

CHRISTIANITY :

DEFECTIVE AND UNNECESSARY.

BY

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CONTENTS :

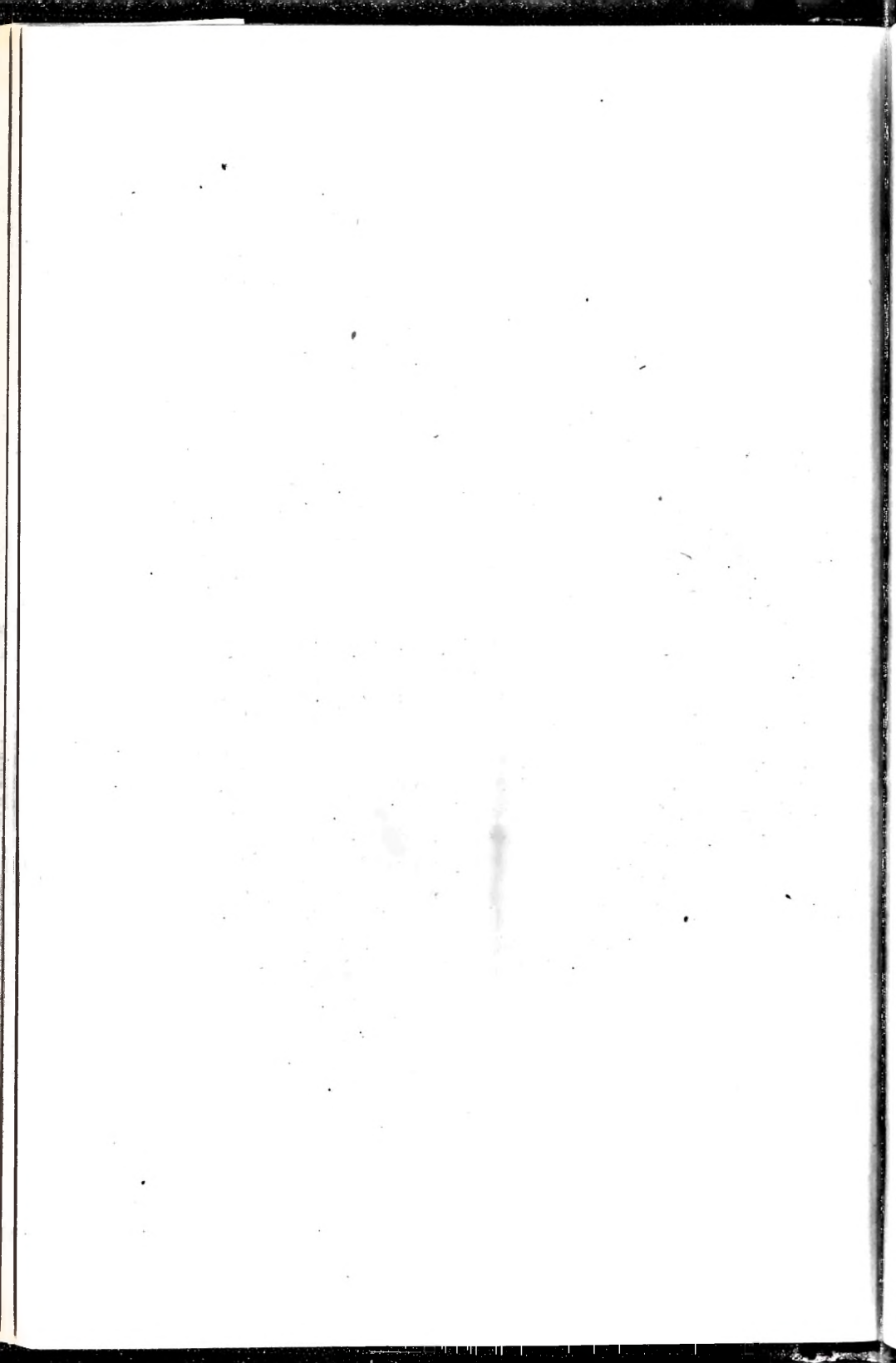
- I. Why is Christianity Believed ?
- II. " Our Father which art in Heaven."
- III. The Fall and the Atonement.
- IV. The Basis and Incentive of Orthodox Christianity.
- V. Christianity Not a Necessity to Mankind.

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CHRISTIANITY:

DEFECTIVE AND UNNECESSARY.

