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# WILL CHRIST

# SAVE US ?

AN EXAMINATION OF  
THE CLAIMS OF JESUS CHRIST TO BE CONSIDERED  
THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD.

BY

**G. W. FOOTE.**

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**Price Sixpence.**

LONDON:  
R. FORDER, 28 STONECUTTER STREET, E.C.

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1893.

Dear Mother

I received your letter of the 10th and was glad to hear from you.

I am well and hope these few lines will find you the same.

I have not much news to write at present.

I am still in the same place and hope to stay here some time.

I have not much news to write at present.

I am still in the same place and hope to stay here some time.

I have not much news to write at present.

I am still in the same place and hope to stay here some time.

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NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

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## Will Christ Save Us ?

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CHRISTIAN Churches are big firms in the soul-saving business. The principal of all these firms is a person who is said to have established the trade nearly nineteen hundred years ago. Some sceptics have doubted his very existence, but they are generally held to be obstinately blind or wilfully captious. Yet in any case it is indisputable that if Jesus Christ ever lived he died, and though he is declared to have risen from the dead, he is also said to have ascended into heaven. He is no longer on earth, except in a theological or mystical sense. The salvation business is carried on by his agents, real or fictitious, appointed or self-appointed. They charge various rates, and issue diverse prospectuses. It seems impossible that the founder of the business can authorise such contradictory advertisements or such various price-lists; nevertheless the many different firms, who all pretend to be branches of the original house, and sometimes to be the original house itself, are all busy, and some do a roaring, profitable trade.

Soul-saving, as we have said, is the business of all these Christian establishments or branches. Many people, however, are doubtful whether they have souls to save, and they are not the least moral and intelligent members of the human species. Science is leaving little room for souls in our economy. Evolution shows a gradual line of development from the lowest to the highest orders of life, and it is more and more difficult to see where the soul comes in. The very Churches, indeed, are beginning to appreciate the growing indifference on this subject, and are issuing manifestoes about their intention to save men's *bodies* as well as their

souls. General Booth himself was obliged to follow this line when he wanted to raise £100,000 for the promotion of his scheme of Salvation.

All these Christian establishments or branches profess to be powerless in themselves. Their strength and efficacy are derived. They do all things through Christ. It is he who works in them. They vend salvation medicine, but he is the patentee. We may therefore set them aside, and deal with him, his recipe, its virtues, and its testimonials.

We will consider, first, the disease for which he offers a remedy. He is to save us, but what is it he is to save us from? We are told it is from *sin*, and its *consequences*. What then is *sin*?

If sin is offence against our fellow men, inflicting misery upon them for our own interest or gratification, or withholding assistance when we might render it without greater injury to ourselves, it is hard to see how Christ can save us from it. Preaching appears to be of little avail. Didactic morality has always been barren. Many a boy has written "honesty is the best policy" all down the length of his copybook, and gone to the playground and sneaked another boy's marbles. Have all the billions of sermons from the pulpit had any appreciable effect on the *morale* of human society? But culture, wise conditions of life, examples of actual heroism, flashing utterances from the brooding depths of genius, an arresting picture, a pregnant poem, a story of love stronger than death, of virtue stronger than doom; these have improved and elevated men, and quickened the springs of goodness in millions of hearts.

Selfishness is the root of much evil. In the natural sense of the word it is the only sin. But how will Christ save us from *selfishness*? We are told that he gave his life for us and this should make us kind to our fellows, out of mere gratitude. He did not die for us, however; every man has to die for himself. If it be meant that he gave his

life as an *atonement* to God, we reply that such a transaction is unintelligible. Jurisprudence does not allow one person to atone for another; and how can the suffering of innocence diminish the selfishness of guilt? Supposing Jesus Christ to be merely a man, he *could* not bear the sins of the world upon his own shoulders. Supposing him to be God, does it not seem farcical for God to atone to himself, satisfy himself, pay himself, and discharge himself?

Sin, in the form of selfishness, vitiates our nature; its consequences afflict our fellow men; and neither the interior mischief nor the exterior evil can be remedied by theological hocus-pocus.

Setting aside the huge improbabilities of the Crucifixion story, and treating it as substantially true, it is impossible to regard Jesus Christ as a real martyr. He died for no principle. He was not called upon to renounce his convictions. The slightest exercise of common sense would have saved his life. His end was rather a suicide than a martyrdom. His trial and execution are an incomparable tragic picture, which has made the fortune of Christianity; but if we allow reason to operate in the midst of terror and compassion, we cannot fail to perceive that the tragedy involves no ethical lesson or heroic example.

We are equally disappointed if we turn to the *teaching* of Jesus Christ. Nearly all his ethics have a selfish sanction. Future reward and punishment, the lowest motives to right conduct, are systematically proffered. Those who forsook family and property for his sake were to receive a hundred-fold in this life, and a still greater profit in the next life. "Great is your *reward* in heaven" was his highest incentive, except in occasional moments when he was truer to the natural instincts of sympathy and benevolence. Not in such teaching is the cure for selfishness, but rather its intensification. A finer spirit breathed in the Pagan maxim that "Virtue is its own reward."

Christ cannot save us from selfishness, because he appeals to selfish motives. Still less, if possible, can he save us from the *consequences* of selfishness. No man or god can do that. What is said is said, what is done is done. The lie, the slander, the innuendo; the harsh word, the malicious smile, the savage frown; the fraud, the curse, the blow; these have passed from effects into causes, and produce misery in ever-widening circles, as the stone dropped into a still lake produces an extending circle of ripple, whose vibrations continue when lost to the perception of human eyes.

Even if we admit the blamelessness of Christ's life, for the sake of argument, without laying stress on many high qualities that were lacking in his nature, it is impossible to regard him as our "great exemplar," and in that sense as our Savior. Regarded as God, he is beyond our imitation. We have not his means, he had not our weakness. If he was "tempted as we are, yet without sin," he was *not* tempted as we are. The external solicitation is powerless without the internal proclivity. Public-houses are the same to drunkards as teetotallers, yet they alternately attract and repel. On the other hand, if we regard Jesus as a man, how are we to imitate him then? Most of his life-story is miraculous. *We* cannot cure the sick, give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, or restore dead sons and brothers to their mothers and sisters. Our powers and duties are more prosaic. We want incentive and guidance as husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, friends and citizens: and here the example of Jesus fails us as utterly as his teaching.

Let us first look at the example and the teaching of Jesus from the domestic standpoint, which is of incalculable importance.

The unit of the human race is neither the man nor the woman; it is the family. Here the supplementary natures of men and women find free scope, as husband and wife, and



as parents, whose various functions, alike on the physical and on the moral side, are equally necessary to the nurture and education of their offspring. The family, indeed, is the ark of civilisation, containing the sacred elements of humanity, and preserving the germ of all social organisation amidst the worst disasters that flow from the folly and wickedness of nations or their rulers.

In this respect the example of Jesus is worthless. He was certainly not remarkable for filial devotion. Of his relations with his brothers and sisters we know next to nothing. He was not married, and was therefore unacquainted with the duties of a husband and a father. Whatever else his example may be worth, it is entirely valueless in regard to domestic obligations. Men, and even gods, can only be an example to us so far as they have been in our position. Without this qualification their very advice is apt to provoke laughter or impatience; a truth which is reflected in the proverb that bachelor's children are always well brought up.

The teaching of Jesus, on this point, is as barren as his example. It is a singular fact, which rarely attracts the attention of believers, that the domestic ethics of Christianity are not to be found in the Gospels, but in the epistles of Saint Paul. Jesus does occasionally condescend to touch the question of sexuality, which lies at the basis of all our social life; but on such occasions he is either enigmatic or repulsive. He appears to have regarded sexual relations in the spirit of an Essenean. One of his sayings went still farther; it prompted the great Origen to emasculate himself as a candidate for the kingdom of heaven. Another fervent disciple of Jesus in our own age, the great Russian writer, Count Tolstoi, argues that no true Christian can enter into the marriage relation. He quotes a number of the sayings of Jesus in support of his argument. And what is the answer of the Churches? Their only answer is silence. They dare



not meet him on this ground. They trust his article will be forgotten, and they act on the maxim "the least said the soonest mended."

In a certain sense the virtue of industry is a part of domestic morality. Although every worker may be regarded as a cell of the entire social organism, it is not for society that he primarily labors, but for his own subsistence and the maintenance of his family. Now Jesus never taught the virtue of industry. "How could he," asks Professor Newman, "when he kept twelve religious mendicants around him?" Here again it is to Saint Paul that we must go for ethical teaching. So far as Jesus can be understood, he taught a doctrine of special providence which cuts at the roots of thrift and foresight. "Take no thought for the morrow," and similar maxims, would, if acted upon, reduce civilised communities to the condition of the lowest savages, who live from hand to mouth, and feast to-day and starve to-morrow.

The only escape from this difficulty is to treat such maxims as mystical, hyperbolic, or allegorical. It is difficult, however, to regard them in this light, when we remember the whole drift of Christ's teaching. We have not a few isolated texts to deal with, but a whole body of inculcations, culminating in the advice to a rich young man to sell all he possessed and give the proceeds to the poor; advice, indeed, which was universally acted upon by the primitive Church, if we may trust the narrative in the Acts of the Apostles.

We may further remark that if Jesus did not mean precisely what he said in these numerous instances, the Churches are bound to tell us two things; first, what he did mean; secondly, why he spoke in a misleading or perplexing manner. Was it worth while to cloud the path of salvation with dark sayings? And if a writer or speaker does not mean what he says, is it really possible for anyone

to be certain what he *does* mean? Unless language is used with its ordinary significance, every man will interpret it according to his fancy, and the conception of its meaning will vary with taste and temperament.

So much for Christ's example and teaching with respect to domestic morality. We will now, before examining his other teaching, briefly consider his claim as "the great exemplar" in the more general sense of the words.

Not only is it impossible for us to imitate his miracles; not only does he afford us no practical example in the ordinary duties of life; his example in all other respects is perfectly useless. As a god, we cannot imitate him; as a man we cannot imitate him either, since it is impossible to ascertain his real character; and the very fact that he *has* been worshipped as a god precludes his serving as a human model.

Let us elaborate these propositions a little. When a king is dethroned it is undignified for him to take part in public affairs. He should retire into private life. In the same way, as Professor Bain observes, a dethroned God should not set up as a great man, but retire into the region of poetry and mythology. "He who has once been deified," says Strauss, "has irretrievably lost his manhood." This is the reason why Unitarianism, despite wealth, learning, and ability achieves no success amongst the people. It is also the reason why Christian panegyrists of the *character* of Jesus indulge in such hectic eloquence. They *must* maintain a certain feverishness; a lapse into cool reason would betray the hollowness of their cause.

Jesus as a man is one of the most shadowy figures in history, and his outlines perpetually shift as we read the gospel narratives. It was this confusing fact which prompted the following objection of Strauss to regarding the Prophet of Nazareth as a human model:—

"I must have a distinct, definite conception of him in whom I am to believe, whom I am to imitate as an exemplar of moral excellence. A being of which I can only catch fitful glimpses, which remains obscure to me in essential respects, may, it is true, interest me as a problem for scientific investigation, but it must remain ineffectual as regards practical influence on my life. But a being with distinct features, capable of affording a definite conception, is only to be found in the Christ of faith, of legend, and there, of course, only by the votary who is willing to take into the bargain all the impossibilities, all the contradictions contained in the picture; the Jesus of history, of science, is only a problem; but a problem cannot be an object of worship or a pattern by which to shape our lives."

Thus the "great exemplar" vanishes in the light of rationalism; it can only exist in the twilight of faith.

There is, however, a more subtle and plausible aspect of this "great exemplar" fallacy, which imposes on some who are entirely free from orthodox superstition. It imposed even on John Stuart Mill. That great man's essay on Theism was published after his death by Miss Helen Taylor, who confesses that it had "never undergone the repeated examination which it certainly would have passed through before he would himself have given it to the world," and that even its style is "less polished than that of any other of his published works." At the close of this unfortunate essay there occurs the famous panegyric on Christ. It is an unusually rhetorical piece of writing for Mill; its statements betray a great want of information on the subject, and its reasoning is remarkably loose and inconsequent. Nevertheless it has been eagerly seized upon by Christian apologists; and, as Professor Bain remarks, the inch of concession to the existing Theology has been stretched into an ell. Mill dismisses contemptuously the doctrine of Christ's divinity, and declares that the Prophet of Nazareth "would probably have thought such a pretension as blasphemous." Yet he treats it as "a possibility" that Christ was "a man charged with a special, express, and unique commission from God to lead mankind to truth and virtue." "Religion," he says—meaning of course *Christianity*—"cannot be said to have made a bad

choice in pitching on this man as the ideal representative and guide of humanity." And he adds that even the unbeliever would have difficulty in finding "a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete, than to endeavor so to live that Christ would approve our life."

