

# From Bondage to Liberty in Religion

A Spiritual Autobiography

George T. Ashley



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[Transcriber's note: this book uses several non-standard spellings, e.g. "tho" (though), "thoro", "thoroly" (thorough, thoroughly), "thru" (through), etc.]

# **FROM BONDAGE TO LIBERTY IN RELIGION**

**A SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

**BY**

# **GEORGE T. ASHLEY**

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## **FOREWORD**

The substance of what is written in this book has been given on several occasions during the past five years in the form of sermons or lectures. On each occasion they met with such hearty commendation, and so many requests that they be written and published in book form that they might have a wider circulation, that I have been induced to undertake it. This volume is the result.

It is in no sense a treatise on controverted theological questions; altho some of these are incidentally treated, but only as they entered as factors into my own religious life and experience. This book is simply the story of my own religious life from my early childhood to the present time, in its various transitions from the narrowest orthodoxy to a broad, liberal, rational religious faith. It necessarily deals to some extent with certain theological problems that from time to time

confronted me, the way in which I solved them, the conclusions I finally reached, and why I reached them. But these have been treated in mere outline only. The temptation has been very great to treat, some of these at least, more elaborately; but I have been compelled to content myself often with the bare statement of my views, with few or no detailed arguments to support them. But as my object has been, not so much to try to solve these problems for others, as to point the way thereto, and stimulate the reader to further inquiry and deeper investigation of the subjects treated, if I have succeeded in this, my main object has been accomplished.

No one is more sensible of the many defects in this work than I am. It makes no pretension to any literary merit, nor to any scholarly erudition. I am not a "professional writer." I have simply tried to tell my story in a simple way and make it "readable" if possible. My sole purpose in writing these pages has been to try to help others who may still be in the fetters of ecclesiastical bondage, or wandering in the quagmires of agnosticism—and I know there are many such—to find the way to light and liberty in a rational religious faith. If I can accomplish this, even in a small degree, I shall feel abundantly repaid for the time and labor spent in reviewing the story of my own religious evolution.

## INTRODUCTION

When the traveller, bent on some important quest, makes a prolonged and perilous journey and returns in safety to his friends and neighbors, instinctively those who have known him in former years realize that he is, and he is not, the same person who had dwelt among them. He has seen unfamiliar peoples, traversed strange lands, encountered unexpected dangers. Old prepossessions have been effaced, erroneous opinions have been corrected, new habits of thought have taken the place of old ones and the narrow world of youth has expanded on every side. Naturally, what has happened to him becomes a matter of curiosity and enquiry, and the hero of a great achievement is expected to relate the story of his adventures.

The man who, in these revolutionary days, takes religion seriously—there are many who do not—must make a journey which is fraught with as many surprises

and filled with as many anxieties—especially if it be a pilgrimage from orthodoxy to personal independence—as that which the explorer encounters in a voyage to the North Pole or the jungles of Africa. At every turning of the way he must be prepared for disillusion and the discovery of facts and errors which call for unlimited courage and boundless faith. Religion is not simply a matter of the emotions, its very perpetuity depends upon that sane and persistent activity of the intellect without which the emotions are tyrannous and fateful. Emotion in religion is the driving force by which religion may be applied to human welfare, but if emotion be not governed and directed by the well-trained intellect, informed by patient thought and the use of all the evidence available from those who are entitled to be summoned as witnesses, the result inevitably is merely a matter of superstition, or a spineless acquiescence in old and futile beliefs. To continue all the while to believe in *religion* while one is pursuing a course of reasoning which is bound to shatter many of the interpretations of it which one has previously accepted, requires the kind of intellectual endurance and the quality of faith which characterize the inventor, or the scientific explorer.

When the author of this volume, as an unquestioning disciple of his ancestral fellowship, earnestly sought to pledge all that he was and all that he hoped to become to the salvation of those who he believed stood in peril of everlasting torment, it was the unadulterated spirit of religion which prompted him. But he was at that time unaware of that fact. Religion was with him when it moved him to give himself for others, but to him religion was itself something entirely different. He was urged and commanded by a force, old as mankind, and it took him, as the reader of these pages will see, many years of heart-breaking endeavor, to learn that what most he desired was what most he possessed. His quest was a long and weary one, and the reality of it and the importance of it to him are proven by the thoroughness and the eloquence with which his spiritual experience is recalled and set down in these pages. Only one who had begun in earnest, proceeded in anxiety and continued to the end, as if he absolutely believed in the integrity of the human reason and the intimate friendliness of a supreme Guidance, could have emerged at last triumphantly and with the ability to tell the tale.

To him who thinks of religion only as a matter of course, or as an affair of the church, or as a medium of social advantage; or to him who identifies religion with the ravings of half-witted fanatics and regards it with patronizing contempt, this book will make no appeal. But to the man or woman who has learned that religion is one thing and theology another, and at whatever cost, is willing to

share with the author in his struggle to know the truth about it and be at peace, these pages will command undivided attention; for they relate not only the story of mental perplexity ending in a great personal solution, but they likewise have the charm of a real romance of the soul.

LEWIS G. WILSON.

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# **FROM BONDAGE TO LIBERTY IN RELIGION**

## **A RELIGIOUS AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

### **CHAPTER I**

#### **MY CHILDHOOD, YOUTH AND EDUCATION**

Practically all people inherit their first religious opinions from their parents, their early environment or both, as I did mine. The trouble with most of us is that we never get beyond that stage. We take it for granted that these opinions, whether about religion, politics or anything else, are correct, because we have been told so, and never go out of our way or trouble ourselves for a moment to investigate their truth or error. And thus we go on from generation to generation, traveling in the same old ruts, thinking the same old thoughts, in the same old way, each of us assuming that our particular ancestors could not possibly have been wrong about anything; and although Christianity is divided into several hundred different denominations and creeds, each believes his creed to be absolutely correct and all the others partly or wholly wrong.

Like Saul of Tarsus, I belonged to the Pharisees of the strictest sect. I was taught from infancy that the church of my parents was the one and only true, scriptural and orthodox church on earth, with an unbroken organic succession from Jesus Christ himself down to the present time; that it was the only true exponent of apostolic faith and practice; the only true and lawful custodian of the word of God, and the only authority for the administration of the ordinances of the gospel; that all other organizations claiming to be churches were not churches in fact, but merely religious societies; and that while some of these societies might do some little good in the world, and some of their members might ultimately be saved, they could never reach those sublime heights of glory reserved exclusively for the truly baptized members of the true and only church. Just when and how these ideas first took concrete form in my mind it is impossible for me now to remember. As above intimated, in the plastic condition

of my youthful mind, I naturally absorbed them from the very atmosphere in which I lived, from the common talk I heard around me, as well as from the direct instruction given me.

As far back as I can remember, I understood the Bible to be the word of God, every word of it, from the first word in Genesis to the last "Amen" of Revelation; that it was all divinely inspired, *verbatim et literatim*, just as it appeared in the old King James version; that it was God's revelation to mankind, beside and outside of which there never was, and never would be any other; that every word of it was literally, and infallibly true, just as it read. Such a thing as figurative, or allegorical interpretations I never heard of until I was a grown man, as we shall see later.

This, of course, meant a literal six-day Creation, an anthropomorphic God, a literal physical heaven, and likewise a literal, physical hell, a personal devil, the absolute, literal, truth of the story of Eden, the original perfection and fall of man, total depravity of the race, vicarious atonement and the eternal damnation of all mankind, individually and collectively, who did not accept the prescribed creed of the church of my parents, as the only means of escape.

My first conception of God was that of a great big good man sitting high up in heaven on a great white throne, whence He would judge the world; that heaven was a great city somewhere up in the skies, with streets of gold and walls of jasper; that hell was a literal burning lake of fire and brimstone somewhere down under the world, and that it was presided over by the devil and was made to burn people in who were not good, or who had not believed in Christ as a personal Savior. As a little child I was taught that if I was not a good boy, when I died, the devil, usually spoken of as "the bad man," would get me and burn me in this hell forever and ever; and that I never could burn up or die, and if I called for water he would pour melted lead down my throat. Many a time I would think over this horrible torture that I might inadvertently fall into by doing some bad thing when at heart I really meant to be good, and sincerely wish I had never been born.

In my night visions I could see the devil with his tea-kettle of melted lead, pouring it down the throats of the helpless little ones, writhing in the tortures of the never ending fire!

On the day that I was twelve years old a little incident occurred that so

indelibly stamped itself on my mind, and so changed the course of my thoughts thereafter, that it is necessary to mention it. I was proud I had reached that stage of life. I was boasting of it to a hired man, with whom I was doing an errand, informing him that I was now "more than half a man," and that in nine more years I would be a man, when "I could do as I pleased." He informed me that, after all, it was not a thing to be so proud of; that I had that day reached "the age of accountability"; that on that day I became personally responsible to God for my sins; that if I had died before that day I would have been saved from hell by God's free grace, because of my infancy; but that *from that day on*, I must account to God for myself; and that it would be necessary for me to repent, and pray daily for the forgiveness of my sins, lest I die and fall into the "bottomless pit" for all eternity. This was news to me. I had never heard of before. It produced a profound sensation in my thought; and to say it seriously troubled me is to put it mildly. As soon as my errand was done I went to my mother with it. She confirmed it. Then I sincerely wished I had died before I reached that fateful day.

Another serious trouble confronted me. When told I must repent of my sins and pray for forgiveness, I could not comprehend just what it meant to "repent." I was told that it was "to be sorry" for my sins.

To be frank, I was not conscious of any sin. I had tried to be a good boy; I was obedient to my parents, and did no evil to any one that I was aware of. True, I made childish mistakes every day, as all children do. But I could not recognize that I had been personally sinful against God. I knew I had not meant to be. Then they told me that I was *born* a sinner! That when Adam ate the "forbidden fruit" it made every person that was ever born into the world thereafter, a sinner by nature; and I would have to repent of this sin, as well as all that I ever committed, if I ever expected to escape the lake of fire and brimstone "where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched." My whole nature, even as a child, revolted against the injustice of thus making me responsible for, and punishing me for something some one else did thousands of years ago; but I had no remedy and had to take it and prepare to repent of Adam's sin.

What a monstrous doctrine to teach a child! Can any mortal in this age of the world believe such nonsense, or perpetrate such a caricature of God? I wondered how the "Good Man" up in the skies on his great white throne in his beautiful city of gold, could be just and plunge a little child into hell and burn it for ever and ever because Adam ate fruit from the wrong tree! But I believed it then,

because I was told so, and knew no better. I don't believe it now, and how any human being with the instincts of justice pertaining to the common brute creation can believe such a thing is a mystery to me.

As time went on I learned more about repentance, faith, conversion, baptism and the current theology of my time and environment. But I was ever anxious to escape from that dreaded hell that ever yawned before me in daytime and disturbed my dreams at night. The thought of it was a veritable nightmare to me. It destroyed the happiness of my early life. As a child I could not reconcile it with any conception of God's goodness or justice. I was often, in the silence of my heart, tempted to rebel against God and defy him. But I was afraid. My thought was to make the best I could of a bad situation, and at the earliest possible moment make good my escape. Perhaps this is as good a place as any to state the fact that my parents were members of the Baptist Church, and that in this faith I was brought up. However, I am glad to be able to state that they were much broader and more liberal in their views than many of their brethren. I do not wish to be unjust to this great organization; but it is necessary here to make some statements concerning its doctrine and practice, in order that my future relations to it may be the better understood—statements, the truth of which, all intelligent Baptists will testify to.

First, the Baptist Church is just as exclusive in its claim to being the only true, scriptural, orthodox, apostolic Church as are the Catholics, Episcopalians, or any other Christian body. But this applies *only* to their ecclesiastical organization, and *not* to the character of its membership.

Second, it *does not* hold that baptism is essential to salvation, but that it *is* to church membership. They do not baptize people *to make* them Christians; but because they recognize them as already being Christians, thru repentance, faith in Christ, and the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. Thus, they *recognize* the true Christian character of any and all others who furnish evidence of these fundamental characteristics of a Christian life, tho they do not recognize them as "church members," no matter to what other ecclesiastical organization they may belong. These statements are necessary to understand what follows.

