

SOME RELIGIOUS TERMS

SIMPLY DEFINED

(FOR THE USE OF CHILDREN)

BY

E. L. MARSDEN

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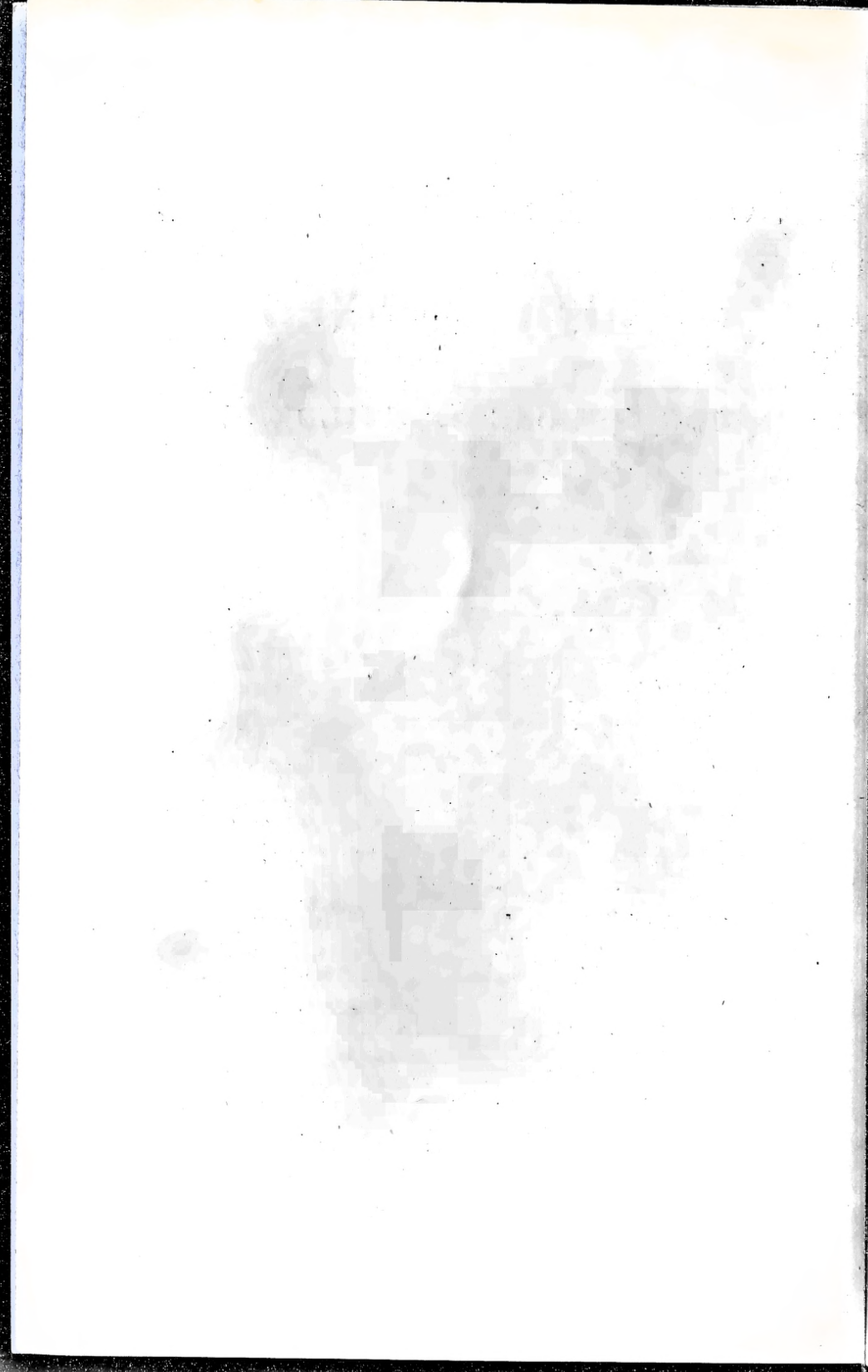
NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