"My dear sir," might the unbeliever reply to Mill, "your illustration and argument are alike arbitrary and fantastic. Profound scholars like Strauss, and patient, well-informed thinkers like George Eliot, plainly declare (and who can seriously dispute it?) that the materials for a biography of Jesus Christ do not exist. The ideal Christ is a creation of centuries; nay, the process still continues, each generation of Christians adding to, subtracting from, or in some way modifying the never-finished portrait. The real Christ, if he ever existed, is lost beyond all hope of recovery; he is buried under impenetrable mountains of dogma, legend, and mythology. In vain will you search the New Testament for any coherent conception of his personality. The protean figure is ever passing into fresh shapes; a hundred contradictory aspects flash upon your baffled vision. The total impression upon the beholder is, as it were, a composite photograph, representing types and qualities, but no individuality. To make it one's ideal is only self-delusion. Even if this objection be waived, and the intelligible personality of Christ be conceded for the sake of argument, why should a rational, self-respecting man bind himself to the perpetual study and emulation of one type of character? The seeker for moral beauty, like the seeker for intellectual truth, should gather honey from every flower that blooms in the garden of the world. And why should Christ be made the ideal critic of our actions? Many a man devotedly loves his mother, or cherishes her memory. Would it not be a safe rule for him to act so that the dear dead or living parent would approve his conduct? But even this rule, in the wisest and loftiest

estimate, is too personal and limited. It would be better to act so that every honest man would approve our conduct; better still, to act so as to secure our own approval. Let men be true to themselves, let them broaden and deepen their intellectual light, let them gain what help they can from the example of great and beautiful lives, let them consider the consequences of their deeds; and having acted, let them practise the benign art of self-reflection, bringing their conduct before the inner tribunal of a sensitive conscience, whose judgment, if sometimes mistaken, will always be pure and nearly always decisive. For every man who takes the trouble to *think* (and without *thinking* what avails?) will always know himself better than he can be known by others; and thus the verdict of his own conscience is not only superior to the brawling judgment of the ignorant world outside him, but even superior to the judgment of the wisest and best, who can never know exactly his motives, his powers, and his necessities, or the myriad circumstances of his position."

Having seen that Christ is no real *exemplar*, and that he cannot save us from *sin* in the form of *selfishness*, let us now consider his power to save us from sin in its theological significance.

The Christian theory is delightfully simple, and at the same time brutally crude. It is not entirely derived from the Gospels, but the Epistles are an integral part of the Christian revelation, and a successful attempt to discard the inspired authority of Saint Paul would eventually wreck the entire structure of Christianity.

We must start with Adam, in whom all men sinned, as in Christ all men are saved, who *will* be saved. The grand old gardener, as Tennyson calls this mythical personage, was created as the father of the human race. He was placed in the Garden of Eden, and allowed to eat of the fruit of every



tree except one, which was strictly forbidden. He was also given a wife, who was made from one of his ribs, extracted while he lay in a deep sleep. These two were the only inhabitants of the garden, but there came a visitor, called Satan, a powerful rival of the creator. This subtle and wily adversary tempted the woman to taste the forbidden fruit; she yielded, and induced her husband to taste it also. For this act of disobedience they were expelled from the garden; they were cursed by their offended God, and the curse fell upon all their posterity. Sin had vitiated their once pure natures, and this vitiation was necessarily transmitted to their offspring. Thus the whole human race is corrupt; in other words, full of original sin.

This original sin puts enmity between God and his creatures. God hates sin and must punish it. Every sinner, therefore—and *all* men are sinners—owes God an infinite debt, not because his sin is infinite, but because he sins against an infinite being. But finite men can never pay an infinite debt; therefore they are doomed to eternal imprisonment in Hell, where the God of infinite justice and mercy immures and tortures his wicked children.

This theory is set forth by hundreds of Christian divines, in thousands of treatises, but no one puts it more clearly than the once-famous Rev. Charles Simeon in *Nine Sermons on The Sorrows of the Son of God*, preached before the University of Cambridge.

"We, by sin, had incurred a debt, which not all the men on earth, or angels in heaven, were able to discharge. In consequence of this, we must all have been consigned over to everlasting perdition if Jesus had not engaged on our behalf to satisfy every demand of law and justice. . . . Jesus having thus become our surety, our debt 'was exacted of him, and he was made answerable' for it. . . . Hence, when the time was come, in which Jesus was to fulfil the obligations he had contracted, he was required to pay the debt of all for whom he had engaged; and to pay it to the very utmost farthing. It was by his sufferings that he discharged this debt."

The suffering of Jesus was but for a time, but as an infinite

being he suffered infinitely, and hence his death was "a full, perfect, and sufficient propitiation for the sins of the whole world." Such is the metaphysical juggling of Christian dogmatists!

Now if this orthodox scheme of salvation be closely examined, it will be found to be rotten to its foundation. Adam never fell, and we are not inheritors of his vitiated nature, nor participators in his curse. No such persons as Adam and Eve ever existed. Their very names are not personal but generical. Only modern ignorance or ancient mythology speaks of the "first parents" of mankind. Evolution does not admit the conception of a first man and woman. The simian progenitors of the human race did not suddenly develop into the *genus homo*. They did not wake up one morning and find themselves men. Their progress was slow and gradual, precisely like the psychical progress of humanity since it virtually became such. Nature does not advance by leaps and bounds, but by infinitesimal changes which only amount to decisive alterations in vast periods of time. This is the teaching of modern science, and in the age of Darwinism the old story of the special creation of man falls into its proper place, beside the other guesses of ancient ignorance.

If Adam did not fall, because he never existed, there is an end to the Christian doctrine of original sin. The just and merciful God, of whom we hear so much, did not curse his children in the Garden of Eden for violating a prohibition which had no moral significance; nor did he involve in the curse the whole of their unborn posterity. The idea is only mythological. Yet it adumbrates a certain truth. We now perceive the great law of heredity, which applies in the mental and moral as well as in the physical world. Children do inherit something from their parents; not sin, for that is an act, but tendency, disposition, or whatever name it passes under. And in all of us there are passions inherited from our far-off brute ancestors, that *do* war against our highest



interests. But these passions are not in themselves a curse. The evil is one of excess, or want of equilibrium, which it is the business of social and individual culture to rectify. Take away our passions, volcanic and insurgent as they sometimes are, and you would reduce us to nonentity. Passion is our motive power. Let the intellect and conscience employ this natural force, directing it to the permanent good of each and all, which in the long run are identical.

The new truth supplants the old error, at the same time preserving whatever grain of verity it concealed. Only the most docile and degraded slaves of superstition now believe the hideous doctrine of original sin as it was preached by our Puritan forefathers, and is still set forth in the creeds of the Churches. Generous natures always revolted against it. Loving mothers, bending over their little ones, never thought them reeking masses of spiritual corruption. The answering love in the child's eye, the clasp of its little fingers, its appealing helplessness, and its boundless trust, nursed the holy flame in the mother's heart, until it grew into a fire of affection that consumed the evil dogma of birth-sin with which the priest sought to over-lay her natural instinct. Stern old Jonathan Edwards, that consummate logician of a devilish creed, was not deflected from "God's truth" by the smiles of his children; but it is said that he never quite convinced their loving mother. The logic of her heart was better than the logic of his head.

Obliged to dismiss, as we are, the story of the Fall and the doctrine of Original Sin, what becomes of the Atonement? Must it not go with them? Every student of religion perceives that the doctrine of the Atonement is a last sublimation of the old theory of Sacrifice. Men were once slaughtered to appease the wrath of the gods; animals were substituted for men as civilisation progressed; finally a compromise was effected in the death of a man-god, whose blood was a universal atonement.

The savage origin of this central dogma of Christian theology is betrayed in its nomenclature. "Without shedding of blood there is no remission." "The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin." "Washed in the blood of the Lamb." Such are the flowers of speech in the garden of the Atonement. And who that has ever heard it fails to remember the famous hymn?—

There is a fountain filled with blood  
 Drawn from Immanuel's veins,  
 And sinners plunged within that flood  
 Lose all their guilty stains.

This language of the shambles would never be adopted by civilised people. It comes down to us from ages of barbarism. We lisp the words before we comprehend their meaning, and familiarity in after years deadens our sense of horror and disgust. Only when we break through the mesh of custom do we realise the shocking nature of the "holy" language of our hereditary faith.

Having once begun to reflect upon it, we soon perceive the absurdity of the doctrine it expresses. We see it is false, immoral, and foolish. Punishment is justifiable only as it aims at the protection of society or the reformation of the criminal. Having *satisfaction* out of *somebody* is simply vengeance. Jesus Christ, therefore, could not be "a propitiation" for our sins, unless God were a brutal tyrant, who went upon the principle of "so much sin, so much suffering," regardless upon whom it was inflicted. Nor could the sufferings of Jesus Christ, borne for our sins, even if they appeased our angry God, either remove the consequences of our ill-doing in human society or prevent the inevitable deterioration of our characters. And when we consider that God the Son, who makes expiation, is "of the same substance" with God the Father, who exacts it; and that the discharge of this "debt" is like robbing Peter to pay Paul; we lose all control of our risible muscles, and drown the demented dogma in floods of laughter.

What honest man would be saved by the loss of another? It were noble for a friend to offer to die for me; it were base for me to accept the sacrifice. He who hopes for heaven through the sufferings of an innocent substitute, is not worth saving, and scarcely worth damning. People are growing ashamed of the advice to "lay it all upon Jesus." Self-respecting men and women prefer to bear their own responsibilities. It is disreputable to sneak into heaven in the shadow of Jesus Christ.

According to orthodoxy, Jesus saves us from the wrath of God, who seems to be in a permanent passion with his children. To speak plainly, he saves us from hell. But the belief in future torment is dying out in the light of civilisation and humanity. Men have advanced, and their god must advance with them. Hell is being recognised as "the dark delusion of a dream" by the most educated, thoughtful, and humane of our species; and the progress of this emancipation may be measured by the desperate efforts of the more astute clergy to "limit the eternity of hell's hot jurisdiction," or to explain away a literal hell altogether as a false interpretation of metaphorical teaching.

Salvation from hell in another fifty or a hundred years will be universally laughed at, if not forgotten, in all civilised countries. And the fate of the Devil is no less certain. "Deliver us from the evil one"—as the Lord's Prayer now reads in the Revised Version—will only be a monument of old superstition. The great bogie of the priest is going the way of the bogies of the nursery. We do not need to be saved from Old Nick. Our real peril is in quite another direction. The suggestions of evil do not come from Satan, but from our own faulty and ill-regulated natures. Stupidity, ignorance, sensuality, egotism, and cowardice; these are the devils against which we must carry on an incessant warfare.

It may of course be plausibly argued that Christ was (and is) God; that, being so, his ability to save us, here and here-

after, is unquestionable; that, having the power to save us, he may be presumed to have the desire; that he is the Son of "our Father which art in heaven," and that we may—and indeed ought to—rely upon his mercy and generosity for our salvation.

Now there are two fatal defects in this argument. In the first place, it is not clear that Christ was God; in the second place, it is not clear that, if he was, he will certainly save us.

The deity of Christ has always been rejected by a more or less numerous section of professed Christians. Learned books have been written to prove that the doctrine is inconsistent with the teaching of Christ and the utterances of the primitive Church. Even an outsider, who studies Christianity as he studies Buddhism or Brahminism, sees that the doctrine of the deity of Christ—or the dogma of God the Son—was slowly developed as primitive Christianity made its way among the Gentiles. It required centuries to reach its perfection in the metaphysical subtleties of the great Creeds, which are accepted alike by Protestant and Catholic. Peter, in the Acts of the Apostles, speaks to his countrymen of "the man" Jesus whom they had slain; the god Christ was an after construction of the Græco-Oriental mind.

We do not propose, however, to trouble the reader with laborious proofs of this position. We prefer to leave the historical ground—at least in the present inquiry—and to tread the ground of common knowledge and common sense.

Apart from history and metaphysics, for which the popular mind has neither leisure nor inclination, and in which it is often as easy for a skilled intelligence to go wrong as to go right—there are only two ways in which the belief in Christ's divinity can be supported. It may be argued that he was not born, and that he did not live or die, like a mere human being; and that his supernatural career proves his deity. Or it may be argued that he taught the world what it did not know, and could never have discovered for itself.