I. WHY IS CHRISTIANITY BELIEVED ?

WHY has belief in orthodox Christianity obtained such a firm hold upon the great mass of the people on this part of the globe ? This question has often obtruded itself upon my attention and I have only been able to find one reply, and that is contained in the following fact. The superstition of Christianity is implanted in the human mind before it possesses the power of reasoning, at that period of life when almost anything impressed upon the youthful mentality is accepted with a firm and unquestioning faith. As a child thus trained grows older the forms and ceremonies of the faith strengthen their hold upon him, and these form a strong and mystic web which requires more than the ordinary type of intelligence to readily disentangle. Take a child who has been educated in the Secular or Liberal school, whose mind has been kept perfectly free from all phases of superstition during childhood, and it would be almost a matter of impossibility to make him or her believe in the Bible account of the creation of the world, the alleged sin of our first parents, the misery and suffering that followed it, and the marvellous and wholly incomprehensible scheme of the Atonement. That child, if allowed to reach the age of manhood or womanhood unfettered by theological teachings, would never bring his or her mind to worship with holy reverence such a character as the Bible gives to its God. Its better nature would revolt against the horrible cruelties and despicable tyrannies that are credited to his account, and it would unhesitatingly refuse to worship in servile obedience and intellectual abandonment a being so immeasurably inferior to the faultiest of Nature's productions.

The Bible stories would be rejected as improbable and useless, for even were they true they would be productive of no good to the world, and the injustice and cruelty they relate would be regarded with horror and aversion.

To commence the study of the Bible at a matured period of life would be to entirely disbelieve in its divinity, and instead of the perusal inspiring awe and admiration, it would induce surprise to think how any really intelligent people could have allowed their reason to be shackled and their judgment warped by its absurd and unreasonable teachings. I do not condemn the Bible wholesale. It of course contains much that is good and true, as do most books that have been put forward as guides for humanity. It must, however, be remembered that originality cannot be honestly claimed for those portions of the Bible which would tend, if followed out, to make the world better and purer. We should not, therefore, be deprived of these good teachings if the Bible were taken from us, because we can easily find what is useful in the Old and New Testaments in other and older books, and rather than have to accept the Bible in its entirety it would be better, in my opinion, to give it up altogether.

The clergy thoroughly recognise the fact that the belief in the divinity of the Bible must be firmly grafted into the youthful mind before it has the power to think for itself, or their case would be hopeless. They know perfectly well that if the children grow up without religious training the future men and women will never be won over to the Church. The strongest argument against the truth of their system is the endeavour upon the part of the clergy to imprison the tender and impressionable brain of youth, for surely principles and doctrines that will not bear careful and honest investigation are of very little value, and will do small service towards reforming and improving the human race, which should be the greatest aim of every individual. I earnestly sympathise with those who have not known the invaluable privilege of commencing life with a mind free from all superstition and gloomy doubt, but the very struggles they have passed through and the battles they have fought to

clear their path from Christianity to Freethought, should cause them to appreciate the value of such freedom, and should be a sufficient inducement for them to do their utmost to make the way easier for their children. Above all things, Secular parents should not permit their children to attend orthodox Sunday schools. Let them grow up with their thoughts free ; impress upon them with strong and loving words, and, better still, with good and pure example, the sterling fact that truth and integrity are absolute essentials to happy lives ; teach them that their highest duty is to mankind, that in endeavouring to elevate others they elevate themselves ; teach them that their noblest labour is for the improvement of the world ; try and eradicate the selfishness and servile abjectness that lie at the root of popular Christianity, and we shall then hear much less of crime, misery, and fanaticism than we do at present.

One great difficulty to contend with is indifference. Being free from the chain of superstition and credulity themselves some people make no effort to free others, whereas if they would only rouse themselves sufficiently to look around, and give a helping hand to struggling doubters, the ranks of avowed Secularists would speedily assume a far more imposing appearance. It is the duty of every man and woman to help those who are not so fortunate as themselves in possessing intellectual freedom. A judicious opinion given here, and a paper or pamphlet containing Liberal views dropped there, would be sowing such seed as would without fail produce good fruit. There are many people who never give themselves the trouble to think—they subscribe themselves Christians, because they have been taught from their birth to consider themselves such. They can give no legitimate argument in favour of their faith, for they have never taken the trouble to study its claims, they are content to accept it as true because their parents did so before them. The opinion of a person who makes an assertion without caring to investigate the truth or reasonableness thereof is not worthy of much consideration. The majority of so-called Christians of to-day have not studied even the little evidence that exists of their faith ; they start with the

assumption that it is true, and sit listening with the simple faith of childhood or the calm indifference of the Nothingarian to the prosy utterances of a minister whose intellectual calibre, in nine cases out of ten, is inferior to that of his congregation. They indulge in rites and ceremonies that they condemn and ridicule in those they are pleased to call heathens, but who in reality have as much evidence and reason arrayed on the side of the faith they profess as the most devout Methodist or holy Catholic. If orthodox Christians would rest here it would not be so objectionable, but, not content with blindly worshipping a creed that will not bear the investigation of reason, they invariably condemn and, where they have the power, persecute those who are endowed with more common sense than mere faith, and whose judgment suggests the advisability of being thoroughly acquainted with the system they profess. Such conduct is a reproach to the intellectual activity of the present age. The pioneers of progress in all times have been those brave workers who have resolved to overstep the bounds of blind faith, and, fearlessly entering the domain of doubt, have triumphantly travelled on to the haven of mental freedom.

