begins to preach. He attracts attention only by his miraculous power over devils (in which he believes like any other Jew) and diseases. He has a jolly supper with tax-gatherers

and, apparently, their lady-friends, and his mother and brothers want to put him under restraint on the ground that he is insane. III, 21. And he continues to heal the sick and teach and wrangle with the Pharisees. In short, we hardly glimpse any personality at all, and can merely admire that he was in the end patient and silent under persecution, as very many thousands of the sons of men have been before and after him.

The picture is not much more definite in Matthew, but fuller in Luke, and fullest of all in John. It increases in color you see, in the course of a hundred years instead of fading as genuine historical memories do.

Now, as we have just seen that this gospel narrative was, as far as the discourses go, clearly put together with all sorts of borrowed material in the course of time, is it not reasonable to suppose that the record of actions also was gradually compiled? Were not the good human features just as likely to be added to as the miracles connected with the birth and death?

Let me give one definite piece of evidence that this was the case. It is stated as a trait of the character of Jesus that he took compassion on the multitudes because they were "as sheep without a shepherd." We know that, on the contrary, there were literally thousands of unpaid teachers, Essenes and Pharisees, doing all in their power to give the people moral and religious instruction. The popular belief is, and the gospels are responsible for it, that there were a few such teachers, but they taught a harsh and arid doctrine, and in language which alienated the people. Jesus, on the contrary, introduced the method of speaking to the people in parables and the novelty of it charmed and delighted the people, and this in spite of the fact that Mark expressly says that he used parables to conceal

the truth from the people.

All this is historically false. The parable was a very favored means of teaching among the early rabbis, and we may be sure that those who read and commented on the law every Sabbath in the crowded synagogues used to repeat the parables of the rabbis. We have hundreds of them in the Talmud and as so few people seem to know, we have in the Talmud another version of every single parable that is attributed to Jesus. I will just give one or two of them quoting again from Professor McCabe's splendid book. One is the parable of the wedding-feast (as in Matthew XII, 2) which is in the Talmud assigned to the Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai, who died before, according to the critics, Matthew was written:

Like unto a king (a very common beginning of a Jewish parable) who invited his servants to a banquet, but appointed no time unto them. The wiser among them put on their festive garments and betook themselves to the door of the king's house, saying: In a king's house nothing is wanting (perhaps the banquet will take place to-day). But the foolish among them went about their work, saying: Can a banquet be prepared without trouble? And of a sudden the king summoned his servants. The wiser went in to him, as they were in their festive garments; and the foolish went in to him, as they were in their soiled garments. Then the king was pleased with the wise, but angry with the foolish. He said: They who have dressed themselves for the banquet may sit, eat and drink: but they who have not put on festive garments shall stand by and watch.

In this the oriental idea of the wilfulness of a monarch is used with the moderation to warn people to prepare for death. But in the gospel it becomes foolish and much lower in moral sentiment. Those who are invited

to a royal banquet refuse to come, and they even kill the king's servants for inviting them. So the king massacres them and then bids his servants drag in unprepared folk from the streets, and because one of these did not happen to wear his Sunday clothes when they seized him to bring him in, he is barbarously treated.

Where is the beautiful superiority of the gospel-figure to that of the rabbis? And can there be any reasonable doubt that the parable which turns up in a Christian document at the end of the first or beginning of the second century was based upon the parable repeated in the Jewish schools? The tradition of the Jewish schools was so strictly watched and checked that it is impossible for the parable to have been borrowed and grafted on to the Rabbi Jōhanan thirty or forty years after he died. There was no such care in the Christian Communities.

Most of the Talmud parables which correspond to those of the gospels belong to the early part of the second century; but, as we have no evidence whatever that the gospels were then closed, we may still suspect Christian borrowing. For instance:

I will make thee a parable. To what shall I liken the matter? To a man who lendeth his neighbor a mina, and appointeth unto him a day of reckoning in the presence of the king. And he swore to him on the life of the king. The time came, but he paid not; and he came to make his peace with the king. And the king said unto him: Thy offence against me is forgiven; go thou, and make peace with thy neighbor.

This is reasonable enough, but in the corresponding parable in Matthew XVIII, 23-34, a servant is represented as owing the king ten thousand talents, which is in modern coinage about \$10,000,000, or enough to buy up Jerusalem!

The truth is that the parable was so familiar to the rabbis that no doubt the germ was generally taken from some early rabbi and worked out independently by Christian writers and Jewish teachers. The practice begins in the Old Testament. The three thousand "proverbs" credited to Solomon are, in the Hebrew text, "parables." Ezekiel and Isaiah have many parables. They abound in the oldest sections of the Talmud and for several centuries the rabbis continued to use them. Rabbi Meir (140-160 A. D.) one of the compilers of the Talmud and the least likely of Jewish scholars to imitate Christian methods, is said to have composed "three hundred parables."

Thus one feature of the traditional conception of Jesus, that he adapted his teaching to the people in a novel way, is at once found to be legendary. If there was a Jesus, and he taught in parables, he did only what the rabbis did, and the Pharisees probably repeated; but it seems likely that the gospel-writers borrowed the practice of the rabbis and worked it into that composite picture of Jesus.

The contradictory nature of this picture is not sufficiently regarded by many. One really doubts if many of those who exalt the marvellous personality of Jesus have ever read the gospels. It is a tradition, like the immorality of the Romans or the Babylonians. People ignore these facts: (1) in all the earlier gospels the attitude of Jesus toward his mother and brothers is not edifying; (2) Jesus encouraged all the superstitions of his time about devils and insanity; (3) he became violent and intemperate in speech when he was opposed, and (4) he "sweat blood" at the prospect of execution.

People notice no contradiction: (1) when Jesus attends banquets with sinners and makes wine for them,

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yet is a stern despiser of all pleasure and human sentiment; (2) when he loves children but both by example and precept urges men and women to have none, and (3) when he condones adultery but commits fairly harmless people who differ from him to eternal perdition.

There is not one Jesus in the gospels. There are a dozen. Each gospel-writer had his own idea, and scores of inconsistent bits were interpolated later in his narrative. But when you have ignored all that is not edifying, all that betrays moral or intellectual limitations (like the belief in devils or in the approaching end of the world) although you have no right to do this, you have only the sufficiently familiar figure of a religious rebel who shared the higher ideals of his time. And if someone asks me how I can imagine this very ordinary figure making so profound an impression on later ages, the reply is that he did not. In the third volume I showed that this figure was imposed on Europe by violence, and Europe steadily sank.

In the next volume I will prove to the hilt that faith in the message of Jesus distracted men from the real work of human redemption, which has scarcely yet begun.

**THE MESSAGE  
OF PAUL**

THE Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves one to another: but rather is a Sacrament of our Redemption by Christ's death: insomuch that to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith, receive the same, the Bread which we break is a partaking of the Body of Christ; and likewise the Cup of Blessing is a partaking of the Blood of Christ.

Wherein is verily expressed and presented the most exceeding and inexplicable love of our Saviour Jesu Christ towards us, His Church, with whom it hath pleased Him to leave for our nourishment, strength, and comfort, so precious and glorious a Sacrament: which among all the Sacraments is of incomparable dignity and virtue, forasmuch as in the other Sacraments the outward kind of the thing which is used in them remaineth still in their own nature and substance unchanged.