Now in the country where I was brought up, in the time of my boyhood, there were but two churches,—Baptists and Methodists. In fact I was nearly grown before I knew there were any others at all. These churches were generally friendly—in a way. While there was occasional criticism of each by the other,

and some controversy over doctrinal differences, there was no open warfare; and often members of each would attend and worship with the other.

As above said, I was anxious to make terms with God by repenting, being baptized, or anything else that would relieve me of that constant dread of eternal damnation that overshadowed my life.

Perhaps the reader has already surmised that I was brought up in the country districts. Our churches usually held services but once a month. But in the summer, when the "crops were laid-by," we usually had our "protracted meetings," usually lasting a week—from Sunday to Sunday—having two services a day at the church, with dinner on the ground "for all who came." This was the annual revival season, when sinners were "snatched from the eternal burning," back-sliders reclaimed and the cold and indifferent warmed up and aroused.

Well, the summer after I was twelve years old and had reached that fateful period of "personal accountability," at our protracted meeting, I wanted to go to the "mourner's bench," repent, join the church and be baptized, and thus make good my escape and my "calling and election sure." At this time I had no clear conception of the meaning of conversion. Somehow I identified it with joining the church and being baptized. Contrary to the teachings of my church—which at that time I did not understand,—to me, baptism was the main thing. I wanted to be baptized. But they told me I was too young,—and too small to go down into the deep water. This was a great disappointment. But I saw a ray of hope.

The next week the Methodist Church near our home had its protracted meeting and we attended. There I saw children, younger and smaller than myself go to the mourner's bench, join the church and be baptized,—by sprinkling. They even sprinkled babies. While I clearly understood that this was not *true baptism*, I also knew that many of the Methodists were considered truly good people, good Christians, and sure of heaven at death, notwithstanding their lack of true baptism. I therefore conceived the idea that after all, this sprinkling might possess some merit, at least provisionally; and I therefore insisted on being permitted to join the Methodist Church and be sprinkled for the time being, as a sort of emergency measure, until I should grow up to that age—and size—where I might join the Baptist Church and be baptized right. But this pleasure was denied me.

During the next two years I learned much; for I was a close student, altho only a child. My mind also underwent a considerable change. That constant and tormenting fear and dread of hell gradually weakened. In fact I was consciously growing more and more indifferent toward it. Yet I was not altogether uninterested. I had learned much more about the meaning of "conversion" as I saw it manifested in many, and sometimes violent, forms of demonstration. As I saw these I fancied that this was the kind of conversion I would like to have. I wanted to "get happy and shout" as some of the others did.

The time came for the annual protracted meeting at the church of my parents. At this meeting I found myself the object of considerable solicitude. I was now old enough to be converted, join the church and be baptized. They were all anxious that I be "saved." Of course I had to repent of my sins,—and also of Adam's. I was not so self-conscious of innocence now as I was a few years before. I really felt that I had something to repent of.

The preacher, and a good honest, sincere man he was, pictured the flames of hell and the torments of the damned with such power that I almost felt the warmth of its fires and smelled its fumes of sulphur.

I set out in earnest to repent of my own sins as well as Adam's. Repenting was very easy. I cried until the tears refused to flow longer. Believing was easy, for I believed it all. Being baptized was easy. But I had not yet been "converted." There was no miraculous transformation in me. I had not yet "got happy and shouted." I waited for it. My tears dried up. I still went to the "mourners' bench," but nothing came of it. I could not even cry. One day the preacher, noting my condition, had a talk with me. I told him my feelings, and he said I was converted. But I told him that no such change had come over me as the others told about, and that seemed manifest in their emotions and actions. Then he told me that as I was young and had never been a great sinner I could not expect that wonderful "experience" that often comes to the old and hardened cases. I was truly glad to hear it. I really felt saved. I had now escaped the devil. I had already learned the doctrine of "once in grace always in grace," and I felt supremely happy to think that after all I had now escaped from the "eternal burning" and was entirely out of danger. I joined the church and was baptized.

I have thus referred at some length to my childhood for two reasons: It will be seen later how some of these experiences affected my after-life; and also because I feel that in some measure I am only repeating in substance the

experiences of millions of others who have passed through similar conditions of life. Also to say to you, who were brought up in the light of a liberal faith and free from these dogmas of dread, despair and damnation, that you ought to be sincerely thankful that you have escaped at least this much of hell, no matter how much the orthodox may have in store for you in the future; and further, to exonerate my parents from any blame in the premises. They taught me only as they had been taught and firmly believed, and did it all for what they honestly believed, to be for my best interests. Like millions of others, they did the best they knew at the time.

THE CALL TO PREACH.—It was a part of the orthodox belief at that time, and is very largely so even now, that after the fall of Adam, practically all the human race was lost except now and then a worthy patriarch like Abel, Enoch and Noah, down to the call of Abraham; and after that only the pious and faithful of the seed of Abraham, thru Isaac, were saved, down to the coming of Christ. All the balance of mankind were utterly and irretrievably lost, both wicked and apostate Jews and *all* Gentiles. And since the death of Christ those only are saved who repent and believe in him as a personal savior, and accept the prescribed creed of the particular church presenting it. All the balance of mankind, including all Jews and nine-tenths of the balance of mankind are irretrievably lost.

This being the case, the sole end and aim in life is to escape hell hereafter. Nine-tenths of the preaching in my boyhood was to warn men to "flee from the wrath to come." But little was said about the love of God or the brotherhood of man, the nobility of character, human helpfulness, the promotion of happiness here, and the general uplift and advancement of civilization and mankind.

It was wonderful the way they did ring the changes on hell and damnation, and fire and brimstone! It thundered from every pulpit like the traditional thunders from Mt. Sinai.

Taking this view of the world, of life and mankind, I felt that the greatest thing in the world a man could do would be to devote his life to warning men of their danger and pointing the way to safety. I wanted to sound my voice in warning men to "flee from the wrath to come." Believing that all men were lost if they did not follow the prescribed course laid down by my church, I felt that if I did not do all in my power to direct them in the way of eternal life their blood would be on my hands. While I did not feel that I would be "lost" if I failed in

this—for the doctrine of my church was, that once being converted all the devils in hell could not keep one ultimately from heaven—yet I felt that my future happiness in heaven would be diminished just in proportion as I failed to do my best in this behalf. This was interpreted to be a "divine call to preach." I accepted it with profound earnestness and deep conviction, and began early to exercise my gifts.

In due course of events I went to college to "prepare for the ministry." I was in love with the work and happy in its prospects. I was ambitious to be thoroly efficient in my work in the future and pursued my studies with diligence accordingly. Incidentally I learned much that was not in the books, as most college students do.

I little knew what was before me. Here in a "school of the prophets," where I was supposed to be thoroly trained, rooted and grounded in the faith of my church, I was to learn the first lessons that ultimately led me entirely out of the orthodox faith, into a broad, rational liberalism! A few of these it will be necessary to state here, not so much because of any immediate effect they produced, as to show the working of the leaven that years afterward "leavened the whole lump."

The first shock I got was in the study of Geology. When I began it I saw at once that it was out of harmony with the Bible account of Creation, the origin of the earth, and organic life upon it. While no one told me so, I somehow conceived the idea that we were not studying it because it was recognized as truth, but just the opposite. Being rooted and grounded from my infancy in the belief in the absolute literalness, and infallible truth of the Bible; and supposing that I was in college only to be more thoroly instructed in this divine truth, I conceived the idea that this book we were studying was merely the "guess-work" of some modern infidel, and that our real purpose in studying it was to be the more able to refute it when we got out into our life work; all of which would fully appear before we finished the book.

One day when we were perhaps half thru, the professor, himself a Baptist minister, catechised the class individually, as to their opinions as to the length of time the earth was in process of formation, previous to the appearance of life upon it. I noticed, with surprise, that the answers varied from a few millions to hundreds of billions of years, until the question came to me, when I answered promptly, "Six days!" Everybody laughed, professor and all. Of course I felt



"cheap"; but insisted on the correctness of my answer "because the Bible said so," notwithstanding Lyell and Dana to the contrary.

The professor complimented me on my "loyalty to the Scriptures," but explained that the story of creation in Genesis was to be interpreted "figuratively"; that it referred to six great geological epochs in terms of days; and that what we were studying was to be accepted as scientific truth in its general principles, subject, however, to possible revision in some of its details as further geological discoveries were made.

This was a revelation to me. I know the intelligent reader of today will be provoked to laugh at my native, inherent "greenness." But it must not be forgotten that this was thirty-six years ago; and besides this, there are still, in this year of grace 1919, literally millions of men and women, long past the age of student life, who still hold substantially the same views concerning the relations of science to religion and the Bible that I held then. The simplicity of faith is often sublime. And I am not sure that it is not often the truth that, "Ignorance is bliss where it is folly to be wise"; especially where the "wisdom" is just sufficient to disturb the mind but not enough to settle it. But I had a revelation,—two of them.

First, that modern science is to be taken seriously; and second, that much of the Bible must be interpreted figuratively. The latter was the most disturbing to me. The question that confronted me was this: If the Bible is partly literal and partly figurative, when I get out into my life work as a minister, how am I to be able to always determine correctly just what parts are literal and what figurative; and how to interpret the figures? But the answer came as quickly as the question: This is just what I am here to learn, and before I am thru I will doubtless know it all! Some time after this a discussion arose among the divinity students, about the doctrines of inspiration—as to whether the Bible was literally and verbally inspired, word for word, or was merely an inspiration of ideas, the writers being left to write their "inspirations" in their own language and manner. My idea had always been that of the former, that the Bible was inspired word for word, just as it reads. But I found the more progressive and better educated class among both students and professors had abandoned this idea, and accepted the doctrine of the inspiration of ideas only. It was strange to me that God could not have dictated the words as easily as the ideas, and thus have made sure of their correctness. But it set me to thinking. I had never had any doubt about the inspiration of the Bible, yet I could give no reason for it, except that I had always been told so.

Now as progress and education were going to compel me to revise my opinions about the *manner* of inspiration, I began to wonder what evidence we really had that the Bible was inspired at all. I really had no doubts about the fact. I supposed, of course, the evidence existed *somewhere*, but that they had never been specifically pointed out to me; and I wanted to know just *what* and *where* they were. I confided my inquiries to a senior student in whom I had great confidence. He told me the devil was whispering doubts in my ear and I should not listen to him! That there could be no possible doubt about the *fact* of inspiration; that this question had been definitely and finally settled over eighteen hundred years ago by the wisest and best men of the world, and there had never been a shadow of a doubt about it since; that the evidences of inspiration of ideas instead of verbal inspiration were found in the many different styles and manner of writing found in the Bible itself as represented by the different writers. But as to the fundamental fact of divine inspiration itself, there had never been a shadow of a doubt! So I accepted the new idea of inspiration and said "Get thee behind me, Satan," and after that for many years I did not permit myself to doubt the fact of inspiration. Yet occasionally I could not keep from thinking, and many years later this question arose again in my mind with tragic force and effect.

## CHAPTER II

### SEEKING LIBERTY

Other questions now began to arise that were soon to materially affect my church relations, without, however, any material change in my fundamental theology. As before stated, my sole ambition in life was to warn sinners to "flee from the wrath to come." To this one purpose all other things must be made subordinate. For this one purpose I was pursuing my studies in college that I might become the more efficient in its accomplishment. Impressed as I was with the awful truth of man's total depravity and natural alienation from God, and the certainty of his eternal damnation in the never-ending flames, unless he accepted fully, and followed implicitly the prescribed course which I had been taught was the only means of escape, I felt that "Woe is me, if I preach not the gospel." I felt

that any deflection on my part, from the full performance of my duty in this particular, up to the full extent of my power and opportunity, would not only entail eternal torments upon all who might have been thus saved thru my efforts, but would also detract from my own eternal glory in heaven in exactly the same ratio.