We will take the second argument first; and in reply we have simply to observe that a very slight acquaintance with the teachings of antiquity will convince us of the truth of Buckle's statement, that whoever asserts that Christianity revealed to mankind truths with which they were previously unacquainted is guilty either of gross ignorance or of wilful fraud. The note of absolute originality is lacking in the utterances of Christ; what he said had been said in other words before him; and it is inconceivable that God should come upon earth, and go through all the painful and undignified stages of human life, merely to inform his creatures of what they had already discovered.

Let us now take the first argument—the supernatural career of Christ. We are told that he was born without a father; but whoever will read the Gospels critically, without the slightest reference to any other authority, will see that they do not contain the first-hand testimony of any valid witness. If the Gospels were written in the second century (as they were) they are no evidence at all. If they were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, they are still no evidence of the miraculous birth of Jesus; for neither of those writers was in a position to know the facts. The only persons who *could* know anything about the matter were Joseph and Mary. Joseph himself could only know he was *not* the father of Jesus; he could not know who *was*. Mary, indeed, knew if there was anything uncommon; but she does not appear to have informed any one; in fact, she is said to have kept all these things hidden in her heart. How then did the Gospel writers—or rather *two* of them, for Mark and John were ignorant or silent—how, we ask, did they discover the minute details of the annunciation and miraculous conception? Joseph and Mary appear to have kept the secret, if there was one to keep; and during all the public life of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels, not a whisper transpired of his supernatural birth; on the contrary, he is

unsuspectingly referred to as "the carpenter's son" by his neighbors and fellow citizens.

Were such "evidence" as this tendered in a court of law, it would damnify the case for which it was adduced; and Catholics are sagacious in reminding the Protestants that the witness of the Bible is insufficient without the living witness of the Church.

A miraculous birth is necessarily suspicious. The advent of a God should be entirely supernatural. It is not enough to dispense with a father; he should also dispense with a mother. Both are alike easy in physiology. But when there is a mother in the case, it is natural to suppose that there is a father somewhere.

With regard to the miracles of Christ's life, however they are acceptable to faith, they are not acceptable to reason. There is an utter lack of evidence in their favor—at least of such evidence as would be admitted in a legal investigation. It is this fact, indeed, which induces advocates like Cardinal Newman to lay stress upon the "antecedent probability" of the New Testament miracles; which is only supplying the deficiency of evidence by the force of prepossession. Even the Resurrection is unattested. There is no first-hand evidence, and the narrative is full of self-contradiction. This is perceived by Christian apologists, who have abandoned the old-fashioned argument. They say as little as possible about the Gospel witnesses. They stake almost everything on Paul, who is not mentioned in the Gospels, who never saw Jesus in the flesh, who only saw him in a vision several years after the Ascension, and whose testimony (if it may be called such) would be laughed at by any committee of inquiry. They also argue, in a supplemental way, that the early Christians believed in the resurrection of Christ. Yes, and they believed in all the miracles of Paganism. But in any case belief is not evidence; it is only, at best, a reason for investigation. The resurrection was a fact or it was not a fact, and the disincli-

nation of Christian writers to face this plain alternative is an indication of their own misgivings. A counsel does not resort to subtleties when he has a good case upon the record.

The deity of Christ, therefore, is very far from proved; it is even far from probable. Faith may cry "He was God," but Reason declares "He was man." Even, however, if he were God, it does not follow that he *will* save us. What he may do behind the curtain of death is only a conjecture. In this world it is patent that God only helps those who help themselves; he also helps them as far as they help themselves; that is, he does not help them at all. Prayer is no longer a hearty request for divine assistance. Christians ask on Sunday, but they do not expect to receive on Monday. Their supplication is formal and perfunctory. They know that it will not deflect the lightning from its path, or turn the course of the avalanche, or divert the lava's stream, or change the line of an explosion, or banish a pestilence, or bring rain in drought, or draw sunshine for the crops, or quicken the growth of a single blade of grass, or diminish by one iota the statistics of human crime.

It is, of course, impossible to prove that Jesus Christ did *not* work miracles; nor is it incumbent upon the unbeliever to attempt *such* an undertaking. He who asserts must prove; other persons have only to try his arguments and weigh his evidence. Is not every prisoner in the dock presumed to be innocent until he is proved to be guilty? And should not the career of every being in the form of humanity be presumed to be natural until it is proved to be supernatural?

This much, however, may be safely asserted by the unbeliever—that whatever miracles *were* wrought by Jesus Christ were only useful to his contemporaries; that he does not posthumously save their successors from pain and hunger, and disease and death; and that he certainly has not—through the Religion he came to promulgate, and the



Church he came to establish—in the least degree succeeded in saving the world, or any part of it, from evil and misery.

Let us expatiate a little upon each of these assertions; so that, if they are disputed, they may first be understood.

There is no suggestion in the Gospels, or elsewhere in the New Testament, that Jesus wrought any miracle on an extensive scale, except the feeding of some thousands of people at a religious picnic, by supernaturally multiplying a few loaves and fishes, so that they served as an ample repast for the hungry multitude. This was very convenient—for that particular assembly. But of what service was it afterwards to the rest of mankind? Has it ever filled out the pinched cheek of want, put fresh blood in the blue lips of famine, or new fire in the dull eyes of despair? Babes have died at the drained and flaccid breasts of their mothers, and strong men have withered into shadows, for whom a little of the miraculous food of Christ would have meant a real and blessed salvation.

The other alleged miracles of Jesus Christ were entirely personal. A blind man has his sight restored and a deaf person his hearing; a dumb man is made to speak, who might, perhaps, as usefully have remained silent; a cripple is enabled to walk, a diseased person is healed, a widow's dead son and a sister's dead brother are restored to their loving embraces. All this was very interesting—at the time; though it seems to have had a marvellously feeble effect upon the Jews. But of what interest is it now? Jesus did, indeed, promise that his *faithful* disciples should work miracles even greater than his own, and for a while they are said to have done so; but their powers in this direction very curiously declined as they came into contact with the educated classes, and except in the most ignorant parts of Catholic countries it is impossible to find a trace of the miraculous virtue that was to be the "sign of them that believed."

Accordingly, the apologists of Christianity seek refuge in

an arbitrary assertion, and a vague, unsustainable, and irrefutable argument. The arbitrary assertion is (not in Catholic, but in Protestant countries) that the miraculous powers of the disciples of Christ *ceased* at some time after his Ascension. They do not say *when*; and it is easy to prove that the miracles of the Church *since* the days of Constantine (for instance) are better substantiated than the miracles of the primitive ages. Still more extravagant, if possible, is the argument that, whatever may be said as to individual cases of miracle, the establishment of Christianity and its perpetual maintainance is a miracle of miracles, a colossal and permanent proof of the ceaseless care of Christ for the salvation of mankind. Logic, indeed, is powerless against the assumption of something supernatural behind the Christian Church—proof and disproof being alike impossible; but so far as its history can be traced, its growth and progress are entirely natural, like the growth and progress of Buddhism, Mohammedanism, or any other system that has arisen within the historic period.

In any case the Christian Church has not saved the world. Christianity lives upon the falsification of history in the past, and irredeemable promises in the future. Its apologists have systematically blackened the ancient civilisations; they have taken credit for such improvement in human society as was inevitable in the progress of two thousand years; and against the objection that the world is still in a very wretched condition, they have replied that Christianity has not had time enough to produce all its beneficial fruits. Give it *another* two thousand years, and it will turn the wilderness into a paradise, and make the desert bloom with roses!

Now no one *can* give Christianity another two thousand years; and if prophecy is easy, it is also unprofitable. What will be will be, at the end of two thousand years as to-morrow, but none of us will live to see it. Let us, therefore, take a more practical course. We will take a few broad character-

istics of progress, and see what has been the effect of Christianity upon European civilisation. In other words, we shall ask whether Christ *has* saved the world; and the result will help us to answer—as far as it can be answered—the further question whether he *will* save the world.

There is one indispensable condition of all progress—Liberty of Thought. Truth is the highest interest of mankind; it cannot be found unless we are free to search for it, and even if it were found we could never be sure of it without examination. And it is impossible to say which of us will find the next truth that may revolutionise the belief and practice of society. Wise man was he, wrote Carlyle, who said that thought should be free at every point of the compass. The wider the area of selection the greater the variety; and he who seems one of the most insignificant of men may link his name with a great discovery, a splendid invention, or sublime principle. You cannot tell where your Arkwright, Watt, or Stephenson will come from; your Edison may be a street-arab selling newspapers; your Shakespeare and Burns are born in unknown poor men's houses; your philosopher of the century may be unknown, or half contemptible, until he flashes his truth upon the minds of the few, who become his apostles to the many; your social regenerator may live and die despised, or perish in the prison or on the scaffold, and only earn fame and gratitude when his ashes cannot be gathered from the general dust of death.

Let thought be free then; free as the air, free as the sunshine. Set it no limits. Let its only limit be its power and opportunity. Let genius contribute its wealth, and mediocrity its mite, to the treasure-house of humanity.

This priceless freedom of thought has always been hated by Christianity. No religion has ever equalled it in steady, relentless oppression. In every age, and in every nation, it has called unbelief a crime. It has punished honest thinkers

with imprisonment, torture, and death; and threatened them with everlasting hell when beyond the reach of its malice. It has blessed ignorant faith and damned earnest inquiry; it has prejudiced the child and terrorised the man; it has protected its dogmas with penal laws after usurping authority in the schools; it has excluded Freethinkers from universities, parliament, and public offices, when it could not murder them; and even in the most civilised countries it still clings to enactments against blasphemy and heresy. It has fought Science, trampled upon Freethought, and opposed every step of Progress in the name of God.

Christianity has always lent itself to the arts of priestcraft. All its ethical teaching—which is scattered, various, and sometimes self-contradictory—has been overshadowed by its supernatural elements. There have ever been some, it is true, who have made a faith for themselves out of the finer maxims of the New Testament, and held it up as the real Christianity. But these have been only as a few loose stones lying about a mighty edifice. The great mass of Christians, in every age, have been under the dominion of priests; a body of men who, except in very low states of barbarism, where superstition comes to the aid of such culture as is then possible, are always in a common conspiracy against the progress of mankind. Strife for precedence and authority took place at a very early period in the primitive Church, and continued until Christendom was a vast hierarchy. Popes, cardinals, archbishops, and bishops, have lorded it over the common herd. Even in our own age, when the spirit of democracy is abroad, the most successful novelty in Christian organisation—namely, the Salvation Army—is a sheer tyranny; a fact which shows that Christianity, despite a few convenient texts paraded by “advanced” Christians, is in natural harmony with the principles of despotism.

It is idle to cite particular texts against this perennial tendency. We must judge a system by its general spirit,



and its general spirit by its prevalent practice. Even if we were to admit, for the sake of argument, that there is no obvious connection between the doctrines of Christianity and the existence of priestcraft, it would still remain a fact that the religion of Jesus Christ has been manipulated by priests for their own advantage, and the robbery and oppression of the people; and surely a religion which, during eighteen centuries, has not been able to save *itself* from this disgrace, is never likely, either in the immediate or in the remote future, to effect *our* salvation.

Everywhere in Europe, America, and Australia, at the present moment, *Priestcraft*, in some form or other, directs the energies of the Christian faith. If they were ever separate, the two things are now in absolute alliance. Practically, they are one and the same; they stand or fall together. Do we not see that those who break away from Churches, swim or drift down the stream of Rationalism? Quakerism itself, after two centuries of sturdy protest against priestcraft, is now dwindling. Christianity arose quite naturally in a superstitious age, when the old *national* religions of the Roman Empire had fallen into discredit, and the populace was ready to embrace a more universal religion; but it never could have been upheld in subsequent ages without the combined arts of political and ecclesiastical despotism; the altar supporting the throne, and the throne the altar; and both exploiting the ignorance and credulity of the people. Had freedom prevailed, and free scope been allowed to inquiry, the Church would long ago have perished, with the whole system of Christian supernaturalism.

After Liberty of Thought comes Education. The one is necessary to make the other fruitful. And Christianity has never been a true friend of education. We are often pointed to the colleges it established in the dark ages; but it *made* the darkness of those ages, and it did *not* establish the colleges. It simply took possession of them, and made all

permitted learning its subject. Even the study of ancient literature, which followed the Reformation, was a sheer accident, at least in religious circles. In order to maintain their challenge of Rome, the Reformers had to appeal to antiquity; and thus, as Bacon observed, the "ancient authors, both in divinity and humanity, which had long time slept in libraries, began generally to be read and revolved." Those sleeping authors were only roused for the purpose of contention, not from any desire to extract their wisdom for the welfare of mankind.