The Sacrament of the altar was institute by our Saviour Christ the night afore He suffered His Passion, where He, sitting at supper with His Apostles, after He had eaten of the paschal lamb, according to the ordinance of the law of Moses, and willing all such sacrifices and sacraments of the Old Testament to cease, and declaring that they were but shadows and signs to signify Him, who (as St. Paul Saith) is the end and perfection of the law, did then institute and ordain this most high and principal Sacrament of the New Testament.—The Doctrine of the Church of England.



## CHAPTER XI

### THE MESSAGE OF PAUL

I give separate consideration to St. Paul for the following three reasons:

The first is that he is the only witness to the historical reality of Jesus whose writings go back to within twenty years of the alleged date of the crucifixion, and on strict historical principles this means that he is the only witness we have seriously to consider.

The second reason is that Paul was the real founder of Christianity. In spite of Jewish persecution a small group of humble followers of Jesus are said (the authority, the early part of Acts, is very dubious) to have remained in Jerusalem, or at all events there was such a group about the middle of the century. Whether or not these would have survived if Paul had not joined them, it is quite clear that they would have perished when the Romans took Jerusalem and scattered the Jews; and, above all, it was Paul who planted the faith in the cities of the west.

The third reason is that it was principally Paul who gave a new theology to the movement which had risen to make an end of theology and a new church to the people who had been taught to reject all clerical organization and services.

The contrast between the message of Paul and the message of the gospels is very obvious and very significant. There is a school of Dutch theologians, with a very few followers in England, Germany and America, who reject all the epistles of Paul as spurious and doubt if there ever was such a person. Considering how many Jewish books in the few centuries before Christ, among the apocryphal as well as the canonical books,

and how many in the first two centuries of the Christian era bore names which, as all now acknowledge are not the names of the real obscure author, we must not impatiently dismiss these theories. Scholars of high ability and great learning hold this view of the Pauline epistles. However, it will be better for us here to proceed on the theory that Paul is an historical personage and that at least the principal epistles are genuine then see what this proves as regards Jesus and Christianity.

We are, as I said, first struck by the contrast between the message of Paul and the early gospels. If the work of the biblical critics amounts to anything, it shows that memoirs of Jesus began with a small collection of his words about morals and religion and a short and very human account of the last three years of his life. These are supposed to have appeared between 60 and 70 A. D.

In the later and increasingly larger versions of the gospels, we are told, the divine or miraculous element is more and more prominent. In other words, the fond memory of the little communities gradually turns Jesus into a God.

If this is the correct view of what took place between the year 30 and the year 70 A. D., it ought to follow that the earlier a writing about Jesus is, the more strictly human an account of him it will give. Paul's epistles are supposed to have been written, broadly, between 50 and 60 A. D.; and, therefore, they are far and away the earliest documents. Yet there is very little in them about Jesus as a human personality.

The contrast between Paul and Luke is extraordinary. Paul writes as if in his day there was only a very faint recollection of the human career of Jesus. He was born and he died is almost all he

says. He never quotes any of his supposed words. But Luke, writing a half century later and further away from Judea, knows all about Jesus, even to when he took a boat from one place to another, or who was in a house he entered.

This very strongly confirms the belief that what we call the Jesus-personality grew wonderfully in the course of the first century. If we shake off the obsession of the idea, which I have shown to be wrong, that a definite and consistent personality is put before us by the gospels, if we recognize the expression of a dozen personalities (of the writers and interpolators) who are adding their own ideas and prejudices to the composite picture, if we realize, as we surely must, that just those realistic details about taking a ship to some place or meeting a particular sick person by the road and saying certain words to him, are the very last that would be remembered by anybody, we are naturally very strongly impressed by this view, that from somewhere about the year 50 to 100 A. D. the story of the life of Jesus was growing like a rolling snowball.

We must recognize that this gives strength to the mythical theory of Jesus which is that he began as an obscure deity of pre-Christian times or a personified myth and was gradually turned, in the fashion of pagan gods, into one who had for a time walked the earth and had human adventures.

But let us clearly understand that my view of the life of Jesus does not in the least depend on this mythical theory. Because of its supernaturalism I take the entire Jesus-story of Christian orthodoxy symbolically, and it does not matter to me how much or little of human reality there is in it. It is for me just

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an ordinary historical question whether there ever was such a person as Jesus. We see that there is now a strong tendency even among liberal theologians to say that, once the miraculous features are set aside, it really does not matter much about the historicity. In other words it is only the ideal and doctrine that count with them. However, we will take in order the three points I raised about Paul.

### I

The advanced critics who say that Paul knows only a divine Jesus and never gives him any human characteristics do not seem to have read the epistles thoroughly. The first epistle to the Corinthians is said by some experts to be the earliest, while others think that First and Second Thessalonians were already written. This would be about the year 50 A. D. It does not matter because all three insist, as a cardinal point, on the crucifixion of Jesus. An ingenious Polish writer has suggested that this is a sort of personification of the astronomical constellation Orion, which by a little stretch of the imagination may be likened to the figure of a man nailed against the firmament with feet as well as hands drawn out.

But Paul clearly refers to a divine (in some sense) personal mediator between God and man who suffered death on a cross. In what may be called the first letter of Paul, I Thessalonians, in a passage which has no appearance of being an interpolation, he says that the Jews "killed the Lord Jesus," and later he says that he "died for us" and "rose again," and that he is expected to bring about an end of the world in this generation.

If the Epistle to the Corinthians be taken as the

first, it plainly makes Christ's crucifixion and his resurrection the cardinal points of his teaching. This is all that Paul seems to know about Christ.

The reference to a last supper is an interpolation; and also the passage concerning those who are said to have seen the risen Lord. There are no references in these early letters to the birth or any incident of the life, but since Christ is said to have been a man like Adam, there is nothing really new when Paul says in later letters that he was born of a woman.

Paul seems to have to meet the objection of many that a divine being could not die on a cross, and so he insists on the humanity of Jesus. He is always carefully distinguished from God or the Father, but Paul is quite indifferent to any theological formulation of the relation between the two.

This scantiness of human information is not at all explained by the common excuse that the little group in Corinth or in Thessalonica would not be interested in the preaching and the miracles of Jesus, or that Paul does not think such matters sufficiently important to tell them. That would be contrary to all historical experience. We have only to imagine the little groups in the remote cities, most of whom have never seen Jerusalem yet are converted to a belief that a divine being lived there recently in human shape to accomplish the mystery of redemption. It is quite absurd to suggest that they would not want to know more about it. And it is just as absurd to suppose that Paul knows of hundreds of mighty miracles, even to the raising of the dead, by means of which Jesus gave proof of his divine power, yet does not care to impress these Greek converts with an account of them.

Indeed the most striking difference between Paul

and the gospel-writers is just this, that he is not in the least concerned about the miraculous life and moral teaching which absorbs their attention, and they are not in the least interested in this mighty miracle of redemption from sin which absorbs Paul's attention. On the orthodox theory that the New Testament is the word of God this is astonishing and inexplicable.