I began to look upon the church as being at most but a means, or agency to this end; the channel thru which I might work to accomplish this central purpose. Leaving other churches out of consideration, as not being germane to the purpose of this narrative, while yet in school I had become more fully informed as to the fundamental theology of the Methodist Church; and somewhat to my surprise, I found there was no substantial difference between it and the Baptist Church, to which I belonged. They both appealed to the same infallible revelation; both taught the same doctrine of the fall of man, total depravity and inherited sin; both taught the same doctrines concerning the personality and character of Christ, and the vicarious atonement in his death; the same doctrines concerning heaven and hell; and the same doctrines of salvation by repentance, faith in Jesus Christ, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit. I perceived that the only substantial difference between the two was purely one of ecclesiastical organization and polity. As before noted, the Baptist Church did not hold that either baptism or church membership was necessary to salvation; but that "salvation" was first necessary before one was scripturally entitled to either baptism or church membership. It was also freely admitted that a truly repentant and converted Methodist was just as truly "saved" and as sure of heaven as any Baptist,—and that there were many such there could be no doubt,—true members of the kingdom of God and the Church Universal; true heirs of glory and fit subjects for the heavenly kingdom,—yet not fit for membership in the earthly church, admittedly imperfect at its best, solely because they had not been dipped under the water, an ordinance admitted to be secondary, and wholly unnecessary to the main object!

I began to wonder from whence came the authority to bar the doors of God's earthly church against those who were clearly admitted to be members of the Church Universal, and of God's spiritual kingdom. Thus my faith in the exclusive claims of my church to be the *only true church* on earth, was very much weakened; tho I still firmly believed it to be the best church, and by far the most scriptural, orthodox and apostolic. Yet, I could not see why we might not affiliate with, and co-operate more with our Methodist brethren, imperfect and unscriptural (?) as their ecclesiastical organization was, especially in carrying

forward the great central object we both had in view, the salvation of souls from hell; and more especially, since there was no substantial disagreement between us as to the means and processes of accomplishing this object; our real differences beginning only *after* this was accomplished. The Methodists were always willing to co-operate with us to the fullest extent we would permit them; but we, never, with them.

During the summer that followed the close of my sophomore year in college (which, as subsequent events will show, proved to be my last), an event occurred that so affected my future ecclesiastical relations that it needs to be told in some detail.

As is generally well known, one of the principal differences between the Baptist and Methodist churches is their difference of view in regard to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, as well as that of the mode of baptism. The Methodists, as liberal evangelicals, offer it to all Christians present when it is celebrated, leaving it to each individual to judge for himself as to his fitness to partake of it; while the Baptists limit it to "members in good and regular standing" in their own "faith and order." The Baptists generally disclaim being "close communionists," but "close baptists." That is, they insist that no person is eligible to partake of the Lord's Supper until after baptism *by immersion*; and that by a regularly ordained Baptist minister, upon the authority of a Baptist church, expressed by a vote of its members. I do not know that I ever saw the ordinance celebrated in a Baptist church, that some explanation along this line was not made, by way of apology.

The event that so influenced my future thought was this: At a Baptist church, some six miles from my father's residence, their annual protracted meeting had been going on a week,—from Sunday to Sunday. Some eight or ten persons had joined the church during the week and were to be baptized at 10 A.M. on this last Sunday, after which was to follow the regular church services at 11 A.M.; and then the celebration of the Lord's Supper. A half mile away was a Methodist church, and the place of baptism was the ford of a creek about half way between the two.

The Methodist Sunday School usually met at 9.30 A.M. But on this occasion superintendent, teachers and pupils, came in a body down to the ford to see the baptising. After it was over the Methodist superintendent, with several of his teachers and older pupils, remained for the services at the Baptist church. At the

close of the sermon two persons presented themselves for membership, and were accepted, by vote of the members, subject to baptism, at the next regular monthly meeting; after which Brother Crawford, the Methodist Sunday School Superintendent, was called on to lead in prayer, a function in which he was earnest, able and eloquent, as well as being universally recognized as a man of unblemished character, sincere and deep piety.

The minister then proceeded to administer the Lord's Supper, prefacing it with the usual apologies and explanations about "close baptism" instead of "close communion"; and to illustrate this point, he referred to the fact that two persons had just presented themselves for church membership, and had been accepted, subject to baptism, concerning whose conversion and sincere Christian character, there was just as sure confidence as there was of any that had been baptized that morning; yet these two could not partake of the Lord's Supper because they had not yet been baptized.

Just at this point there suddenly darted into my mind, almost with the force of a "clap of thunder from a clear sky," the question, "Where is the scriptural authority for this?" I had heard it perhaps a hundred times. I was as familiar with it as I was with the alphabet, but for the first time in life the thought came to me with the suddenness of lightning, "Where is the scriptural authority for it?" I could not remember that I had ever heard a single passage of scripture quoted in its support, or defense. (The reader must keep in mind that up to this time, and for several years thereafter, to me, the Bible was infallible, inerrant, and the sole and final authority in all matters pertaining to religion and the church.) The shock was so great, and my mental agitation so intense, that it threw me into a fever. I went home sick.

During the following week I read the New Testament thru in special search for some passage to support the doctrine that baptism, in any form, was a necessary prerequisite to a proper participation in the Lord's Supper. *And I did not find it.* In fact I did not find any direct evidence in the Gospel record that any of the twelve to whom Jesus first administered this supper were ever baptized at all! and if they were,—which is only an inference, or a reading into the record, not what actually is there, but what somebody thinks ought to be there,—it was not Christian baptism, but the baptism of John, which, according to the teachings of the Baptist Church, was an entirely different thing in meaning and purpose, tho the same in form.

John's baptism, according to the teachings of my church, was a "baptism unto repentance," *in preparation* for the appearance of Christ; while Christian baptism, "in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost" was not instituted until *after* the descent of the Holy Ghost, according to the promise of Jesus, on the Day of Pentecost. Then for the first time, and not until then, did Christian baptism in the name of the Trinity, have any existence or meaning. It was therefore quite clear to me, that this institution that we call the Lord's Supper, being instituted, and first administered to persons who, so far as we have any specific knowledge, were not baptized at all; and who in the very nature of the case *could not* have been baptized under that formula commonly known as Christian baptism; therefore, whatever meaning may be attached to the Lord's Supper, it has absolutely no connection with, or relation to any kind, or form of baptism whatsoever.

It is one of my misfortunes that I have never had sense enough to "keep my counsel to myself." I have always had a habit of "thinking out loud." And when I thus began to express myself, my position in the Baptist Church began to grow "shaky," not to say precarious. Yet, I still held rigidly to the doctrine that immersion alone was baptism, and that with all its defects, the Baptist Church was the most scriptural and orthodox in its doctrines and practices of any church in existence.

The upshot of this whole matter was, that I was soon cited before my "church conference" to answer a charge of heresy, in holding to the doctrine of "open communion." I appeared and wanted to make a defense of my position before the church. I was vain and silly enough at that time to think if I could only make my argument before the church I would be able to convert a majority of the members to my views, and thus save myself and "reform" the church. But this I was not permitted to do. I was told I might answer either "guilty" or "not guilty," and no more. I refused to answer either way, unless I was further permitted to explain my answer. This was denied me. Whereupon, a motion was made to "withdraw fellowship from Brother Ashley"; and without debate or further ceremony, the motion was put, four persons voting Aye, and three, No, altho about forty members were present. And thus I went out of the Baptist Church, whereby my education for the ministry became automatically "finished," and all hope of my ministerial career blasted.

Strange as it may seem there was a sort of personal satisfaction in this. I had not entered the ministry as a pure matter of choice. While I did not shrink from

it, but rather took it up joyously, it was because I felt it to be a duty divinely imposed upon me, and therefore an honor of which I was proud; and because it was the means thru which I might gratify my personal desire to be of some real use to God and humanity, in saving souls from the eternal burning.

But now I felt that I had fulfilled my part as far as I possibly could, and was denied the privilege of going further by the action of the church; and that thereafter the church, and not I, was responsible for any failure on my part to go on with the work of warning sinners to "flee from the wrath to come." I was a little like Jonah fleeing to Tarshish. I was rather secretly glad I had gotten away, and shifted the responsibility somewhere else.

But these impressions did not last long. My fundamental theology had not changed. The Bible was still an infallible divine revelation. Humanity was still lost, totally depraved, abiding under the "wrath of God"; hell was a reality towards which all humanity was bound; and the only means of escape was to "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ" according to the prescribed formula. The burden of my personal responsibility soon returned. I could not escape it. True, I was out of the church—the Baptist Church; but it seemed quite evident that God was using other agencies, outside the Baptist Church, for the salvation of souls, and seemed to be doing it quite successfully. If God could so use the Methodist Church for this purpose, why might not I? What did baptism amount to anyway? I was never taught that it was necessary to salvation. And if not, why make such a fuss about it? If a person was already saved, and it was only "an outward sign of an inward grace," what difference could it make how it was administered, who administered it, or whether it was administered at all?

These were some of the questions that ran thru my mind. I also began to note that there were at least a few places in the New Testament that might be fairly interpreted to imply that baptism was, at least, *not always* by immersion.

For example, the baptism of so many thousands on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, where the supply of water was very limited, and this all under the control of the enemies of the new religion. The immersion of so many, in so short a time and under such circumstances and conditions was next to a physical impossibility, while easily probable if done by sprinkling.

By these processes of reasoning, in the course of some two years, I found a congenial home in the Methodist Church, at first with some trepidation, but soon

afterwards with perfect satisfaction. While this change in church relations involved quite a radical change in matters of ecclesiastical organization and polity, it must be kept in mind that it *did not* involve any material change in matters of fundamental theology. But let it be noted here that during all this time I was striving for some degree of religious liberty; and in passing from the Baptist to the Methodist Church, I was at least making some progress towards it, however small it might be. To shorten my story, in a few months I found myself a "circuit rider" in the Louisiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South—I was born and reared in the "pine hills" of Mississippi).

It is not necessary to go into any lengthy details concerning my work at this time, beyond the fact that I was fairly successful in it, and for the time being, I found it eminently satisfactory and fairly pleasant to myself. However, under the workings of the itinerant system, in a few years I found myself located in the state of Missouri, where I transferred my church relations to the St. Louis Conference of the M. E. Church. This change involved nothing but a matter of personal choice and convenience.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **NEW VISIONS AND DISTURBANCES**

Having thus changed my church relations, and feeling that I had a greater field of usefulness open to me, my zeal for efficiency and success increased. I had a sincere and consuming desire to "save men's souls." And believing my creed to be as infallible as the Bible upon which it was based, I studied to make myself efficient and able in its defense. By following the ordinary methods of interpretation, I soon found no trouble in doing this. Does the reader inquire here what are the "ordinary methods of interpretation"? Taking a chapter, or verse, or paragraph of the Bible here and there, thru the whole book, from Genesis to Revelation, and weaving them together as a connected whole, regardless of whether there is any natural connection between them or not; then disposing of all contradictory passages as either "figurative,"—with unlimited latitude on the interpretation of the "figures,"—or as pertaining to those "great and mysterious, unknowable things of God's divine revelation,"—mysteries too great for man to



know! This method of interpretation is the common practice, to a greater or less extent, of every church in Christendom that accepts the doctrine of the infallibility of the Bible, and looks to it as its sole and final source of authority in religion. There is not a creed in Christendom today, and never has been, that cannot be supported and proved to be conclusively correct from the Bible by this method of interpretation. By the same method the Bible can be made the defense—and it often has been—of war, murder, slavery, polygamy, adultery, and the foulest crimes known to humanity, and these all made the divine institutions of God. And these are exactly the leading methods of interpretation of the Bible that are being followed today, and have been since Christianity first began to divide into sects and parties.

But this is a digression. While I recognized some merit in nearly all the creeds, I firmly believed mine the best. My faith in, and devotion to the Methodist Church had become so intense that I believed the sum total of all theological knowledge was concentrated and embodied in John Wesley. There could be no more progress, no more discovery. It was a finished science, and John Wesley finished it. There are thousands who still think so, even to this day! I looked back over history to the days of apostolic purity, followed the trend of theological thought in its decline into error and superstition, thru the dark ages, to the first glimmer of light in Wickliffe, followed by Huss, until the flame of the Reformation sprang up in Luther, Zwingli and Calvin, followed by Knox and Arminius; but Wesley was the end of knowledge, and wisdom died with him.

