

LEMUEL KELLEY WASHBURN

IS THE BIBLE WORTH
READING, AND OTHER
ESSAYS

Lemuel Kelley Washburn Is The Bible Worth Reading, and Other Essays

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L. K. Washburn Is The Bible Worth Reading, and Other Essays

DEDICATION

The writer of this book dedicates it to all men and women of common honesty and common sense.

IS THE BIBLE WORTH READING

That depends. If a man is going to get his living by standing in a Christian pulpit, I should be obliged to answer, Yes! But if he is going to follow any other calling, or work at any trade, I should have to answer, No! There is absolutely no information in the Bible that man can make any use of as he goes through life. The Bible is not a book of knowledge. It does not give instruction in any of the sciences. It furnishes no help to labor. It is useless as a political guide. There is nothing in it that gives the mechanic any hint, or affords the farmer any enlightenment in his occupation.

If man wishes to learn about the earth or the heavens; about life or the animal kingdom, he has no need to study the Bible. If he is desirous of reading the best poetry or the most entertaining literature he will not find it in the Bible. If he wants to read to store his mind with facts, the Bible is the last book for him to open, for never yet was a volume written that contained fewer facts than this book. If he is anxious to get some information that will help him earn an honest living he does not want to spend his time reading Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Kings, Psalms, or the Gospels. If he wants to read just for the fun of reading to kill time, or to see how much nonsensical writing there is in one book, let him read the Bible.

I have not said that there are not wise sayings in the Bible, or a few dramatic incidents, but there are just as wise sayings, and

wiser ones, too, out of the book, and there are dramas of human life that surpass in interest anything contained in the Old or New Testament.

No person can make a decent excuse for reading the Bible more than once. To do such a thing would be a foolish waste of time. But our stoutest objection to reading this book is, not that it contains nothing particularly good, but *that it contains so much that is positively bad*. To read this book is to get false ideas, absurd ideas, bad ideas. The injury to the human mind that reads the Bible as a reliable book is beyond repair. I do not think that this book should be read by children, by any human being less than twenty years of age, and it would be better for mankind if not a man or woman read a line of it until he or she was fifty years old.

What I want to say is this, that there is nothing in the Bible that is of the least consequence to the people of the twentieth century. English literature is richer a thousand fold than this so-called sacred volume. We have books of more information and of more inspiration than the Bible. As the relic of a barbarous and superstitious people, it should have a place in our libraries, but it is not a work of any value to this age. I pity men who stand in pulpits and call this book the word of God. I wish they had brains enough to earn their living without having to repeat this foolish falsehood. The day will come when this book will be estimated for what it is worth, and when that day comes, the Bible will no longer be called the word of God, but the work of ignorant, superstitious men.

The cross everywhere is a dagger in the heart of liberty.

A miracle is not an explanation of what we cannot comprehend.

The statue of liberty that will endure on this continent is not the one made of granite or bronze, but the one made of love of freedom.

Take away every achievement of the world and leave man freedom, and the earth would again bloom with every glory of attainment; but take away liberty and everything useful and beautiful would vanish.

SACRIFICE

The sacrifice of Jesus, so much boasted by the Christian church, is nothing compared to the sacrifice of a mother for her family. It is not to be spoken of in the same light. A mother's sacrifice is constant: momentary, hourly, daily, life-long. It never ceases. It is a veritable providence; a watchful care; a real giving of one life for another, or for several others; a gift of love so pure and holy, so single and complete, that it is an offering in spirit and in substance.

This is to me the highest, purest, holiest act of humanity. All others, when weighed with this unselfish consecration to duty, seem small and insignificant. There is, in a mother's life, no counting of cost, no calculation of reward. It is enough that a duty is to be done; that a service is to be rendered; that a sacrifice is called for. The true mother gives herself to the offices of love without hope, expectation, or wish of recompense. A mother's love for her children cannot be determined by any earthly measure, by any material standard. It outshines all glory, and is the last gleam of light in the human heart. A mother's love walks in a thousand Gethsemanes, endures a thousand Calvaries, and has a thousand agonies that the dying of Jesus upon a cross cannot symbolize. This maternal sacrifice is the greater that it is made cheerfully, without a murmur, and even with joy. If it is not sought; it is never pushed aside.

A mother's sacrifice for her family makes a chapter of suffering, of patient toil and strife, of heroic endurance and forbearance, that religion is not yet high enough to appreciate; and this sublime devotion is not in one home, but in *hundreds of thousands in every land* everywhere on earth, and it is real, true, heart-born, and the utmost of renunciation that human life has revealed.

The brief martyrdom of Jesus was not voluntary, was not lasting in its pain or in its service to mankind. His death was cruel, his suffering and agony terrible to think of, but it was all soon over. A few hours of torture make up the tragedy of the cross. But the story of this crucifixion may be fictitious, imaginary; most likely is such. Perhaps no such man died such a death in any such way. Then how vain and foolish to waste our sympathy on a fanciful sufferer, an imaginary martyr, who never existed outside of the brain of the writer of the story, while there are actual, real beings living who are making a greater sacrifice, doing a holier duty, within our reach!

We need not go to a Bible to find those who deserve our tears, or who have earned our admiration. The bravest heart that ever author wrote into being, fails to come up to the lofty height of endurance, of a life inspired by love, of heroic sacrifice, that can be found in hundreds of homes in our land.

Far be it from my intention to paint less any deed of mortal that has brightened the lot of man, or to throw discredit upon aught that is worthy of human gratitude and praise. I yield most

ready sympathy and most willing admiration to every noble soul that has lived or died to make earth better and happier, but I do not believe that greatness, goodness and love are all dead, and that our whole duty is to stand and weep around a tomb. I believe in living men and women, in living hearts and souls, in living greatness and goodness and love, and I tell you all that the earth never bore more loving, more humane, tenderer, braver, or truer hearts than beat today in the living breasts of mankind.

And I place above all that is brave and true, great and good, in the past or present, the mothers of our age.—What man cannot see that silent, patient mother in her home, the victim of a multitude of trials, crosses, annoyances, day after day and week after week, meeting all, bearing all, with a saint's look and manner; and what man, seeing her there, at the side of the sick, worn out with watching and waiting, and then at the bed of death, faithful and true to the last, though wounded in heart and spirit never faltering in the way of duty, that would not say if there be one sacrifice that is above, and greater than, all others, it is that of a mother's love?