Why, indeed, were those ancient authors allowed to sleep so long in libraries? Why was the dust of so many centuries allowed to accumulate upon them? The proper answer to this question is to be found in an appeal to Christian history.

Gibbon remarks that the primitive Christians "despised all knowledge that was not useful to salvation." Some of their leaders, in the second century, were obliged to study "human wisdom" in order to reply to their Pagan adversaries; but a great majority were opposed to this policy. They wished, as Mosheim observes, to "banish all reasoning and philosophy out of the confines of the Church." After the triumph of Christianity under Constantine it became unnecessary to oppose the advocates of Paganism by any other weapons than proscription and imprisonment. From that moment the darkness crept over the face of Europe. The Council of Carthage, in the following century, forbade the reading of Pagan books. "The bishops," says Jortin, "soon began to relish this advice, and not to trouble their heads with literature." Some of the Byzantine emperors, less bigoted than the Church dignitaries, tried to cherish learning; but they were defeated by the ecclesiastics, who, as Mosheim tells us, "considered all learning, and especially philosophic learning, as injurious and even destructive to true piety and godliness." What wonder that in the fifth

century "learning was almost extinct" and "only a faint shadow of it remained"?

After a dismal lapse of hundreds of years the clouds of intellectual darkness began to lift from the face of Europe. Mohammedan learning slowly spread through Christendom. "All the knowledge of mathematics, astronomy, medicine and philosophy, propagated in Europe from the tenth century onward," says Mosheim, "was derived principally from the schools and books of the Arabians in Italy and Spain."

After the Reformation the Jesuits carried on the work of education among Catholics. Their object was simply to train promising young men for the service of the Church. And the same policy obtained in Protestant seminaries. The clergy and the privileged classes, as far as possible, monopolised the extant learning. The wealthier middle-class gradually gained a share of it, but the common people were left in the outer darkness. Even in the early part of the present century they were still excluded. The student of history is aware that the Christian Churches steadily opposed popular education. English bishops, in the House of Lords, voted against the first Education Acts; a famous Bishop of Exeter remarking in debate that the education of the lower classes would render them proud and discontented, and unwilling to work for their superiors.

When it was seen that popular education was bound to come, the Churches resolved to take time by the forelock. To prevent Secular education they set up schools for Christian education. And this is still the secret of their interest in the working of the present Education Acts. Their real anxiety is about their own dogmas; they care not for education, but for theology. Church and Dissent fight each other at School Board elections. The real issue between them is what sort of *religion* shall be taught to the children. Were religion banished from public schools; were State education



made purely secular; parsons and ministers would cease to display any interest in the matter.

With respect to education, as in the case of every other element of progress, we shall of course be met with the hackneyed objection that *Christ* has not opposed it. The crime will be laid to the charge of the Christian priesthood. Be it so. We must then ask if there is anything in the teaching of Christ *in favor* of education. Where is it to be found, even by the fondest partiality? Jesus himself, in all probability, was but poorly instructed. His disciples belonged to the ignorant and unlettered classes. Nor is it likely that he ever conceived the value of any other education than the reading of the Jewish Scriptures. The curriculum of the great schools of Greece and Rome would have astonished him; he might even have regarded it as a waste of time, or a wicked self-assertion of the human intellect.

Cardinal Newman has said that Christianity was always a learned religion. In a certain sense this is true, though purely accidental. A kind of learning was needed by Jerome, who translated the Old Testament into Latin; a higher learning was required when the Greek of the New Testament became practically a dead tongue; and a still higher learning when the Bible and the Fathers were minutely discussed by the opposed schools of Protestant and Catholic divinity. Giants of such learning arose in this mighty contest. But it must be admitted that their learning was entirely subsidiary to theological disputes. We have already observed that it was confined to the clergy; we must now add that it was not very profitable, except in quite an indirect way, to the general civilisation of Europe.

The vital spring of modern civilisation is science; the study of nature and of human nature. Shakespeare was as much a scientist as Newton. We must never narrow science down to the investigation of physical phenomena. Psycho-

logy and sociology are as noble and fruitful as astronomy and chemistry. It must be admitted, however, that the study of physical science gives power and precision to our study of mental science; accuracy in objective investigation must, in the main, precede accuracy in subjective investigation; and as physics precede biology, so biology must precede sociology.

The methods and conclusions of physical science are therefore indispensable, apart altogether from their practical value in providing the material basis of civilisation. Let us inquire then, what is the relation of Christianity to this requisite of all real and durable progress.

We shall pass by the fatuous argument that Christianity is a friend to science because many eminent men of science have been Christians. Suffice it to say that they were not produced by Christianity. They were born and reared in Christian countries, and hence they became Christians. Men of genius have arisen in all civilisations. They were the gift of Nature to the human race. Scientists, artists, poets, historians, and philosophers, were *born* with genius; they were *taught* to be Christians, Mohammedans, Jews, Brahmans, or Buddhists. Genius belongs to no creed; it belongs to Humanity.

Should it be argued that the fact of men of science having been professed Christians shows that there is no real *opposition* between science and Christianity, we should reply that this is taking a very narrow view of the situation. The real questions to be considered are these; first, is there anything in Christianity calculated to make it hostile to science; secondly, has it displayed hostility to science through its chief teachers and great organisations?

There *is* something in Christianity calculated to make it hostile to science. Its sacred books are defaced by a puerile cosmogony, and a vast number of physical absurdities; while

its whole atmosphere, in the New as well as in the Old Testament, is in the highest degree unscientific.

The Bible gives a false account of the origin of the world; a foolish account of the origin of man; a ridiculous account of the origin of languages. It tells us of a universal flood which never happened. And all these falsities are bound up with essential doctrines, such as the fall of man and the atonement of Christ; with important moral teachings and social regulations. It was therefore inevitable that the Church, deeming itself the divinely appointed guardian of Revelation, should oppose such sciences as astronomy, geology, and biology, which could not *add* to the authority of the Scripture, but might very easily *weaken* it. Falsehood was in possession, and truth was an exile or a prisoner.

Even the science of medicine was hated and oppressed. It was seen to be in opposition to the New Testament theory that disease is spiritual—which is still the current theory among savages. Medical men saw that disease is material. Hence the proverb "Among three Doctors two Atheists."

Christianity has been called by Cardinal Newman "a religion supernatural, and almost scenic." It is miraculous from beginning to end. Setting aside the extravagances of the Old Testament, the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles are replete with prodigies. Scarcely anything is natural. Not only is the career of Jesus entirely superhuman; his very disciples suspend the laws of nature at their pleasure; they miraculously heal the sick and raise the very dead.

A history so marvellous fed the superstition of the multitude, confirmed their credulous habit of mind, and prejudiced them against a more scientific conception of nature. It also compelled the Church to oppose the spread of rational investigation. The spirit of science and the spirit of Christianity were mutually antagonistic. A conflict between them was

inevitable. The natural and the miraculous could not dwell together in peace. The conquests of the one were necessarily at the expense of the other. This was instinctively felt by the Church, which could not help acting as the bitter enemy of Science.

Accordingly we find that the splendid remains of ancient science were speedily destroyed. The work of demolition was almost completed within a century after the conversion of Constantine. Hypatia was murdered by Christian monks at Alexandria. The magnificent Museum of that city was also reduced to ruins, and its superb Library was burnt to ashes or scattered to the winds. Astronomy, physics, geography, optics, physiology, botany, and mechanics were annihilated. Before another century had elapsed they were utterly forgotten. Cosmas Indicopleustes, a Christian topographer, gravely taught that the earth was not round, but a quadrangular plane, enclosed by mountains on which the sky rests; that night was caused by a northern mountain intercepting the rays of the sun; that the earth leans towards the south, so that the Euphrates and Tigris, which run southward, have a rapid current, while the Nile has a slow current because it runs uphill!

Science simply ceased to exist in Christendom, and it did not revive for hundreds of years; not, in fact, until Christian torches were lit at Mohammedan fire. The light of Alexandrian science was followed by the long darkness of Christian superstition. "Looking at the history of science," says Dr. Tylor, "for eighteen hundred years after this flourishing time, though some progress was made, it was not what might have been expected, and on the whole things went wrong."

*Things went wrong.* Yes, and Christianity was the principal cause of the mischief. There is no clearer fact in the course of human history. And it is equally clear that when Science reappeared in Europe, after an absence of a thousand years, the Church once more attacked it with tiger-like ferocity.



Astronomy was the first object of the Church's wrath. It gave the lie to the Bible theory of the earth being the centre of the universe; the sun, moon, and stars merely existing to give it illumination, or to decorate the sky. It opened up vistas of time and space in which the Christian ideas of the universe were lost like drops of water in the ocean. Further, by diminishing the relative importance of this world, it tended to discredit the notion that God was chiefly occupied with the sins, the repentances, and the destiny of mankind.

Astronomy came to Christendom from the Mohammedans. Like other sciences it was unknown in Europe after the triumph of Christianity, during "the long dead time when so much was forgotten"—to use the forcible language of Dr. Tylor. "Physical science," the same writer says, "might almost have disappeared [from the world, that is] if it had not been that while the ancient treasure of knowledge was lost to Christendom, the Mohammedan philosophers were its guardians, and even added to its store." Galileo invented the pendulum three hundred years ago; but Dr. Tylor tells us that "as a matter of fact, it appears that six centuries earlier Ebn Yunis and other Moorish astronomers were already using the pendulum as a time-measurer in their observations." According to Professor Draper, the Mohammedan astronomers made catalogues and maps of the stars, ascertained the size of the earth, determined the obliquity of the elliptic, published tables of the sun and moon, fixed the length of the year, and verified the procession of the equinoxes. "Meanwhile," says Draper, "such was the benighted condition of Christendom, such its deplorable ignorance, that it cared nothing about the matter. Its attention was engrossed by image-worship, transubstantiation, the merits of the saints, miracles, shrine-cures."

This indifference lasted till the end of the fifteenth century, when it was broken by the great navigators, like Columbus



De Gama, and Magellan, who settled the true shape of the earth, practically demonstrated its rotundity, and struck a death-blow at the old teaching of the Church. Then came the great astronomers, Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo, who completed the work of destruction by restoring the true theory of the universe.

The treatment of these great men shows us the real spirit of Christianity. Copernicus was called "an old fool" by Martin Luther. His great work *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Bodies*, kept back from publication for thirty-six years through fear of the consequences, was condemned as heretical by the Inquisition, and put upon the Index of prohibited books, his system being denounced as "that false Pythagorean doctrine utterly contrary to the Holy Scriptures."

Galileo invented the telescope, and with it perceived the phases of Mercury and Venus, the mountains and valleys of the moon, and the spots on the sun. He demonstrated the earth's orbit and the sun's revolution on its own axis. A terrible blow was given to the cosmogony of the Church and the book of Genesis. Galileo was accused of heresy, blasphemy, and Atheism. The Inquisition told him his teaching was "utterly contrary to the Scriptures." He was required to pledge himself to desist from his wickedness. For sixteen years he obeyed. But in 1632—only 260 years ago—he ventured to publish his *System of the World*. He was again brought before the Inquisition, and compelled to fall upon his knees and recant the truth of the earth's movement round the sun. Then he was thrown into prison, and treated with great severity. When he died, after ten years of martyrdom, the Church denied him burial in consecrated ground.

Giordano Bruno, the poet-prophet of the new astronomy, was imprisoned for seven years, mercilessly tortured, and at last burnt to ashes on the Field of Flowers at Rome.

It will be said that these persecutions were the work of

Catholics. But were the Protestants more friendly to science? Martin Luther railed at Copernicus, and John Calvin hunted Servetus to a fiery death at the stake.

Christianity has now lost its power of opposing science. But even in the present century it has barked where it could not bite. It was Christian bigotry which made the author of the *Vestiges of Creation* conceal his identity; it was orthodox prepossession which so long prevented Sir Charles Lyell from admitting the truth of evolution; it was Biblical teaching which inspired all the pulpit diatribes against Charles Darwin. Evolution has practically triumphed, but where its evidences are still imperfect the clergy continue to trade upon the conjectures of ancient ignorance.

The effect of Christian doctrine upon the lay mind, even in a high state of development, may be seen in Mr. Gladstone's defence of the Bible. His labored absurdities, and unscrupulous special pleading, show a deep distrust, not only of the teachings, but of the very spirit of Science.