To the free and unfettered mind the difficulties which exist in the way of accepting Christianity are innumerable. Pious people exclaim that you must commence your studies with faith in the truth of that which you are investigating, but this surely is not in accordance with the spirit of free and unprejudiced enquiry. It is impossible to judge fairly of the truth of any system if you have already determined that you will believe in one particular direction, regardless of the amount of evidence that may be brought to the contrary. If Christianity be divine its advocates should be able to answer the doubter, and, instead of avoiding debate and investigation, as they generally do, they should welcome all who are anxious to endeavour to solve the problems of the faith.

Why is it impossible for a free and unfettered mind to accept Christianity? Because there are so many contending creeds, so many conflicting statements, that its tendency is to perplex

rather than to convince. The Roman Catholic, the Protestant, the Unitarian, the Trinitarian, the Church of England, and many other sects put forth their separate claims, each clamouring noisily and asserting dogmatically that their particular one is the only true representation of the divine faith. But all these denominations profess to derive their authority from the Bible, which is as conflicting and contradictory in its statements as are the many faiths said to be based upon it.

II. "OUR FATHER WHICH ART IN HEAVEN."

The first essential to believe as an orthodox Christian is "Our Father which art in Heaven." This father, who is called God, is credited with certain attributes which, did he possess them, would constitute perfection. He is said to be all wise, all powerful and all good. These qualities alone would suffice to render him perfect. The Christian or man of faith accepts these representations of God without investigation, but the Freethinker or man of reason, looking around the world and seeing daily evidence of misery, wrong and poverty, which so many of his fellow-beings are called upon to endure, cannot reconcile this state of affairs with the existence of an Omnipotent being, and therefore prefers to judge from the results, and hence this difficulty in accepting as correct such a representation. If the being represented as the Christian's God does exist, why is there so much wretchedness, destitution and needless oppression in the world? If God is all wise, he is aware of this lamentable fact; if all powerful, he could destroy every obstacle in the path to human happiness and freedom; if all good, he would accomplish that result.

Is it not blasphemy against any God, to claim for him the power of preventing misery, crime and disease, which are evident daily before our eyes, and yet to behold proofs of his unwillingness to do so? Is it not better to credit him with impotency than disinclination? Judging from a human standpoint, the only standard of which we have any knowledge, if

he were all powerful and all good, he would have made this earth a paradise, so that it was capable of affording comfort to all ; he would have endowed all his children with sound, healthy organisations, with firm and erect bodies. There would have been no poor, crippled, disabled forms, whose sojourn on earth is one long moan of misery and pain, who never taste the joys of life or the blessings of health, but who, if God were all powerful, might as easily have been born straight and perfect as crooked and debilitated. We should not be compelled to witness the sufferings of innocent children, whose little lives have never been brightened by a gleam of pleasure, who in addition to the agony of their disease, frequently know the horrors of hunger and cold, who drag out a miserable existence of pain and wretchedness only to be relieved by premature death. Why did God allow these helpless babes to be born into the world ? He knew what suffering lay before them ; he had planned it all. What good lesson does the world learn from the torture of the little ones ? Would it not have been infinitely more merciful that life for such as these should never have been ?

When a human being constructs a piece of work or machinery that upon completion betrays grave and irreparable mistakes, he destroys it. He does not force it upon the world to annoy and perhaps injure those who might have to use it. How much better would it be if God, upon discovering that his work, through oversight, or some other cause, was defective, should painlessly extinguish the little flickering light that has barely come into existence and so save it from years of sorrow and suffering ! If God were all powerful we should not daily see the struggles of the virtuous against the oppression of the wicked ; the wretched poverty upon the one hand and the unnecessary wealth upon the other, and the subjection of the weak to the strong. Nor should we be dismayed by horrible and cruel wars which have ever been a curse to mankind, but for which, if the Bible be true, God is responsible. Were God all good he would send none into the world to die of starvation, but for one and all he would provide the necessaries of life.

Look for one moment upon the horrors of a railway accident. Have you ever tried to realise the anguish of such a scene? If you have, can you honestly and truly say that you believe God to be all good, all powerful and all wise? Have you pictured the familiar scene at the busy railway station; the crowds of people, men women and children, eager to take their seats in the train that they little dream is to prove their funeral car. Mothers with their little ones bidding a fond good-bye to husbands and fathers who are wishing them "God speed" (hollow mockery) and a pleasant holiday? Have you listened to the loving messages that are being sent to absent friends, heard the final order of the conductor and seen the huge locomotive steam noisily and hurriedly to its doom? Have you followed the scene a little further, witnessed the different pleasant occupations with which the passengers endeavour to beguile the tediousness of a railway journey? Suddenly, without a word of warning, an awful crash is heard, down a terrible abyss the dashing train is hurled, and in one moment woodwork, machinery and human beings are one mangled and shapeless mass of destruction? Have your ears been pierced with the shrieks and agonised cries of the sufferers; have you seen the dear little helpless and innocent children enduring such agonies that paralyse the stoutest hearted man; have you witnessed the tortures of the friends and relatives of these poor victims, and then can you believe that this horrible scene was ordained and permitted by a good God—a God who had it in his power to send them safely to their journey's end? It is monstrous, and I emphatically assert that unless the mind is warped and blunted in childhood it is an utter impossibility to believe in such a being. A pure, healthy brain could no more worship such a combination of wickedness and cruelty than it could believe in the idolatries and sacrifices of the most savage of the human race. The Hindoo mothers who throw their children beneath the wheels of the Juggernaut have at least the excuse of ignorance, an excuse which Christians would not care to boast. They profess to pity these poor, ignorant savages, and have the