Yes, I was soon able to defend and prove my creed to the satisfaction of myself and my superiors. But now I wanted to go further. I wanted to *prove* the *proof*. As I grew older and my mind broadened I desired to drink deeper from the fountains of knowledge. I started out with the best materials available to me to make a critical study of the Bible. Up to this time I had studied the Bible only superficially. I had accepted it as truth, as divine, as inspired, as infallible, except the doubts of my school days before described, and these I had long since cast aside. I had studied the Bible as the great mass of Christians study it today—to support and defend preconceived opinions, most of which I had inherited. Now I was to seek for basic principles. I wanted to know just who wrote each book of the Bible, when he wrote it and why, and just what the specific proofs were as to these facts and of its divine inspiration.

In looking back over the period of years that have since intervened, I am still unable to perceive any selfish, egotistical motive in these my ambitions. My

unquenchable thirst for knowledge was inspired solely by my desire to increase my efficiency in that vocation to which I sincerely believed I was divinely called.

I never had the opportunity of taking a Divinity Course in a Divinity School. But both the great branches of the Methodist Church require all its ministers, before final ordination, to take a prescribed course of study, somewhat after the correspondence method, covering four years,—and longer if necessary to cover the full prescribed course,—that is practically equal to the curriculum of the average Divinity School, minus the advantages of class room instruction and class lectures. It was this course of study that I pursued, prescribed by the bishops of the M. E. Church. And it was here in these orthodox books, prescribed by the bishops of my church as necessary for me, not only to read, but to study, learn and digest, to fully equip me for the ministry, that I learned the lessons that completely upset my faith, and finally led me to abandon the church and religion entirely! I might add that it was perhaps as much what I *failed* to learn from these books, things that I was looking for and could not find because it was not in them, that led me to this course, as it was from the affirmative facts I did learn.

Up to this time, and long afterwards, I had never read a book that might be called at all liberal in theology, much less anything of a sceptical character. In fact I had read nothing, outside of school text books, except such books as were authoritatively published by some Baptist or Methodist publishing house. Robert G. Ingersoll was then at the height of his fame, and I would not even read a political speech of his, because he was an "infidel." The strange anomaly of the whole thing is that I was led, or rather driven, clear out of the church into practical agnosticism thru and by my earnest and intense efforts to more strongly fortify and establish myself in my preconceived beliefs about the Bible and religion. This will appear more fully as we proceed.

First of all, all orthodox Christianity is based upon the doctrine that the Bible is the supernaturally inspired, infallible word of God. Upon this Bible as the sole authority, every doctrine, creed, dogma and ecclesiastical practice is based. Take away this doctrine of Biblical infallibility, and orthodoxy crumbles to dust. As long as it is held to be infallible truth, every creed in Christendom can find abundant material in it to prove every point it claims. Every one knows that among the many Christian denominations which fully agree with each other the Bible is an infallible revelation from God; yet the doctrines and conclusions they

deduce from it are as diametrically opposed to each other as midnight and noon.

As I have already said, I never had any doubt, up to this time, of the divine inspiration and infallibility of the Bible, except a very slight one about the method of inspiration, which I have already detailed of my student days. As a Methodist I had become fairly proficient in my ability to defend every detail of my church doctrine. I could repeat almost every passage of scripture from Genesis to Revelation in support of each of the Twenty-five Articles. My only trouble was when I would occasionally run across some sceptic who would question my authority,—the Bible. Of course I would tell him the Bible was the word of God; and he would demand proof, "*detailed facts*," in support of my assertion. While perfectly satisfied in my own mind, these "*detailed facts*" were not in my possession. But now I was going to get them.

In the last year of my conference course of study, one of the books prescribed was "Harman's Introduction to the Study of the Holy Scriptures." Dr. Harman was Professor of Greek and Hebrew in Dickinson College. I was told that in this book I would find "completely detailed, uncontrovertible proofs of the divine authenticity, inspiration, and infallible truth of the Bible." This was just what I had long been looking for, and just how I found it will soon appear.

## **APPROACHING THE CRISIS**

The first one-third of this book of 770 pages is devoted to proving the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, its inspiration and infallible truth. On the subject of inspiration generally the author follows the *ideal* rather than the *verbal* theory. His theory of the *necessity* of inspiration is based upon the idea that the Bible contains records that could not otherwise have been known at the time they were written; for example, the account of Creation "must have been divinely revealed to Moses, as he could not otherwise have known it." The *extent* of inspiration he limits to those matters that were "not otherwise known" to the writers. Things of which they had personal knowledge were therefore not the subjects of inspiration. For example, the advice of Jethro, concerning the division in the burdens of the government, was *not* inspired, because Moses got it directly from the mouth of Jethro himself. Nevertheless the author was "divinely guided" in writing of matters of his personal knowledge, in order that the "sacred record" might be preserved from error. As to the *proofs* of inspiration, I quote verbatim:

"The inspiration of the Bible is evident from its sublime doctrines concerning God, the purity of its moral precepts, and from the wonderful fulfillment of its prophecies." When I read this I confess I felt a little disappointed. I had understood this before. I wanted something more specific, material, tangible.

Then follows a lengthy treatise on the Hebrew language, the original characters in which the Pentateuch was written, without vowels or punctuation marks; how it was preserved by copying from generation to generation; how errors crept into various copies; an account of the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Septuagint; how these all differ the one from the other in many details; of the ancient manuscripts that are still extant, and how these all differ more or less from each other,—not in anything fundamental, but in many minor details; and finally winds up with the statement that "the original text is uncertain"!

This was all new to me. I had naturally supposed that not only the original text was divinely inspired and infallibly correct, but that by some sort of divine supervision, it had been so preserved and kept down thru the ages. And now I was not only disappointed, but alarmed. I wondered what would come next. And I soon learned.

Before this I had never discovered, nor had any one pointed them out to me, the many discrepancies and contradictions in the early Biblical records,—the two stories of creation, the two accounts of the flood that are so intricately woven together, the changes in the law in Deuteronomy from those in Exodus and Leviticus; and others. My simple, blind faith had completely obscured all these until now. It is true the author pointed them out only to explain or reconcile them. But in practically every instance, the explanation failed to explain, or reconcile, and was only an apology or an excuse; and I was left with a clear vision of the discrepancy, and with no adequate explanation. The differences between some parts of the law, as recorded in Deuteronomy and in the earlier books, was explained as a "progressive development according to the changing conditions and needs of the Hebrews." From a purely human viewpoint, I considered this explanation satisfactory. But from that of "divine revelation," I wondered why God did not reveal it correctly at the first; or why he found it necessary to change his own law.

Concerning the ritual law of the tabernacle and the priesthood, the author confesses that, in all probability, Moses was educated at Heliopolis, in Egypt, for the Egyptian priesthood, and was therefore perfectly familiar with all the priestly

regulations of the religion of Egypt; and that *the tabernacle service, its priesthood, their dress, sacred utensils, etc., were doubtless all patterned after Egyptian models, but devoted to Jehovah instead of the gods of Egypt; and he cites this as a proof of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.*

And in support of this view, he quotes the opinion of the Abbé Victor Annessi! And I had always been taught that the tabernacle, the priesthood, and all that pertained to both, were divinely revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai! "According to the pattern shown thee in the mount."

Then on the question of interpolations, our author confesses that there are many of them in the Pentateuch, most of them showing that they belong to a much later age than Moses; yet he denies that any of them are material, or in any way change the original meaning or sense of the text.

Thus I went thru over 250 pages, devoted, not so much to the questions of divine inspiration and supernatural revelation, as these seemed to be very largely taken for granted; but to the defense of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch upon which seemed to hinge the whole question of its authenticity and infallible authority. As the author puts it, "If the Pentateuch was not written by Moses it is a forgery." To do this he quotes quite elaborately from the higher critics, Bauer, Davidson, Bleek, Ewald, Kuenen, Wellhausen, and others, for the ostensible purpose of answering and refuting them.

Now I had, up to this time, never read a line of such Biblical criticism, except that quoted by this author. Naturally, I not only had no sympathy with it, but was strongly prejudiced against it. But I could not fail to note that the refutations and explanations of my author very often failed to either refute or explain.

To sum the whole thing up, when I had gone thus far, I could not avoid the impression that from the standpoint of logical argument, based upon any *known facts*, the whole thing was a failure. It was simply a continued series of apologetics; in legal parlance, a sort of "confession and avoidance." I began in the firm *belief* that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, and that he was divinely inspired in doing it. I expected to find the definite proofs that this was true. When I got thru I didn't know who wrote it. I was equally certain the author I was reading didn't know; and I doubted if any one else did. I felt the incipient doubts of my school days returning, only in much larger volume and greater force. If the reader will pardon the phrase: "I felt myself slipping."

Then followed a study of the authorship, origin, character, and purpose of the remaining canonical books of the Old Testament. These may all be grouped into two or three divisions. Of the historical books of Joshua, Judges, First and Second Samuel, First and Second Kings and First and Second Chronicles, I found to my surprise, that nobody knows who wrote any of them; nor anything definite about the time, or circumstances under which they were written. Joshua was merely *believed* to have been written not later than twenty-five years after the death of Joshua, by some person or persons who were personally familiar with the events therein narrated. As the book is clearly divided into two distinct parts, the first ending with the twelfth chapter and the second beginning with the thirteenth, it is *supposed* that it was written by Eleazar and Phinehas. But this is admitted to be mere conjecture.

The Book of Judges is placed after that of Joshua, because it takes up the narrative where Joshua closes. It is assumed that it *must have been written* sometime before the close of David's reign. "Respecting the Authorship of Judges, nothing is known." The date of both books of Samuel—originally one book—is wholly unknown, as is also that of the Kings and Chronicles. It is conjectured from internal evidence, that Chronicles was *probably* compiled by Ezra, from Samuel, Kings, and possibly other documents, sometime after the return from the exile.

As to the Book of Ezra, it was shown that it is probably one of the most authentic books of the Old Testament, and written by the man whose name it bears. Nehemiah was also placed in the thoroly authentic class, with the admission that about one-fourth of the total contents of the book, appearing in the middle of it, is *very probably* an interpolation by a later, and unknown author. But this, he insists, does not detract from the divine inspiration and authenticity of the book as a whole.

Ruth and Esther also belong to the class of the unknown. Nobody knows who wrote either, nor when, nor where. Ruth is placed "probably sometime during the reign of David." Esther is much later; in fact it is one of the latest books in the Old Testament Canon, from which it was long excluded because the name of God nowhere appears in it. The historical events narrated in it are admitted to be of very doubtful authenticity, as they are nowhere else mentioned in the Bible, and are wholly unknown to secular history; and such events, if they occurred at all, were of such transcendent importance to the Jewish nation, that mention of them in the Chronicles, or by some of the prophets, could hardly have been

omitted. But our author gets around all these difficulties by the Feast of Purim. He insists that such a memorial as this, that has been and still is celebrated annually by the Jews in all parts of the world, "since the memory of man runneth not to the contrary," could not possibly have originated in a mere fiction, and been perpetuated so long. Therefore, the Book of Esther must be true, and divinely inspired!

When I had read thus far, in spite of my former simple faith in the divine inspiration and infallible truth of the Bible, I found myself clearly on the toboggan; and I was deeply disturbed in mind. I was studying a thoroly orthodox author, a distinguished professor in one of our leading colleges, whose book was approved by the bishops of my church; a book clearly written for the purpose of defending the traditional position of the church concerning the Bible, on almost every page of which that I had thus far read, I found a series of apologetics rather than arguments; with constant admissions of the world's total ignorance of the origin, authorship and date of most of the books of the Bible thus far reviewed. I began to wonder, if this was what I was getting from such a source, inspired by such a motive, what might I expect from a Biblical scholar and critic who was in search only of abstract truth, with no preconceived opinions to support or defend? I felt an incipient revolution brewing in my mind. But I was yet to learn more.

Concerning the poetical books, I found that the Book of Job was not written by Job; that nobody knows who wrote it, nor when nor where. I found that conjecture by different scholars placed it all the way from "before Moses" to after the exile. Nobody knows whether it purports to record, in poetic form, a series of actual historic facts and events; or whether it is merely a dramatic allegory, entirely fictitious, or founded upon some substratum of fact. We do not know who Job was, whether a Hebrew, an Arab, or Chaldean;—nor just where "the land of Uz" was.