But there are very good reasons why, if Paul knew of the miracles and the unique moral teaching of Christ, he should use them to impress these strangers across the sea. How he ever induced them to believe in Christ he does not let us see. As far as his letters go, they seem just to have taken his word that a man who had been crucified at Jerusalem some twenty years earlier was in some sense a divine being and had died to expiate the sins of men. The natural way to convince people of this, the way adopted by the gospel-writers, was to say that Jesus had wrought hundreds of miracles which no mere man could work, and that as a moral teacher he made a marvelous revelation and impression on his hearers. Paul knows nothing about these things, and so we may dismiss him very briefly as a witness to the historicity of Jesus.

To return to a point I made in the last chapter, let us suppose that one of our historians took up the subject on purely historical lines. Let us suppose that one of our universities, which are continually appointing men or groups of men to make a scientific study of some subject, appointed a committee to inquire scientifically and dispassionately into the question. They dare not, of course, for every expert historian knows at least how far the conclusion would be from the popular estimate of the gospels as biographies of Jesus. However, such a group of scholars would have before it the

complete evidence which we have now examined.

It would find no evidence outside the New Testament. The passage about Jesus in the "Jewish Antiquities" of Josephus (XVIII, 3) is so generally regarded as a forgery, and on such clear grounds, that they would ignore it.

They would also dismiss the well-known passage in Tacitus (*Annals*, XV, 44) which says that in the days of Nero there were in Rome "an immense number" of men and women who followed a Christ who had been put to death by Pontius Pilate. Without going into the serious reasons for regarding this also as an interpolation, and without examining the value of the expression "immense numbers" (since it was written nearly sixty years after the Neronian persecution) our scholars would say that for a Roman historian of the year 120 A. D. to indicate that there were then Christians who believed that Christ had lived and been put to death in Judea ninety years before is superfluous.

The other Roman historian, Suetonius, who vaguely mentions Jews at Rome who followed a certain Chrestos need not be discussed for the same reason. He wrote nearly a century after the death of Christ. Such writers testify only to the existence of the Christian belief.

Then there are the New Testament writers. There are many letters which are supposed to have been written by Paul between 50 and 64 A. D., and most theologians believe that the writer of those parts of Acts in which the writer says "we" was a companion of Paul and wrote about the same time. However, all that we get out of these is that there was crucified at Jerusalem twenty or thirty years earlier a Jew named Jesus who was a mysterious divine or semi-divine being

who had suffered this death to redeem men and had risen from the dead. If we admit that Paul, as we read in Acts, persecuted Christians about ten years after the date assigned to the crucifixion and then joined them, we get, at the most, historical evidence that about the year 40 A. D. there was a small sect in Judea who revered the memory of a crucified Jew and believed that he had risen from the dead and would come to earth a second time.

Our committee of scholars, having finished their investigation, would probably conclude that a Jew named Jesus who made a great impression on his fellows had been crucified at Jerusalem somewhere round the year 30 A. D. but that the evidence was not very impressive.

Yet such a committee of historians would totally distrust all later documents. On historical principles, they would have to say that narratives which included dozens of private and isolated conversations with angels and devils, impromptu chants in private rooms (Zacharias and Mary) casual remarks and lengthy discourses of half a century earlier, so plainly show that the writer, or those from whom he has borrowed his material, have drawn upon their imaginations that we cannot regard one passage as historical unless it is independently confirmed. You see, I am not saying that miracles are impossible and that therefore, the narrative is false. I am merely saying that on ordinary historical principles these late and anonymous biographies, bearing on every page evidence of constructive imagination, are not historical documents, and so no one can quote from them, as historical facts, either the miracles or the ordinary acts or the speeches of Jesus.



## II

But we must give further and very serious attention to this remarkable difference in interest of the epistles and gospels, the overwhelming interest on the part of the writer of the epistles in salvation by the blood of Christ, and the almost complete ignorance of such a fact, forty or fifty years later, on the part of the gospel-writers.

We might almost add that there is a similar difference in regard to the resurrection. Paul, if any of the epistles are genuine, lays tremendous stress on the resurrection of Jesus. Yet the critics tell us that the original gospels knew nothing about it, that their last parts which contain the accounts of the resurrection, are later additions. Paul loudly and constantly proclaims that the second great blessing that the death and resurrection of Christ assured was the resurrection of all men, but the gospel-writers know nothing of this. They give it as the general belief of Jews (of all but a few Sadducees) long before the death of Jesus and quite independently of his teaching, that there will be a resurrection of the dead. Paul describes it throughout as a special hope or belief of followers of Christ, that has come to them since his resurrection.

We cannot here go into the whole of this enormously complicated biblical question, which the ordinary Bible-reader believes to be so simple, hence I will confine myself to the first point. What is important to the one question at issue between the bishops and me, the great question which our age has to answer on the religious side, is whether the time has not come to leave us all free to say that we accept the doctrinal scheme of the church only in a symbolical sense.

All this modernist business of putting forced inter-

pretations on particular doctrines and all assurances of scientists and historians that they regard Jesus as unique must not be allowed to distract us from the main issue. It is not whether there ever was a Jesus or whether he taught something that nobody else had ever taught. It is whether any person can now reasonably be asked, as I was asked, to repeat the old formularies and say that he believes them in a literal sense.

Now that doctrinal scheme of orthodox Christianity is essentially based on the Pauline epistles, so neither the Old Testament, nor the gospels need be regarded as being literally true.

The Old Testament is not, let me reiterate, a basis of doctrine. It does not even teach creation out of nothing, and the unknown adapter of Babylonian legends in Genesis would not have the slightest authority to bind us even if he did teach it. Nor does the Old Testament teach that the race was punished in any other than a terrestrial, material sense for the sin of Adam; and again, or even more emphatically, it would be absurd to say that this Jewish adapter of the Gilgamesh Epic could bind us. And there is certainly no trinity, and no doctrine of hell and heaven, in the Old Testament.

Next, there is really no basis for the doctrine of orthodox Christianity in the New Testament as far as the gospels are concerned. The very latest, and most disputed, or most positively rejected parts of the gospels are the stories about the miraculous birth and resurrection of Jesus, which cannot be traced back further than the second century and the stories of his miracles. The great biblical scholars ask us only to believe, as a rule, that there existed some human biography of Jesus as a reformer and teacher about thirty or forty years

after his death. What historical value that would have if we possessed it, which we do not, we need not further consider. It certainly would not be the basis of any Christian dogma.

Let me say a last word on this point. Ordinary believers who have not leisure or inclination to study these matters as they are discussed among experts will say that I am taking too much for granted. But I have already shown that I am taking nothing for granted which the bishops do not already permit to be held and taught in the Anglican churches. The biblical experts whom I am following are all theologians, largely professors of theological seminaries, and the one conclusion of theirs which I assume here (that the miraculous birth, miracles and resurrection are late and unhistorical additions to a plain human narrative) is preached and written with impunity in the churches.

Consequently the weight of the structure of theological dogma rests on Paul. It is, as I said, most peculiar that the earliest Christian writer has a clean-cut doctrine that the later writers, during fifty years or more, do not share. A whole library of books has been written on Paul and the origin of his ideas, and yet they have shed no satisfactory light on this important point. There have, in recent years, actually been theologians who have suggested and the theory has been seriously considered in the world of biblical scholarship, that there are two totally different traditions in Paul and the gospels, in fact, that Paul never heard of the Jesus whom Matthew, Mark and Luke describe.

