

THE BIBLE GOD

AND HIS FAVOURITES.

BY ARTHUR B. MOSS.

THERE are various conceptions of Deity. From the beginning God has been drawn in the image of his maker, man; and the grosser the character of the man, the lower have been the qualities ascribed to his Deity. Find a noble-minded man like Paine, elevated above his fellows by virtue of his lofty principles and benign character; find a magnanimous soul like Spinoza, or a penetrating mind like Voltaire, and no inhuman conception of Deity would exist in his imagination: only a grand pure spirit, of which the human mind could form no picture—only a lofty ideal, the reflection of his own pure mind, would satisfy him. It is not our purpose, however, to deal here with the intangible essence of the pure Theist, or with the honest imaginings of modest philosophers; we shall strike only at the man-made idol of the theologian—the puerile, vacillating, petulant, and revengeful God described in the Holy Bible.

Who wrote the books containing the description of the character and conduct of the God of the Jews? Secularists do not know; Jews do not know; even Christians do not know, although they say they do. It is very important that we should know to whom God entrusted the great office of agent or medium between himself and the creatures of his manufacture. The Christians say it was Moses. Freethinkers ask for proof of this, since they fail to see the possibility of Moses being able to write an account of his own death and burial. Whoever placed the name of Moses in the front page of the Bible as the author of the Pentateuch must have either been an impudent Freethinker or an incipient dolt; for, in the one case, he could only have done it for the purpose of seeing how far credulity can go, or, in the

other, to demonstrate how very simple religious compilers or translators often are. Though it is very important that we should know who wrote the Pentateuch, in order that we might not be duped by some wicked impostor, we need not trouble ourselves to investigate the matter now at any length. We have but to read the books themselves—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Numbers, etc.—to be at once convinced of the character of the author's mind. There are some who say to us, Who wrote the plays attributed to Shakespeare—plays that have thrilled so many thousands by virtue of the human interest that pervades every scene, which have commanded admiration from the loftiest minds, and which even the greatest wit cannot successfully ridicule? We answer by confessing that the authorship is disputed. Shakespeare may, possibly, not have written the works of which he is alleged to be the author; but this much at least we do know—that he who wrote them must have been a great human soul, swayed by human sympathies, understanding human frailties, painting virtue in the purest and most beautiful colours, describing vice with true artistic skill, and causing the profoundly wise to bow their heads in humble reverence before the greatest mind England has ever known.

But can we in the same way reverence the writings of Moses? The ignorant and credulous, who belong to the masses, would worship the writings of an idiot if they were labelled "inspired." Do not let us, however, be misunderstood. There are many pure, high-minded persons who regard the Bible as the greatest and best book that has ever been written. But they do not think it so because Moses, or any other of its authors, contributed to it; the reason is because they regard it as the word of God. Their belief is the result of circumstances, not of thought; it is more an hereditary matter than the outcome of intelligent examination. It is such as these that Freethinkers desire to win; we would sooner expend all our time and energy in converting these to truth and liberty than give a thousand lectures to cause mirth among the ignorant and the thoughtless.

But the Bible is the inspired word of God, and surely he would not libel himself. He would not, for instance, say he was of jealous disposition if he meant us to understand that he was a God of love; he would not advise us to make

slaves of the heathen if he wished us to believe that he was the father of us all, and that all men were brothers; he would not command us to slaughter inoffensive and undefended people if he intended to impress us that he was just; and neither would he, if he desired us to believe that he was infinitely wise, give us to understand that he came down from above to see if it were true that the people were building a tower that should reach up to heaven—indeed, he could not do or even sanction these things and at the same time retain the attributes ascribed to him by theologians.

Let us turn over the pages of the Bible, and see who were the favourites of God. We have a right to expect that God would be impartial—that, like the wisest and noblest judge who ever adorned the bench, he would administer justice to all, favouring none. If, however, he should esteem some more than others, those selected for this special mark of respect should certainly be among the most virtuous, the most upright, the most true. This is what we have a right to expect. But, when dealing with the Biblical God, our expectations are very rarely realised; and the only consolation the believer can give us is that "God's ways are not our ways." Adam, the first man of whom we read, was not a favourite with God, and, consequently, the Lord soon set the Devil on to Adam, of whom he made very short work. When we come to the fourth chapter of Genesis we find God showing favour to Abel by accepting his offering of the blood of a lamb, and despising poor Cain's modest offering of "the fruit of the ground." Why this favour? We all feel a thrill of horror in the contemplation of the wicked crime of Cain in slaying his brother; but is not our horror intensified when we remember that it was the manifestation of favouritism from God that led to the commission of this crime? The Bible God has much to answer for.