THE DRAMA OF LIFE

With the passing of the season we are reminded of the rapid flight of life. It seems but yesterday that the first bluebird of spring lit on the bare bough of the apple-tree in the orchard near by, and the early robin sang his welcome notes in our glad ears, and yet the bluebird and robin are seen and heard no more, and the green promise of spring has changed to the brown harvest of autumn, which will soon be stored for winter's use. This is the way every season comes and goes; a little long in coming sometimes; but never long in going; and every year grows shorter as we grow older, and every year goes more quickly as we near the border of old age. Life soon changes from a glad look ahead to a sad glance behind. From baby to boy, from boy to man, from man to tottering age;—how swiftly the scenes change, and life comes and life goes, and the door of death opens almost before the door of birth closes. The cradle and the grave touch, and the blithe youth that lends his strength to feeble age finds himself ere long leaning upon the arm of youth and strength. The circle of years soon rolls round, and life is but a day of toil and a night of dreams. As we look back upon vanished time and see the happy scenes of childhood mingled with the surroundings of later life, days and months shrink to hours, and years seem to be spanned by a sunrise and a sunset with a little laughter and perhaps some tears between.

We who have travelled more than half way on the road cannot look backward without a sigh, cannot think backward without a pang. Many of us have left the graves of father and mother behind, perhaps the smaller graves of children, where some of our heart lies buried too. The storms that beat on us make life seem shorter; make the days go faster, and the night draw nearer; and all of us have already, or must sometime, bow our heads to the blast.

One human being in the great world of man, and in the greater world of Nature, plays but a small part. Of but little account is a human life in the vast, limitless universe. A man fills but a little space while alive, and touches but a few hearts when he dies. We are fortunate if we make during life, one true, loyal friend who stands by us while that life lasts. We reckon this, after all, the grandest triumph of the human soul. It is not difficult to gather dollars—quite a number, at least,—nor to win a measure of fame, but to live, to be, to act, in such way as to bind one true heart to ours, is a victory which we may be proud of. Some lives have larger circumferences than others, radiate farther, influence more, but none can win the rare tribute of perfect friendship from more than one or two. Yes! man plays but a small part in the great drama of life. He is on the stage but a few short hours, and most men are but poor or indifferent actors at best.

Who cares when a man dies? Not the sun, for it shines just as gaily when he closes his eyes to its golden light; not the birds, for they chatter and sing over his coffin, and hop and sing on his

grave; not the brook, for it runs laughing on and never stops its gambols and song; not any of the things of earth, but man.

When man dies, a few say, Is he gone? and then forget that he ever lived; a few go to help carry his dead body to the grave, and then turn away to join the business and pleasure of life, and forget that they have buried a man; a few, some days after, call at the house where he lived and drop a tear of sympathy for the weeping widow and tearful children, and then forget that the husband and father is no more. But does no one care? Perhaps a wife, who will carry his dead image in her heart as long as it beats; perhaps a daughter, who will remember him a year or two, or a little longer, who will miss his happy greeting, his loving kiss, his proud, kind look as he lifts the heart's dearest idol to his knee; and this is all. And this is enough. We care for only a few; and why should many care for us?

Though life is short and not always heroic; and though, when it ends, the world goes on just the same, we love life and it is sweet while it lasts. Though we travel quickly over the road, we enjoy for the most part, the journey of life. We have pain, it is true; we learn of sorrow and grief; we feel the pang of parting and weep on the white face of some loved one, and yet, we find happiness, we enjoy living, and we regret when the curtain is rung down and our part is played and the lights turned out. When we strike the balance between pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, happiness and misery, most find that life is worth living.

A dogma will thrive in soil where the truth could not get root.

The measure of liberty which man enjoys determines the civilization of the age in which he lives.

The person who can make a loaf of bread is more to the world than the person who could perform a miracle.

The indifference to Christianity may well alarm the men who live on the credulity that gives it the show of life, but to those who delight in actions of sincerity, it affords the greatest encouragement, for it promises to the world a day when intelligence and integrity will be respected more than ignorance and hypocrisy.

NATURE IN JUNE

We can hardly look anywhere in Nature without having the conviction grow in the mind that there are more or less superfluous things on this spot of the universe where our lot is cast, however it may be in Mars, Venus, Saturn, or any other of the Greek-named planets or any heavenly constellations with or without names. Just at this particular season of the year, the presence of weeds in the garden or on the farm raises a colossal doubt as to the fact of any wisdom guiding the divine voice when, in a majestic sweep of its omnipotent power on the third day of the drama of creation, it called into being the grass, the herb, the tree and whatsoever bears leaf or blade or flower. To those who have to pull the weeds out of the ground they are a curse of the first magnitude, and how a creator, who had common sense, could take pride in making such vegetable abortions as weeds we cannot comprehend. The most worthless things in Nature are the most prolific. Chickweed will cover an acre while clover is considering where it is best to go into business, and every pesky, nasty little weed will live and laugh when the queenly corn droops its head in the sun, and the beet and turnip cannot get nourishment enough to keep them alive.

It is just the same in the animal world. An immense quantity of useless beings go about on two and four legs or on none at all. The only excuse for the snake is that he was made to eat

the toad; for the toad, that he was made to eat insects; for the insects—well, nobody has yet made a wholesome excuse for their existence, anyway. It looks as though one being in Nature was made simply to kill another being, and the last-made being, man, is the supreme killer of the whole lot. Take the whole range of wild beasts, and find, if you can, aught but malice in their creation, if they were created. No plague ever destroyed hyenas and jackals. No one ever found a sick rattlesnake or an invalid hornet. The fittest survive? The fittest for what? To worry man, to make life miserable. Mosquitoes, wasps, fleas, reptiles and wild beasts, poisonous vines and shrubs, noxious blossoms whose perfume is the kiss of death, weeds that push and crowd decent plants until they die in utter despair—these are the sturdiest triumphs of the creative art. We cannot help wishing that the Lord-God had not rested on the seventh day, but instead, had gone around and destroyed about seven-eighths of what he had created. We might then have had quite a decent world to live in.