assurance to beg for funds in order to send missionaries to convert them from the error of their ways. How dare they do it, when they set up in a civilised country, and before a civilised and cultivated people, an idol which has never been surpassed for cruelty and injustice? If I worship a God he must be superior to myself. His conduct must be merciful, humane and just. He must be a being who is not actuated by such weak and evil human passions as vacillation, partiality and revenge. My God must be ever ready to help the oppressed. He must ameliorate the condition of our poor working women, who toil from early morn to solemn midnight for a mere pittance that barely suffices to keep life within them. He must emancipate the oppressed nations of the earth and curb the power of their tyrants. He must bestow more loving care upon the children of the poor—let them enjoy some of the privileges and beauties of childhood, so that they may grow up better men and women. God knows, if he knows anything, that it is the early associations that make or mar the future men. When we look into the loathsome dens mockingly called homes, where so many thousands of these poor children exist, the marvel is not that crime and immorality are so rampant, but that they are so well controlled. It is comparatively an easy matter to be good when one is surrounded by every incentive to virtue, but there is the other side of the picture—the dull sordid poverty, the unutterable gloom never illuminated by one ray of sunlight, the gnawing pangs of poverty, the chilling blasts of cold. How can you expect virtue and honesty to grow in such surroundings? An all powerful God could change this dismal swamp into pleasant flowery meadows; he could give joy and comfort to all, and yet he withholds his hand. What greater proof is needed of the impotency of God's power than the frequent wholesale sweeping away of entire towns and villages? Our human hearts are torn with anguish as the horrible details are revealed to us. Tell me not, ye Christians, that your God had the power to prevent all this—do not accuse him of such fiendish indifference; rather believe there is no God than in-

vest him with qualities that would be revolting if possessed by the wildest savage.

God's acts as recorded in the Bible are one long series of cruelty, bloodshed and injustice, and if the Christian's belief is correct he has pursued the same course up to the present day. I don't see the slightest improvement in it. The men who were said to be most after God's own heart, and who found the most favour in his eyes, were those most celebrated for their cruelty. God ever arrays himself upon the side of the oppressor, and rewards the most revolting acts of immorality and barbarity. In the Bible it is said that he raised people up for no other purpose than to have the pleasure of mercilessly exterminating them. His treatment of Pharoah and the Egyptians is further proof of his injustice. According to the Bible, he hardened Pharoah's heart and inflicted a series of plagues upon him and his people because he did not do that which God had previously arranged he should not do. The fact of God being obliged to harden Pharoah's heart is evidence in favour of Pharaoh's natural goodness, and it must have been God's love of slaughter that prompted him to act as he did. Read the life of David, God's great favourite, and try and realise how such a character would influence the world. To an unprejudiced person, the whole career of David was one of immorality, cruelty and horror. Yet this man was esteemed by God above all others—the man after his own heart. Then again God was most unjustly partial. Although the father of all he selects one particular race upon whom he showers his principal benefits, and other people are required to be subservient to these chosen favourites or incur every horror it is possible for God to inflict. He is all powerful and yet he contrived to be at enmity with his children the greater part of his time. In spite of his god-like power they grow more wicked every day and he less capable of controlling them. How can sensible people believe in such folly and inconsistency as this? How can they devote time and money in worshipping such a "Heavenly Father" and ignore the wants and claims of their fellow-men? Why don't they harken to the

promptings of their better nature and sound common sense and strive to rescue the masses from the power of the priestcraft of the Church, the allurements of dogmas and the liberty-destroying influence of foolish and bygone creeds ?

I once listened to a "Thanksgiving" sermon, and was perfectly amazed at the egotism and selfishness of its tone. The minister offered up earnest and profound thanks for the bountiful harvest God had been pleased to bestow upon his favoured lands, but I waited in vain for words of pity for the nations whose crops had been ruined by drought or utterly destroyed by floods, for words of sympathy for the wretched men, women and little helpless children who had to face a cruel death of slow but sure starvation, for words of explanation why God, who was all good and all powerful, should, while favouring one band of his children, so unjustly afflict another. Apparently, one portion of the Bible is true—God evidently did raise people up to have the pleasure of mercilessly exterminating them. But don't believe it ; rather think that this vast universe is governed by some law or power of which we have not gained full knowledge ; increase your efforts, with the aid of science and investigation, to prevent such disasters in the future, and endeavour to alleviate by every means in your power the sufferings of those who are so direly afflicted.