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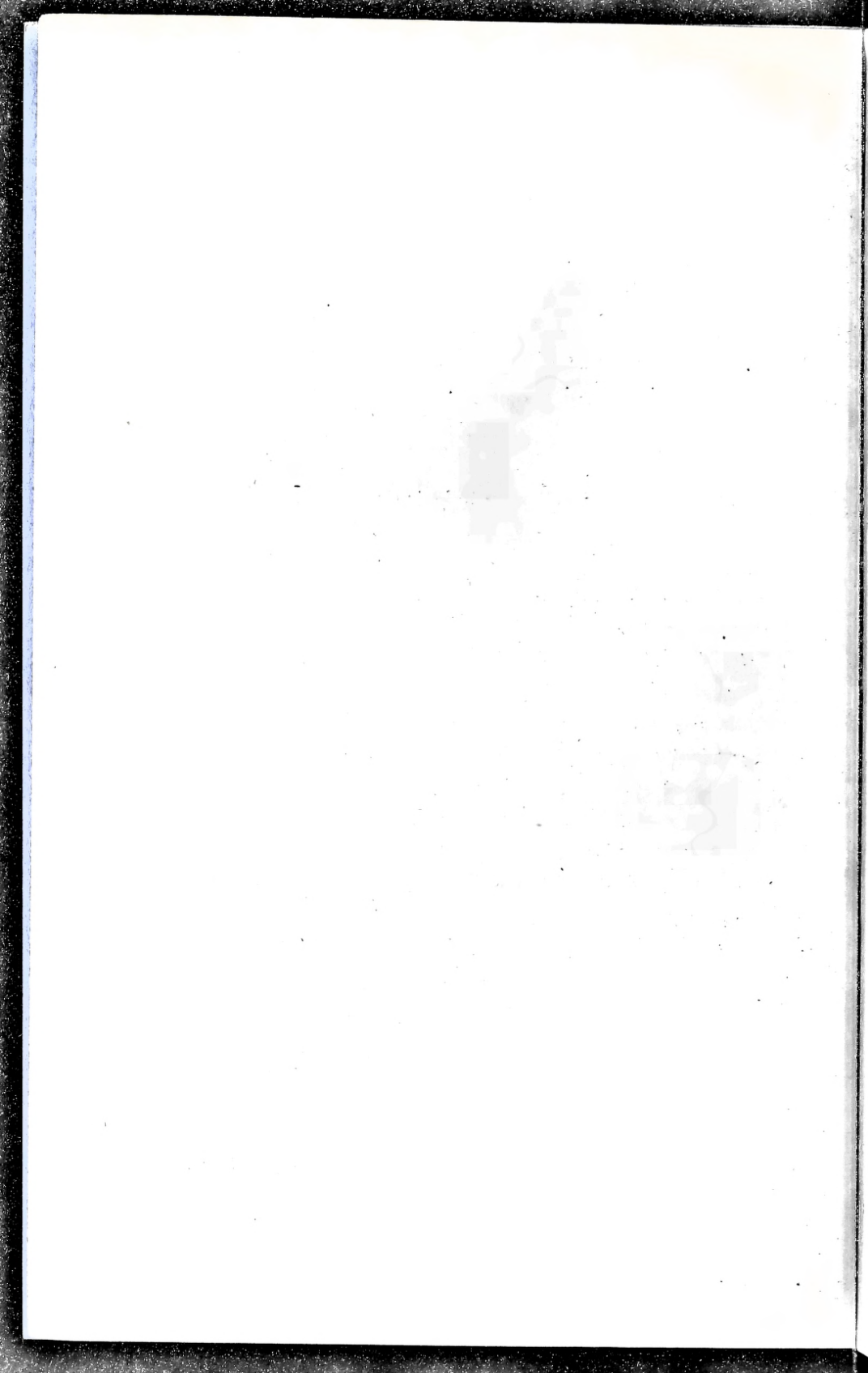
FOREWORD

THE result of "pious" parents beginning to teach children at an early age theology, prayers, catechisms, etc., is that many children learn to use words without having any definite conception of their meaning. This is intellectually injurious, and as a rule awakens a mere superstition founded to a large degree on false history. I have here attempted to explain in a rational manner and as simply as possible the meaning of a few of those expressions which children are constantly using and hearing used, words of whose meaning they have but the vaguest idea.

This pamphlet is written in the hope that a simple explanation of some of the more common words used daily in religious instruction may be of benefit to the young, and possibly to a few of their teachers.

May, 1914.