Man builds a home for her he loves, he plants beside it all that will make it beautiful to the eyes of his wife. He works and brings what is fair to adorn it, and makes every room a casket to hold the jewel of love. He looks at his home with pride, and feels that it is “the dearest spot on earth,” a refuge safe and secure. The cyclone comes and in a moment all is swept away. Man cannot trust the God of the winds.

There is no more terrible calamity that afflicts our globe at the present time than an earthquake. It comes without warning, by

day or night, when man is at his place of business or when he is at rest. There is no way of preventing it, no way of preparing for it. It may wait a hundred, a thousand, years before it works its deadly ruin. But when it comes, havoc is left. An earthquake may be good for the earth, but it is almighty discouraging to the people that live on it. It may seek a beneficent end, but it goes to work in a cruel manner to accomplish it. Human life counts no more than the life of rats when an earthquake gets started. This infernal visitor does not seek a spot where its malevolence can be wrecked upon the rocks and hills. Oftener it goes to the thickly populated city or town and topples over houses and swallows up dwellings, with men, women and children. Does God send the earthquake? If he does, where is the evidence of his love for man? If He does not, who does?

It is pretty tough business to try to reconcile Nature with the idea of God's watchful care over man. If the winds did not turn to hurricanes; if the sunshine did not make drought; if the rain never became a flood; if the sea never grew angry and sunk the ship; if the clouds always dissolved in gentle rain or in dew; if there were no wild beasts; no venomous snakes; no poisonous vines or flowers; if there were only what is bright and fair and good on earth and nothing that was dark and cold and repulsive, we might believe that a heavenly father had made the earth for a dwelling-place for man. But as it is, we have to think as well of Nature as possible and dodge her lightning, run from her water-spouts, keep out of the way of cyclones and shift for ourselves

while here. What follows nobody knows. It may be better for us beyond this life; we hope it is no worse. And it may be only sleep, sleep with no dreams and no awakening. We should dislike to die on this side of the grave with the fear that we should come out on the other only to meet a hurricane in the teeth, or find an earthquake had been put under us to give us a shaking up the first thing on that “shining shore,” or to be caught in a furious torrent that poured down the sides of some heavenly mountain. Earth is a pretty good place when the conditions are all favorable, but if we are to have another life it ought to be a better one or else we should be saved the trouble of dying.

The feet of progress have always been shod by doubt.

A true man will not join anything that in any way abridges his freedom or robs him of his rights.

THE INFINITE PURPOSE

A Christian writer recently said:—"The supreme duty of humanity is to get into touch with the infinite purpose." This may be so, but we want first to understand just what the infinite purpose is before we subscribe to it. When the infinite purpose is bent on getting up an earthquake we do not care to "get into touch" with it, not much. When this purpose is forging an electric bolt to shoot out of the clouds, we have no desire to "get into touch" with any such thing. It makes a vast difference what this purpose is bent upon, whether or not we want to go into partnership with it. Now, when the infinite purpose is at work on the earth, turning dirt into flowers, or vegetables, or trees, we should feel a joy in sharing its labor, but when it is determined to burn and scorch everything on the face of the ground with a heat that knows no abatement, we should want to sell out our interest in the concern at once.

There is just as much nonsense connected with the use of this phrase "the infinite purpose" as there is with "special Providence" or "Divine love," or any other religious expression which expresses nothing unless you are religious. Where this "purpose" "makes for righteousness," as Matthew Arnold delighted to believe, we are willing to catch on to it, but where it is going in the other direction we prefer to go our own way.

This notion of uniting the finite with the infinite purpose is all

right, providing the latter does not conflict with the former, but we have serious objection to doing anything that will interfere with the highest development of our humanity. The purpose which is at work in the world does not make for health any more than for disease. It seems to carry a tubercle with as much satisfaction as a ray of sunshine, and lends all its forces to assist the highwayman with no more charge than it makes to the law-abiding citizen.

It seems to us that it is necessary to divorce the "infinite purpose" from a lot of intentions that do not work for human interests, before it will be desirable to assume intimate relations with this purpose. We do not want to "get into touch" with what is not going our way; that is, the way of health, of prosperity, of happiness. We do not deny that we need to give a higher direction to human thought. We affirm this fact as positively as our most Christian contemporary. But before we advise mankind to harness its wagon to the infinite purpose we want to be sure where it is going. Man has to go to mill and market as well as to meeting, and there is just as good a purpose manifested in getting the most wholesome food for our stomachs as there is in getting the safest creed for our souls. We are loth to trust any religious purpose as opposed to a human one. We believe in man first, last, and all the time.

Now, let us admit that humanity needs a wiser purpose to guide it, but let us also admit that it can be found in a wiser human head and human heart. If what is called the infinite purpose is

working for the highest end of human life, there is no evidence of the fact. If there is anything better than human energy back of a good human thought that will help this world, we do not know what it is.

The man who accepts the faith of Calvin is miserable in proportion to the extent he carries it out.

Whatever tends to prolong the existence of ignorance or to prevent the recognition of knowledge is dangerous to the well-being of the human race.

A higher respect for man has been one of the chief promoters of civilization. Advancement has always been toward right and truth when the ranks were imbued with a proper regard for human hearts and human happiness.

FREETHOUGHT COMMANDS

Say nothing about others that you would not have others say about you.

Be severe toward yourself; be kind to your fellow-man.

Do not give advice that you cannot follow.

Do not thank God for what man does.

Serve neither God nor Mammon, but humanity alone.

Do not try to be perfect as a "Father in heaven," but try to be better than you yourself are.

Seek first to improve the earth, and heaven will be of less consequence.

Let us not forget that men speak according to the measure of their knowledge and light, and that a superior enlightenment is a higher authority.

History shows that there is nothing so easy to enslave and nothing so hard to emancipate as ignorance, hence it becomes the double enemy of civilization. By its servility it is the prey of tyranny, and by its credulity it is the foe of enlightenment.