There is, indeed, an essential opposition between Science and Christianity. The whole atmosphere of the Bible is miraculous. Nor is the New Testament any improvement in this respect upon the Old Testament. It incorporates the savage theory of disease as the work of evil spirits. Its stories of demoniacal possession belong to the ages when madness was treated as a spiritual disorder. The narrative of Jesus casting devils out of men and sending them into pigs is an aspect of the same superstition which inspired the terrible text "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." And the healing of disease by Paul with magic handkerchiefs, or by Peter with his shadow, goes down to the lowest depths of credulity.

Not a single sentence is to be found in the New Testament showing the slightest appreciation of science or philosophy. It is clear that the writers of those books looked for the speedy second coming of Christ. Nothing therefore was of

any importance in their eyes except an earnest preparation for "the great and terrible day of the Lord."

This superstition of the Second Advent is not yet extinct in Christendom. It still retains a hold upon millions of the most stupid and illiterate; and its strength, after so many centuries, and amid such hostile influences, enables us to realise its tremendous power in the early ages of Christianity.

The great majority of Christians are, of course, emancipated from this superstition. They take it for granted that the earth and the human race will exist for thousands and perhaps millions of years. They are reconciled to the idea of mental, moral, and material progress in this world. Nevertheless, their inherited instincts, the teaching of their religious instructors, and the reading of their sacred scriptures, make the most pious and zealous among them look askance at Science, even while they are ready to enjoy her benefactions. They feel that she is the natural enemy of their faith.

The clergy themselves treat science in precisely the same spirit, only their hatred is sometimes tempered by discretion. The more ignorant and presumptuous still denounce "science falsely so called," preach against Darwinism, and dread every new scientific discovery. They share the feeling (in their small way) of Leibniz, who declared that "Newton had robbed the Deity of some of his most excellent attributes, and had sapped the foundation of natural religion." They also share the feeling of those who asserted that the use of chloroform in cases of confinement was an impious interference with God's curse on the daughters of Eve. The better instructed and more cautious clergy profess a certain respect for science. But it is a respect of fear. You may tell by their faces, tones, and gestures, that they detest it while they sing its praises. They are unable to disguise their real sentiments. When they are most successful they merely treat Science as the prodigal son, who has too strong a taste for husks and swine

and is to be coaxed into renting a pew and taking the communion.

Let us pause for a moment to see how Science, having grown to manhood in spite of the murderous hostility of the Church, has completely subverted the ideas that were the very foundation of Christianity. The notion that God was solely concerned with the salvation or perdition of the inhabitants of this little planet was connected with, and supported by, the belief that this world is the centre of the universe, and that all the other heavenly bodies existed for its advantage. That belief is for ever annihilated, and with it the religious conception it countenanced and cherished. The notion of the world's antiquity, based upon the Bible genealogies from Adam to Christ, is dwarfed and made ridiculous by the discovery that the world has existed for myriads of ages, and man himself for a period immensely greater than the orthodox chronology of six thousand years. But the most terrible blow at the Genesiac theory has been struck by Darwinism. It is now certain that Adam was not the first man; nay, that there never *was* a first man. Man is not a special creation, but the highest product of a long process of evolution. The story of the Fall, therefore, is only a piece of ancient mythology. Man is not a fallen creature, but a risen organism. He did not degenerate from a paradisaical condition; he was not cursed by God; he did not need an atonement. Thus the historic doctrine of Christian salvation is deprived of its basis and meaning. Man did not die in Adam, and cannot live again in Christ. The salvation which was proffered to the world was founded upon a complete misunderstanding of its history, its nature, and its necessities.

Seeing, then, how fantastic is the *religious* salvation of Christianity, let us pursue our inquiry into the character of its *natural* salvation. Let us see, that is, in what respect it



has aided or hindered the political and social progress of Europe.

It has already been shown that Christianity opposed liberty of thought and the advance of science, and did not befriend the education of the masses of the people. We shall now see that its political and social influence has always been conservative, and never progressive.

Misty-minded sentimentalists affect to regard Jesus Christ as the most illustrious of democrats. It is difficult, however, to find the slightest justification of this view. He himself paid tribute to the Roman tax-gatherer, and taught "Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's." His language to his disciples was that of a would-be tyrant, as the word was understood in the vocabulary of the free people of Greece. He promised them that when he came into his kingdom they should sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. It was a promise as magnificent, and as empty, as Don Quixote's promise of a governorship to Sancho Panza. Nevertheless, as we may presume it was made in good faith, it must be held to indicate something very different from a republican sentiment.

Simon Peter enjoins us to "Fear God and honor the King" — quite irrespective of his deserts. "Let every soul," says Paul, "be subject unto the higher powers: for there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God." He adds that whoever resists any established authority "shall receive unto themselves damnation." According to tradition this was uttered in the reign of the cruel and detestable Nero, who would have been a greater scourge than he was if the Romans had not acted on other maxims than Paul's, and forcibly terminated his sanguinary career.

Professor Sewell, who once filled the chair of Moral Philosopher at Oxford, in a work of considerable ability, entitled *Christian Politics*, quotes many other texts from the New Testament in corroboration of Paul's teaching. He then



declares that "It is idle, and worse than idle, to attempt to restrict and explain away this positive command. And the Christian Church has always upheld it in its full extent. *With one uniform unhesitating voice it has proclaimed the duty of passive obedience.*"

There is no disputing Professor Sewell's dictum on this point. He spoke as a Churchman, not as a sceptic; he knew the history of Christianity, and was competent to pronounce an authoritative judgment.

Gibbon had previously remarked, in his sarcastic way, that it was this feature of Christianity which attracted the admiration of Constantine. "The throne of the emperors," he wrote, "would be established on a fixed and permanent basis if all their subjects, embracing the Christian religion, should learn to suffer and obey."

The doctrine of passive obedience is strongly enforced in the sermon "Against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion" at the end of the *Book of Homilies*, which, according to the thirty-fifth Article of the Church of England, is full of "a godly and wholesome doctrine," and is therein appointed "to be read in Churches by the Ministers, diligently and distinctly, that they may be understood of the people."

The first rebel, according to this Homily, was Satan himself, who was expelled from heaven. "We shall find," it says, "in very many and almost infinite places, as well of the Old Testament as of the New, that kings and princes, as well the evil as the good, do reign by God's ordinance, and that subjects are bounden to obey them." "A rebel," it declares, "is worse than the worst prince, and rebellion worse than the worst government." And in proof of this doctrine it cites many passages of scripture, and many illustrations from Bible history.

The universality of Christian teaching on this subject is strikingly exhibited in the *History of Passive Obedience Since the Reformation*, dated Amsterdam, 1689. It is a rare

and curious book, written with energy and great learning. The author ransacks the theological literature of two centuries, and shows that the doctors of all schools, including the Puritans, upheld the doctrine of passive obedience, and the absolute unlawfulness, nay, the heinous sin, of rebelling against any prince, however weak, vicious, cruel, or despotic.

Christians who have rebelled against tyranny have violated the teaching of the New Testament. They have acted on the impulses of their own nature. Oliver Cromwell disobeyed the injunctions of Peter, Paul and Jesus. John Hampden was more of a Jew than a Christian, and more of a Roman than either, when he drew his sword against his king. Mazzini, Garibaldi, Victor Hugo, and Kossuth, if the Christian scriptures be true, were guilty of insurrection against the ordinance of God.

George Fox and the Quakers were consistent Christians. They obeyed the order of Jesus to "resist not evil." If they were smitten on one cheek they turned the other to the smiter. Count Tolstoi preaches, and as far as possible practises, the same doctrine. Every form of violence, he says, is inconsistent with the teaching of Christ. Not only the soldier, but the policeman, is in opposition to the Sermon on the Mount. Count Tolstoi believes it would be an un-Christian act to kill or injure the wretch he might find ravishing his wife or slaying his child. Active resistance to evil must never be offered; passive resistance is all that is permitted; and the rest must be left to Providence.

To certain minds of a soft, peaceful, and humane disposition this doctrine is attractive. But it would never quell the world's tyrannies. Wolves do not care for the pious bleating of sheep.

Inquiry shows us that political freedom has been systematically opposed by the Christian Church, and always won in spite of it. The English bishop who once declared in the

House of Lords that "all the people had to do with the laws was to obey them," voiced the real spirit of Christianity.

Political freedom is, indeed, a very recent phenomenon in modern society. A hundred years ago it was as unknown in other parts of Europe as it is to-day in Russia. Czars, emperors, kings, and aristocracies held the multitude in subjection. The people were outside the pale of such constitutions as existed. Prussia and Austria were sheer autocracies. Spain and Italy had less civil freedom than a province of the Roman Empire. France had no constitution before 1789. England had a parliament, but the House of Commons was filled with nominees of the House of Lords. The suffrage was confined to a handful of citizens. For this reason Shelley described the House of Commons as a place

Where thieves are sent  
Similar thieves to represent.

"Infidels" won political liberty for France. Rousseau was a Deist; Mirabeau, Danton, and many other leading spirits of the Revolution were Atheists. Christianity is still on the side of reaction in the land of Voltaire, while Republican and Freethinker are almost convertible terms.

"Infidels" were the chief fighters for political freedom in England. Thomas Paine, who wrote the *Age of Reason*, was found guilty of treason for penning the *Rights of Man*. Bentham was a Freethinker, and probably an Atheist. James and John Mill were Freethinkers. Shelley, Byron, Leigh Hunt, Landor, and most of the Chartist leaders were all tainted with "infidelity." Christian leaders were generally on the side of wealth and privilege, while Freethought leaders were always on the side of the people.

Ebenezer Eliot, the Corn-Law rhymer, exclaimed—

When wilt thou save the People,  
O God of mercies, when?  
Not thrones, O Lord, but peoples,  
Not kings, O God, but men!

This exclamation was uttered eighteen hundred years after the death of Jesus Christ, in a land which boasted of being

the most Christian on earth. This is itself a proof that Christ had not saved the people. Their salvation since has been due to other causes; chiefly, it must be said, to the progress of science, which is the great equaliser. Was it not Buckle who declared that "the hall of science is the temple of democracy"?

One of the most significant facts in recent history was the attempt of the German Emperor to strengthen his power over his subjects. Feeling that the democratic movement was threatening his throne, he introduced a Bill in the Reichstag by his ministers, providing that Christian instruction should be given in the public schools, even when scholars were children of Freethinkers. Happily the Bill was defeated. "King-deluded" as Germany is, she has outgrown such illiberalism. Yet the very fact that the Emperor sought to Christianise the young more completely, in order that they might grow up his very obedient slaves, is a striking proof of the essential antagonism between Christianity and political freedom.

Christian apologists are often obliged to confess that their faith has cherished, or certainly countenanced, the superstition of the divine right of kings; a superstition that is even now stamped on our English coinage, although in a dead language which makes it less obtrusive. Nor can they deny that the maxims of free government are rather found in the writings of the philosophers and historians of Greece and Rome than in the pages of the New Testament. They sometimes contend, however, that it is not the object of Christianity to meddle with political politics; that its principles and sentiments enter as a leaven into human life; and that its influence is to be traced in the gradual improvement of human society. In other words, Christ saves us individually and socially, and the outcome of this in the sphere of politics is left to the ordinary course of things.



Now it is plain to every candid student of history that Christ has not saved the world from social evils, and equally plain to the student of philosophy that he is incapable of doing so. The Civilisation of modern Europe is not the creation of Christianity, nor has it conformed to Christian methods. Comparatively speaking, it is a thing of yesterday. It came in with the dawn of modern Science. We have little in common with our Christian forefathers of the Middle Ages, still less with our Christian forefathers of the Dark Ages. The Græco-Roman world, as Mr. Cotter Morison observes, went down into an abyss after the days of Constantine. "The revival of learning and the Renaissance," he says, "are memorable as the first sturdy breasting by humanity of the hither slope of the great hollow which lies between us and the ancient world. The modern man, reformed and regenerated by knowledge, looks across it, and recognises on the opposite ridge, in the far-shining cities and stately porticoes, in the art, politics, and science of antiquity, many more ties of kinship and sympathy than in the mighty concave between, wherein dwell his Christian ancestry, in the dim light of scholasticism and theology." This truth was in Shelley's mind when he wondered how much better off we might have been if the Christian interregnum had not occurred, and civilisation had been carried on continuously from the point reached by the Pagan world.