The difference is so striking that one really cannot be surprised, yet, unless we arbitrarily cut out all references to Christ, as a man, from the epistles, we cannot go so far. Both epistles and gospels relate to a Jew

who was crucified by the Jews at Jerusalem, and the "we" document in Acts connects them together. But this early narrative that has been worked into his book by the later writer of Acts is itself much more on the side of a primitive gospel than of Paul. The writer has no idea that Paul is a profound thinker with a peculiar theology. He makes Paul differ from the other Christian leaders about details of discipline, but he hardly mentions even this difference. For any reader who would like to read this "we" document, which is supposed to have been written by a companion of Paul, I may say that it is found in XVI, 1-17, XX, 5-11, XXI, 1-18, and XXVII, 1 to XXVIII, 16. It is the later part of Acts that sets Paul in violent opposition to Peter.

So we are left with the puzzle of Paul's epistles, and this is no place to go into it thoroughly. I take only one more important point. Apart from questions of morals and discipline, the great point of Paul's teaching is that Christ had to die on the cross to redeem the race, whereas the gospels represent his death only as a sort of accidental and inconsequential end of his great career as an unique teacher and healer. The epistles are concerned vitally only with his redemptive death. The gospels, in the original form, or, without the acknowledged later additions, are concerned vitally with his salutary teaching, life and example.

What is this redemption that obsesses Paul and Paul alone? It is not merely a satisfaction to God for the personal sins of men. This is vaguely intimated, but it is a broad rhetorical statement. The Corinthians, Paul plainly tells them, are going to be damned for their sins all the same. Everybody will be damned for his sins, unless he repents, in spite of the atonement.

What is specific and clear in Paul is that all men died or sinned in Adam. This does not refer to the condemnation of the race to manual labor, pain and physical death. The death of Christ has not made the least difference to the race in this respect, yet Christ has undone what Adam did.

Paul believes in original sin, and that is the real foundation of the doctrinal and ritual schemes which were afterwards constructed in the church.

Strangely enough from the orthodox point of view—Jesus forgot to mention this important mission of his. It is discovered by the one apostle, Paul, who never heard of him until after his death.

That is almost the final, and certainly the most important, point that I want to draw to the attention of readers of the Bible. What was the purpose of Christ's death if, as all our catholic and protestant formularies imply, it was part of a supernaturalistic scheme and not an incident of Jewish history? The gospels assign no supernaturalistic purpose to the death of Jesus. Late texts represent Jesus as foreseeing it. Some even make him say that it is "expedient," but the context deprives this of any transcendental meaning.

It is only in the gospel according to St. John, which is an embodiment of developed Christian thought of the second century, that Christ becomes (on the lines of Neo-Platonist philosophy) the pre-existing Logos. It is only in the gospel according to St. John that Christ becomes "the Lamb of God" which taketh away the "sin of the world" on the lines of the Mithraic religion.

On the other hand, it will hardly be disputed that Paul's doctrine of the atoning by Christ for Adam's sin became fundamental in the church. It is the key

to the incarnation and therefore to the trinity. As early as the fifth century it gave rise to the belief that even infants would be damned eternally if they died without baptism. The Pelagians of the fifth century denied this and St. Augustine then formulated in the most rigorous terms the doctrine that all men were born under a sentence of eternal damnation, inherited from Adam, that Christ had atoned for this, and that baptism was the means of applying or benefitting by the atonement.

The entire western church, at least, accepted this doctrine. It is retained in the Anglo American Church to-day, for it was demanded at my trial that I should subscribe literally to the second article, which declares that the death of Christ was "a sacrifice not only for original guilt, but also for actual sins of men."

This doctrine is so repugnant to the higher moral sentiments of what many call our materialistic age that it dare not be pressed on college-trained members of the church, or indeed many others.

They do not believe in Adam, to begin with, and so the basis of the myth has gone. They entirely refuse to believe that God could condemn billions of human beings to eternal punishment for a trivial act of disobedience of one woman.

I doubt if you would get one person of acknowledged intellectual eminence in America to entertain the idea of the damnation of the whole race for the fall of Adam, yet this is the basis of the Christian interpretation of redemptive religion by the blood of Jesus.

So new meanings are given to the atonement. It is said that Christ died to give a general satisfaction for the personal sins of men. To those who still object that the idea of a bloody vicarious sacrifice is barbaric,

modernists offer the genial pun that atonement simply means at-one-ment and the Christ vaguely (please do not press them too hard) reconciled us with God. And those who scorn this vague subterfuge are told (within the Anglo American Church, remember) that it is all a mistake. It is Christ's life, not his death that matters.

I need not again chastise the bishops for attempting to bind me to a literal acceptance of the church's formularies and then turning a drowsy eye on the thousands who take these liberties with them. I say only that a symbolical acceptance of the whole is the only way out of the mess.

But I want to point out very emphatically the consequences as regard the authority of the New Testament. The earliest, the most outstanding, the most "inspired writer of the New Testament," St. Paul, is, it seems, totally wrong. He builds his essential conception of the mission of Jesus on a legend of Adam which you would not to-day ask any educated person to accept.

One of the fundamental theories of the Christian creed which grew up out of the teaching of Paul has actually been dissolved into symbolism. The word of God, in a passage on which the church built a towering structure of dogma, turns out to be totally mistaken.

Does anybody imagine that the bishops of to-day would venture to repeat the action of the bishops who condemned Pelagius and cast a man out of the church for denying original sin? Such action would make them the laughing-stock of America. Every humorous paper would revel in caricatures of Adam and Eve. Every college student of history and prehistoric science would scoff.

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Yet this passage of Paul's epistles is, as I have shown, one of the chief foundations of those formularies by which I was judged in the third decade of the twentieth century.

### III

Not many years ago the great empire of China was guarded against western innovations by Manchus and mandarins. A few decades earlier they had still believed in the intimidating effect of dummy guns and fire-crackers. A rough experience taught them to abandon that belief, but they gathered under the ensign of the dragon and swore that they would make no more concessions. No compromise, they said. This western science of which people boasted was far inferior to the grand old truths of Chinese literature. Where are they to-day?

Let the bishops ponder the experience. Whenever I take up my pen to continue this struggle, I picture them to myself as a pig-tailed, yellow-robed group, shuddering as the noise of the modern world reaches them through the palace-windows, swearing on the classic books of Kung-fu-tse (I mean of Christ) that they will suffer no innovations.

How much wiser, how much healthier for the church, how much more comforting to its members, if they bowed to truth and let the church adapt itself freely. I have taken from them the last pretext for obstinacy. They cannot plead that they must cling to formularies which were merely made by bishops like themselves. They cannot plead that these formularies derive authority from the word of God.

The gospels are not the word of God. They are, as "Luke" indicates, a few biographies of Jesus that



have survived out of a number which all sorts of people, on their own initiative, wrote in the first and second centuries.

The epistles are not the word of God. Everybody always knew that they are just Paul's letters to the communities, and that it was merely bishops of a later date who called them inspired and the word of God.