We turn over the pages of the Bible, and find that the men and women whom God created in his own image had gone irrevocably bad—so bad, indeed, that he determined to destroy them all. Stop! not all; God still had favourites. He would destroy all but one family. We search the Bible in vain to find the record of any good that the family of Noah had done for mankind. God looked upon the earth, and found that it was corrupt; "for all flesh had corrupted

his way upon the earth." Noah alone "was a just man—perfect in his generation." We will not dispute his justice nor his perfection : in the Biblical sense these do not mean much. Was Noah's wife perfect too? There is not a word about her in the Bible. If she were not just, did God save her for the sake of her husband or her children? If yes, here is favouritism again. But why save Shem, Ham, and Japheth? What good had they done? The God who would save these, or who could have pity for these, and yet ruthlessly slaughter the thousands of mothers with babes at their breasts, cannot be worthy of a moment's earnest thought—indeed, such a wretched idea of Deity could only have emanated from a base and brutal mind.

We can pass by the absurdities involved in bringing all the animals, two by two, and packing them close as herrings in the ark. But we are appalled at the magnitude of God's wickedness in destroying the world by a deluge, and wonder how any people could have put their trust in such a being again. We pass to Abraham, another favourite of God. What did he do to merit God's approval? He offered to sacrifice his only son to show his faith. But God, being all-wise, must have known his faith beforehand. The dramatic scene with Abraham, with outstretched hand ready to do the bloody deed, was a mockery. Though Abraham wished to show his faith, he looked round to see if the Lord was at the side-wings ready to rush on and cry, "Hold! enough!" Abraham was a great favourite of Jehovah's; yet Abraham was a great liar, and on two occasions allowed his wife's purity to be very seriously imperilled because he feared to tell the truth. God favours liars; he favoured Jacob and that father of liars, David. Abraham ill-treated the woman who had borne him a child, yet God reproved him not; Jacob cheated his brother of his birth-right, yet God was with him; Moses slew an Egyptian, yet God encouraged him; David committed almost all the crimes in the calendar of guilt, yet he was perfect in the sight of God.

We will consider Jacob more closely. When Isaac lay on his death-bed he called his two sons to him, promising to pronounce a blessing upon Esau. But Jacob came with a lie on his tongue, and stole away the blessing intended for his brother. Yet the Lord forsook him not. Day by day Jacob increased in wickedness, and we are not at all

surprised, in following him, to find that he ultimately became a great thief, and actually aided and abetted Rachel, his wife, to steal the images that belonged to her father. In all this the Lord's encouraging voice was heard to say, "Jacob, I will be with you." Oh! what a contrast is this to God's treatment of Esau! Esau was despised of God; yet none can read his life without admiring his magnanimity. Even when a chance of revenge was possible Esau forgave his wicked brother, and fell on his neck and kissed him. What noble conduct! Not one word in the Bible praises Esau for his generous forbearance.

In Exodus we read of some midwives who feared God, and we are told that, on account of this, God dealt well with them, and built them houses. We will not ask whether God has given up the trade of jerry-builder now; only one thing concerns us—we are anxious to know whether those houses were freehold or only leasehold.

Moses played a very important rôle in the Biblical drama arranged by God. The first thing recorded of him when he grew to manhood was that one day, seeing that a Hebrew and an Egyptian were quarrelling, he looked in one direction, and then another, and when he saw that no one was looking he slew the Egyptian. The Lord took no notice of this, or, perhaps, did not see it; and, had not another Egyptian been peeping round the corner, this crime would have gone unobserved and unrebuked. Moses, with his eloquent brother Aaron, were great favourites of the Lord, and assisted the Almighty very materially in plaguing the Egyptians. The Lord had playfully hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he objected to "let the children of Israel go;" and thus God brought great trouble upon the Egyptians, who had done no evil. It is true that Moses had some conscientious scruples at first in going to Pharaoh; but when he was informed that the Israelites should "spoil the Egyptians, and take their jewels of gold," he readily consented to pocket his conscience and the spoil.