III. THE FALL AND THE ATONEMENT.

These Christian doctrines constitute, to my mind, the very essence of absurdity, cruelty and injustice. The Atonement, which is the basis of orthodox Christianity, was, it is said, necessary in consequence of the sin of those who are termed our first parents. God created man and placed him in the Garden of Eden. After a little while, finding it was not good for man to live alone, he sent woman to be a helpmeet to him. In the garden was placed a tree which was called the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and of this tree Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat. Not being a man I am not in a position to say whether

Adam would have had strength of mind sufficient to prevent him from touching it if Eve had not persuaded him, but, as a woman, I can positively assert that I should not have known one happy moment until I had solved the mystery, and I feel perfectly sure that if I had been in Eve's place, and tasted how good the fruit was, I should have been most desirous to share the dainty with my Adam. Eve would not have been a woman at all if she had not yielded to the temptation, and God must have known this, but, not content with implanting in her nature the full share of curiosity, which has been uninterruptedly handed down to all her daughters up to the present time, he must needs create a serpent which, according to the Book of Genesis, was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. Fortunately for us (women) this serpent was a male, thus proving that the greater amount of wickedness was even at that early stage possessed by those of the masculine gender, and they have firmly and undeniably maintained their right to its possession ever since.

To an unbelieving mind the creation of this serpent appears to be an unnecessary and a wicked act. God must have known, according to popular theology, that the serpent must tempt Eve to eat the forbidden fruit; indeed, he must have planned it, and to punish them for doing that which he had arranged they should do was a wanton exercise of power, and such that no reasonable being should be guilty of. God then curses them all in turn. He commences with the serpent and says: "Because thou hast done this thou art cursed above all cattle; upon thy belly thou shalt go, and eat dust shalt thou all the days of thy life." I am sorry the account didn't tell us the mode of locomotion the serpent adopted on entering the garden before the curse fell upon him, for then we should be able to judge if the one to which he was now condemned was likely to prove much of a punishment. I have examined serpents with considerable interest and curiosity, and I fail to see, according to their style of architecture, how any other mode could be so comfortable; and, considering how very important was the part this reptile played

in the great drama of our life, I assert he was let off very easily and did not receive one tithe of his deserts. To the woman the curse was most terrible, and one that could never have emanated from an all good and merciful God, and which would cause me to reject him as "Our Father," even had I no other reason for doing so. Because Eve yields to the temptation of eating the fruit which God had arranged she should eat, he curses her with the most terrible curse that could ever befall a woman. He cause what should be one of the most beautiful acts in connection with nature, the ushering of a new life into the world, to be attended with so much agony and suffering that many a woman yields up her own life in giving birth to her child, and the event that should be hailed with delight is consequently contemplated with dread. In truth it was a heavy punishment to inflict for a trivial sin, if, indeed, it were a sin. God then cursed Adam, and having now exhausted his animate subjects he turned his attention to the inanimate, and cursed the ground for bringing forth the tree, the fruit of which they had eaten, although, upon the Christian hypothesis, the tree never would have grown if the all wise and all powerful God had not imparted to the ground the necessary vitality for its growth. Read such an account in any other book than the Bible and it would be cast aside with scorn and contempt. Is it not utterly unreasonable to believe that the sin and misery that exist in the world were brought about by so trivial and absurd a cause? Instead of letting the time roll on and the people become more and more depraved each day, why did not God at this early stage of the disasters wipe out all his work and, profiting by his past experience, make a new world and new people that should be free from the disturbing elements that proved to be stronger than the all powerful God himself?

This act of disobedience on the part of our "first parents" is supposed to have been the cause of man's depravity and alleged fall, and to have necessitated the Atonement. The conclusion to which any ordinary thinking person must arrive upon reading this remarkable history, is that God blundered most sadly in his

work. The whole Christian scheme of redemption is in reality founded on God's mistake. But the most unjust part of this doctrine is that posterity has to suffer for the supposed fault of two people which really was no fault at all, and in consequence of this one act in the Garden of Eden the whole of human nature is said to be depraved. Being unable to remedy in any other manner the evils he had caused, God determines to send his son to die as a means of atoning for the sin Adam and Eve had committed. How God became possessed of this son, who is stated to be as old as himself, we need not go into now—we shall assume that he was God's son and deal with him as such. Would it not have been possible for God in his all-wisdom to have devised some less brutalising scheme for the redemption of the world than the sacrifice of his son, who was pure and innocent, who had committed no fault, and who therefore had no right to suffer penalties for others? What good lesson can be derived from such a doctrine as that of the Atonement? Could not God have made Christ more serviceable for the regeneration of mankind by permitting him to live than by condemning him to die? With a character as perfect as Christ is credited to have possessed what benefits he could have bestowed upon us in the form of example, good and pure teachings and a noble and useful life. Instead of suffering a cruel and torturing death he might have gone about the world preaching the faith that was to save mankind. How he met that death, how he made the sacrifice for which he was sent down to earth, how he prayed that the cup might pass from him is familiar to all. His dying scene would not be creditable to a human being, in a God it is indeed pitiable.