A RAINBOW RELIGION

There is little doubt that the faith of the early Christians was what might be classed under the head of rainbow religion. We learn from the New Testament that it was taught that those who accepted the faith held by John and Jesus and Paul were in some peculiar manner to be protected from the common ills of life, and were to be especial favorites of their "Father in heaven." How sincerely this faith was held we cannot now determine, nor to what extent it was put into practice, but that it possessed the mind in a considerable degree there is no room whatever to doubt. But this is not the question that we want settled, but rather the value of this faith.

It is pleasant and comforting to believe that one is watched over by a superior power which at any moment of peril or temptation is ready to stretch forth its hand and rescue from danger and death, and it is on account of the wonderful seductiveness of this faith that it has lasted so long and has been so hard to overcome. But what we are interested in is, whether or not such a belief has any foundation in fact or in human experience. When Jesus bid his followers to cease giving thought to what they should eat and drink and wear, telling them that their "heavenly Father" fed the fowls of the air, and that they were better than such fowls, thus implying that their heavenly Father would take proportionately better care of them, was there

any ground for any such teaching, and is there any ground for this faith today? We claim that the “heavenly Father” referred to by Jesus never fed anything, neither fowl nor man; and that no human being was ever taken care of by any superior power or snatched by it from danger or death. Such a faith is the veriest delusion, and it could lodge and take root only in the childish mind. Jesus also taught that the “Father which is in heaven” would “give good things to them that ask him.” Is there any ground for this rainbow religion? Is there any evidence that there is a “Father in heaven” who has good things to give to those who ask for them?

We presume that this faith led men to give up work and to trust to begging for a living. But the question is, which got the most good things,—those who studied the laws of Nature and of life and worked in harmony with them, or those who prayed for good things? How is it to-day? What good things can be had by praying? Who has any good thing that he received by asking his “Father in heaven” for it? The asking business has been carried on for hundreds of years, and all that has been asked of God has had to be given by man or has not been given at all.

Has it ever been true that Christians had any immunity from danger that others did not have, or that they could live in defiance of the laws of Nature? Jesus told his followers that in his name they shall cast out devils, they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them and they shall have the power to cure the sick by laying their hands upon them.

Have men, who professed to follow Jesus, ever done the things which he said they shall do? Is there any man to-day who can do these things? Is there any evidence that Christians are treated by any power of the universe differently from what others are treated? And is there any evidence that they possess any gift that is not shared by others? As far as we can see Christians are subject to the same laws of Nature that all others must obey, and they cannot either defy those laws or act independently of them. If they fool with deadly serpents they will get bitten and probably die—just the same as would an infidel; if they drink a cup of poison, they will suffer and perhaps die just the same as an unbeliever; if they have any sickness, they do not trust to the laying-on of hands by a fellow-Christian, but send for a doctor the same as a freethinker. The fact is, the world has learned better than to put faith in these teachings of Jesus.

The Christian faith belonged to the childhood of the race, and ought no longer to be preached to man. No one attempts to put this faith into practice, to carry into life the teachings of Jesus. And why not? Simply because *it is known to be false*. Christianity is a rainbow religion, a representation of things for which there is no warrant in Nature; a picture painted in false colors; a view of life copied from a diseased imagination; a falsehood fed by priests upon which they live.

There is not an intelligent man or woman living to-day who has any faith in the rainbow religion taught by Jesus; not an intelligent man or woman who believes that a heavenly Father or

a God will provide food or drink or clothes for a human being; nor an intelligent man or woman who has faith that he or she can get good things by asking a "Father in heaven" for them and not an intelligent man or woman who cares or dares to put the declaration of Jesus to the test; that those who have faith in him can play with serpents without danger, and drink deadly poison with no more harm than attends quaffing a glass of water.

We are then to conclude that Christianity is held only by the ignorant.

There is greater argument in one fact than in all the creeds.

It is easier to believe that a man is honest who says the Bible is the word of God than to believe that he is bright.

A CRUEL GOD

There may be some other religion in the world that sings of a God more cruel than the God of Christianity, but we do not know of any. At any rate, we believe it is safe to say that no religion of a civilized people has a God who is more vindictive. We have always wondered how men and women could set such infernal ideas to music as we find in Christian hymns. It is really too bad that human beings are compelled to sing such lies as we find in the pious song-books of the church. The sentiments contained in them are not fit for savages. It can only brutalize the heart to sing of blood, and nothing but blood, no matter whose blood it is. The “precious blood of Jesus” is just as suggestive of cruelty as the blood on the executioner’s knife. Men become what they read, what they think, what they sing, what they believe. Religions have made men wicked, cruel, hard, unkind. It is impossible to have faith in a God of wrath and vindictiveness without in time developing these qualities. Men grow into the likeness of their belief. As a man believes, so is he, to a certain extent.

The influence of cruel sentiments on the mind is greater with the young than with adults. Some hymns sung in Christian churches are positively brutal in tone. Think of *human* beings singing the following verse:—

“But vengeance and damnation lie

On rebels who refuse His grace;
Who God's eternal Son despise,
The *hottest hell shall be their place.*"

Christians seem to delight in pictures of hell. God would hardly be God to them if he did not damn somebody. In painting the divine idea vengeance and damnation are laid on thick.

Here is the Christian notion of father and son:—

"How justice frowned and vengeance stood
To drive me down to endless pain!
But the great Son propos'd his blood,
And *heavenly wrath grew mild again.*"

Think of the religion based on such an idea of God! And think on the terrible effect on men and women which such religion must have!

The following description of the Christian God was probably written by one of his adorers:—

"Adore and tremble for our God
Is a consuming fire!
His jealous eyes with wrath inflame,
And raise His vengeance higher.

"Almighty vengeance, how it burns,
How bright His fury glows!
Vast magazines of plagues and storms

Lie treasured for His foes.

“Those heaps of wrath, by slow degrees,
Are force into a flame:
But kindled, Oh! how fierce they blaze!
And rend all nature’s frame.

“At His approach the mountains flee,
And seek a watery grave;
The frightened sea makes haste away,
And shrinks up every wave.

“Through the wide air the weighty rocks
Are swift as hailstones hurled;
Who dares engage His fiery rage,
That shakes the solid world?