As I said in the third volume, what really happened in that first century we do not know and probably never will know. The only new document we have discovered in the last fifty years, "The Sayings of the Lord," merely throws doubt on the first tradition about the gospels, which is that Matthew wrote a collection of the sayings of Jesus. The whole work of biblical scholarship about this period is a confusion of theories and disputes.

Uneducated members of the churches are encouraged to laugh at science and its changes of theory. But theories are only scaffolding in science. Behind them the structure of truth steadily rises. No solid permanent structure rises behind the changing theories of experts on the New Testament. The theories remain because no new facts are found, as in science, to test them. But they have no evidence or only very strained inferences to support them. Hence I cannot here, as I have done elsewhere, summarize for my readers the conclusions of experts.

There is a general agreement that Paul lived and that his chief epistles are genuine, and the same experts agree that he was sadly mistaken in his Adam-theory.

There is a general agreement that the substance of Mark was written about 70 A. D., but there is no agreement as to what is the substance of it.

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There is also on the negative side a general agreement that the simple faith of the ordinary Bible-reader is misplaced.

Perhaps Paul's epistles give us some clue. At least, if you compare passages in Paul with passages in Polycarp and Irenaeus seventy years later, you find there never was a consistent tradition about Jesus. The little scattered communities seethed with controversy. Those who listened to delegates from Jerusalem said that Paul was not likely to know the truth as he had never seen or heard Jesus, and people were too much accustomed to claims of visions in those days to pay much attention to Paul's assertion that he learned the truth in a vision. After the execution of Paul, there was no very forceful personality going from community to community trying to secure uniformity of belief.

Paul's peculiar view of the purpose of Christ's life and death seems, in fact, to have been almost abandoned in the church for a time. When you read about original sin in a formal treatise of theology, you notice that scarcely any father of the church is quoted for it before Augustine. Chrysostom, perhaps, has it clearly enough, but he is a contemporary of Augustine. The Greek fathers are not at all clear about it. The Greek mind seems reluctant to entertain it.

Hence I would suggest that in the church generally, after the death of Paul, men began to think less about the purpose of Christ's death or, at least, to make it the natural culmination of a life. Lives of Christ began to appear. Probably Alexandria, Antioch and Ephesus were the chief centers of growth. Let us not be too ready to admit a spontaneous growth of piety. Every new anecdote and speech had to be thought out

by somebody. The older rationalist lives of Jesus used to say, for instance, that a very natural and modest story of a basketful of leavings after a meal of Jesus and his followers in a sort of religious picnic became, as it passed from mouth to mouth, several baskets or scores of baskets, and at last a miraculous increase of bread and fish.

Some incidents may have grown in this way, but we have the plainest evidence of fabrication. We smile when we are asked to believe that a Galilean carpenter's wife (Luke I) wrote down at once her conversation with an angel and her twenty-line song of praise (which is obviously a literary composition) and in her old age gave the copy to a literary devotee. The way the lives of the martyrs grew in the early Middle Ages shows us what happened. One man deliberately improved upon another. Many of the stories may almost be said to grow under our eyes in the gospels.

Thus we end all the long trouble about the inconsistencies, inaccuracies and impossibilities of the gospel-story. A man in Antioch would not make quite the same version of the resurrection-story as a man in Corinth. Toward the end of the century some men collected stories and wrote long memoirs. By all means let us say, if you like, that they merely wanted to edify people, to give some sort of reply to the growing demand for details about the life of Jesus. When the generation of Paul and Jesus died and there was no end of the world, which both had predicted, people began to ask for details.

When Greeks and Romans heard that the Redeemer had been promised to the Jews for ages, yet the Jews violently repudiated Jesus, a plausible explanation had to be given. It had to be shown that Jesus had preached to

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them for years, but these proud and hypocritical Pharisees blocked the way. How should these Greeks far away know that the Pharisees were mostly farmers and artisans and commonfolk? How should they know that (so some historians say) there were no publicans or tax-gatherers in Judea? The leading bishops, we saw, took no notice of these circulating memoirs. They never mentioned them or quoted words of Jesus from them as authority. It was the furious controversies of the second century that led to their being adopted by the bishops as authentic records, dictated by the apostles.

THE CANON OF  
SCRIPTURE

1. That the Body and Blood of Christ are truly present in the substances administered to the communicants.

2. That the faithful verily and indeed take them, and receive them.

3. That the faithful spiritually feed upon them as spiritual food.

4. That the wicked receive the Sacrament of the body and blood of Christ into their mouths, but do not receive the benefits which are derived from spiritual feeding upon that Sacrament.

5. Lastly, in the earlier formularies it is stated that "the bread and wine do not remain in their own substance, but, by the virtue of Christ's Word, in the consecration be changed and turned to the very substance of the Body and Blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ," while the twenty-eighth of the Thirty-Nine Articles declares that "the change of the substance of bread and wine" cannot be proved from Scripture, and is repugnant to its plain words.

It is difficult to believe that the apparent opposition of these statements is any thing more than an opposition of words, as there is so distinct a concurrence on the only really important doctrine, that the Body and Blood of Christ are verily and indeed contained in the substances which are taken from the Lord's Table and given to the communicants.—The Doctrine of the Church of England.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE

There is a curiously trustful belief in many quarters that the apostles and early bishops under the influence of the Holy Ghost carefully watched this steady growth of New Testament literature and took care that only the divinely inspired books which we now have in it should be read.

That there was a formidable growth of what we all regard as fictitious narrative, everybody ought to know. As early as the second century some of the eastern bishops condemned certain "Acts of St. Paul," chiefly because the apostle was too closely associated with Thecla, whom we now know to be a transformation of a pagan myth of Asia Minor. But that is the only condemnation of which we have any knowledge in several centuries. By the fourth century the church was flooded with spurious literature.

There was a gospel of James, a gospel of Thomas; and, in fact, a book connected with the name of each of the apostles, and weird and wonderful were the stories they told about the infancy and boyhood of Jesus and the life of his parents.

There were Acts of Pilate, Acts of Peter and Paul, Acts of Barnabas, Acts of Philip and the Acts of Andrew.

There were spurious epistles of nearly everybody and romances called the Assumption of Mary, the Apocalypse of Paul, the Apocalypse of John and much other literature of the kind.

But the idea that these books were from the first denounced as spurious and the genuine writings carefully separated from them is not true. There is on

this subject a decree of a Council of the Roman church which many authorities put in the year 494 A. D. Dr. Putnam in his history of the censorship accepts this date and attributes the decree to Pope Gelasius, but other authorities make it a century earlier. If we adopt the earliest date which any scholar can claim for it, we see that as late at least as the year 370, or more than three hundred years after the first gospel is supposed to have been written, the whole of the forged literature described was circulating freely in the Roman church, where a larger proportion of the people could read than in any other city of the world.

Some of this literature was sordid, and nine-tenths of it was absurd. A pope (probably Pope Damasus) behind whom was St. Jerome, felt that the pagans were laughing at his church, as he plainly intimates. He mildly forbade people to read these spurious gospels and lives of saints, but no penalties were imposed, and no doubt the reading continued. We have found manuscripts of the most of the works in medieval monasteries.