What good results did the Atonement bring about? Was it useful? Did it succeed in abolishing crime and in destroying the supposed depravity of man's nature? Did it save man from the consequences of his sin? Only conditionally, for practically Christ's sacrifice was useless unless men believe in him with blind and unquestioning faith. A life of good deeds and honest endeavour will, according to the Christian faith, count for nothing on the judgment day, unless you have unreservedly yielded up

your judgment and your reason and prostrated yourself humbly and unquestioningly upon the altar of submissive faith. Did it remove the curse from woman? Not a jot, she still has to suffer in agony and sorrow as in the days before the advent of Christ. I cannot believe in this doctrine of the Atonement; and as its acceptance is necessary if I adopt Christianity I prefer to reject it, having firmer faith in the goodness of human nature than in the blood of Christ, a stronger belief in human efforts than reliance upon a crucified Saviour. The more men and women study themselves the more they discover their own power, and the more they cultivate their own intellectual greatness the less they will depend upon Christ, who, whatever his value might have been, was evidently impotent to redeem the world from ignorance, moral darkness and intellectual subjection.

IV. THE BASIS AND INCENTIVE OF ORTHODOX MORALITY.

Practically the foundation of morality as taught by popular Christianity is the hope of heaven and the dread of hell. This Christian doctrine of rewards and punishments is a severe stumbling block in the path of the unprejudiced thinker and searcher for truth. We should require no incentive for doing good beyond the desire to confer happiness upon our fellow creatures; no reward for leading virtuous lives beyond that which accompanies a virtuous act and the knowledge of its service to our kind. To perform a good deed only because it will secure our individual happiness is mean and selfish, and those who are influenced by such a pitiful motive will seldom rise to any grandeur of thought or nobleness of purpose. The Christian faith condemns the majority of our race to a burning hell for not believing that which God has so ordained that they cannot believe. Upon God, therefore, rests the burden of such unbelief. If he be all-powerful, he should so have ordered men's thoughts that they would never have gone in opposition to his will. Instead of this he endows the human family with reasoning faculties, and because they use those faculties he

punishes them for doing precisely what he has intended they should do.

The wonderful attractions of such an everlasting life as that offered by the orthodox religion I utterly fail to see. I would far rather believe that when my end on earth had come, I should lie down to sleep the everlasting sleep that knows no waking. Eternal rest is surely preferable to perpetual torture, and annihilation to a continued sense of suffering. The picture of heaven as depicted by St. John has no charm for me. I have no desire to enter such an abode nor have I sufficient respect for the character of the venerable patriarch Abraham to be desirous of occupying a resting-place on his bosom. If I might be allowed a choice in the matter, and as the location selected is to be mine "for ever" I think I ought to be, there are several other bosoms I should infinitely prefer to his, and I most willingly waive my claim in favour of any one desirous of taking it.

Those who accept the belief in heaven must not ignore the other side of the picture—hell; for there is just as much evidence in favour of the one as there is of the other, although, when dilating upon the advantages of their creed, Christians are apt to ignore this view of the subject. When speaking of an eternity of happiness, do they ever think of an eternity of misery to which, according to the Bible, so many of their fellow creatures are condemned? How could they be happy, even if fortunate enough to secure for themselves a passport to heaven, if they were conscious that any unhappy victim was writhing in agony below? The idea of the orthodox hell is so revolting that many of the more advanced and intellectual Christians have given it up, but they do so contrary to the evidence presented in the New Testament, and they have no right to throw over this feature of the future life they promise the believer, unless they discard the heaven they cling to so fondly. If they accept the one they should not, to be consistent, ignore the other. If the New Testament heaven is in their eyes an everlasting fact, then the New Testament hell is a living reality

But it is only those believers who endeavour to keep up with the times, who try to explain away the hideousness of this eternal punishment. There are, unfortunately, many orthodox Christians who still hold its horrid tortures over the heads of the young children, and it becomes a duty incumbent upon all who are free from this horrible nightmare to do their utmost to expose its absurdity whenever and wherever they have the opportunity. Apart from the cruelty of this doctrine, it is thoroughly useless from a reformatory point of view? it loses the character of punishment and assumes the aspect of revenge because it leaves no opportunity for improvement. No crime ever committed would warrant an eternity of punishment, and the God who could devise such torture as the God of the Bible is reported to have done, is not a being to command our love and admiration, but on the contrary, he merits our abhorrence and distrust.