What a picture is drawn by Professor Draper of the squalid life of our ancestors only a few hundred years ago. In Paris and London the houses were of wood daubed with clay, and thatched with straw or reeds. They had no windows and few wooden floors. There were no chimneys, the smoke escaping through a hole in the roof. Drainage was unknown. A bag of straw served as a bed, and a wooden log as a pillow. No one washed himself; the very archbishops swarmed with vermin, and the stench was drowned with perfumes. The citizens wore leather garments which



lasted for many years. It was a luxury to eat fresh meat once a week. The streets had neither sewers, pavements, nor lamps. Slops were emptied out of the chamber shutters after nightfall. Æneas Sylvus, afterwards Pope Pius II., visited England about 1430. He describes the houses of the peasantry as built of stones without mortar; the roofs were of turf, and a stiffened bull's-hide served for a door. Coarse vegetable products, including the bark of trees, were the staple food; bread was quite unknown in some places. Is it any wonder that famine and pestilence raged periodically? In the famine of 1030 human flesh was cooked and sold; in that of 1258, fifteen thousand people died of hunger in London; in the plague of 1348 all Europe suffered, and one-third of the population of France was destroyed. Nor was the moral prospect a whit superior. "Men, women, and children," says Draper, "slept in the same apartment; not unfrequently, domestic animals were their companions; in such a confusion of the family, it was impossible that modesty or morality could be maintained." Sexual licentiousness was so universal that, on the introduction of the dreadful disease of syphilis from America, it spread with wonderful rapidity, and infected all ranks and classes, from the Holy Father Pope Leo X. to the beggar by the wayside.

For this wretched state of things the only remedy was knowledge. Science was necessary to alter the environment, and produce the conditions of a happier and purer life. Christianity had nothing to offer but charity. This is an admirable virtue in its proper sphere, but a poor substitute for independence and self-respect. Charity will go to a plague-stricken city; it will tend the sick and comfort the dying. Science will guard the city and drive the plague from its gates.

Christ has not, therefore, been our social savior any more than our political savior. The modern (in fact, very recent) improvement in the general condition of the people, is solely

owing to the conquests of Science. Were our vast accumulation of scientific knowledge and appliances to be lost, it is easy to see that Christianity could not save us from falling back into a state of barbarism.

It is frequently alleged that Christ has saved the Western world from the curse of Slavery. This is a most ridiculous assertion. Slavery has nearly always been under a religious sanction. There is no instance in the history of the world of religion having abolished the ownership of men and women and the traffic in human flesh and blood. The great causes of emancipation have been economic and material. "History," says Mr. Finlay, the great historian, "affords its testimony that neither the doctrines of Christianity, nor the sentiments of humanity, have ever yet succeeded in extinguishing slavery, where the soil could be cultivated with profit by slave-labor. No Christian community of slaveholders has yet voluntarily abolished slavery." Mr. Finlay's assertion is profoundly true, though the fact is disguised to superficial observers. Slavery was abolished in the West Indies by England, who compensated the slave-owners. True, but not until England had completely outgrown her own slavery of the feudal system. In the United States, also, the Confederate party of the South tried to maintain slavery, with the sanction and blessing of the ministers of religion. The Federalists of the North were against slavery, and they put it down within the Union, because they had reached a higher stage of industrial development.

So much for the fact, and now for the theory. What right has anyone to say that Slavery *could* be abolished by Christianity? Christ himself never uttered a word against the institution. His object was personal piety, and not social reformation. Not a single Apostle so much as hinted a dislike of Slavery, though it was condemned by the leading Stoics as unjust and inhuman. St. Paul sent a runaway slave

back to his master, with words of kindness, but without one word against Slavery itself. All the great Christian writers, from Basil to Bossuet, through a period of thirteen hundred years, taught that Slavery was a divine institution. It was defended as such by Christian jurists in the eighteenth century. Mrs. Beecher Stowe, in America, said that the Church was notoriously in favor of Slavery. "Statesmen on both sides of the question," she said, "have laid that down as a settled fact." Theodore Parker showed that 80,000 slaves were owned by Presbyterians, 225,000 by Baptists, and 250,000 by Methodists. He declared that if the whole American Church had "dropped through the continent and disappeared altogether, the anti-Slavery cause would have been further on." Professor Moses Stuart, the greatest American divine since Jonathan Edwards, announced that "The precepts of the New Testament respecting the demeanor of slaves and their masters, beyond all question recognise the existence of slavery." Mrs. Beecher Stowe, in her *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, prints a great number of resolutions in favor of Slavery as a Bible Christian institution, passed by all sorts of Churches in the Southern States. One sample of these precious documents may suffice; it emanated from the Harmony Presbytery of South Carolina—

"Resolved, That slavery has existed from the days of those good old slaveholders and patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (who are now in the kingdom of heaven), to the time when the apostle Paul sent a runaway home to his master Philemon, with a Christian and fraternal letter to this slaveholder, which we find still stands in the canon of the Scriptures; and that slavery has existed ever since the days of the apostle, and does now exist.

"Resolved, That as the relative duties of master and slave are taught in the Scriptures, in the same manner as those of parent and child, and husband and wife, the existence of slavery is not opposed to the will of God; and whosoever has a conscience too tender to recognise this relation as lawful, is 'righteous over much,' is 'wise above what is written,' and has submitted his neck to the yoke of men, sacrificed his Christian liberty of conscience, and leaves the infallible word of God for the fancies and doctrines of men."

Equally striking facts are cited in the series of Anti-Slavery Tracts, edited by Wilson Armistead, of Leeds, in 1853, and apparently published for the English Quakers. Pronouncements in favor of Slavery are given from a host of American ministers. Bishop Hopkins, of Vermont, for instance, was asked, "What effect had the Bible in doing away with slavery?" He replied, "*None whatever.*" Missionary, Tract, and Bible Societies, were all abettors of Slavery. Fred Douglass, the runaway slave, cried out thus in one of his eloquent speeches: "They have men-stealers for ministers, women-whippers for missionaries, and cradle-plunderers for church-members. The man who wields the blood-clotted cowskin during the week fills the pulpit on Sunday, and claims to be a minister of the meek and lowly Jesus. . . . We have men sold to build churches, women sold to support the gospel, and babes sold to purchase Bibles for the poor heathen! . . . The slave auctioneer's bell and the church-going bell chime in with each other, and the bitter cries of the heart-broken slave are drowned in the religious shouts of his pious master. . . . The dealer gives his blood-stained gold to support the pulpit, and the pulpit, in return, covers his infernal business with the garb of Christianity."

Enough has been said to show that the Bible has been used as the slaveholder's manual, that Christianity did not abolish Slavery, that the institution flourished for centuries under the sanction of the Christian Church, that Christian divines blessed it and approved it with a text wherever it was possible and profitable, and that it only disappeared in very recent times under the influence of a higher type of material civilisation. It should be added, however, that Slavery has always found an enemy in Freethought. It was the sceptical Montaigne who first denounced the villainies of the Spanish Conquest of America; it was the sceptical Montesquieu who first branded negro slavery as wicked; it was the sceptical Voltaire who took up the same attitude in



a later generation; and the first pen couched against Slavery in America was wielded by the sceptical Thomas Paine. Let it also be remembered that Christian England was not the first emancipator of slaves. "The first public act against slavery," says Professor Newman, "came from Republican France, in the madness of atheistic enthusiasm."

Christ has been no savior of the world in respect to the condition of woman, which is one of the best criteria of civilisation. The ordinary Christian, seeing polygamy prevail beyond the borders of Christendom, and monogamy within them, imagines the difference is due to Christianity; and his clerical guides, who know better, confirm him in the delusion. Here again it is obvious that religion only consecrates the established social order. It sanctions polygamy in the East and monogamy in the West. Christianity found monogamy existing, and did not create it. Greeks, Romans, and even Jews, in spite of the Mosaic law, had become monogamists by a natural evolution. Polygamy was illegal in the Roman Empire at the advent of Jesus Christ. Nor did any disturbing influence arise from the conversion of the Northern barbarians, for monogamy existed among the Teutonic tribes, who held women in high honor and esteem, and allowed them to participate in the public councils.

Had monogamy not prevailed before the triumph of Christianity, it is difficult to see in what way the new faith would have established it. There is not a word against polygamy, as a general custom, from Genesis to Revelation. Jehovah's favorites were all polygamists, neither did Christ command the marriage of one man with one woman. The Mormons justify polygamy from the Bible, and the United States government answers them, not by argument, but by penal legislation. Concubinage is also justified from the Bible. The more a man is steeped in the Christian Scriptures, his sexual and domestic views become the more patriarchal.



Christianity, indeed, has been woman's enemy, and not her friend. Christ's own teaching on sexual matters is much disputed. His language is very largely veiled and enigmatic, but it gives a strong plausibility to the opinion of Count Tolstoi, that sexual intercourse is always more or less sinful, and that no one who desires to be Christlike can think of marrying. St. Paul's language is more precise. He plainly bids men and women to live single; only, if they cannot do so without fornication, he allows of marriage as a concession to the weakness of the flesh. Essentially, therefore, he places the union of men and women on the same ground as the coupling of beasts. Further, he orders wives to obey their husbands as absolutely as the Church obeys Christ; coating the pill with the nauseous reminder that the man was not made for the woman, but the woman for the man.

Following Christ and Paul, as they understood them, the Christian fathers lauded virginity to the skies, emphasised woman's dependence on man, and treated her with every conceivable indignity. Their language is often too foul to transcribe. Let it suffice to say that they were intensely scriptural in thought and expression. Taking the story of the Fall as true, they regarded woman as the door of sin and damnation. Logically, also, they saw in the birth of Christ from a virgin, a stigma on natural motherhood. Under the old Jewish law, every woman who brought forth the fruit of love was "unclean." This sentiment survived in the Christian Church. It was deepened by the miraculous birth of Christ, and strengthened by contact with the great oriental doctrine of the opposition between matter and spirit; a doctrine which lies at the root of all asceticism, and is the key to the sexual morbidity of all the creeds.

These are debateable matters, and it is easy for Christian rhetoricians to find ways of escape by subtle methods of interpretation. The Bible becomes in their hands "a nose of wax," as Erasmus said, to be twisted into any shape or

direction. Plain matters of fact, however, are not so easily perverted; and an appeal to history will show that Christianity lowered, instead of raising, the whole status of women.

Principal Donaldson (and it is well to take a clerical authority) is the author of an important article in the *Contemporary Review* for September, 1889, on "The Position of Women among the Early Christians." It is very unflattering to Christian vanity, and it has been answered by *silence*. "It is a prevalent opinion," says Principal Donaldson, "that woman owes her present high position to Christianity, and the influences of the Teutonic mind. I used to believe this opinion, but in the first three centuries I have not been able to see that Christianity had any favorable effect on the position of women, but, on the contrary, that it tended to lower their character and contract the range of their activity." He points out that at the dawn of Christianity women had attained great freedom, power, and influence in the Roman Empire. "They dined in the company of men," he says, "they studied literature and philosophy, they took part in political movements, they were allowed to defend their own law cases if they liked, and they helped their husbands in the government of provinces and the writing of books." All this was stopped by Christianity. "The highest post to which she rose" in the Christian Church "was to be a door-keeper and a message-woman." A woman bold enough to teach was in the eyes of Tertullian a "wanton." The duties of a wife were simple—"She had to obey her husband, for he was her head, her lord, and superior; she was to fear him, reverence him, and please him alone; she had to cultivate silence; she had to spin and take care of the house, and she ought to stay at home and attend to her children."

Sir Henry Maine had previously observed, in his remarkable *Ancient Law*, that Christianity tended from the first to narrow the rights and liberties of women. Not Roman juris-

prudence, but the Canon Law, was responsible for the disabilities on married women that obtained in Europe down to the present century. The personal liberty conferred on married women by the middle Roman law, in Sir Henry Maine's opinion, was not likely to be restored to them by a society which preserved "any tincture of Christian institution." Married women, however, in every civilised country are now rising into a position of legal independence; and this is but a revival of the best Roman law, which prevailed before the triumph of Christianity.

It must be a remarkable fact, to any thoughtful Christian who is interested in the great problem of woman's emancipation, that the most strenuous advocates of her rights during the past century have belonged to the sceptical camp. The first striking essay on the subject was written by Condorcet. It was Mary Wollstonecraft, the wife of William Godwin, and the mother of Mrs. Shelley, who wrote the first important essay on the subject in England. Shelley himself was an ardent champion of sexual equality. His poignant cry, "Can man be free if woman be a slave?" expresses the very essence of the question. Jeremy Bentham, Robert Owen, and John Stuart Mill, are a few of the names in the subsequent muster-roll of custodians of the high tradition; indeed, it is hardly too much to say that Mill's great essay on *The Subjection of Women* marks an epoch in the history of social progress. Let it be added that the Freethought party has steadily upheld the banner of common rights, making absolutely no distinction in position or service between men and women. The Christians are but slowly and timidly following in the wake of a party they affect to despise.