This is the answer to those who ignorantly or untruthfully tell people that they may trust the New Testament which we have to-day because the church vigilantly watched its growth and saw that no fraudulent literature entered the canon. The church leaders did in part give guidance to their followers by respecting only the four gospels and the epistles which we have, but there seems to have been no limit on the output of fraudulent literature until the end of the fourth century. Even then it was not Rome and Constantinople that protected the faithful. The canon of the New Testament was officially closed by councils of the African church, under St. Augustine, in 393 and 397 A. D. though there had been earlier unofficial lists. How



the remaining books which are included in the canon were composed we may briefly consider before I sum up our short study of the Bible for the purpose of showing the bankruptcy of Christian orthodoxy so far as it is based on the claim that the world has in it a divine revelation upon knowing and living which its salvation is dependent.

## I

As the epistles other than those of Paul are of little or no importance from our present point of view, that of the scriptural basis for Christian doctrine, we need not stay to inquire how far they are genuine. I can safely leave you to imagine what conclusion would be reached.

The most important of the remaining books is the Acts of the Apostles, because it professes to give us an historical account of the growth of the church after the supposed ascension. I have already explained that it is the general opinion of the critics that the section of this book in which the writer says "we" is much earlier than the rest and is a straightforward account by a man who accompanied Paul on the journeys he describes. It is then commonly believed that the author of the third gospel, whom a later tradition called Luke, incorporated this as a complete story from the end of his gospel to the arrival of Paul in Rome. The first part of his work is an account of the gospel among the Jews, and its second part is an account of the gospel among the Gentiles.

Even on these points, so complicated and difficult is the study of the New Testament which many take to be a simple book, hundreds of works have been written, and the biblical experts still wrangle. I must

select a few points that are of interest here.

In the first place, the reader will find it interesting to compare the "we" narrative in Acts (I have already indicated the chapters in which it is found) with the rest of Acts. He will feel quite disposed to accept it as a genuine fragment of first century literature. It ends (XXVIII, 16) with the arrival of Paul at Rome; and, if we accept the tradition that Paul was put to death there during the Neronian persecution, we may conclude that it was written some time after the year 60 A. D.

But it tells us nothing of the least importance except to biblical historians who want to trace the movements of Paul. Its interest is in the contrast with the rest of the book. It is a simple and, for the age, sober narrative, in which, it is true, certain acts of Paul are suggested to have had a vaguely miraculous character, but it is in striking contrast to the glowing supernaturalism of the remainder of Acts. In other words, there is the usual growth of the miraculous. Paul's companion, in the year 60 A. D.; tells a natural and human story of the activity of the apostle, one can scarcely say of his hero, for he does not at all conceive Paul as the great personality he afterwards became in the church.

Luke, on the contrary, writing about the year 100 A. D. (Professor Bacon says that there is a very general agreement in assigning that date to Acts) is not only immensely richer in detail but sees miracles illuminating the spread of the gospel from first to last.

The amount of detail he gives sixty years after the events, which some strangely take as a proof of genuineness in the gospel, is enough to discredit him on ordinary historical principles. It is a mere proof of thoughtlessness when people read how, in the second

chapter, for instance, Peter explained at great length to the citizens of Jerusalem how he and his colleagues were not drunk but gifted with tongues and imagine that they are reading a verbatim report of his speech. How could a man describe half a century later the hour of the day when Peter and the others went to the temple and give the smallest details of an adventure by the way? This is mere story-telling, in the familiar manner of Luke, and the miracles and speeches incorporated in the narratives are as trustworthy as his reproduction of the secret and extemporary chants of Zacharias and Mary. This is of course fiction, not history.

The long study of Acts, in comparison with the epistles of St. Paul, during the last one hundred years has only brought out more clearly that striking contrast of the doctrine of Paul and the teaching of the other propagandists (as found in the gospels) to which I referred in the last chapter. The difference, in fact antagonism, is now fully recognized, and it is generally agreed that the writer of Acts falsifies the facts in order to soften the opposition.

"Luke," says Professor Bacon, "slightly postpones its beginning and very greatly antedates its suppression; and he makes Paul accept a solution which his letters emphatically repudiate." The professor, in his little book, "The Making of the New Testament" (in the Home University Library) shows in detail how the story of Acts is contradicted by Paul's epistles and is quite unreliable.

But it is a very large subject and I will merely, for a broad understanding of the matter, tell how Professor Bacon summarizes this great controversy of the early church as it is seen by modern biblical scholars.

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He is, it should be observed, a professor in the divinity school at Yale and not at all a radical.

There were, as I have already pointed out, two very different schools, with very different literature, in the first century. One was the stream that flowed out from Jerusalem and was embodied in the two primitive documents (attributed to Matthew and Mark) which are the basis of the three gospels. The other school was that of Paul, expressed in his epistles, which are "based on their author's personal experiences." The first gospel, that of the apostles of Jerusalem, is Jewish.

As Professor Bacon says: "Denationalized Judaism contributed the social ideal, the messianic hope of a world-wide kingdom of God." Greek thought, blended in Paul with his personal mysticism and general knowledge of non-Jewish religion, gave the other element: "personal redemption in mystic union with the life of God." Paul's gospel was, naturally, firmly lodged in the churches of Asia Minor and Greece, which he fostered. But "the literature of the Teacher and Prophet," the gospel-conception of Jesus, which spread from Jerusalem to Antioch and Rome, came to overshadow it. The book of Acts was written to reduce or conceal the antagonism, and the fourth gospel was afterwards written to complete the reconciliation of Jewish and Greek ideas.

So the conservative critics explain the literature of the New Testament, and on broad lines we may accept the explanation. But let us put it more humanly.

Paul's gospel was the expression of a temperament of terrible rigor and bleakness which could not long appeal to the Greek character. Tarsus, where he had been educated (it is not at all certain that he studied at Jerusalem) had a school of Stoic philosophy as well

as temples of the ascetic sects of the time. So in the mind of Paul, to use his name as a Roman citizen (or Saul as a Jew and Pharisee) the sense of sin became the dominant element, and it set the story of Jesus in a simple but terrible frame of eternal punishment and bloody expiation. The details of the life of Jesus mattered nothing.

His account of the moral character of the community at Corinth, with which he was so closely associated, shows that the number of his sincere followers was bound to be limited. Representatives of the milder gospel of Jerusalem stole his converts and brought out his facile anger. When his eloquent tongue and pen were silenced, the human affection for and interest in the living Jesus steadily displaced his sterner conception. Pretty anecdotes, miracles, parables, concrete dialogues and speeches were more appreciated.

So, as Luke says, many were employed in writing biographies of Jesus and, we may add, accounts of the journeys of all the chief apostles. This culminated, early in the second century, in the production, probably at Ephesus, of the gospel which was later ascribed to John, making Jesus at once the Logos of Greek mysticism and the God of love.

The last book of the New Testament bearing the heading in the protestant Bible of "The Revelation of St. John the Divine," has attracted more legend than any other book of the Bible. It was less welcomed by the churches than any other book of the New Testament, and it is still not accepted as canonical or inspired in some branches of the Christian church. Whether the author did or did not wish to have himself identified with the apostle John, he was so identified in every part of the church until the third century, when many

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began to doubt and to reject the book. It was, as I said, only one of several Apocalypses or Revelations forged in the names of different apostles. There were, in fact, many who maintained even then that all that went under the name of John, including the fourth gospel, was spurious. It is instructive that Papias, who is quoted as the chief authority for an early Matthew and Mark, held that Revelation was really an inspired work of John which casts grievous doubt on his supposed connection with apostolic pupils.