Concerning the Psalms, which I had always been taught were written by David, "the sweet singer of Israel," I found to be the Jewish hymn book, compiled by an unknown hand, or hands, at an unknown date; but in its present form, perhaps as late as the third century B.C.; that the authorship of very few of them is known; that David wrote but few of them, if any; but that they were written by various authors, mostly unknown, ranging all the way from the time of Moses to that of Ezra, or later; that collections and revisions were probably made from time to time as new compositions appeared; until its present form

was attained.

I found that the "Book of Proverbs" was not written by Solomon, but that it was probably compiled in the time of King Hezekiah, by unknown persons. However, our author insists that most of the proverbs in the collection are Solomonic in origin; and therefore we may very correctly speak of the collection as the "Proverbs of Solomon."

The Book of Ecclesiastes, from the superscription in Chapter I, verses 1 and 12, always attributed to Solomon, I found was not written by Solomon, at all, nor until more than five hundred years after his death. Our author concedes it to be the "latest book of the Canon"; that it could not have been written before Malachi, and possibly much later, and who wrote it, nobody knows.

Likewise I found that the "Song of Solomon" was not written by Solomon, nor by anyone else until centuries after his death; and nobody knows who wrote it, nor what its real meaning or purport is, whether fact or fiction, spiritual or sensual. It is admitted that its real meaning and purport is the most obscure and mysterious of any book in the Old Testament, yet, as it is in the Bible it must be the divinely inspired, infallible word of God! So our author thinks.

Coming now to the Prophetic Books, I learned from our author that the Book of Isaiah, as it now appears, is a collection and compilation of various writings of this great prophet, written piece-meal over a period of some fifty years, and after his death collected and arranged in its present form by some unknown hand; and that the present arrangement was made without any reference to the chronological order of the original writings, or the subject matter treated. He admits the radical difference in style, manner and subject matter of the two parts of this book, upon which modern critics have based their theory of two Isaiahs, one living before and the other during the captivity, and reconciles these discrepancies by asserting the power of God to miraculously change the literary style of his servants at will.

About the same thing is said of the Book of Jeremiah what was said of Isaiah; that it is a collection of the writings of the prophet, made after his death, by some unknown person, but more probably by Baruch; and that like Isaiah the contents of this book are arranged without reference to their chronological order. Great differences are admitted to exist between the Hebrew and Septuagint versions of this book, which our author does not try to explain or reconcile. He frankly



admits that the last chapter of this book, which is identical with 2 Kings xxiv, 18, and xxv, was added by a later, and unknown hand.

The Book of Ezekiel is treated briefly and considered one of the most authentic and unquestioned of any book in the Canon. But the author devotes twenty-six pages to the Book of Daniel, almost entirely to prove that the book was written by the prophet of that name in Babylon, during the exile. He quotes elaborately from the critics who hold to a later date and a different author, and tries to refute them. About the only effect produced on my mind was that neither party knew anything definite about it; and of course my faith in the authenticity of the book was greatly weakened.

Coming to the Minor Prophets, twelve in number, the author holds that Hosea, Joel, Amos, Micah, Haggai, Zephaniah and Zechariah were well known prophets, concerning the date and authorship of whose books there is no grave doubt. Yet, he admits that there are manifest interpolations and additions to the Book of Zechariah. Of Nahum, Habakkuk, Malachi and Obadiah he admits that we know absolutely nothing, except what is written in their respective books, and the dates they were written can only be conjectured from their contents. Obadiah is composed of but one chapter of twenty-one verses, and almost identically the same thing is contained in Jeremiah xlix, 7-22. The identity is so great that our author assumes that one of them copied from the other, but which, he does not say. Of the Book of Jonah, he admits that it was not written by the prophet of that name mentioned in 2 Kings xiv, 25, nor for at least three hundred years after his time, notwithstanding he is evidently the same as that in the book. He insists, however, that no matter who wrote it, or when, the book is authentic and the story true; and as one of the principal proofs of this fact, he quotes Matt, xii, 39, 40.

Thus I finished the Old Testament, considerably shaken in faith; but as the Old Testament belonged to a long past dispensation, I considered it of little value anyway, and approached the study of the New with the hope that all difficulties would be removed and all doubts made clear. If the New Testament was truly inspired of God and infallibly true, what difference did it make if the Old was doubtful and uncertain? It was "out of date" anyway.

## CHAPTER IV

### NEARER THE CRISIS

Our author begins his "Introduction to the Study of the New Testament" with an account of the language and characters in which most of it was originally written, as he did the Old. These were Greek Uncials, all capital letters, without any space divisions between the words, and neither accent nor punctuation marks; that from these original manuscripts, down to the invention of printing, all copies were made by hand copying. The oldest existing manuscripts were made in the fourth and fifth centuries of the Christian era, and no two of these are exactly alike. During the succeeding centuries several thousand manuscript copies of all or parts of the New Testament were made that are still extant, *and no two exactly alike!*

I also learned that there are still extant quite a number of ancient Versions of the New Testament, translated into different languages, all of which are more or less different from each other, not alone in the text, *but in the books recognized as authentic and canonical.*

Here the author gives a brief history of the formation of the New Testament Canon, which so surprised, and even startled me, that I must make some mention of it. (In his treatment of the Old Testament the author gives but a few pages to the formation of the Old Testament Canon.) In the fifth Article of Religion in the Methodist Discipline it says: "In the name of the Holy Scriptures we do understand those canonical books of the Old and New Testaments of whose authority *was never any doubt in the Church.*" (Italics mine.) But here I was to learn that for over three hundred years there was more or less controversy, and sometimes very bitter, over what books of the New Testament were, or were not, authentic and authoritative; that as a matter of fact there never was complete agreement among the Church Fathers; and that there never was any authoritative declaration on the subject by any Church Council until the Council of Trent (Roman Catholic) in 1545, which included in its canon all of our present recognized books of both the Old and New Testaments, and in addition thereto, included as canonical the Old Testament Apocrypha, which is universally excluded from the Protestant Bibles.

As this work is designed, at least partly, to stimulate additional study in

others it may be well to cite a few examples, as I learned them from this book, designed to prove conclusively the authenticity, divine inspiration and infallible truth of the Holy Scriptures.

The canon of Muratori, about A.D. 160, omits Hebrews, both epistles of Peter, James and Jude, as uncanonical, and expresses doubts as to the Revelation.

The Peshito Syriac, about A.D. 200, omits Second Peter, Jude, Second and Third John and Revelation.

The Latin Version Itala, about the middle of the second century, omits James and Second Peter.

The Version of Clemens, about A.D. 202, omits Second Peter, James, Second and Third John and Philemon.

That of Cyprian of Carthage, about A.D. 250, omits Hebrews, Second Peter, Second and Third John, and Jude.

Eusebius, the great church historian, about A.D. 340, disputes the authenticity of James, and omits Jude, Second Peter, second and Third John, and doubts the Revelation. He also gives a list of "Spurious writings" at that time, a number of which are still extant. (It was years after this before I saw The Apocryphal New Testament.)

Ambrose of Milan, late in the fourth century, rejects Hebrews, Second and Third John, Jude, James, and Philemon.

Chrysostom, of Antioch, about A.D. 400, omits Second Peter, Jude, Second and Third John, and Revelation.

Jerome, about A.D. 420, rejects Hebrews, doubts James and Jude, and attributes Second and Third John to John, a Presbyter of Ephesus, and not the Apostle John.

I have only cited the names of those who *did not* accept the present canon. That many of the Church Fathers, perhaps a majority of them, did accept it is not questioned. I have cited these instances—and not near all our author gives—to show that opinion on this subject was by no means unanimous in this early day; nor was all the intelligence, ability and character on one side. I quote it also to

show that the teachings of my church concerning those books, that there "was never any doubt in the church" was not correct.

It must however be said in all fairness, according to our author, that from about the close of the second or the beginning of the third century, there was practical unanimity in the church as to the authenticity of all the books in our present New Testament except these seven: Hebrews, Jude, Second Peter, Second and Third John, James and Revelation. Over these the controversy continued until the Roman Hierarchy overshadowed the Church and suppressed all liberty of thought or expression.

We now come to the detailed study of the origin, authorship, date and character of the different books of the New Testament.

The first shock I got was learning that "The Gospel According to Matthew," was not written in its present form by the Apostle of that name. Nor is the author or date definitely known. The substance of a long article on the subject is to the effect that Matthew the Apostle, about A.D. 68, wrote an account of the doings and sayings of Jesus, in the Syro-Chaldee language, the vernacular of Palestine at the time, for the benefit of the Hebrew Christians. From this basis some later hand, unknown, translated into Greek, and elaborated it into substantially our present version. The earliest known Hebrew, or Syro-Chaldee version was that used by the Ebionites, which materially differed from our present Greek version; but which is the original and which the recession has never been settled. The early Ebionite version did not contain the first two chapters, giving the account of the miraculous birth; but our author insists that these were cut off from the original, rather than added on, tho nobody knows which.

Concerning the Gospel of Mark, he insists that it was also written as was the original of Matthew, before the destruction of Jerusalem, but after Matthew; that the material in it was learned from Peter, whose companion Mark was (how does this comport with divine inspiration?) as Mark was not an apostle and could not have known these facts at first hand. He admits the last twelve verses to be spurious and added by a later hand.

Concerning Luke he says that he derived his information from Paul (another case of doubtful inspiration), admits the date and place he wrote are unknown; admits the discrepancies between him and Matthew, in regard to the circumstances of the miraculous birth and the genealogy of Jesus—something I

had never noticed before!—and undertakes to reconcile them. When I turned to the records and read them in this new light, his attempted reconciliation, to my mind, was an utter failure. Like every attempted reconciliation I have ever read since, it was done by "reading into the record," not only what was not there, but what was wholly inconsistent with the record that is there. If any candid reader will first read carefully the first two chapters of Matthew, noting all the details, and then likewise the first two chapters of Luke, he will see that they are wholly irreconcilable in their details. They agree in but two points: That Jesus was miraculously begotten, and born at Bethlehem. But in every detail of what went before and after, they are wholly at variance.

My belief in divine and infallible inspiration was here materially weakened. How could the Holy Spirit "inspire" in two different men, writing upon the same subject, such varying and irreconcilable accounts of the same event? Besides, our author had practically abandoned the idea of inspiration by attributing Mark's knowledge of the life of Jesus to Peter and Luke's to Paul. But, on the other hand, as I learned a little later, in all the writings attributed to Paul, there is not a single reference, even most remotely, to the miraculous birth of Jesus; but on the other hand there is much evidence in his writings to lead to the conclusion that he knew nothing about it. Then where did Luke get this information?

Concerning the Gospel according to John, our author devotes forty-eight pages to an effort to support its authorship in the Apostle John, and to try to reconcile it with the other Gospels. Like the differences between Matthew and Luke concerning the birth of Jesus, this was the first knowledge I had that there were any discrepancies between them, or that there was any doubt about its authorship. He quotes elaborately from the Church Fathers in its favor, as well as from the modern critics both for and against. He admits that chapter xxi is a later addition to the book, but insists that John wrote it himself, except the last two verses, which were "added by the church at Ephesus." He also admits that v, 2, 3, and viii, 1-11, are both spurious and added by a later and unknown hand.

When I had read it all I knew less about the authorship of the book than when I began. But the discrepancies between it and the synoptics loomed large and menacing. I will not go into details concerning these. The reader can easily see them for himself. But on the question of inspiration I was about at my wits' end. Here I was at the very vital part of the Christian religion, as I had been taught it and was trying to teach it to others. I have already told how I passed up the matter of the inspiration of the Old Testament as being of little importance under

the Christian dispensation. And now every prop was falling from under me in regard to the inspiration of the New. If the very records of the life and teachings of the Christ himself, upon which the whole fabric of Christianity rested, were now shown to be discordant and irreconcilable in their contents, and some of them very doubtful in their authorship; with it the whole doctrine of a divine and infallible revelation would have to go.

I was dumfounded. Was it possible that all this upon which I had staked my whole life, and had been preaching for years, was a mere fiction? It seemed to be so, if the Bible was not divinely inspired, a true revelation from God, and infallibly correct. But how could it *all* be true, when it told so many different and conflicting stories about the same thing? Was not God the very essence of truth? Then how could He miraculously reveal one thing to Matthew, another and entirely different one to Luke, and still another and different one to John, all about the same thing? And yet, that in many instances this was true, I could no longer doubt. Even tho these discrepancies might not go to the essence of Christianity as a system of religion; nor materially affect its fundamental doctrines; yet they did go to the very foundations upon which it was based,—a divine and infallible revelation from heaven. Take this away and orthodox Christianity is not left a leg to stand on; and I knew it.