E. L. M.



SOME RELIGIOUS TERMS SIMPLY DEFINED



BIBLE TEACHING

RELIGION appears to be the only subject in which teachers make no use of the most recent authorities and the latest discoveries. The practice of most Christian ministers, and of many other teachers of religion, of ignoring modern Biblical criticism amounts to a scandal. Children are given the impression that the Bible is for us what it was for our ancestors. Congregations are kept in ignorance of what has taken place in historical research, textual criticism, and comparative mythology; they are not informed that, however useful and edifying as parables the old tales of the Bible may be, those tales have no claim to be treated as historically true. Knowledge and research have shown that the traditional theories about the Bible are no longer tenable; but many children from their earliest years are given utterly false impressions on the subject. It is not honest to preach as if the Bible consists of absolutely trustworthy documents when scholarship, both Christian and secular, knows them to be otherwise. The old matter-of-course assumption of the divinely guaranteed accuracy of the Old Testament has disappeared from the minds of the well-educated, and no well-informed person treats the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch as anything but unsupported tradition.

Some few years ago the *Encyclopædia Biblica* was issued, the purpose of which was to ascertain the real facts and to state them. This book is the work of some of the greatest of the world's Biblical students, and it sums up, supported by a mass of learning, the conclusions of modern criticism. A glance at the list of contributors will show the large number of scholarly Churchmen who have abandoned the theory of the literal truth of the Bible. We

learn from these volumes that the creation story originated in a stock of primitive myths common to the Semitic races, and is almost identical with the Babylonian myth; that the very existence of the Old Testament patriarchs is uncertain; that the whole book of Genesis is not history, but a narrative based on older records, long since lost; that the story of Joseph was compiled in the seventh century B.C.; that the book of Exodus is a legend; that it is doubtful whether Moses is the name of an individual or of a clan; that the alleged origin of the Ten Commandments is purely traditional; that it is very doubtful whether David wrote any of the Psalms; that everything in the Gospels is uncertain; that we do not know when Jesus was born, when he died, or who was his father; that the supposed virgin birth has no evidence in its favour; that it is impossible to separate the truth from doubtful legend and symbolical embroidery in any of the Gospels; that the accounts of the Resurrection exhibit contradictions of the most glaring kind; that the view that the four gospels bearing the names of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were written by them and appeared thirty or forty years after the death of Jesus can no longer be maintained, nor can they be regarded as credible narratives; that the genuineness of the Pauline Epistles is far from clear. These and a hundred other conclusions can be found in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, wherein eminent Christian scholars proclaim results quite contrary to the usual orthodox teachings.

Nevertheless, dogmas discarded by enlightened Christian ministers continue to be taught to our children, whereas real religion, the development and direction of the moral and spiritual feelings, is neglected to a great extent. Highly as we may prize the Bible, a system of instruction which makes it a fetish tends to degrade it, and it is much to be regretted that it should be so much misused in religious education. To treat as solemn fact every Hebrew legend and impossible miracle, to try to harmonize Old Testament fables of lust, slaughter, and deceit approved by Jehovah with the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount, can do nothing but harm; to teach a child the story of the Fall as historically true when he will soon know that man has not fallen, but gradually risen, can only unsettle his mind.

If we were to exclude the idea of absolute historical accuracy in teaching the Bible, we should eliminate much unreality and insincerity from the moral atmosphere. It is not the book, but the conventional superstition with which it is treated, that is at fault. Treated with

intelligent discrimination, it will always have its educational value, but it cannot supply the place of instruction in real religion, in the morals of daily life. Scripture is one thing, morality another.

Now that many ministers of all sects admit that nearly every book in the Old Testament is of unknown authorship, and much of it is mythical and fabulous, it is time that we should protest against our children being taught that the Fall, the Deluge, the plagues of Egypt, the massacres in Canaan, etc., are part of an infallible and divine revelation; that view is gone except for the grossly ignorant, and to cause children to regard these stories as authentic history is demoralizing both to teachers and taught.

RELIGION AND THEOLOGY

RELIGION is not the observance of forms and ceremonies, for men may observe these and be wholly wanting in religious life; nor is it the belief in some particular creed, for men have held every kind of orthodox creed and yet been quite impious. Religion is a state of the heart and feelings, a state of reverence, awe, love, or dependence, according to the character of the divine object presented to the mind. Religion is the feeling, theology is the attempted explanation of that feeling; hence religion must precede theology, and they may exist independently of each other.

Questions of theology, "historical criticism" of Scripture, and such subjects, are of undoubted importance, but are not matters of religion. The end of religious education should be the development and direction of the moral and spiritual feelings, and instruction in the morals of daily life, leading to the victory over Self. Theology is the supposed knowledge as to God and the unknown, and what man believes about supernatural beings and about those things at present inexplicable by any known laws of nature. Such beliefs should be freely discussed, but not made the subject of ridiculous quarrels, as no human being *knows* the truth about these matters; and it should be remembered that man's early theological beliefs, which we are asked to accept, were due to the limitations of his knowledge and experience.