Criticism has shown that there was no single author of the book, and the later tradition of John's writing of it is worthless. Some of it is said to have been written as early as the year 95 A. D., and a later Palestinian Jew added the fierce denunciation of Rome, in the form of prophecies, quite in the tone of the older prophets. It is a picture of a Jewish world ground into the dust by Rome and of Christian churches seething with passion and controversy. In that respect alone it is interesting, apart from its oriental style and imagery, if one can read the historical situation in all the turmoil of its verbiage.

## II

In what sense any man, who accepts the ideas of even biblical critics whom the bishops pass as orthodox, can press the New Testament on us as, in any literal sense, the word of God, it is difficult, indeed impossible, to understand. There has, naturally, been much zeal expended in finding new meanings for the words inspiration and revelation since modern biblical science began to unveil the real nature of the New Testament writings. I am not interested in these. A divine impulse to write, in whatever sense it be understood, does

not interest us from our present point of view unless it implies a divine guarantee of the accuracy of what is written. Naturally, these learned biblical scholars do not for a moment imply such a guarantee.

They point out scores of contradictions between the gospels, epistles and acts.

They smile at the idea that the innumerable conversations, speeches and prayers in the gospels and Acts were revealed to the writers and must be read as the very words of the characters to whom they are attributed.

They plead only that these are sacred or inspired books in a sense in which, let us say, the letters of Clement and Ignatius are not and that they may still, in a certain sense, be said to be the word of God.

The futility of this is seen at once when we reflect that most of these biblical experts reject at least the stories of the birth of Christ and the stories of miracles ascribed to him. If their ideas were generally known, if a reader of the New Testament were assured that half of what he reads is fiction for the purpose of edification, there might be less zeal even than there is to-day.

But I am not concerned about the reading of the New Testament for the purpose of edification, for I have many far better books to read for that purpose. The circumstances of my trial, condemnation and punishment have compelled me to consider it as a standard of belief for us in modern times, and even what the moderate experts, men in honor in the churches, say about it has deprived it of that character.

I need not here discuss the miracles or the miraculous birth or the resurrection. Any man in the Episcopal church (except myself, apparently) may call these

things into question or explain, as the modernists absurdly do, that he does not mean what the writers of the New Testament meant. That is in itself a confession, but a very timid and unworthy one, that there is no word of God giving any authority to the formulation of the beliefs in the Catholic Creeds, the Protestant Articles and the Prayer Book. They are formulations by the bishops who assembled in the so-called Ecumenical Councils chiefly of the fourth and fifth centuries, and of the bishops who led the so-called English Reformation in the sixteenth century. There is not one doctrine in them resting on the authority of a divine revelation or a word of God. The whole conception upon which the bishops proceed in their anachronistic trial of me is rejected by the leading biblical critics, to say nothing about the vanguard of humanity.

Let the bishops make a declaration in plain English (not the timid, equivocal English used by them in the Reports, Resolutions and Encyclical Letter at the 1930 Lambeth Conference\*) whether one may deny those doctrines, in a literal sense, yet remain in the Episcopal church, and then let them explain why the addition of a few more heresies by me entailed a sentence of episcopal damnation.

The idea that the bishops need not act until a man is denounced to them is an unworthy subterfuge and an abuse of an obsolete ecclesiastical mechanism. In earlier times the bishops could wait for a denunciation because the doctrines were clearly formulated every day, and it was just as clearly formulated in what sense they

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\* See my Quarterly Lecture, No. V, entitled, *The Bishops' Belief in God and Their Disbelief in Birth Control*. A free copy is available.—W. M. B.



were to be understood. In the conditions of our own times the only question for educated men is in what sense the ancient supernaturalistic formularies are to be interpreted. I contend that they must be understood symbolically if retained at all, otherwise they are just so many superstitions.

But let us next take the New Testament as it is presented to us by biblical experts who do not profess modernism. No distinguished scholar among these sanctions the conception of the New Testament which people of little leisure and education are encouraged to cherish. None holds such a theory of the dates and authors and compilation of the books of the New Testament as would justify a man in saying that it is, in any other than a poetic sense, the word of God.

To be more explicit, none holds such a view of the origin of the books of the New Testament as to give it doctrinal authority over us. All acknowledge, though some stress more than others, the antagonistic currents and interpretations in the early church, showing that in the literature of neither school was there any substantial ground for confidence about the message of Jesus, and that the final reconciliation in an Ecumenical Council was a purely human accomplishment. Nor can they bring any existing gospel within half a century of the death of Christ in the form in which we have it; and, when they attempt to settle which are the earlier and which the later strata, they invariably regard as later those sections on which doctrines were more particularly based by the bishops.

We have, in short, in the New Testament a literary growth, or what remains of a literary growth, analogous to that which gave the Jews the Old Testament. As the Jews owe the Old Testament to interested priests,

so the Christians owe the New Testament to interested bishops. If there had not been Jewish and Christian priesthoods with axes to grind for themselves we would not have the Bible as the word of God.

We have the same interested editing of early fragments by later writers, and these are men who have definite purposes and are obviously of the opinion that it is a pious act to invent speeches and picturesque details. The later the gospel, the larger it is, and the more of the miraculous it contains. Why, in such case, puzzle any longer about Gadarene swine and miraculous multiplication of loaves and fishes? Why not tell the whole world the truthful story of this gradual accumulation of literary records in a new sect at a time when every man who might have been an eye-witness of events was dead?

And, finally, we may surely now conclude that a man is free to attach whatever historical value to the gospels his judgment and conscience will allow. The last word about the doctrinal value of the gospels does not lie with their authors. They neither claim divine guidance in compiling their records nor do the facts which modern biblical scholarship has brought out admit of such guidance. They have doctrinal weight only in so far as they are held to be correct records of the words and acts of Jesus. There can be no question whatever of the divinity of Christ (of the incarnation, atonement, resurrection, ascension and trinity) unless we admit the historical accuracy of the evangelical narrative. To appeal to the authority of the church on such points would be like appealing to the authority of the President of the United States for the validity of the Constitution. All doctrine is

based essentially on the assumption that the gospels are historically sound.

We now find that they fail so badly to stand the common tests of historical documents that we cannot even say positively that the substance of their story that there clearly was such a person as Jesus is proved. We marvel when theologians like Professor Deissmann obligingly tell the orthodox that the date of the gospels does not matter. It would not matter so much if we had evidence that the writers had used earlier records compiled by eye-witnesses, and that they had not added imaginatively to those records; or at least, that we know, which was original record and which later addition. We have no such evidence and no such power of discriminating.

Even if Jesus lived and a companion of his wrote a small collection of his sayings and doings, it could not possibly consist of more than a few striking sentences and acts. The speeches and miracles condemn the gospels. We may at the most say that where there is smoke there is fire, and that where there is a religious movement or literature centering on a personality there probably was a personal starting-point. But the earliest literature, Paul's epistles is so vague, and the remaining literature so late that we cannot be sure even that Jesus was more than a dramatic character.