But we will hurry on thru this subject. The authorship of the Acts of the Apostles was attributed without serious question to Luke. All the Epistles usually attributed to Paul are conceded to him by our author, except that to the Hebrews, while some critics reject the Pauline authorship of any of the Pastoral Epistles,—those to Timothy, Titus and Philemon. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is admitted to be unknown, and its date uncertain, tho it existed in the church quite early.

The Epistle of James is admitted to be doubtful; and especially as to which of several men of this name might have written it. It is admitted that it could not have been written by the Apostle James, as he was put to death at Jerusalem long before the epistle was known. As has already been seen, it was rejected by many of the Fathers; and even Martin Luther dubbed it "an epistle of straw."

First Peter is considered genuine, and written by the Apostle; but Second Peter is admitted to have been unknown in the church before the third century, and consequently spurious.

The First Epistle of John is believed by our author to have been written by the same hand that wrote the Fourth Gospel, the Apostle John. Second and Third John are admitted to be doubtful, probably written by some other John, and by later tradition, because of the identity of the names, attributed to the Apostle. Third John was unknown in the church before the third century.

The Epistle of Jude is admitted to be a mystery. Nobody knows even who Jude was, or what he was, or when the epistle was written. It was known to exist early in the second century. It was generally rejected by the early church, but somehow got into the canon.

The Book of Revelation is admitted to be the most mysterious book in the whole Bible. By whom and when written are both unknown. Tradition and its internal content is the only evidence that the Apostle John wrote it, and this would apply to any other John as well. It is evident that the same person did not write it and the Fourth Gospel. It was unknown in the church until near the middle of the second century; tho it bears internal evidence of having been written before the fall of Jerusalem. Most of the early Church Fathers rejected it, but it got into the canon;—and is therefore divinely inspired!

My study of "Harman's Introduction of the Study of the Holy Scriptures" was here finished. I have elaborated somewhat on these studies for two reasons: First, because the results that these studies produced in me, that I shall presently sum up, were the results of the whole, rather than any particular part of it, except those portions which I have already specially noted. Second, I desire to arouse a similar spirit of study and investigation in my readers; and I thus give this outline of study in detail, as a sort of basis from or upon which to work.

I have already indicated in part my feelings at this time. I summed the whole thing up briefly. The one great question around which it all hinged was this: If the authorship of the books of the greater portion of the Old Testament are wholly unknown, as well as the dates when they were written, and the same is true of several of the books of the New Testament, how are we to know these same books are divinely inspired, the infallible truth, the word of God? This is a fair question and a reasonable one.

I had set out in earnest and good faith to find the proofs of inspiration, in which I had always believed, and only found them wanting. Add to this the manifold discrepancies and direct contradictions which I now began to discover

running thru the whole Bible, both Old and New Testaments, and I found them wholly irreconcilable with any idea of divine revelation and infallible truth.

I here recalled a small book I had read some years before on Inspiration,—the author I have forgotten,—but I remember the three leading reasons for the inspiration of the Bible which he gave, and which, with my limited knowledge at the time, seemed satisfactory. These were: Tradition, Necessity and Success. The tradition of the Jews as to the authenticity and inspiration of the books of the Old Testament: it was argued, that whatever may at this time be the limits of our knowledge concerning these books, the ancient Jewish Rabbis *knew* just what they were, and if they had not every one been the word of God, these Rabbis would have known it, and they never would have been in the canon. The same doctrine of tradition was applied to the Church Fathers concerning the books of the New Testament. But I had here learned that these Church Fathers were by no means agreed as to these books. I began to see now that the same argument might be applied with equal force to the Vedas, the Zend Avesta, or the Koran.

The argument from necessity was based upon the assumption that man in his fallen and sinful state was by nature wholly unable to discover anything about God, or the means of his redemption. Therefore a divine revelation was necessary to meet man's needs in this case; and the Bible meets this necessity. Therefore the Bible is a divine revelation. But I here recalled that the only evidence we have of man's original perfection and fall is in the Bible itself; and that this line of argument must ultimately drive us back to the mere *assumption* of the facts upon which this supposed "divine necessity" was based.

The argument based upon success was that Christ and Christianity were not only the fulfillment of Old Testament promise and prophecy; but that it never could have made the success in the world that it has *if it had not been of divine origin, the result of divine revelation*. I was prepared at this time to look with some favor on the argument drawn from "promise and prophecy"; but if success was a true test I wondered if the same argument would not apply with equal force to Buddhism, with a third more followers than Christianity, or to Mohammedanism with half as many in a much shorter time.

These arguments could satisfy me no longer, in the light of the new facts I had learned. But I was not yet ready to give up religion and Christianity. I began to look for some new basis of interpretation. I asked myself the questions: May not Christianity be substantially true after all? Is not man a sinner? And as such



does he not need a Savior? Does not Christianity meet this necessity? Is not the Bible after all, tho of purely human origin as I now conceived, a valuable book? May we not yet find much valuable truth in it, tho neither inspired nor infallible? May not the "great plan of salvation" be true after all? Is it not of vital importance to know? But if the Bible in which we find it cannot be relied upon infallibly, *how* are we to know?

In thus questioning myself I took into consideration my own personal experiences, those emotional impressions and manifestation which I had always been taught were the supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit on my life and consciousness. I could not deny them, nor get away from them. They were real. It was years later before I learned to interpret them from the scientific standpoint of psychology. I determined to take a new course—a course I had never taken before. I had heretofore taken my religion on authority. This authority had now failed. I determined to apply the test of *reason*, with a firm conviction that in doing so God would guide me aright. "If any man will do his will he shall know of the doctrine."

I may say just here that I have never yet met a person who undertook to defend the "Christian System," or doctrine of sin and salvation, from the standpoint of *its own intrinsic reasonableness*. The only manner in which reason has been applied to its defence is, that it is *a reasonable deduction* from the *divine revelation* upon which it is based; which revelation *must be accepted* as true without question or equivocation. To doubt is to be damned. In fact, its *unreasonableness*, from any natural human viewpoint, was quite freely admitted. But it was argued that man in his fallen state was quite incapable of perceiving, or understanding, any of the great mysteries of God. "Great is the mystery of Godliness" was often quoted to me; as well as, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," saith Jehovah. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." This was the court of last resort and must be accepted, and to ask further questions was to blaspheme.

Perhaps it may be well to give here a quotation which I came across years afterwards, as illustrating this process of reasoning from the assumed hypothesis of a divine and infallible revelation, that *must be taken* as the starting point. It is from Dr. Albert Barnes, a distinguished Presbyterian minister of Philadelphia, about the middle of the last century. I quote him because of his high character and representative position; and his dilemma is substantially the same with

practically all others with whom I have conversed on the subject. Here is what he says:

"That the immortal mind should be allowed to jeopard its infinite welfare, and that trifles should be allowed to draw it away from God and virtue and heaven; that any should suffer forever,—lingering on in hopeless despair and rolling amidst infinite torments, without the possibility of alleviation and without end; that since God *can* save men, and *will* save a part, He has not purposed to save *all*; that, on the supposition that the atonement is ample, and that the blood of Christ can cleanse from all and every sin, it is not in fact applied to all; that, in a word, a God who claims to be worthy of the confidence of the universe, and to be a being of infinite benevolence, should make such a world as this, full of sinners and sufferers; and that, when an atonement had been made, He did not save *all* the race, and put an end to sin and woe forever,—these, and kindred difficulties, meet the mind when we think on this great subject; and they meet us when we endeavor to urge our fellow-sinners to be reconciled to God, and to put confidence in him. On this ground they hesitate. These are *real*, not imaginary difficulties. They are probably felt by every mind that has ever reflected on the subject; and they are *unexplained, unmitigated, unremoved*. I confess, for one, that I feel them more sensibly and powerfully the more I look at them, and the longer I live. I do not understand these facts; and I make no advances towards understanding them. I do not know that I have a ray of light on the subject, which I had not when the subject first flashed across my soul.

"I have read, to some extent, what wise and good men have written; I have looked at their theories and explanations; I have endeavored to weigh their arguments; for my whole soul pants for light and relief on these questions. But I get neither; and, in the distress and anguish of my own spirit, I confess that I see no light whatever, I see not one ray to disclose to me the *reason* why sin came into the world, why the earth is strewed with the dying and the dead, and why man must suffer to all eternity.

"I have never yet seen a particle of light thrown on these subjects that has given a moment's ease to my tortured mind; but I confess, when I look on a world of sinners and sufferers, upon death-beds and graveyards, upon the world of woe, filled with hosts to suffer forever; when I see my parents, my friends, my family, my people, my fellow-citizens,—when I look upon a whole race, all involved in this sin and danger; and when I feel that God only can save them, and yet he *does not* do it,—I am struck dumb. It is all *dark, dark, dark* to my

soul, and I cannot disguise it."

I think the conclusions Dr. Barnes reached are about the only conclusions any honest, intelligent *man* can reach, starting from his hypothesis, that a certain book is a divine and infallible revelation from God, which no one dare question, or go behind. But, as has been seen, this foundation had now entirely slipped from under me. My only course was to proceed just as tho no such book were known; or at least, that it was completely shorn of all claim to being a divine revelation, or infallible truth. I proposed to analyze every element that entered into the whole Christian system, creation, sin, redemption, atonement, salvation, immortality, heaven and hell, going back to original sources so far as possible, without any preconceived hypothesis whatever, in search of abstract truth. I felt that since God had left me without any conclusive and indisputable proofs of the truth of those things which I had always believed to be of the most supreme importance to mankind for time and eternity, that this supreme, distinguishing feature of man that lifts him above all known forms of creation could, and should be, appealed to as the final authority and last test in all things. And since reason was universally recognized as the court of last resort in all other things outside of religion, why should it not be applied to this also? I felt that if I thus honestly and sincerely followed the last and only light I had, that God could not be just and everlastingly damn me for some possible error in my conclusions. The process I followed and the results I reached will be told in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **THE CRISIS**

I went back to the beginning. God was certainly good. He was all-wise, infinite. He must have known all things—the end from the beginning. If He thus knew all things He must have known the whole destiny of man before He created him. He must have known that he would yield to temptation and fall, and that all the direful consequences would follow it that orthodoxy has pictured for centuries. I began to wonder how God could be just and make a creature, whom He knew in advance would do what Adam is alleged to have done, and knew in advance the dreadful consequences that would follow it, not only to Adam

himself, but to all the unborn generations yet to people the world. Especially was I perplexed to understand how God could be just and visit all the consequences of Adam's sin on his entire posterity for uncounted generations when they were and could be in no way responsible for it and could not help it. Yet I believed God to be just. He could not be God and be otherwise.

Since the whole purpose of religion, and Christianity in particular, was to save mankind from hell hereafter, I first directed my inquiries to the question of hell. Who made hell? and whence came the devil? The Bible is silent as to their origin, except the vague reference in the Book of Revelation to the war in heaven and the casting out of Lucifer with a third part of the angels with him into the bottomless pit so graphically portrayed by Milton in Paradise Lost. But this only carried me back farther. Who created the angels, or were they co-eternal with God? If they are co-eternal with God then there are other eternal beings in the universe over whom God has little or no control. If so God is not omnipotent. The devil is his rival in the spiritual world and, according to the current doctrine, his equal in omniscience and omnipresence, and a close and terrible antagonist in the contest for omnipotence.

Take the other horn of the dilemma. Then angels and the devil are created beings, creatures of God, and not eternal. Then God must have made the devil. If He created him a holy angel, yea, an archangel, as is claimed, God certainly knew in advance that this archangel would sometime lead a rebellion in heaven and lead one-third of the angels into the conspiracy! Would an all-wise, a just and good God create such beings, knowing in advance what they would do and what the consequences of it would be? This forced God to create a hell in which to put and punish these rebellious angels whom He knew before He created them would rebel against him and thus have to be punished. If God needed angels to glorify him was it not just as easy to create good ones, that would not rebel against him! He created some that way, why not all? And if rebellious angels had to be punished why not do it by annihilation instead of making this burning hell for them? If annihilation be considered too merciful and this hell the only adequate punishment, all very well for rebellious and sinful angels; but why should this yawning gulf of eternal woe open its throat to receive the future being to be made in God's own image and called man?