TRUTH AND LAWS OF NATURE

TRUTH is the most perfect knowledge attainable concerning any given question, and such knowledge is what we depend upon for the highest ends of life. Truth is acquired by experience and study, and the only permanent truths are those of observation and inference. Formerly they were few; but with modern scientific development they are increasing rapidly, and they stand apart from truths derived from supposed revelations. The latter's durability is comparatively short; there are everywhere traces of extinct religions once devoutly believed. Real truths are always in harmony, not so theological truths; time strengthens the one and weakens the other. When we seek truth, we are seeking a knowledge of that which is capable of verification and proof. In science, the truth is a statement giving a correct representation of facts; in theology, the truth is a statement supposed to be in accordance with the particular revelation which is accepted. Science appeals to facts; theology appeals to supposed miracles, and asks us to believe in a number of events contrary to all experience, on the authority of unknown writers. "Laws of nature" means the invariable order in which facts occur, all facts being links in an endless chain of cause and effect; one single exception to this invariable order, and it cannot be a law of nature. Truth is founded upon laws of nature.

REVELATION AND REASON

IN the history of the human race there have been many so-called "revelations" claiming to teach us things we should not otherwise know. Such are the Zoroastrian, Brahman, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, Mohammedan; they all claim divine origin, and each condemns the others as unreliable and incomplete. In separating what is true from what is false in these various revelations, or in accepting one of them as the only true one, we must use our judgment. It follows, therefore, that our reason is a higher authority than revelation, for we cannot believe anything without

the approval of our reason. (What people *say* they believe is a different matter.)

In all the revelations and bibles there are many mistakes in history and science, and numerous contradictions. Such mistakes are natural, as all these bibles are the work of man. All we can do is to follow the best light we have—our reason; for even if it sometimes leads us into error, we have nothing better to follow. In the name of Revelation or the "Word of God" many of the worst crimes have been committed, and some of the world's noblest men have either known nothing of it or disbelieved in it.

Many people in this country believe that the ancient Jews were specially favoured with a revelation; while the Greeks, the most advanced people of antiquity, had none. If this were true, it would show that morality and intelligence are possible without revelation, and are in no way dependent upon it. Those who believe in revelation think that it makes truth known to us by "inspiration." If so, these questions arise: What is inspiration? How are inspired thoughts distinguished from uninspired? and, How did the selectors choose between genuine and spurious? These questions have never been answered.

GOD

By the word "God" is meant the power which exists behind the facts of the universe. If such a power exists, its nature is unknown and unknowable. The popular idea of God is that he is a Person who created the universe, that he knows and sees everything and is everywhere; also that he is just and holy. Man has made God in his own image, consequently God has grown better as man has improved in intelligence and character. The God of the savage was a savage; the God of the ancient Jews, as represented in the Old Testament, was bloodthirsty, vindictive, jealous, and petty; the God of the Christians was a being who punished the errors of this brief life with eternal torments. This is still the opinion of many Christians, but it is difficult to understand how anyone can believe this horrible doctrine. God has been known by different names in different countries—Zeus, Jove, Ormuzd, Brahm, Jehovah, Allah, among others; he is also called the Supreme Being,

the Infinite, the First Cause, Nature, etc. Some people when they say God mean a person, others an idea. Belief in several Gods was the earliest belief of all nations. It is quite clear from the Old Testament that the ancient Jews believed in other Gods, of whom their God was jealous.

The sun, moon, mountains, rivers, animals, almost everything, have been regarded as Gods, and men have prayed to them and sacrificed to them. As mankind advanced in knowledge the belief in Gods decreased, and now nearly all educated people believe either in one God or in none. The old argument that, as every effect must have a cause, the universe must have a cause which is God, is met by the obvious rejoinder that, if every effect must have a cause, God must also have a cause. It is just as easy or difficult to imagine a universe without a cause as a God without a cause. The existence of God cannot be demonstrated, but is a very general belief. Each man makes his own God, which word represents the highest ideal of the individual. Hence one man's God may be better and nobler than that of another, as each man is the measure of his own ideal or God. Theologians who profess belief in an all-wise, all-powerful, and all-good God have never been able to give a rational explanation of all the pain, misery, and evil which exists in the world, and some have believed that God allows an evil spirit, Satan, to tempt everybody. If God had wished sin to abound, what more could he have done than to appoint a being to the office of tempting mankind at all times and places? Any parent who allowed his children to associate with bad characters would deserve censure.