We do not know then that Jesus lived as a conscious, personality; but, if we assume that he did and so give orthodoxy the benefit of the doubt we must nevertheless insist that we are no better off for we do not know anything about what he said or did.

### III

I conclude therefore that neither in the Old nor the

New Testament is there any authority to bind the intellects or consciences of men in modern times. That tradition on which bishops indolently rely is the product of an age of ignorance. Neither in the early period of Judaism nor in the early period of Christianity was there this slavery to books. The myth of infallibility was a product of later ages which had lost sight of the real origin of the books, or which were in some measure deceived about their origin. This is assuredly not the age in which blindly to maintain and truculently to affirm such a tradition.

It is a part of the paradox of our time that while the greatest of our discoveries, evolution, is resisted in the name of the Bible, a patient and laborious scholarship was at work revealing the evolution of the Bible itself. The evolution of man or of civilization, or political forms or architectural structure, has a perfect parallel in the evolution of the Jewish and Christian literature and religion.

And, as in every other department of reality, evolution has proved the most illuminating thought that was ever applied to the Bible. It is, as ever, a sun that has risen upon a dark world, lighting up mysteries and obscurities. All the crudities and contradictions, all the anachronisms and errors, are beautifully explained. The student of human development can take the Bible, which he had begun to discard and learn from it real truths. Nor does this fact of the evolution of the Bible lessen for any man the help or inspiration he may get from its finer pages.

The paradox is the more singular when we reflect that this work has been done almost entirely by learned divines of the different branches of the Christian church. There are now many historical manuals of biblical

science, and if any reader cares to consult one of these he will find hardly a single layman named in the long series of what are called biblical critics. Until the end of the eighteenth century the work of bringing out the errors and imperfections of the Bible was left to laymen, the Deists—in America Paine and Jefferson are examples. Then the German protestant theologians were compelled to take up the work and create a new science, and it has become almost entirely a branch of theology.

The real situation to-day is, if we put it in general terms, that the greater experts are in conflict with less equipped and less learned divines on the subject of the Bible. One can hardly take into account professors of biblical scholarship in churches where the fundamentalist sword is suspended over the head of every man. One may not accuse them of insincerity, but one must realize to how painful and demoralizing a pressure they are subjected.

However, it is not in these churches that we find the men who possess the requisite qualifications for the science, which are a command of Hebrew, Greek and Latin, and an adequate knowledge of archaeology, ancient history, and the non-Jewish and non-Christian religions of the world until the beginning of the Christian era.

I have said that four-fifths of our ablest historians, scientists and philosophers do not believe in a personal God or personal immortality. I would venture to add that four-fifths of our biblical theologians who have the equipment which I have described accept the evolution of the Bible in the sense of the moderate critics I have quoted.

Let the bishops choose. To many members of the church they may have seemed to have a plausible de-

fense when they refused to listen to those teachings of modern scientists, historians and philosophers which I would have put before them at my trial. They appealed to the letter of the formularies, but they meant, of course, that they were appealing to standards of doctrine from which the formularies themselves professed to derive their binding force. They were appealing to the word of God against the word of man.

This plainly meant that in trying me they were appealing to the Bible not as it is represented in modern biblical scholarship, but as it is conceived in that lower scholarship, or lack of scholarship, which has not yet shed the medieval scales from its eyes. In this last and decisive stage of my plea I would, in a fair trial, quote, not men of science and philosophy who are no longer interested in the church or its fate, but a goodly company of the finest biblical scholars of the church itself.

Do the bishops enter this conspiracy to exploit the devotion of the great mass of men and women who have no leisure, no opportunity, no incentive to read learned works?

Do the bishops also support this undignified appeal to Christian ignorance, laughing at scholarship, stifling inquiry and basing faith upon illusions and sophistical rhetoric?

These are the effects of their decisions against me. For the modern educated world the Bible still has a two-fold interest, historical and ethical. By all means let its finer passages be read in the churches and whatever historical truths it brings down to us be appreciated. But let us not offer it even to the simplest in what we now know to be a false light.

The Bible is ancient history written in ancient

fashion. The inspiration it has is the inspiration that men had in the various stages of their upward advance toward real civilization. In some of its pages it reflects the highest inspiration and best poetry of the time, but it is ancient. It most unfortunately kept men's minds bent on the past. It gave them a conviction that the Bible contains the word of God, the last word, as to man's welfare and that there was no higher truth to come. It concentrated attention, as far as it was sincerely followed, on an imaginary world beyond the horizon. In doing this it retarded the real redemption of men. When new apostles with new light came along, when Darwin founded a new science and Marx brought a new outlook on human society, none were so united against them as readers of the Bible.

Men must see this old story of Moses and Jesus and their followers only as a symbolism of the far greater story of Darwin and Marx and their successors before they will be redeemed in fact. The blood of a prophet wipes away no stain, but in every generation it has stained afresh the lives of those who persecuted him, generally in the name of old formularies.

The greatest sin against the light is to say that it will never grow. The greatest sin against man is to deny his hope that the miseries of this world can be lessened. Put the old formal lies aside with a symbolic salutation. Let us march on. New strength as well as new light comes to the race; and, as I will show in my next and final volume of this series, it does not come from brooding over ancient writings and thinking that the last word of social wisdom and justice was spoken nineteen hundred years ago.

# The Narrow Bed

A Bird's Eye View of  
the Trial for Heresy of

**WILLIAM MONTGOMERY BROWN**

Bishop in the Protestant Episcopal Church  
in the

United States of America

By

**EDWARD BUSHNELL, DECEASED**

His Friend and One of His Legal Advisers

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This is the most important among the reviews of the trial of me for the alleged twenty-three heresies of my booklet, *Communism and Christianity*, which covers the fields of politics and religion from the view-points of Darwinism and Marxism.

The author, Mr. Edward Bushnell, stands solidly for the capitalistic system of economics and as much so as possible in the case of a highly educated man for the Christian interpretation of religion. His father was a distinguished minister of the Presbyterian Church of which he is a member in good standing.

This background lends an exceptional interest to Mr. Bushnell's part in the review of the trial—an interest which is increased by the fact that he is prominent as a lawyer and citizen of Cleveland, Ohio, where both the Trial Court and the Review Court held their sessions.—W. M. B.



Never have anything to do with those who pretend to have dealings with the supernatural. If you allow supernaturalism to get a foothold in your country the result will be a dreadful calamity.—Confucius.

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The theses, or main contentions, of all my radical books and lectures of which the Bankruptcy series of six volumes is the most important are the following propositions:

We cannot have a better world until we make it economically classless, povertyless and warless, but this we cannot do until we make it safe for Darwinism and Marxism by banishing the gods from the skies and capitalists from the earth; and, then, instead of our old capitalistic civilizations, built on property and competition for property, we must build a new communistic civilization on service and competition in service under which every man, woman and child will have, what nobody now has, the greatest of possible opportunities to make the most of life by having it long, happy and useful.

WILLIAM MONTGOMERY BROWN  
Episcopus in partibus Bolshevikium et Infidelium.

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Social revolution is not the way of destruction: it is the one way to creation. Social revolution is a study in pacifism when compared with the illimitable futile murder of the wars of capitalism. I look upon it as of the greatest importance that thoughtful minds shall quit thinking erroneously on this momentous issue.—Schmalhausen.