We are told that hell was not created for man, but for the devil and his angels. Nevertheless, if the story of Eden and the doctrines of modern orthodoxy be true, it is now and will ultimately become the eternal abode of about ninety-eight per

cent of the entire human race. I could never again reconcile the old views of hell with any rational conception of a just and merciful God. The story of Eden itself I took up for analysis. Man was alleged to have been framed up out of dust, yet made "in the image and likeness" of God,—and consequently perfect. At least this is the universal teaching. He was alone. A companion was made for him from a rib. They are happy in a garden. God walks and talks with them like a man. Everything is going smoothly until one day God comes in and points out a certain tree, hitherto unnoticed and unknown, and informs Adam that he must not eat of the fruit of this particular tree on penalty of death. Then comes the serpent, talking like a man, and tells the woman that what God said was not true; but if they would eat of the fruit of that tree they would "be as Gods, knowing good and evil." "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat." Gen. iii, 6.

Now, was the first sin that eternally damned the whole human race a mere matter of eating from a forbidden tree? It seems so from the natural import of the language used. "When the woman saw that the tree was *good for food* ..." Could a just God inflict such an awful punishment as orthodox Christianity teaches, not only upon this simple, ignorant couple, but upon the entire human race for all time and eternity for such a trifling incident? I trow not. Besides, I have often thought that if that particular tree had not been specifically pointed out and forbidden, probably neither Adam nor Eve would ever have had any desire to eat of it. It is the forbidden that always draws the strongest.

Let us examine this story closely and see whether the serpent or God told the truth. Don't be alarmed and accuse me of blasphemy or sacrilege. We set out in search of truth; let us try to find it. God is alleged to have said, "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for *in the day* that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Gen. ii, 17. But he *did not* die, according to the subsequent story, for over nine hundred years thereafter. The fact that the penalty: "For dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return," was pronounced *after* the transgression, does not fulfill the statement "in the *day* thou eatest thereof." But we shall refer to this again.

The serpent is alleged to have said: "Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil." Gen. iii, 4, 5. And verse 7 says: "And the

eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked." And verse 22 says: "And Jehovah God said, 'Behold, the man is become as *one of us*, to know good and evil.'" Does not this confirm that what the serpent said was true?

The temptation is very great here to digress far enough to offer a rational interpretation of this beautiful poetic allegory of the "Fall of Man." But it is outside the scope and purpose of this work, and I leave it with the simple question: Was not that which we call the first sin only the expression of man's natural aspirations onward and upward, in search of knowledge and a higher and better and broader and larger life, that always entails its penalties of trial, suffering, toil, and more or less disappointment?

When God comes to call them to account, Adam puts the blame on his wife, and she shifts it to the serpent. Note what follows: The serpent is cursed to crawl upon his belly, just as we see him now. Did he walk uprightly before, and did he have legs and feet? "And dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life." What did he eat before? As a matter of fact, serpents do not eat dust now. Remember, this sentence was pronounced *to the serpent* himself: "And Jehovah God said unto the serpent,"—not to Adam and Eve. We shall have occasion to recall this again.

"Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy pain and thy conception; in pain thou shalt bring forth children..." This was the penalty pronounced upon Eve for her part in the tragedy. The question arises: Was Eve never to be a mother but for this transaction? This, if not the only, is at least the most natural inference. Then how was the race to be propagated? or was it to be propagated at all?

Adam for his part was condemned to hard labor, and altho creation was supposed to have been finished and complete, the ground was cursed so as to make it produce thorns and thistles to annoy and tantalize him and increase his labor. Were none of these things on the earth before? Were the rose bushes in the Garden of Eden "thornless"? "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground: for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

Several questions arise here. Was Adam to be immortal in the flesh if he had not eaten of the forbidden fruit? Did death enter the world, as we have always been taught, because of this sin? And if Adam had not sinned would he and Eve still be living in the Garden of Eden, without the knowledge of good and evil,

naked and unashamed to this day? If Eve was never to become a mother if she had not sinned, would she and Adam still be there alone, with nothing but the animal world about them for companions?

And if death only entered the world because of sin, why does all nature die? Man alone was capable of sin, and according to the story, man alone sinned,—unless we include the serpent. Yet, not a beast of the field, a fowl of the air, a fish of the deep, nor a reptile or creeping thing of all the earth has ever lived but that it died, or will die. Not a tree has ever grown, not a plant has ever opened its leaves, blades or petals to the sun; not a seed has ever germinated, nor a flower ever bloomed that was not doomed to die. Did all this come upon all nature because Adam ate an apple? Would all the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, paraded before Adam that he might name them, be still living with him in the Garden of Eden, if he had not sinned? Would all the plants and trees and flowers that grew and bloomed in the Garden of Eden in the days of Adam and Eve's innocence be still there, with the same leaves and blooms, just as they were, if man had not sinned?

These questions I know look silly. But if we are forced to accept the premise, we must be prepared to accept the natural conclusion to which it leads. And if death—physical death—as orthodoxy has always taught, entered the world only because of Adam's sin, it naturally and inevitably leads to the conclusions I have indicated.

Another question presents itself. Can perfection, or that which is perfect, fall? If either man or angels were created pure, perfect, holy, and in the image and likeness of God, how can such a being fall? It seems to me that it would be just as possible for God himself to fall. The very fact of the fall,—if such a fact exists or ever existed,—of either man or angel, is in itself conclusive proof of some moral imperfection or weakness somewhere. That man is morally imperfect is freely conceded. In plain words, he is a sinner. But was he ever otherwise? The farther back we trace him the worse he appears on the general average. All the Bible outside of this one story in Genesis, as well as all history attests this fact. Then may it not be a fact, that while man is a sinner, he always has been so; that he never fell, for he had been nowhere (morally) to fall from but always has been and still is morally imperfect and incomplete, but ever striving onward and upward?

But supposing this story of the fall to be true, what was the penalty for it,—

physical death, as we have seen, or eternal spiritual death, or both? After all the preaching and writing about eternal death, damnation, hell-fire and brimstone as a result of Adam's sin, I could not find any such doctrine taught in the story of the fall, nor anywhere else in the Old Testament, and but very vaguely, if at all, in the New.

The story in Genesis cannot be construed by any reasonable rules of interpretation to mean or involve any other punishment on Adam or his posterity, for his sin, beyond physical death. "Dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return" is the final climax of the penalty. There is no hint, so far as I can understand it, of immortality or any future life. There is not the remotest hint of it in this story. All the punishments for sin from Adam to Noah, and long afterwards, culminated and ended, so far as Genesis is concerned, in physical death. The Hebrew Hades, Sheol and Gehena, were creations of a much later period.

And who, or what was the serpent? A real snake, or the devil? I know the current belief is that the serpent is a mere figure for the devil, or that at least the spirit of the devil was incarnated in the serpent. But there is not a line of Scripture to support either assumption. In the story itself it is stated only that the serpent was "more subtle than all the beasts of the field." He is classed with them, not above them, except in subtlety. The whole fabric upon which this idea of the identity of the serpent of Eden and the devil is based seems to be a single verse in Revelation (xii, 9): "And the great dragon was cast down, the old serpent, he that is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world; he was cast down to the earth, and his angels were cast down with him." There are one or two other passages in the same book that speak of "that old serpent, which is the devil and Satan," but they have no more connection with or relation to the story of Eden, than Homer's "Iliad" has to the nebular hypothesis. And yet upon these few passages is built up the whole fabric of the identity of the serpent of Eden and the temptation, with the devil, Satan or Lucifer, that is so graphically portrayed in "Paradise Lost." This whole story of the serpent in Eden is very likely but an adaptation, in another form, of the old Babylonian myth of "Marduk and the Dragon."

All this shifting of the penalty for Adam's sin from physical to spiritual death and identifying the serpent with Satan, was an after-invention, to try to make it harmonize with later developed doctrines of immortality. Any candid reader can see that no such interpretation can be placed upon the natural and simple language of the story itself. In fact immortality for man, according to the story, is



forever inhibited, according to verses 22-24. After eating the forbidden fruit the only way to immortality was to "eat of the tree of life." And to keep Adam from the "tree of life," of which he might "eat and live forever," God drove him out of the garden and placed the cherubim over it with a "flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." According to this story, man is not immortal at all, and the only way to attain it is to get by the cherubim, or scale the walls of the garden of Eden and get to that tree.

I was now ready to determine for myself that this whole story of the Garden of Eden was a myth, legend, or some oriental allegory, the true purport and meaning of which is now wholly unknown; beyond the reasonable conjecture that it originated with some very ancient oriental philosopher, in the childhood of the human race, and is an allegorical portrayal of his attempt to solve the problem of the origin of evil, of suffering and death in the human race.

## **THE FLOOD**

But I pursued my course of reasoning and investigation further. I approached the period of the flood. The infinite and omniscient God is revealed as disappointed with this creature that He had made "in his own image and likeness." He gets angry with him for his perversity, declares He is sorry He made him, and resolves to destroy the whole race, except one family whom He proposes to preserve for seed for a new start; together with every beast, fowl and creeping thing of the earth, except one pair of each for seed. Think of an infinite and omniscient God, who knew all things from the beginning, all that man would ever do, before He created him, now looking down from heaven on his work, confessing it to be a stupendous failure, getting angry and repenting that He had made man or beast; and now resolving to take vengeance by drowning the whole outfit! If man was so perverse that he needed to be destroyed, why wreak vengeance also on the animal creation that had not sinned? And if the animal creation must be included in the universal destruction, why do it by a process thru which all marine life naturally escaped, while all terrestrial life was destroyed? Then why save any seed of such perverse stock? Was not God acquainted with the laws of heredity that had worked so perfectly in transmitting the sin of Adam down thru all the generations thus far; and did He not know the same thing would continue in the "seed of the race" after the flood? If He really desired to correct the mistake He had made, why did He not destroy the whole

race, root and branch, while He was at it, renovate the earth and start with a new creation of better stock?

This flood story must be noticed a little closer. Noah is commanded to build an ark, as his family is chosen especially to preserve the race for a new start. He is also to save in pairs, male and female, specimens of every beast of the field, fowl of the air, and creeping things of all the earth to preserve the species. And now when the ark was ready, these beasts of the field, fowls of the air, and creeping things of all the earth, polar bears, moose, reindeer, and the thousand varieties of fur-bearing animals from the arctic north, together with those of the torrid deserts and jungles of the south, lions, tigers, hyenas, elephants, leopards, antelope, giraffes, ants, mice, hawks, doves, wolves, lambs, serpents of all varieties, of birds, beetles, flies, bugs and insects, all came of their own accord, in the exact number prescribed, quietly walked into the ark and lay down to rest until the deluge was over!

The deluge over, the new race started was as bad as ever. Even righteous Noah got drunk from the first crop of grapes he raised, and cursed one of his son's posterity to perpetual servitude. The race soon tried to outwit God by building a tower by which to reach heaven, and God's only way to prevent its success was to confuse their tongues so they could no longer work together, and the scheme had to be abandoned. The race grew continually worse, drifted into idolatry, and God resolved to try a new scheme to ultimately save the race. We come now to:

## **THE CALL OF ABRAHAM**

Abraham is called to leave the land of his fathers, go to a new country and start a new race, through whom God would yet save the world, as all his previous efforts had proven failures. Here we have the beginning of the Jewish nation, whose history I have not space to even outline, much less to follow in detail. Study it for yourself in its fullness, because it has a vital relation to modern orthodoxy as now represented and taught in most of the churches. A few points, however, must be noted. The story tells us that the great God of the universe selects this one man, one family and one nation to be supremely blessed above all the balance of mankind, and to whom He committed his revelation and plans for their ultimate salvation, and denied these blessings to all the rest of his

creatures. Could such a God be just? When the Israelites were trying to get out of Egypt, while Moses and Aaron were to go and beg Pharaoh to let them go, God is said to have hardened Pharaoh's heart not to do so, only to have an excuse to plague Egypt, kill the first born in every house and then overwhelm Pharaoh and his whole army in the Red Sea! Can a just God do that? When they finally arrive at the borders of the promised land they are commanded to literally exterminate the inhabitants and neighboring tribes, root and branch, men, women and children indiscriminately and unsparingly. God is described as resorting to lying, deceit and intrigue to lure the enemies of Israel to their destruction. Time fails me to pursue this horrible record in its details. It begins with Abraham and ends only with the close of the Old Testament Canon. Study it for yourself. Could a just God be guilty of such outrageous conduct? I think not.