PRAYER

PRAYER is a supplication to God, or a desire for communion with him. No one prays to laws of nature or to great ideals; prayers are always addressed to a personal God. But the idea of a God and a person is incongruous. To be a God is to be infinite; to be a person is to be finite. Prayer originated in a desire to appease the anger or secure the favour of invisible beings. When after a long period of drought a minister prays for rain, it is in the belief that God caused the drought, and can be persuaded to discontinue it. As a drought does not last for ever, such prayers are apparently

answered. It may happen that some people are praying God to do what other people are just as earnestly praying him not to do, and such prayers imply that God is an individual ready to adapt himself to the convenience of everybody. There is no reason to believe that God has any less control over the law of gravity than over the weather, but people never pray to have the law of gravity suspended for their benefit; they know such law is inviolable, and they will stop praying about the weather when they learn that the laws governing it are equally inviolable.

It is said that God demands that his creatures should continually address him in terms of glorification and endearment. Such an idea insults God; a really great and good being would not constantly want our prayers and laudations. The idea, of course, came from the East, where sultans can only be approached with presents and salaams. Prayer makes men look for help outside themselves, and thus weakens their self-dependence. When we offer flattery, build churches, give money, etc., to obtain a favour it is an attempt to corrupt God by bribery. It makes morality and justice of less importance than rites, prayers, and dogmas. It is inconsistent with any high ideal of God that he will be influenced by prayers and praise. Public prayer is less desirable than private prayer, as it is formal and not spontaneous, professional and not personal. Even in the New Testament Jesus is reported as saying that we should not pray in public (Matthew vi, 5-6).

CHRISTIANITY

It may be said that the Christian revelation has exerted more influence in the world than any other, as it has helped to shape the history of the first-class nations. This particular revelation is found in a book called the Holy Bible, divided into two parts—the Old Testament and the New Testament. It consists of sixty-six books, written by different authors at different periods in different languages and in different countries; these books were gradually collected into one volume by religious councils. The Old Testament relates the history of the Jews, their laws, customs, and wars. This history is not materially different from that of other primitive people, and there is no reason why it should be regarded as the "Word of God."

The New Testament consists of a number of writings collected about one hundred-and-fifty years after the death of Jesus Christ, and of these writings we have no knowledge of the authorship, with the possible exception of four letters of Paul and one of James. The titles, "The Gospel according to Matthew," etc., represent the opinion of the editors or translators; and probably the name of an apostle was used to give the work greater authority. The apostles, expecting the world would end in their lifetime, did not write their own messages.

There were many other gospels besides those in the New Testament; but they have been excluded as being doubtful—that is, they did not receive the necessary number of votes in ecclesiastical councils to be considered inspired. The books of the Bible were written in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic; and as the original manuscripts from which our English Bible is said to have been translated are not in existence, we do not know that the translation is accurate. Our translation is from the supposed copies of the lost originals, which copies were produced possibly hundreds of years after the originals had been lost, so that we cannot know that the copies are reliable.

The Christian revelation teaches that humanity was originally perfect, that it fell into sin, and that a select few may escape through faith in the atoning death of Jesus Christ. We now know that the human race has been ascending slowly, and that incarnation and atonement are world-wide myths. We also realize that the idea of a guilty person pardoned through the atoning death of an innocent victim has no moral value. Christianity, in the light of modern knowledge of comparative mythology, is one member of a large family of religions (Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Mohammedan, etc.) which in one form or another are co-extensive with the history of humanity. Christianity might have led on to true religion, but has taken its place; in its petrified form it holds prisoner the forces of real religion.

THE CANON OF THE BIBLE

THE "canon" of the Bible consists of those books which ecclesiastical councils have declared of divine authority; this canon has not always been the same. The earliest Christians

regarded only the Old Testament as the word of God, and the Apostolic Fathers apparently did not look upon the New Testament as of equal authority with the Old. Schisms between early Christians gave rise to the idea of a canon; a generally accepted word of God was necessary, and the demand created the supply.

The first reference to a canon was in the latter half of the second century. In 352 A.D. the canon of the Emperor Constantine was produced, and contained the present number of books except the book of Revelation. Many books in the Bible have been questioned at various times. Luther did not regard the book of Revelation and the Epistle of James as part of God's word. The Roman Catholic Bible contains seventy-two books, as it includes as inspired some books that Protestants reject. Roman Catholics hold that it is the Church that gives the Bible its authority, and do not allow private interpretation of it; while Protestants look upon it as infallible, but each individual must read and interpret it for himself. The Holy Spirit does not, apparently, reveal the same meaning of the Scriptures to all readers; for, in spite of the assumed infallible revelation, all Protestants are not agreed on such important questions as Baptism, Predestination, Eternal Punishment, Atonement, and the Divinity of Jesus.