“Thy hand shall on rebellious kings
A fiery tempest pour,
While we, beneath Thy sheltering wings,
Thy *just* revenge adore.”

And we are asked to love this God! We should just as soon think of loving a tiger, a cyclone, a deluge, a fiend. Love goes out to what is lovely. We can love what is good, what is beautiful, what is noble; a great-hearted man, a pitying woman we cannot help loving, but if we should say that we love such a God as is pictured in the words of that hymn we should lie. Man cannot

love hate, vengeance, wrath—even in a God.

The Christian church, down through the ages, has been like the God it worshipped—full of hate, malice and cruelty. The world has grown kind and humane just in proportion as it has given up worship of this divine monster. We judge gods as we judge men, and we can respect and love only what is worthy of respect and love from a human point of view. If there is such a God as is painted in Christian literature he deserves, not to be worshipped, but to be shot.

The Bible upon which Christianity is founded does not say what Christianity is, what a Christian is, nor what we must do in order to be a Christian.

WHAT IS JESUS

Time was when Jesus was looked upon as God, or the Son of God. No one had any doubt of his divinity or divine character; or if he had, he wisely deferred to the superstitious majority and kept his mouth shut and so kept his head on his shoulders. This idea that Jesus was God has been steadily declining for several hundred years. Intelligence has pretty much given it up, except where it is paid a big salary for preaching it. There is no rational defence that can be made of the dogma of the divinity of Jesus. It is one of many theological absurdities that was born when gods were popular.

A large number believe that Jesus was a man and nothing more; a good man, but still human. They look upon him as a product of human nature. He is allowed a human father and mother, although the gospels, in which is found the story of his life, hardly warrant so much earthly parentage. He is regarded as a part of humanity, and his extraordinary deeds merely as exaggerated performances of heart and hand of man. The people that look upon Jesus as a man have a superstitious reverence for his humanity. He is called "the one perfect man," the "pattern of the race," etc. Though a man, they will have him every inch a man.

Yet others see nothing remarkable in the career of Jesus; nothing which marks him for universal emulation; nothing which

compels praise and admiration. They think he was a sort of mild lunatic, possessed of the idea that he was the Messiah of his people, and that in endeavoring to further his scheme he antagonized the existing authority and met the just punishment of his ambition.

But it is neither as God nor as a man that Jesus must be regarded, but as a myth. No such person ever lived either as a human or divine existence. He is simply a creature of fancy, the fruit of the imagination. He is a character of the brain, the creation of religious genius.

There is no justifiable Christianity in this age.

A dogma is the hand of the dead on the throat of the living.

The progress of the world depends upon freedom of thought and freedom of utterance.

If you can forgive the man who wronged you, the neighbor who slandered you and help the poor about you, you need not be particular about making any professions of righteousness.

DEEDS BETTER THAN PROFESSIONS

We have tears of regret to shed over the wreck of beauty and talent; but if we take no steps to preserve beauty and talent from wreck, our compassion is not to our honor but to our disgrace. The feeling of pity which to-day expends itself in solemn warning or solemn weeping for the poor unfortunates of earth, must devise means to rescue them from misery, or it is but a mockery and a shame. One arm inspired with love of man will do more than a thousand tender sentiments. Sympathy must take the form of assistance, or it is not sincere.

When we do not love man as we ought, we hate ourselves. The way to get heaven for ourselves is to give it to others. The way to be happy is to make others happy. Selfishness kills every noble feeling and defeats every good desire. We cannot have peace when we give pain to others. Our deeds reward us. What wrongs man is wrong for man to do. We should live so as not to regret the past nor fear the future. We set too great a value upon earthly possessions, and spend our lives in gaining what we cannot hold. We best enjoy the things of earth when we give up wanting them wholly for ourselves. The best part of our happiness is having someone to share it.

GIVE US THE TRUTH

If there is one tree that man needs to eat of, it is the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil; and if any knowledge will keep him alive and make him happy and perfect, it is just this knowledge which God forbid him to acquire. We are dying to-day from ignorance, not from knowledge,—dying because we do not know the good from the evil; and we are dooming ourselves and future generations to premature death because we do not eat more of the tree of knowledge.

To *know* more is what we need. Let us look into things and find out what the world means. If this universe is only an illuminated deception, the man who discovers the fact will be a public benefactor. If things which exist around us are lying to us,—if the stars that shine out through the deep space above us are only fire-flies of the night, let us know it. Knowledge will not hurt us so much as ignorance and deception. If the flowers that uncover their beauty for our delight have but a phantom loveliness, and nought is real in the enchanting world about us, then let us be told the truth. The soul can bear it better than to be deceived. We may be trusted with the knowledge of good and evil and of right and wrong, ye God of Genesis! and praise be to the first-created man for breaking the command to remain in ignorance and taking the first step toward solving the riddle of life!

We learn everything by living. The truth is not revealed to us: we must discover it. It is seen when we climb high enough to see it, or live wise enough to feel it, or act true enough to utter it. When we hear the truth, we hear only the echo of the universe. The last thing that we have to fear is the truth and the consequences of knowing it. Let us not fear to speak it or to hear it. And let us go with it whenever found. They who are keeping the world from the knowledge of good and evil, who are trying to discourage the preaching of truth, are the enemies of mankind.

If man had no knowledge except what he has got out of the Bible he would not know enough to make a shoe.

The great work of man has ever been to rescue the present from the past; to turn the mind from what it has left behind to the opportunities and duties which are around it. For this has genius toiled down the ages, sung its song of love, carved its dream of beauty and whispered to the world's dull ear its bright message of hope.

THE AMERICAN SUNDAY

Everybody has heard of what is called the “Christian sabbath,” and nearly everybody has a tolerably clear idea of what is meant by a “continental sabbath.” A “continental sabbath” may be described as a sort of week-day Sunday, that is, as a religious holiday with more secular, than pious, features. A Christian sabbath is so near dead in this country as a religious fact that a definition of it cannot be had from real life. We find the ideal sabbath of the Christians in the history of early New England. For two centuries the people have been gradually outgrowing the austere religion which made Sunday a day to be dreaded all the week. The attempt has been frequently made by a small puritan contingent, which has survived all these years, to resuscitate this dead sabbath and inflict it upon the world again. But so far the effort has only met with deserved failure.