Men and women who reject these doctrines can and do lead as good, true and pure lives as those who endorse them. If we accept the definition of the word "morality" as embodying that which is useful, the Secularists suffer nothing by comparison. Some of the teachings of Christ are highly inimical to the welfare of society and would, if acted upon, do much towards retarding the march of progress. He taught an utter disregard for this world, which would be most disastrous if followed out; he enjoins his followers to take no thought for their lives, and advises them to "resist not evil." He upheld poverty and preached, "Blessed be ye poor." Can a doctrine be useful that teaches a man to be contented in a state of poverty? If a person be contented, he makes no effort to improve his condition; his contentment frequently degenerates into apathy and he gradually assumes the role of a careless, indifferent being who is never roused to do any good work that may improve his own position or that of his fellow-creatures. We must, however, do human nature the justice of recording that very few are insane enough to follow out this teaching. Many, alas! too many, may be found who are called upon to endure this poverty which

Christ prescribed as so good for their constitution, but it would be difficult to find one who would not eagerly exchange this "blessing" for the "curse" of a portion of this world's goods. Have the wealthy Cardinals and Archbishops, Bishops and Right Reverends no uneasy qualms for the manner in which they have set Christ's advice at defiance? Have they no fear as to their ultimate end? Are they not afraid the riches they enjoy on earth may prove a barrier to their entrance into heaven on the Day of Judgment? Their common sense overcomes their faith; they evidently firmly believe in and act up to the truth of the old adage, that "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," and if they ignore the one teaching, "Blessed be ye poor," they endeavour to atone for their sin by believing most profoundly in another from the same book, "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof;" so they endeavour to make the best of this world, get all they can procure of its good things, and are quite content to take their chance in the next.

Now this is precisely what we as Secularists do—we certainly try to make the best of this world, but we differ very materially from the Christian on one point. The true believer in Christ upholds poverty—for his neighbours, not himself; the Secularist condemns it. He counsels all to be ever striving for improvement and advancement, not from selfish motives, but from a desire to promote the common good. The Christian preaches contentment for the poor in this life, and promises that they shall be amply rewarded when they reach the next. The Secularist advises all to glean as much comfort and happiness as they can from this world, as it is by no means certain that there is any other in which they can do any gleaning. He would impress upon all human beings the desirability of leading good moral lives, of being conscientious and honest in their dealings with their fellow men, of doing what good they can for the whole world irrespective of creeds and religions. If God exist, and if he be a good God, those who follow out these teachings will succeed in winning his approbation. They need have no fear of being condemned to hell to suffer an eternity of punishment for

no other reason than a disbelief in the cruelties, inaccuracies and absurdities of one particular Book. Those who have no faith in Christianity or the possibility of a future life need have no difficulty in believing that should there be a heaven they, by doing their duty to their fellow-creatures, by endeavouring to check vice and seeking to inculcate a love for virtue; by striving to alleviate suffering and working to promote happiness, will win admission into that abode notwithstanding the fact that they did not believe in the infallibility of the Bible, never attended "divine worship," nor subscribed to any particular creed. A good God must be a just God, and this very justice would not allow him to consign any of his children to a burning hell for an unbelief which he himself, according to the Christian hypothesis, was responsible for.

I have heard Christians speak with horror of the fact that Secularists have no hope after death, no prospect of reunion with those they have loved in life, and they put this assertion forward as if it were one of the greatest arguments against Secularism. What is the truth and wherein lies the difference between the Christian and the Secularist? The former simply *believes* he will live again and enjoy an eternity of happiness, but he has no proof that it is more than a belief. The Secularist instead of wasting valuable time in prayers and supplications to a Being of whom he has no knowledge, or in ignoring the duties and responsibilities of the world of which he knows so much, contents himself with the reflection that should there be another world, a place established to reward the labours and struggles of a well spent life on earth, he by doing his duty here, is equally certain to share any advantages that are to be distributed as is the Christian. "Resist not evil" is an injurious and impossible teaching. Fortunately for the safety and well-being of society the religious body practically ignore it, although by doing so they are placing themselves in opposition to Christ. The bad qualities of man which God so bountifully bestowed upon him in the manufacturing, and which are so productive of evil, cannot be permitted to run riot—they must be resisted, hence the

necessity for police courts, prisons and reformatories. We owe all our good and glorious reforms to the grand truth that evil was resisted. Luther resisted the dominancy of Roman Catholicism, which was a tremendous evil. George Washington, when he took up arms and fought against the oppressions of English Monarchy ; Oliver Cromwell, when he rebelled against the Court of Charles the First, exhibited the fallacy of the non-resistance doctrine. Garibaldi passed most of his life in his endeavours to resist evil. The impracticability of this teaching should be plain to all, and what has been proved to be thoroughly impracticable cannot be good, because not useful. We all know that Christians do not follow out the teachings of the New Testament, but that only serves to illustrate either that their faith cannot be reduced to common every-day practice, or that they are inconsistent, if not dishonest, in professing what their nature forbids them carrying out.