Apart from the fact that the meaning of the Bible is not clear to everybody, the objection to an inspired book is that it limits the possession of truth to one people or race, and makes it a thing of the long past; it makes research needless, and gives the Church power to suppress new truth. Fortunately, the Bible's power for harm is decreasing now that we are beginning to regard it as the literature of a primitive and uninformed people. It is only worshipped as infallible by the least educated of mankind.

JESUS AND HIS TEACHINGS

THE prevailing belief about Jesus is that he was both God and man, that he was begotten by the Holy Ghost, that he was without sin, that he worked miracles, and was equal to God. We have only the word of man on the subject, and, as all religions have claimed power to work miracles, there is no reason for treating the miraculous element in the life of Jesus in any other way than

we treat the same in the life of Buddha, Moses, or Mohammed. All our knowledge of Jesus is contained in broken records of a few months in the last year of his life.

"Towards the middle of the second century A.D. certain documents are found to be in circulation professing to describe the life of a religious teacher who had lived in a remote part of the Empire more than a hundred years before. These documents or gospels are many in number, and all of unknown authorship; they are in the possession of an obscure and fanatical sect, and many of them contain obvious absurdities. Gradually the more absurd are denounced as apocryphal, and four are retained, which, together with some letters of one of the early Christians, form the 'New Testament' of future ages." (Joseph McCabe.)

With regard to these documents or records next to nothing is known. Their authors, place of origin, the motives that caused their compilation, are all matters of guesswork. The charm of the narratives, viewed as literature, is greatly due to our magnificent "Authorized" version. As contemporary writers are entirely silent on the subject of Jesus; as Apostolic literature knows nothing of the Jesus of the Gospels, of his virgin birth, of his alleged miracles; as our only knowledge of him is contained in the New Testament, the utmost we are justified in thinking of Jesus is that he was a man of noble life, with a remarkable influence over his fellow-men. His undoubted sincerity in believing that he was divinely chosen to teach the people is no proof of the truth of his belief. He believed that the earth belonged to the devil, but that some day he (Jesus) would be recognized as the king of kings. "Verily, I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled." That prophecy, uttered by Jesus himself, has not been fulfilled; it was uttered about 1,900 years ago. He recognized Cæsar's authority, and advised others to do the same. He did not denounce war or slavery; but he said to his disciples: "My peace I give unto you." Those who called themselves Christians, however, have not lived in peace with one another, but have repeatedly waged war with one another and persecuted one another; the worst persecutors in the world have been Christians. The teaching of Jesus is partly responsible for this, inasmuch as he said that they who did not believe on him would be damned; and his followers, to save people from damnation, tried to compel them to become Christians. This persecution, this attempt to maintain an opinion by violence, to conquer the reason without enlightening it, has characterized the

larger part of Christian propaganda. The teachings of Jesus about love, charity, brotherhood, justice, and forgiveness, although not entirely original, embody the finest ethical code ever presented to mankind; but an attempt to make them a universal rule of conduct would in our present state of society be impracticable; no Christian shapes his life on the principles of the Sermon on the Mount. He taught that this world was of no importance, and, instead of trying to right wrong conditions here and now, he advised non-resistance to evil. He told those who wept and suffered to rejoice, for they would have their reward in another world. This teaching has consoled some people, but has prevented many from trying to right their present wrongs. It has encouraged the rich and powerful to answer the cry for justice by suggesting to the oppressed that they ought to be satisfied with the reward promised in the next world. Those in power have always encouraged religion among the poor; orthodoxy is generally on the side of the oppressors. In spite of the fact that the words of love and goodness spoken by Jesus have been an immense influence for good, his theological doctrines have caused much hatred, bloodshed, and misery.

THE CHURCH, CREEDS, AND CLERGY

THE word "church" originally meant an assembly or congregation, and was at first merely an organization of fellow-believers, out of which has gradually arisen the distinction between clergy and laymen. There are many Churches in Christendom, of which the most important is the Roman Catholic. It was organized about the time that the Roman Empire became converted to Christianity, and the Emperor Constantine, one of the worst criminals in history, was its first imperial head and protector. It soon became covetous, ambitious, partisan, and intolerant, and its domination over the conscience and its punishment of heretics has caused an immense amount of useless suffering.