Resurrections have never been successful. When the inhabitants of graves have come out of their abodes it has been only to walk the streets for a brief period, and then to return again to silence and rest. The stories of ghosts, when true, are always short. These visitants never stop long or do anything that is of any worth to the world. When the grave is once made over the dead it is best to let it alone. There is nothing in cemeteries to aid progress or civilization.

We do not need the revival of old customs or of old faiths.

To endeavor to rehabilitate the sabbath of our forefathers is as foolish as to try to make people go back into log houses and cook over a fire-place. Some persons can never realize that the world grows; that what was a help to one age becomes a hindrance to another; that time corrects the mistakes of men and that respect and reverence for our ancestors do not necessarily require us to adopt their clothes or their habits.

Men and women are made fossils by their religion. The people who are trying to-day to resurrect the puritan sabbath are people who have got religion, but not much of anything else. A man who allows religion to dominate all his thoughts, all his efforts, all his acts, usually is a nuisance, if nothing worse.

A day of rest once a week is a good thing in itself, but it is a bad thing when controlled by religion. We are in favor of Sunday as a day when man can lay aside his business, his care, his tools, and enjoy himself, but we want everybody to take their hands off of it. Sunday is not a day for religion alone. If certain people wish to go to church on Sunday, let them go; but when these people, who go to church on Sunday, wish to compel everyone else to do the same, they need to be informed that *liberty on Sunday is just as much a human right as liberty on Monday*. There are better things that man has found than religion. Liberty is better, truth is better, happiness is better. We would like to see an American Sunday on this continent, a Sunday in harmony with the principles upon which our government was founded, a Sunday which was not run by religion, a Sunday for man and not for the church. Such a day

would not be a sabbath, but it would be a free day, a happy day. The notion of Sunday as a holy day is too absurd, too ridiculous to deserve respectful attention. No man can have fifty-two holy days in a year.

The minister must take his pious grasp off of the throat of Sunday.

A true man is not troubled by anything but his own acts.

The true man walks the earth as the stars walk the heavens, grandly obedient to those laws which are implanted in his nature.

A great many people are afraid of knowledge, but we have seen hundreds of people that we thought would be improved if they knew more, but we have never seen one that we thought would be better if he knew less.

LORD AND MASTER

The Christian is fond of referring to Jesus as his lord and master. We wonder why, for it is evident that not a Christian of this century takes Jesus for his lord and master. The fact is, that there is nothing that a *man* objects to more strongly than a master. Man wants to be independent. He does not want anybody to be lord over him. The struggle of the race for ages has been to get rid of lords and masters, to be free from tyrants. Religion is after all only dead politics. The church makes sacred what the state casts off. What sense is there in fighting for long centuries to liberate the body, and voluntarily accepting slavery for the mind? Jesus is the ghost of a dead king. But why should the world prostrate itself before his invisible throne when it refuses to acknowledge by its obedience that he is fit to rule the kingdom of conduct?

What hypocrites Christians are! What a farce it is for men and women to call Jesus lord and master! They do not obey his slightest command, and they ignore his teachings as undeserving their regard. There is not a precept, that the Christian church teaches came from the lips of Jesus, that Christians honor by practice, not one. Never did a lord receive so little honest respect from his vassals; never a master so little true obedience from his servants.

Men and women are not sincere when they profess to accept Jesus as their lord and master. They doubtless feel grateful to

him for saving them from the fires of hell hereafter, but they look upon him as a mighty poor example for them to follow here. As everybody knows, the church does not require that its members shall practice the precepts given by Jesus. If she did demand this of men and women her membership would speedily be reduced to zero. We do not regard a man as honest, or worthy of respect, who calls Jesus his lord and master and turns his back in contempt upon the precepts he gave his disciples to practice.

You cannot stuff your minds with the lives of saints and grow good on the stuffing.

Some persons are remembered solely for their virtues and others solely for their faults. This is why we have a Jesus and a Judas.

ARE CHRISTIANS INTELLIGENT OR HONEST

Future generations will regard the men who accept the Christian superstitions either as simple or dishonest.

We are forced to doubt the sanity or sincerity of people who profess to believe in the doctrine of the trinity, in a “begotten Son of God,” in miraculous conception, in the resurrection of the body, in the Bible as the word of God, in miracles, and in heaven and hell. We ask ourselves:—Are men intelligent who believe these things, or do they merely profess to believe them, and are dishonest? We cannot reconcile faith in the Christian superstitions with mental soundness and good sense.

What is there in Nature to suggest any of the Christian doctrines? Does not everything we know, everything we have seen, everything we have experienced, deny and disprove the Christian superstitions? Why, then, do people accept them? We find no one that acts as though Christianity were true, no one who lives as though hell were under his feet and liable at any moment to pull him down to eternal damnation. We find men spending all their energies in trying to get the good things of earth, just as though they were told to do so by God, instead of commanded not to lay up treasures upon earth, etc.

It is one of the serious problems of the age to know how to deal

with Christians. They are, as a rule, respectable and decent; they have good manners generally, and they eat and drink, dress and talk, live and die very much as other people, and yet they profess a faith that is absurd and foolish and that has no foundation in fact or philosophy.

We like to think well of our fellow-beings, and we would like to think well of Christians, but we cannot do so as long as they pretend to believe what a person of intelligence, of good sense, cannot believe. Are Christians honest? Perhaps they think so, but have they ever really examined their belief in the light of the knowledge of the twentieth century? If they will do this, we do not see how they can longer profess to be Christians, if they are honest.

When men are hungry roast mutton is better than the lamb that taketh away wrath.

If a man can look in the mirror of his own soul without shame, he can look the whole world in the face without a blush.

THE DANGER OF THE BALLOT

Men speak usually as though voters ranged themselves on one side of a political question, or another, according to their convictions or principles. We wish this were so, then we should be nearer having a pure ballot. But we cannot share this lofty view. It does not seem to us that the average voter is a man of either political convictions or principles. Party service does not require intelligent, independent action, and politics to-day stands for party fealty more than for governmental ethics.