Descending from the mothers of the race to its criminal members, who are still a large section of the community, let us see what Christ or Christianity has done for them; or rather for the society which they curse and disgrace. The

Christian method of reform is *preaching*. Sublime, pathetic, or ridiculous, as you happen to regard it, is the Christian belief in exhortation. It is a legacy from the pre-scientific ages. A clergyman mounts a pulpit, informs people that they ought to be good, tells them that in view of a future life and a day of judgment honesty is the best policy, and imagines that he has done a good stroke of work for the moral elevation of society. How profoundly is he mistaken! It is not thus that human beings are really acted upon. The way to empty goals, said John Ruskin, is to fill schools; and, although this is a partial and exaggerated statement, as epigrams are wont to be, it expresses truth enough to show the utter futility of the common "spiritual" recipes for human salvation.

Let our yearning for social improvement be ever so intense, it is only by *scientific* methods that we can do any lasting good. Social diseases must be studied like bodily diseases, and the proper remedies discovered and applied. To *preach* at sinners, either by the way of promises or threats, is in the long run, and in a general way, as idle as to preach at persons who suffer from fever or rheumatics.

"Man," said D'Holbach, "will always be a mystery for those who insist on regarding him with the prejudiced eyes of theology." "The dogma of the spirituality of the soul," he added, "has turned morality into a conjectural science, which does not in the least help us to understand the true way of acting on men's motives." Accordingly, it was not until the Christian view had largely given place to the scientific view, in ethics and in jurisprudence, that any radical reform was possible in the treatment of crime; which is, by the way, a very different thing from the amelioration of prisons, with which we associate the name of John Howard. Criminology is an impossible science while we are under the dominion of Christian ideas. The criminal is merely endowed with an extra quantity of original sin, which must be



counteracted by spiritual agencies; indeed, it is still set forth, in the language of indictments, that the prisoner in the dock was instigated by the Devil. Madness itself, while Christianity was dominant, was "an intolerable exaggeration of this perversity." "It is certainly true as an historical fact," says Mr. John Morley, whose words we have just quoted, "that the rational treatment of insane persons, and the rational view of certain kinds of crime, were due to men like Pinel, trained in the materialistic school of the eighteenth century. And it was clearly impossible that the great and humane reforms in this field could have taken place before the decisive decay of theology."

Science is indeed far more humane than Christianity. It does not boast so much about its "great heart," but it keeps its eye upon the problem to be solved. At the present moment the science of Criminology is almost exclusively in the hands of materialists, who smile at the notion of "sin" and scorn the idea of "punishment"; regarding crime as moral insanity, and aiming at its treatment by scientific methods, without cruelty to the criminal, but rather with the same constant firmness and gentle skill which we have learnt to apply to the victims of mental insanity.

The jurisprudence of Christian ages was savage and scandalous. When madmen were beaten to drive the Devil out of them, it is no wonder that criminals were treated with monstrous severity. Torture, for instance, was common and systematic; it was not only applied to accused persons, but even to witnesses. "It is curious to observe," says Mr. Henry C. Lea, "that Christian communities, where the truths of the gospel were received with unquestioning veneration, systematised the administration of torture with a cold-blooded ferocity unknown to the legislation of the heathen nations whence they derived it. The careful restrictions and safeguards, with which the Roman jurisprudence sought to protect the interests of the accused, contrast

strangely with the reckless disregard of every principle of justice which sullies the criminal procedure of Europe from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century." The death penalty was inflicted with shocking frequency in every part of Christendom. Until the early years of the present century it was common, in England, to see men and women hung in batches, some of them for petty offences, such as stealing goods to the value of five shillings; and when the great Romilly attempted to reform this ferocious law, he was opposed by the whole bench of bishops in the House of Lords. Since then we have witnessed a vast improvement; not in consequence of Christ's teaching, or the spirit of Christianity, but in consequence of the general spread of science, education, mental liberty, and democracy; or, in other words, the progress of secular civilisation.

Coincidentally with this movement there has been a diminution in the statistics of crime. What could not be effected by pulpit anathemas and penal cruelty, has been effected by wiser and nobler agencies. In England, for instance, since the passing of the Education Act of 1870, the number of convicted prisoners has largely decreased, despite the considerable growth of population; and it is worthy of special notice that the principal decrease is among the youthful offenders.

Christian nations are fond of boasting their superior virtue, yet it is among Christian nations that we find the worst developments of the three great vices of gambling, drink and prostitution. The present Archbishop of Canterbury, in a volume entitled *Christ and His Times*, confesses that "Intemperance is in far greater rage and ravage" in England than it was "among those Gentiles" denounced by St. Peter. His Grace confesses, also, that England is debauching whole populations of "heathen." "The earth's long-sealed dark continent, stored with her grandest products," he declares,

"is being developed for the wealth of the world through the application of intoxication to its innumerable tribes by civilised traders and Christian merchants." With regard to prostitution His Grace admits that we are in a sorry plight. "The streets of London," the Archbishop says, "fling temptation broadcast before youth and inexperience," and "Our medical authorities speak of a river of poison flowing into the blood of this nation."

These are shameful words to come from the highest dignitary of the richest Church in the world. And the shame lies in their truth. After eighteen hundred years of Christianity, it is very questionable, if allowance be made for mere differences of *manners* as distinguished from *morals*, whether the Christian nations do in practice exhibit a higher level of morality than many of the "heathen" nations. The general practice of Christian apologists is to single out some particular virtues in which we have an advantage, to the neglect of other virtues in which we are distinctly inferior; and then to bid us plume ourselves on our superiority. But this special pleading is abashed by such admissions as those of Archbishop Benson. Christian nations are the greatest gamblers and drunkards. Christian nations have almost a monopoly of prostitution. The vice of Christian cities is as bad as any recorded of the worst imperial cities of antiquity. Perhaps the corruption is not so widespread, and it is covered with a thicker veil of decorum. *Some* improvement has no doubt taken place, especially amongst the middle and upper-lower classes; but some improvement might be expected in the course of two thousand years. What there is of it is not enough to establish any great ethical claim on behalf of Christianity. It has not reformed the world, as a divine revelation should do; in other words, Christ has not saved us *morally*; and what he has not done in such a long past, he is not likely to do in any possible future.

. . . . .

Poverty is another curse of Christian countries. From the point of view of material comfort, there are myriads of our pauper and semi-pauper population who are far worse off than the slaves of ancient Greece and Rome. St. Peter spoke of a suffering population. "We know of one," says Archbishop Benson, "which can only just exist, hanging on a sharp edge of illness, hunger, uncleanness physical and moral, incapacity mental and bodily, in full sight of abundance, luxury, and waste."

Christianity promises many fine blessings to the poor, but they are only realisable in heaven. Poverty is represented as a blessing in itself. Jesus seems to have regarded it as a permanent characteristic of human society, and the Church has been ready to do everything for poverty except to remove it. But its abolition is the chief object of modern reform. Poverty is not a blessing; it is a curse. It is "an imprisonment of the mind, a vexation of every worthy spirit," wrote Sir Walter Raleigh; nay more, it "provokes a man to do infamous and detested deeds." Poverty is one of the chief secrets of popular abasement. Even in the sphere of economics, strange as it may sound to the superficial, it is not low wages that are the cause of poverty, but poverty that is the cause of low wages. Yes, it is absolutely indispensable to a civilisation worthy of the name, that poverty—the want of the necessaries and decencies of life—should be exterminated. But there is nothing in the teaching of Christ, or in the traditions of Christianity, to be helpful in the accomplishment of this great object; indeed, it would appear from a study of Christian writings that the poor are providentially kept in that position as whetstones for the rich man's benevolence. The Gospel of Giving has been preached with incredible vigor and unction, and even now it is the pride of Churches to act as rich men's almoners. But giving, if excellent in crises, is bad as a policy; it presupposes folly or injustice, or perhaps both, and it perpetuates



and intensifies the evil it affects to mitigate. The true, deep, and lasting charity is *justice*; and for that the world has looked to Christianity in vain. It will be a glorious moment when the poor despise the "charity" which wealth flings to them as conscience-money or ransom, when they scorn the eleemosynary cant of the Churches, when they cry "Keep your bounty, and give us our rights."

Meanwhile it is well to observe the industry with which the apostles of Christ shun the "blessings" of poverty. They do not take it themselves, they recommend it to others; it is good for foreign export, bad for domestic consumption. "Blessed be *ye* poor" is the text. The clergy never say "Blessed are *we* poor." They preach with their tongues in their cheeks, and an Archbishop is the greatest harlequin of all. How Christ has saved the world from poverty may be seen in the fact that, nearly two thousand years after his advent, an Archbishop is paid £15,000 a year to preach "Blessed be *ye* poor."

There is nothing in the teaching ascribed to Christ which indicates that he understood poverty to be a curse, or that he had the slightest appreciation of its causes or its remedies. He was a preacher and a pietist, with the usual knowledge of secular affairs possessed by that description of persons. Well-meaning he may have been; there is no reason whatever to dispute it; but good intentions will never, by themselves, effect the salvation of mankind.

On one occasion the Prophet of Nazareth gave a counsel of perfection to a wealthy young man. It was to sell his property and give the proceeds to the poor. Can anyone conceive a greater economical absurdity? Most assuredly we want a better distribution of wealth, but this is not the method to bring it about. It would simply plunge all who have anything into the slough of poverty. Such advice is a counsel of ignorance or despair: of ignorance, if the teacher thinks it would help the poor; of despair, if he regards

poverty as irremediable, and aims at nothing but an equality of misery.

Christ's teaching as to poverty, if reduced to practice, would pauperise and ruin society. Of course it may be contended—it *has* been contended—that the advice to sell out for the benefit of the poor, was solely meant for the individual to whom it was tendered. But this is inconsistent with the practice of Christ's disciples, who must surely have been in the most favorable position to understand his meaning. They held all things in common, and those who had possessions sold them and paid the price into the common exchequer. Here again, however, the *later* disciples of Christ find a convenient explanation. According to Archbishop Benson, for example, it was "no instance of Communism," but "an extraordinary effect to meet a sudden emergency." Such are the devices by which it is sought to escape from a palpable difficulty! Whenever the plain meaning of Scripture is unpleasant, it is always nullified by artful interpretations. But the slippery exegetes, in this particular instance, overlook the fact that they are explaining away the only practical bit of Christ's teaching with respect to poverty. They remove a difficulty and leave a blank. And there we will leave *them*.

So great is the practical failure of Christianity to save mankind *in this world*—so great its failure to save us from the evils that too often make a hell on earth—that two distinct lines of apology are pursued by its advocates. According to the first, it was not the object of Christ to save us from mere worldly evils; according to the second, we might have been saved in this very sense of salvation, but we have obstinately rejected our Redeemer.

As a representative of the first line of apology we select Mr. Coventry Patmore, who is a Roman Catholic, and a poet of some distinction. "Some," he remarks, "who do not consider

that Christianity has proved a failure, do, nevertheless, hold that it is open to question whether the race, as a race, has been much affected by it, and whether the external and visible evil and good which have come of it do not pretty nearly balance one another." Mr. Patmore denies that it was the main purpose of Christ, or any part of his purpose, that "everybody should have plenty to eat and drink, comfortable houses, and not too much to do." Neither material nor moral amelioration was to be expected; on the contrary, Christ was so far from prophesying "that the world would get better and happier for his life, death, and teaching," that he actually prophesied "it would become intolerably worse." "He tells us," says Mr. Patmore, "that the poor will be always with us, and does not hint disapproval of the institution even of slavery, though he counsels the slave to be content with his status." Christ came to save those who would, could, or should be saved from their sins, and fitted for the Kingdom of Heaven. "It was practically for those few only that he lived and died," and, shocking as it may seem, it is the teaching of the New Testament.

This is clear, emphatic, and straightforward. With such a defender of Christianity as Mr. Patmore even an Atheist can have no quarrel. They may salute each other respectfully across an impassable chasm.

It is not so easy to select a representative of the second line of apology. The name of such is now Legion. They tell us that Christ has been blindly misunderstood or wilfully misrepresented. He was the great, the sublime preacher, they say, of the doctrine of human brotherhood, which, if reduced to practice, would make earth a heaven. His Sermon on the Mount, they add, is the charter of our secular redemption.