In the sixteenth century the Church was split up chiefly through Martin Luther, the principal author of the Reformation movement. The seceders from the Church of Rome were called Protestants. The Church of England dates from the time of Henry VIII, who, quarrelling with the Pope over a matter of divorcing his wife, founded

a new Church, of which he became master. In the past the Protestant Churches have persecuted almost as much as the Roman Church in their desire to exterminate what they looked upon as heresy. In these days, when blind belief and superstition are not regarded as a virtue, the Churches have not the power to persecute except quite indirectly. Liberal and Broad Churches exist which make little of theology and much of character, and the number of people who look upon religion as something apart from formal ritual is gradually increasing.

Disagreements among believers necessitated an authoritative expression of Church doctrine; this was the origin of "creeds," the object of which was to enforce uniformity of belief and prevent independent thinking. The oldest Christian creed is supposed to be the Apostles' Creed, which we know was not written by the apostles. The fundamental beliefs of this creed are those in the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, and the Resurrection of the Flesh. No proofs are given; they are assumed to be true. The Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, the creed of the Greek Church, the Church of England Creed (the Thirty-nine Articles), the Westminster Creed—all contain statements of belief narrow and intolerant. They tend to prevent the pursuit of truth and confine it to one sect. Our creed should be one in accord with facts, and one which keeps abreast of our growing knowledge. To subscribe to a creed that forbids freedom of thought lowers the dignity of man, whose reason is his greatest possession. A clergyman is a man who has received "Holy Orders" from the Church. A man can become a clergyman by passing an examination and asserting his belief in the creed of the particular Church to which he applies for admission.

THE EARTH AND MAN

THE Bible states that some six thousand years ago God created heaven and earth and all that they contain. Science teaches us that the earth is many millions of years old, and that there has been for countless ages a slow growth and gradual ascent. The origin of matter remains a mystery.

Science teaches us that man is hundreds of thousands of years old, and is descended from the lower animals. In the structure and

functions of his organs he is exactly like an animal; every bone, muscle, and organ can be paralleled in the animals; he is composed of the same materials, and is subject to the same laws of life and death. The human embryo, before birth, passes through stages of development when it has gills like a fish, a tail, a body covered with hair, and a brain like a monkey's; thus showing that man, in his long existence, has climbed through all these forms to his present state. He was not specially created, but grew slowly upwards, and his mind or reason was evolved in the same manner as his body, the struggle for existence having been the chief contributor to his development.

Some people still believe that he was created "perfect." What they mean by "perfect" is probably "as perfect as a man can be." Had he been perfect, he could not have fallen. It is said that God permitted him to fall, and encouraged Satan to tempt him, the consequence being sin, suffering, and death for all mankind. People believed these stories because their fathers and mothers believed them; but hardly any enlightened people now hold these unreasonable beliefs.

DEATH AND IMMORTALITY

MANY people fear death because they think that it is the beginning of an irrevocable doom; but the rational view is that it either secures happiness or ends suffering. We can conquer death by serving some noble cause in which we may live after we have passed away. When we are dead we shall not miss life, and to lose what we cannot miss is not an evil.

It is popularly believed that there is a soul or spirit temporarily inhabiting the body, which soul continues to live after death; that men, but not animals, have souls; that the body cannot live without the soul, but that the soul can live without the body. It is impossible for the finite human mind to form a conception of this soul, this spirit without form or extension. Theology teaches that at death the soul leaves the body and goes to some other world, each sect having its own view of what sort of place this other world is. The view of the Christian creeds is that only those who have the true faith will be happy; others will go to eternal misery. Even great and good men and women not holding the true faith will go to

hell, according to this view. The desire for immortality, a conscious personal immortality, is almost universal ; it is an extension of the instinct of self-preservation.

We know nothing of any future life, and, although the belief in it is very general throughout humanity, many general beliefs have turned out to be illusions. All we can say is that we do not know. But we can safely affirm that all that we say and do will contribute to build the world of the future, in which we shall live again as influences and examples, as moral and intellectual forces. In this sense we are certainly immortal, and the knowledge should inspire us to cultivate only what is true and noble. A future life for each personal individual is an enormous assumption to be made without proof, and yet all the alleged consolations of orthodox religion hang on this. Many people believe enough to be full of anxiety and fear, and never have complete peace ; belief to them is a source of inward unrest and alarm. For one death-bed smoothed by orthodox beliefs it is probable that hundreds have been turned into beds of torture.