V. CHRISTIANITY NOT A NECESSITY TO MANKIND.

A belief in Christianity is not necessary in order to induce people to live good moral lives, nor is it a deterrent in the case of vice. If men or women are morally diseased Christianity has no power to deter them from the commission of evil deeds. They will sin again and again, unless detected and prevented by the strong arm of the law ; and when they have reached the end of their tether, when outraged society at last decides to place them where they can do no further harm, these hardened sinners are cheered and consoled by the thought that if they repent at the eleventh hour all will be forgiven, and they can unhesitatingly take their place among the noblest and best of earth's sons. The world cannot be guided by a system that is impracticable, therefore the New Testament teachings are valueless to the Secularist. He looks to nature, and, by studying her great problems, finds no difficulty in discovering the rules of life ; experience will teach him what is best to promote the well-being of himself and fellows, and the same great teacher will show him what to avoid. When nature fails to assist him it

will be quite time enough to look about for other aid, and to try to ascertain if there is anything beyond nature, and if so, what it is.

There is not a nobler and more instructive sentence in the whole Bible than that memorable one of Thomas Paine's, "The world is my country—to do good is my religion." This embodies all that is good, great, and true in nature. If, instead of men pinning their faith to any one creed they would follow out the words of Paine, what a different place this world would be. We should not then have to read of long courses of tyranny and oppression practised by one religious body towards another because they disagreed as to the manner in which God should be worshipped, but we should find a growing love and respect for individual thought, a more lenient bearing to those who differ from us in matters of opinion, and a general desire to work for the improvement of mankind, no matter to what nation or religion they belonged. Instead of having in our midst a stern and cold theology which has ever obstructed human happiness and mental elevation, we should try to foster a deeper regard for humanity, and unbiassed by creeds or dogmas seek to purify it from the taints of ecclesiastical influence by a consistent moral training. The guiding principle to regulate present conduct should not be based upon decrees of past Councils, but rather on the accumulated lessons of experience and observation. The highest religion is humanity, and the noblest worship is service to mankind. Most sensible people who aspire in the smallest degree to keeping up with the times have ceased to regard prayer as a potent means of obtaining material help; they prove beyond doubt day by day that they deem the assistance obtainable from science to be far preferable to prostration before and supplication to an imaginary being. They have been forced to recognise that the inequalities and despotisms under which our forefathers suffered were not removed by prayer, but through determined human efforts—in other words, through resisting evil. The drawbacks to modern civilisation and progress are being lessened, not by Evangelical Associations, not by Church

Congresses, not by huge Methodist Conventions, but by persistent Secular efforts, such as Social Science gatherings and Co-operative Conferences. These are agents that were unknown in strictly Christian times; they are the product of Freethought development and an extensive Secular propaganda. No student would care to dispute the fact that when Christianity was triumphant humanity was at its lowest ebb. No sooner did the power of the Church decline than the dignity and independence of mankind asserted their growing vitality.

I am one of the fortunate ones who started unhandicapped in the great race of life and thought. I owe grateful thanks to Secular parents for a mind entirely free from any phase of superstition, and I speak from experience when I say how utterly impossible it is to become a believer in the Bible and its God, unless you take your doses of faith with your earliest nourishment. My position enables me to accept all that is good and useful wherever it may be found, and I may reject what does not please me without suffering mental tortures as to my ultimate fate for so doing. Fortunately indications are not wanting even in the churches themselves that the coming years will be a glorious improvement on the present. Looking forward into the future there is a bright and happy picture. This world of wealth and beauty, inhabited by men and women whose minds, no longer torn by conflicting doubts, are all united by the great bond of their common sympathy. The churches no longer used for the purpose of teaching lessons that can never be put into practice, but devoted to the study of science and art, which knowledge shall assist us to improve this already beautiful world. A race of people whose training and education prompt them ever to assist the weak and to resist the oppressor, whose desire for the common good and happiness is so great that they could not be happy if they knew that any of their fellow creatures were not enjoying the same advantages as themselves, and who would strive as earnestly to promote the well-being of others as they would their own. A time when wars shall be unknown, when all differences of thought shall be arranged by reason and not by

force: A time when poverty shall be no more, when every man, woman and child shall taste of the beauties of life and never know the heart-consuming anguish of despair. It is true that a great many years may come and go before this picture is realised, but surely it is not beyond the bounds of possibility. It is upon work and fidelity to duty that its future success in a great measure depends. Each member of society should strive to lead such a life as will reflect credit upon himself and also inspire others to do likewise; he must be prepared to do that which is right for the sake of right itself, because it will tend to increase the happiness of others as well as his own. They must gather the gems of truth and beauty wherever they can find them, whether it be from the Bible, the Koran, or from any of our great poets and philosophers. Faith must make way for Reason, which will prove a guide to the discovery of the good of all systems. Live up to the principles professed and profess none in which there is not a firm belief. Follow this course consistently, and although at first it may not win the patronage of the bigot or the consent of the orthodox, it will gain what is far above these—the approval of the men and women of thought, of science and integrity, and above all it will sow the seeds of a tree of knowledge immeasurably superior to the one that produced such disastrous results in the Garden of Eden, the fruit of which, instead of debasing and demoralising its partakers, shall confer everlasting happiness, moral purity, and intellectual elevation upon every member of the human race.

THE END.