Now if Christ has been misunderstood, or even misrepresented, for two thousand years, some at least of the blame must surely attach to himself. Why did he not express

himself with the clearness of a Confucius, a Cicero, a Seneca, a Marcus Aurelius? We are told that he used oriental metaphors; true, and metaphors are good adornments, but bad foundations. Something plain, solid, and satisfying should form the basis of every structure.

As for the doctrine of human brotherhood, it was taught before Christ, and after him by moralists who owed nothing to his influence. Besides, such a doctrine is but a poor truism or a barren platitude unless it takes a practical shape in government and society. Louis the Fourteenth would have allowed that the meanest peasant in France was his brother in Christ. Such a broad generalisation means anything or nothing, according to individual circumstances. What is wanted is something more precise, something addressed to the intellect as well as the emotions. What is the real value of a doctrine of brotherhood which saw nothing wrong in slavery? What is the worth of it when the agricultural laborer and the landlord sit and listen to it in the same church, and go their several ways afterwards with no sense of incongruity, the one to slave for a bare pittance, and the other to live in comparative idleness on the fruits of his "brother's" labor?

With regard to the Sermon on the Mount—which, of course, is no sermon, but a disorderly collection of maxims—it has well been described as a series of "pathetic exaggerations." The moment it is discussed as a basis of action, nearly every sentence has to be explained, qualified, or hedged in with reservations. "Resist not evil" means, resist evil, but resist it passively. "Take no thought for the morrow" means, take as much thought as is necessary. "Blessed are the poor in spirit" means, blessed are the rich who do not keep their noses too high in the air. "Blessed are the meek" works out as, blessed are those who stand up for their rights. The way in which Christian Socialists turn and twist, amplify and contract, explain and obscure this Sermon



on the Mount, is a fine illustration of how men will trim and decorate their gods sooner than discard them altogether. Morally, it may be "touching." Intellectually, it is contemptible. In any other cause it would be treated as downright dishonesty. We are bound to tell these Christian Socialists—or Social Christians, as some of the species would prefer to be designated—that they are lacking in subtlety. Archbishop Magee knew what he was about in declaring that any society which tried to base itself upon the Sermon on the Mount would go to ruin in a week. This he knew was indisputable, except by softs, cranks, or lunatics. But he did not therefore abandon the Sermon on the Mount. He sheltered it behind a pretty, convenient theory; namely, that its injunctions are meant for the Church, not for the State—for the individual, not for society—for Christians, not for citizens. Jeremy Taylor also knew what *he* was about in declaring that the clauses of the Sermon on the Mount are not commands, but counsels of perfection. Intellectually, this is not contemptible; it is very clever—whatever else we may think of it; whereas our Christian Socialists, or Social Christians, play the confidence trick too clumsily, being as open as a hat through the whole performance.

From any rational point of view, it is impossible to regard Jesus Christ as the savior of the world. For a god, his failure is egregious. His apostles were to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature; according to the last chapter of Mark, those who believed were to be saved, and those who disbelieved were to be damned. Eighteen centuries have rolled by, and little more than a quarter of the world's inhabitants even *profess* Christianity. Missionaries are still laboring to convert the "heathen," but the proselytes they make are not a tithe of those who are lost to the Churches at home through scepticism or mere indifference. Further, the "revelation" through Christ is so obscure, so compli-

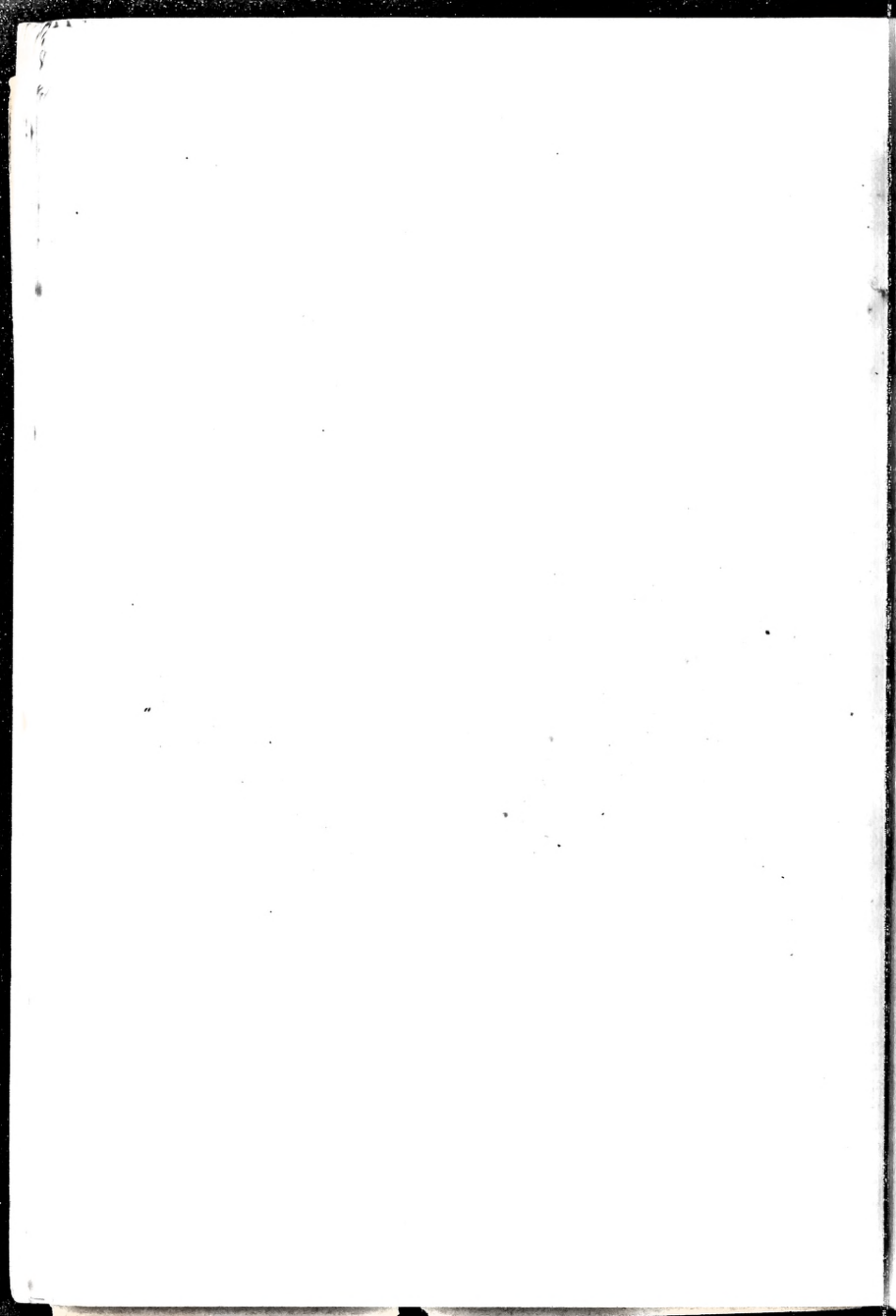
cated, or so self-contradictory, that Christendom is split up into a multitude of sects, each declaring itself the only true custodian of "the faith once delivered unto the saints." The only points on which they are universally agreed, are the cardinal doctrines of pre-Christians religion. To imagine such a poor, confused result as the work of a deity, is to sink gods below the level of men. To bid us regard it as the work of a being at once omnipotent and omniscient, is to insult the very meanest intelligence.

Christ is a failure also as a man; though, perhaps, it is less his fault than his misfortune. The true story of his life—if, indeed, he ever lived at all—has been buried under a monstrous mass of myths and legends. The sayings ascribed to him have given rise to endless disputes and bitter quarrels, in the course of which blood has flowed like water and tears have fallen like rain. His very name has been an instrument of terror and oppression. Priests and kings, age after age, and century after century, have used it to delude and despoil the people. The nails of his hands and feet have been driven into the brains of honest thinkers; the blood from his wounds has been turned into a poison for the veins of society. Could he see all the frauds and crimes done in his name, he would wish it to perish in oblivion.

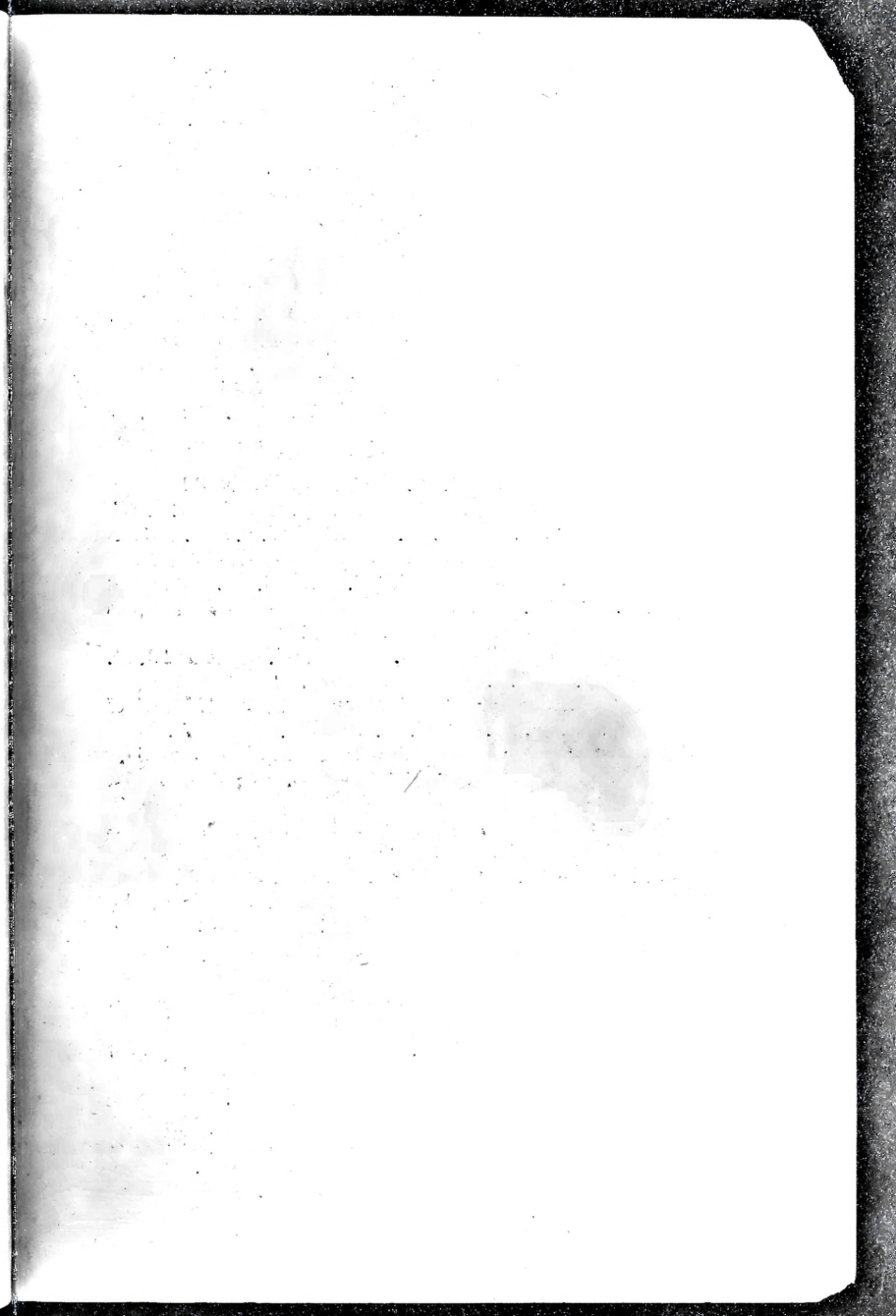
In no sense has this Galilean saved the world. As a simple man, and no god, how could he possibly do so? The world's salvation is far too huge a task for *any* man, let him be ever so wise and great. It is a task for the soldiers of liberty, truth, and progress in every age and every land. Why should millions of men be constantly bending over the tomb of a single dead young Jew? Is not the whole world a sepulchre of poets, artists, philosophers, statesmen, and heroes? Do not the stars shine like night-lamps over the slumbers of our mighty dead? And why confine ourselves to one little country, one petty nation, and one type of character? Not in Palestine, not in Jewry, not in Christ, shall

we find all the elements of human greatness and nobility. Let us be more catholic than our forefathers. They were narrowed by a creed; we will be as broad as humanity. It is a poor, cowardly spirit that dreads the cry of "Lo here!" or "Lo there!" The wise, brave man will be curious and eclectic. He will store the honey of truth, beauty, and goodness from every flower that blooms in the garden of the world.

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