The main question that is decided by an election in our country is, which political party shall have the privilege of dispensing the offices of Government? There is a desire on the part of certain persons to obtain office, for either personal or party advantage, and this desire is oftentimes so fierce that it will betray the honor of citizenship. Where this is done, or attempted, lies the danger of the ballot.

If men voted only as their political convictions dictated, we should have a higher party morality and purer officers, but we must face the facts even though the duty is not an agreeable one. Politics has degenerated to a dirty business and political trickery and bribery secure victory where honor, integrity and principle suffer defeat. The plain truth is, we have a large class of voters who make merchandise of their right of suffrage, and a set of demagogues whose business it is to bribe or coerce voters for the

advancement of selfish ends.

The honest, virtuous, intelligent, independent vote is the noblest power of a freeman, but the purchasable vote, the ignorant vote, the vicious and servile vote, is the opportunity of the knave and the scoundrel. The purity of the ballot is the only safety of a Republic, and no greater danger threatens this nation to-day than that which arises from the corruption of the suffrage. A ballot should be the honest declaration of our principles, the expression of our own opinions, the badge of our manhood; but when it is held in the hand that has sold it for a price, or will deposit it at the dictation of another, it is the prostitute of greed and the hired assassin of the despot.

Every man should select his own ballot and vote to please himself, and any person that would interfere with his right and duty to do this, should be disfranchised forever. *The individual who does not know enough to select his own ballot has no right to vote in this country.*

There have been too many voters led to the polls, and used as party troops. There are still slaves on election day who are afraid of the crack of the whip. There ought to be permitted in this nation no political or religious disability on account of the honest exercise of the right of suffrage. A man should be protected from the politician and the priest. When a man votes as he thinks, he has discharged the highest duty of citizenship, but when he votes through bribe or fear, he forfeits the privilege of the ballot. The polls are more sacred to man than the altar. Religion might die

and man could still have every blessing of earth, but when liberty is killed, the noblest blessing of earth has departed.

The petty salvation offered by Christianity is not much sought after to-day, while the world is bending its mighty energies in the direction of knowledge as never before, and the glory of the electric light, the song of the steam-whistle, the music of the telegraph, the chorus of machinery and the grand anthem of countless enterprises tell of a bright and golden future time when man will master the elements of Nature and guide his life through its course of years in perfect safety and security and step down at the end of it,—“Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch about him and lies down to pleasant dreams.”

WHO CARRIED THE CROSS

Who carried the cross upon which Jesus was crucified? Such a question ought to be easy to answer, if the event ever occurred. There ought to be no disagreement upon so simple a matter as this. But there is disagreement, and quite a serious one at that. Three of the gospels declare that Simon carried the cross, while the fourth gospel says that *Jesus* himself carried the cross upon which he was crucified. Now, which is right? Is John right? If so, then Matthew, Mark and Luke are wrong. If Simon carried it, Jesus could not have done so; and if Jesus carried it, then Simon did not.

That there is such a discrepancy in the accounts of this alleged event does not so much indicate that one is right and the others wrong in regard to the carrying of the cross as that none is right. To our mind this disagreement of the gospels is an indication that no such event as the carrying of a cross upon which to crucify Jesus ever occurred.

Christians put forth the Bible as a work which in some way came from God; as a book which is reliable in its statements, and correct in its narrative of events. Now, it is patent to everyone that in the gospels there are two distinct accounts of the carrying of the cross. How can Christians reconcile this fact with their theory that God is the author of the Bible?

It must be admitted by all that one mind could not have written

or inspired both of these stories, and it must also be admitted that if one is true the other is false. What is the natural conclusion that an unprejudiced mind would arrive at after reading the account of the carrying of the cross for the crucifixion of Jesus in the four gospels? Is it not that no such cross was ever carried for any such purpose?

There are too many gospels, too many stories of Jesus. It would have been better for Christianity had all but one of these narratives been destroyed. They contradict each other in so many essential points as to make them totally unreliable as records of facts. It is plain that *not one of the writers of the four gospels knew of what he was writing*.

We must in honesty say that no one knows who carried the cross on which Jesus was crucified, and no one knows whether Jesus was crucified or not, and no one knows whether any such person as Jesus ever lived, to be crucified.

Civilization has come about by going to school more than to church.

Nature is the volume from which all of our knowledge has been translated.

MODERN DISCIPLES OF JESUS

The modern disciples do not resemble very closely the ancient disciples of Jesus. In fact it is very hard to find a reason why Christian preachers call themselves disciples of Jesus at all. According to the narrative of the New Testament Jesus was not in love with money and what money will buy; he did not have a high appreciation of the good things of the world; he did not express any anxiety about his food or dress, nor manifest any desire to have aesthetic surroundings.

And if we can credit the story of the gospels, Jesus charged his disciples to be and do pretty much as he himself was and did. He said to them: "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils; ... Provide neither gold nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves, for the workman is worthy of his meat.... It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master."

Whether or not the ancient disciples heeded these words of their master, and carried out his instructions, we do not know, but there is abundant evidence that his modern disciples do not pay his commands the compliment of obedience. If there is one item that the clergyman of to-day looks after it is his salary. He deliberately disobeys all of the injunctions of Jesus to his disciples, and thinks he is doing his duty to do so.

This is the funny part of his discipleship to us. He does not

consider the charge of Jesus worthy of being heeded. When we point to the commands of Jesus, and ask some Christian minister why he does not obey them, he coolly informs us that it would be the height of folly in this age to attempt to do as Jesus commanded his first disciples. In other words the Christian clergyman acts upon the ground that the orders of Jesus to his apostles are incompatible with personal dignity and decent living, and that only a person utterly devoid of all sense of fitness and social responsibility would undertake to follow his directions.

We agree with the action of the modern disciple of Jesus in regarding his commands as foolish and unfit to be obeyed, but we want him to take an honest stand before the world and say so like a man. Now he is a hypocrite, when he assumes a place in the Christian ranks but refuses to obey the orders of his master. The modern disciple of Jesus is more concerned about putting money in a bank or investing it in real estate than he is about "laying up treasures in heaven."