The many battles fought by Moses on the Lord's behalf and his own we have not space to detail; we will, however, select one quotation as a sample of how the Lord permitted his favourites to deal with their fellow creatures. It is from Exodus xxxii. 26—28: "Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered

themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour, And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses : and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men." In Numbers xxxi. 7—18 we find Moses warring against the Midianites, killing all the males and all the married females, but directing that the virgin women should be preserved to gratify the lust of the Israelites.

We pass a long list of smaller favourites, and come at last to the man after God's own heart. We find on examination that he told innumerable falsehoods, that he robbed his friends and neighbours, that he committed perjury, adultery, murder, and other crimes too numerous to mention. Yet God was ever with him and prospered him. These were among the favourites of the God of Israel.

Job was a good man: how did God treat him? He subjected him to such torture as language is altogether powerless to describe. He let the Devil do as he pleased with him, for the Devil was always on the very best of terms with God. It is better far to earn the disfavour of such a God than his approval. And what is the conduct of the favourites of God—the priests—to-day? They are still on the side of injustice. They asked God to help them to slaughter the poor Zulus, while the Infidel Bishop Colenso prayed that their lives might be spared. They favoured the perpetuation of ignorance among the poor by opposing a national scheme of education which did not include the teaching of their theological doctrines, and now they stand in the way of a duly-elected member of Parliament taking his seat in the House of Commons, because his faith is in Humanity, and not in the Biblical God.

Leaving individuals, we come now to consider the character of God's chosen people—the Israelites. First, what idea had these people of God? Did they think he was a spirit—an essence permeating the universe? Not so. To their mind God was but an elongated man, with all the attributes—very much amplified—of humanity. He was a material being, seen on the mountain top by Moses, Aaron, and a number of Jewish elders—a Being who conversed with Moses face to face, wrestled with Jacob, visited Abra-

ham and Manoh, Samson's mother, and who, above all, was a mighty king of war. It is no wonder that, in studying the early history of the Israelites, we find them constantly engaged in warfare, always arrogating to themselves that the Lord of Hosts was on their side. From the time of their deliverance from Egypt till the death of David they were scarcely ever free from military engagements. And the Lord showed them much favour! If Moses desired to win a battle, when it seemed as though defeat were inevitable, he had but to hold up his hands, or get somebody to hold them up for him, and victory was certain; if Joshua were engaged in warfare, and the day was far spent, he had but to command the sun to stand still, and triumph over the enemy was complete.

Throughout the whole of Judges, Samuel, and Kings we are confronted with tales of bloody deeds perpetrated in the name of the Lord; and we shudder to think that in the nineteenth century pure-minded men and women can be found who do not hesitate to confess that they render the homage of their lives to so atrocious a Deity as that which the sacred writings of the Jews describe. "Barbarous and uncivilised nations," says Shelley, "have uniformly adored, under various names, a God of which they themselves were the model—vengeful, bloodthirsty, grovelling, and capricious. The idol of the savage is a demon that delights in carnage. The steam of slaughter, the dissonance of groans, the flames of a desolate land, are the offerings which he deems acceptable, and his innumerable votaries throughout the world have made it a point of duty to worship him to his taste."

In addition to the bloodthirsty qualities ascribed to the Hebrew God, the inspired books teem with obscenities, such as no pure woman could read without a blush of shame suffusing her face, and which no man would dare publish to-day apart from the Bible. Moreover, God is said in Leviticus to have personally instituted some of the most filthy observances it is possible for the human mind to conceive. The conclusion, therefore, is forced upon us that the books of the Bible contain the description of a God who is the outcome of base and brutal imaginations, and that priests have encouraged the belief in this Deity among the ignorant and credulous to awe them into submission. Doubtless there will be many who will call this blasphemy;

the Freethinker, however, cannot blaspheme a God in whom he has no belief. The strongest denunciations which the human mind could frame, and to which the human tongue could give utterance, would be all too feeble with which to condemn the conduct of such a God as the one we have been considering, if such a being really existed. And if a good God exists, altogether unlike this one, he would assuredly be the first to condemn the so-called "inspired" writers for their wicked audacity in describing him in such odious terms. The believers would be the blasphemers—not the disbelievers.

How long will the people worship in ignorance the monster wrought by a base imagination? Surely not long. They are even now awakening from this hideous nightmare, and we put in our feeble voice and cry aloud for intellectual freedom for all people of the nations of the earth.

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Printed and Published by Watts & Co., 84, Fleet Street, London.—
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