GOOD AND BAD

ANYTHING adjusted for some purpose and efficiently accomplishing that purpose is "good"; when it fails in that purpose it is "bad." For example, a knife is good when it cuts well ; a road is good when it makes travelling easy and comfortable ; a watch is good when it keeps time correctly. When a knife is blunt, a road uneven, or a watch incorrect, in each case it is "bad." Thus efficiency is goodness, inefficiency badness ; and to know whether conduct is good or bad the first question to be asked is what purpose social conduct is intended to serve. Social conduct is conduct adjusted for the benefit of society, or co-operation. Conduct which tends to draw individuals closer together is good ; conduct which repels them from one another is bad. To the conduct of a single individual on a desert island, where no act of his could affect anyone but himself, the terms "good" and "bad" in a moral sense would have no meaning. Man is dependent on the co-operation of society, and the aim of the moral code is to discourage actions injurious to social co-operation and to encourage conduct which promotes it ; therefore good and bad actions may be

roughly defined as those which benefit or injure somebody else or society as a whole.

Theologically, "good" and "bad" mean obedience or disobedience to the supposed will of some God, apart from any ethical or social value in the action itself. Adam's crime was disobedience; the command not to eat of the tree of knowledge was quite a capricious and arbitrary one; no reason was given why he should not eat of it, and it was a natural thing for him to think that a knowledge of good and evil was an excellent thing to acquire. But eating the fruit, simply because it was an act of disobedience, was so great a crime that the whole human race was damned for it. Abraham agreed to commit the crime of burning his son; but because this was an act of obedience theologians hold him up as a model of virtue.

We now realize that a "good" man is one who promotes the happiness and well-being of his fellow-creatures, and that morality does not consist in blind obedience at the expense of our conscience and reason, especially as, even assuming the existence of a God whom we ought to obey, we have no means of knowing his will.

THE CHIEF OBJECT OF LIFE AND THE RELIGION OF THE FUTURE

OUR duty is to seek those things that increase and elevate life; to learn by experience (the accumulated experience of humanity as well as our own) what is right and what is wrong, good and bad. We need no revelation to tell us what is right and what is wrong; we must discover it for ourselves. Nature is the sum of all the forces which keep the world in movement; she is our first and oldest teacher. We obey her because we must. She has joined cause and consequence in such a way that every act and word bears seed. If we sow evil, we reap pain; if we sow good, we reap happiness. The reward of goodness is to be good. If we will not be good without future rewards and punishments, others will; and, by the law of the survival of the fittest, theirs will be the power of the future. What is needed is knowledge; we must know what is for our highest good. Knowledge will give us sympathy instead of

prejudice, justice and humanity instead of oppression and greed. Knowledge will help us to make the highest use of this life, without reference to imaginary heavens and hells of which we can know nothing.

In accordance with the law of evolution, we progress very slowly ; but truth will ultimately prevail, and, even if its results cause pain to some people, they must be accepted without hesitation. Man, as a rational being, will no longer accept his religious opinions without a mental conviction of their truth—a conviction demanded in every other province of knowledge. Reason and experience will replace theology, and, free from the difficulties and mysteries generated by dogmas, we shall no longer try to force our conscience and intelligence to accept ancient revelations.

But, although theology will die, religion will remain ; not the religion which consists in singing hymns and reading bibles, in pious talk and unctuous prayers, but the religion of acting rightly and kindly. Real religion—the sense of duty arising from our relationship to some superior Power, even though the nature of that Power is unknown to us—will grow stronger. Our object in life will be to promote the well-being and happiness of our fellow creatures, and every new truth we learn will fit us better for this task. Sympathy will replace selfishness ; those tendencies injurious to social life will become weaker, those which facilitate social co-operation will become stronger. We know that all faculties and organs are strengthened by exercise and weakened by disuse. Our duty, then, is to cultivate the faculties that are social and sympathetic, and to neglect those that are not. Every good act benefits not only others, but self ; for it strengthens the faculties by which it is performed. Conversely, every bad act not only injures others, but also the actor ; for it strengthens faculties which should be unexercised and allowed to die out from disuse.

No churches for propitiating imaginary deities will be built, but we shall propitiate our conscience by the fulfilment of duty. No imaginary heaven will arouse hope, and no hideous phantoms of eternal hell will terrify the mind ; but we shall face the unknowable with calmness and without fear.