If there is one person who believes thoroughly in looking after himself and his in the world, and getting all the good things out of it, it is the Christian minister. He is well housed, well fed, well dressed, and, as a rule, has a comfortable income. How he must laugh when he reads the New Testament! He probably regards Jesus as a chump to tell men and women to take no thought for what they shall eat and drink and wear, and not to lay up a few dollars for a rainy day. He has to make believe honor the poor, unsophisticated peasant of Galilee, in order to get his fat living.

He has to fool the fools that support him in luxury, but all the reverence he has for Jesus you could put in your eye.

If it paid better to tell the truth and to take an honest position in the world, we presume that most ministers would quit playing the hypocrite, but as long as Christianity pays its preachers more than they can get from any other source, we may expect them to profess to follow Jesus and then do as they please.

Every fact is backed up by the whole universe.

Christianity is a black spot on the page of civilization.

The church is a bank that is continually receiving deposits but never pays a dividend.

A POOR EXCUSE

The excuse of the poor for not going to church is a poor excuse. The woman who does not go to church because she cannot dress well enough, cannot have much respect for her master. Jesus did not rail against the poor, but the rich. He did not condemn Lazarus, but Dives. Christian churches should be filled with rags, not silks; with paupers, not bankers. No one can be too poor to feel at home in the church of him who was too poor to have a place to lay his head. A Christian church is the church of poverty, and its minister should welcome the tramp, the beggar, the rag-muffin, and should give the cold shoulder to the rich merchant, the well-dressed politician, the prosperous citizen.

It is a singular thing that while silks despise rags, rags respect silks. The poor Christians ought to glory in their poverty, ought to be proud of their patches. They should have utter contempt for good clothes, and go to the church of Jesus with a feeling of pride that they honor him by being poor, as he was. Velvet, satin and broad-cloth are insults to him whose ragged royalty they profess to reverence.

If the poor were not as big hypocrites as the rich, they would drive the richly-dressed worshipers out of the church dedicated to the poverty-stricken Nazarene, who has been elected to the office of savior. A person has not very much Christianity when

his religion is ashamed of his old clothes.

PROFESSION AND PRACTICE

There are a great many persons who are anxious to pass for more than they are worth, to stand for more than they represent. They always get on the side of the majority, because that is considered the safe side, the side that is most likely to have the largest number of loaves and fishes. These people are willing to pay the price of popularity; willing to do anything that is regarded as respectable, even to denying their own souls. The easiest way to win favor is by professing the popular faith, no matter what it is. A true man will be true to his convictions, true to his principles; but such a man may not receive applause, may not make money, may not be allowed to enter the door of society. In order to win the favor and secure the good-will of the majority, it is necessary to go with it, no matter where it is going. The thoughtless, the weak and simple, follow the crowd.

Profession is demanded of him who would join the ranks of the pious. Profession is required of the man or woman who belongs to the church. The performance of every duty, the practice of every virtue, is not a sufficient recommendation to popular favor. It is a fact that profession without practice is accepted in preference to practice without profession.

The man who gives his life to man without thought or care about God is considered a bad man, while he who gives his life to God without thought or care about man is regarded as holy

and saintly. Nobody can do God any good or any harm, and all the worship that is offered him is a waste of time.

The man who stands up in public and asks God in prayer to help the poor, to bless the suffering, is looked upon as a good man, while he who does not pray nor ask God to do anything, but helps his needy brothers and sisters, is pronounced wicked and sinful. Values have become strangely mixed in the eyes of mankind. Religion is considered as worth more than morality; worship more than work; prayer more than performance and profession more than practice. This is wrong, false and foolish.

Profession is a mighty poor jewel, a cheap and flashy substitute for the diamond of practice. It is a confession of fraud; a mask for a face; a coward's excuse; a hypocrite's wile. Honesty need not profess to be honest.

When a minister says that God will help you, ask him to put up the collateral.

The church spends thousands of dollars to save a dogma, where it spends a cent to find a truth.

WHERE IS TRUTH

Men have enthroned truth in some far-off kingdom, away from the world, as though it were too pure to live on earth. It has been made supernatural, and only to be known by being revealed. But truth is everywhere; its voice is heard in everything. The very pebble at our feet holds its image, and its light twinkles in the white splendor of the distant star.

Man has searched for truth in books, but has not found it there. He has invented words to conceal his disappointment, such as God, heaven, providence, etc. Nature contains all the truth, and so far as men have read Nature aright they have learned what is true, but we cannot catch and hold Nature in our philosophies. She breaks through all the finely-woven theories we put about her, and man, in his attempt to bind Nature with his thoughts, binds only himself.

Men in all ages have tried to read the secret of the universe. We have been told that God directs it, that a divine mind planned it and keeps it in motion. Why not let the universe explain itself? Why not read it by its own light? Why not confess our ignorance? God is a figure of speech, but Nature is a reality. Let us trust what we know. Nature is never capricious. Fire will always burn, water will always drown, frost will always freeze. Though we have confidence in Nature, let us acknowledge that we do not yet comprehend the meaning of things. The old habit of inventing

words to hide our ignorance has been adopted by science as well as by religion. Evolution does not reduce the mystery of existence to a simple problem. What we call truth is more than we have yet found. The unknown is still provocative of investigation, and the only prayer of the mind is, more light. We must beware of accepting dogmas, whether of science or religion. No statement is the last word of truth. Doubt is the first step of progress, and inquiry is the way to knowledge.

There is nothing that stands more in the way of human advancement than the authority of opinions. Some dragon of assertion ever disputes our right to the golden fleece of truth. If we ask for proof of God's existence or man's immortality, we are answered with a text, but a text is only the dead opinion of a dead man. This age demands truth, not the belief of a person who lived centuries ago.

Because superstition holds the contents of a book sacred we are not to enslave reason to its statements. We will not be bound by the opinions of others, neither must we bind others to our opinions. We must make freedom sacred, and cease condemning men for disbelief or unbelief. The bondage of faith is the slavery of the soul. It makes man unjust, unwise and unkind. Allegiance to a creed makes us ill use a man simply because he does not believe as we do.

No church has all the truth, and no school either. So-called religion merely shows where the search after truth ended. But truth is the infinite reality, and it will always be for man to find.

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