As is well known, the doctrine is that God thus called Abraham and the Jewish nation apart from all the balance of the human race, that thru them He might ultimately send his son into the world to save the race from sin and hell. To this end promises and prophecies are said to point, thruout the entire Old Testament from Abraham to its close, and even as far back as the Garden of Eden and the first sin.

When Jesus of Nazareth appeared he was accepted by his followers as this promised Savior, the Messiah of promise and prophecy, and has been so accepted by the Christian world ever since. To him was attributed a miraculous birth as the Son of God; and in the opinion of his followers he was soon considered, not only the Son of God, but God Himself incarnated bodily in the son. In other words, that God Himself came down from heaven in the form of human flesh, to save the world by making an atoning sacrifice of Himself for the sins of humanity. And when Jesus came, suffered and died on the Cross, we are told that "the scheme of redemption was completed." And what is this "scheme" of redemption, or "plan" of salvation? This was the crucial point to me. I thought man was certainly a sinner and needed a Redeemer. I looked it over with scrutinizing care. Here is one God who is three Gods. A part of God left heaven, came to earth as a man, died on the Cross to satisfy the other part of himself for sins somebody else committed! I know this sounds to the orthodox like sacrilege, but I mean it seriously. Think of it for a moment! God dividing himself, one part in heaven, one part on earth and the third part, the Holy Ghost, a go-between! Boil it down to its last analysis and this is what it means. Either this, or three separate gods, one of whom comes to earth to die in order to appease the wrath of the other, the third remaining in heaven with the first until

the second returns, when He would come to earth to continue the work begun by the second. There would thus be always two gods in heaven and one on earth. This is, in a nutshell, the sum and substance of Trinitarian orthodox Christianity.

We are told seriously that "there is no other name given under heaven, nor among men, whereby we may be saved except Jesus Christ." And that in order to be saved, we must believe in him as the only begotten Son of God, and in the atoning sacrifice of his death for our sins. Here I seriously inquired: If the salvation of the human race is entirely and exclusively dependent upon faith in the merits of the death of Jesus as an atoning sacrifice, what became of all the people who died before his coming? Orthodoxy answers that they were saved by faith in the *Promised Savior to come*, as given to Abraham, Moses, and the prophets. If so, how many were saved? The Jewish nation never looked for a spiritual Messiah. It was always a temporal one. There is no evidence that they ever had the remotest conception of a Messiah that was to make a vicarious atoning sacrifice of himself for them. Hence their faith in this promise was in vain. It was not the kind that saves, according to orthodoxy. An occasional prophet, like Isaiah or Jeremiah, or some others, *might* have so understood and believed it. But very few, if any, others did. Then the great mass of "God's chosen people" are now in hell; for they did not believe *rightly*; and all the balance of the world is there because they never heard of such a promise and hence did not believe at all!

But the question here arises, If salvation from Abraham to Christ was secured by faith in the promised Messiah *to come*; and which, as we have just seen, according to orthodox definitions, was practically a complete failure; how were they saved from the time of Adam until the promise made to Abraham?

The answer of orthodoxy is, By the promise made to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, that "the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." This is not the exact language of Genesis, but of the creed. The substance is correct. But according to Genesis this was not a promise to Adam and Eve at all; but a part of the curse pronounced on the serpent! There is nothing in the record to indicate that either Adam or Eve even heard it, or ever knew anything about it. There is nothing in the record to indicate that the serpent was present when God accosted Adam and Eve about their transgression. Besides, the incident is never referred to again in the whole Bible, by either prophet, priest, Christ or apostle. It is simply an example of that far-fetched method of interpretation I have before referred to, to establish a preconceived opinion and satisfy the demands of such a

necessity. There is not a single line in the whole Bible to justify such an interpretation of this incident. The only possible cross reference that might indicate it is in Rom. xvi, 20: "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." And this can have no reference to the incident in Eden. Besides, if this sentence on the serpent was a promise of the victory of Christ over him, it was *already accomplished* before Paul wrote these words.

And if such a promise had been made, with the meaning attached to it that is claimed, God certainly knew that the race would soon forget it, and thus render it futile and give him additional excuse to vent his wrath and wreak his vengeance against his helpless creatures. If faith in such a promise was the only way of salvation from Adam to Abraham then practically all the world up to that time is now in hell! Who can believe such a caricature of God?

But after all, what about the salvation of the race since the death of Christ? If salvation since his coming is only attainable thru personal faith in him as the miraculously begotten Son of God, and in his death as a vicarious atonement for sin; and that all are lost except those who have thus believed, how many are saved? Certainly very few. Take a mere glance at the world since the time of Christ. Leaving out of consideration the countless millions who never heard of him, and confining ourselves to those who have, how many of them fully met exactly these conditions? If such a doctrine is true, there are but few people in heaven except infants; and it is only in recent years that some of the orthodox have admitted infants indiscriminately into heaven!

I could comprehend to some extent how, if God had offered salvation and a home in heaven forever to all mankind on such easy terms as faith in the merits of the death of Jesus, He could visit condign punishment on such as knew it and wilfully rejected it. But I could not see the justice of such a punishment being inflicted on the countless millions of people who never heard of it, had no means of knowing it, and could not be justly blamed for not knowing it. Another thing that I now put the test of reason to, was the doctrine of salvation by faith itself. Was faith the only thing that could merit the favor of God? Was character of no avail? Was all moral purity, goodness and brotherly love but "filthy rags in the sight of God," unless buttressed by belief in the Deity of Jesus and the vicarious atonement? Was salvation after all as arbitrary as that described in "Holy Willie's Prayer"?

"O, Thou who in the heavens dost dwell,

Who as it pleases best thyself  
Sends one to heaven and ten to hell,  
A' for Thy glory,  
And not for any good or ill  
They've done afore Thee."

I thought of such moralists and philosophers as Zoroaster, Buddha, Confucius, Socrates, Plato, and thousands of others who have lived in the past, and left a lasting impression in the world for the good of mankind that continues to this day, some of them but little less than Jesus himself, in the moral sublimity of their lives and teachings, and wondered if these men were all in hell to roast and fry and burn forever because they had not "exercised faith" in the merits of a dying God of whom they had never known or even heard! And every nobler sentiment of my human nature rebelled against such an idea. To attribute such a character and proceeding to God is to make him, in cruelty and injustice, below the level of the most ferocious beast of the jungle. This was not all. I beheld the divisions in the church itself. Some hundreds of different denominations, all bearing the name Christian, each claiming to be right and all the balance wrong, each claiming to expound the only truth, and all the balance error; each claiming to direct to the only true and infallible way of eternal life and all the balance only deadly heresies. I found the history of the Christian Church written in blood. For fifteen hundred years Christian had slain Christian as a part of his religious duty. Fire and fagot, sword and rack and all the instruments of torture known to the ingenuity of mankind were employed for the torture and death of heretics—all in the name of Christ and for the salvation of the world. Catholics tortured and burned Protestants and Protestants murdered each other. Calvin consented to the burning of Servetus and the New England Puritans hung witches and persecuted Quakers and Baptists by burning holes in their tongues with hot irons, and driving them from their midst as they would the pestilence. I wondered how, if God ever takes any interest in affairs on earth and hears the prayers of his children, he could sit supinely by on his throne and permit such things to be done in his name and for his glory! If his spirit could enter into the hearts of men and direct their thoughts and minds, why did He not do it and stop this useless slaughter? Again I turned back to the beginning of things. If God foresaw what Adam would do and the dreadful consequences of it, why did He not make him different so he would not fall? Was it not just as easy? But if God can be better glorified by saving a fallen creature than by keeping him from falling, then why

did He not make this "plan of salvation" so plain and clear that there could be no possibility of misunderstanding or misconstruing it? If God was to be ultimately glorified in the sacrifice of his son as a means of salvation for the world, and this salvation was to come simply by faith in this promise, why did He not make this promise so specific and clear that the most ignorant and benighted could not misunderstand and fail to accept it? Why did not God reveal this promise to all mankind alike, so that all might be saved, instead of to one family and one nation? And when this son came and "died for the world" why did not God make it known to the entire world instead of a handful of Jews in an obscure corner of the earth? And when this "plan" was completed, why was it not heralded in every nook and corner of the earth, wherever man was found, instead of being confined for centuries around the shores of the Mediterranean? Then again, I say, why was not this "plan" made so plain and unequivocal that no man, however ignorant, could possibly fail to comprehend it, and all men understand it exactly alike, and thus live in the bonds of a true brotherhood, the sons of the one great God, instead of butchering each other for fifteen hundred years in the name of religion, each sect claiming to be the only true followers of the Son of God, and all the balance reprobates and devils?

But the most inconsistent and unreasonable phase of the whole thing is yet to come. If salvation is attainable only through the merits of the "death on the Cross" of Jesus Christ, then Jesus *had to be crucified*. It was a part of the "eternal plan." No other death would do. If Jesus had died a natural death there could have been no salvation. He must needs be punished, killed for the sins of Adam and all mankind. He was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." To carry out this "divine purpose" somebody had to crucify him. Every actor in this great "drama of redemption" was a necessary factor. No one was either unnecessary or unimportant. Judas was necessary to betray him into the hands of his enemies. He and the part he performed were necessarily as much a fore-ordained and eternally predestinated factor in the "scheme of redemption" as that of Jesus himself. The Jewish priests who prosecuted him before Pilate were as equally necessary as the subject of the prosecution. The Jewish nation whom they represented, or some other nation, was equally necessary as a background for this prosecution, in whose name it was conducted. Pilate or some other was necessary as the judge to hear the trial and pronounce the sentence of death before it could be carried out. And finally, the Roman soldiers were necessary to execute the sentence. All these, Jesus, Judas, the priests, the Jewish nation, Pilate and the Roman soldiers, were necessary links in the one great chain of the "scheme of redemption," or "plan of salvation" by the vicarious

atonement of the Son of God on the Cross. If either one of them had failed, the chain would have been broken, God's eternal plans and purposes thwarted, and man left without redemption to eternally perish!

And yet poor Judas was driven by remorse to a suicide's grave, and according to the doctrines of the Church, for these nineteen hundred years has been justly writhing, frying and burning in the bottomless pit of eternal torments, and will continue so to suffer forever,—and for what? For faithfully performing and fulfilling that part in the scheme of redemption which he was, by the eternal decrees of God, foreordained and predestinated from before the foundation of the world to perform; and which he could neither escape nor avoid, without breaking the chain, and thus defeating the eternal purposes of God in the redemption of mankind! For nineteen hundred years the Church has thus execrated and anathematised Judas Iscariot, Pontius Pilate, the High Priests, the whole Jewish nation and the Roman Empire, and consigned them to eternal perdition, the tormenting flames of an eternal hell, and scattered the Jews to the four quarters of the earth, never ceasing its horrid persecutions, in many places even to this day; and all for what? For crucifying Christ; for carrying out the divine purpose planned from before the foundation of the world; for obeying the Eternal Will; for doing only what they were *compelled* by the eternal fates to do in order that mankind might be saved from the eternal burning!

Our author that I had been studying says on page 257, "No man can read the Bible with any faith in its teachings, and deny that this terrible calamity (the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation) overtook the Jews on account of their great sins, *especially their rejection of the Son of God.*" (Italics mine.) Suppose they had not rejected him. Suppose they had accepted him as the Messiah of prophecy, as the Church insists he was, and had set about to make him their king and succeeded; and he had lived on a normal life and died a natural death, what would have become of the "scheme of redemption" by vicarious atonement? What about the "plan of salvation," the remission of sins only thru the "power of the blood"? "Apart from the shedding of blood there is no remission." Then if the Jews *had not* rejected Jesus and thereby caused his blood to be shed, what would have been the eternal destiny of the whole human race? According to orthodox Christianity, the whole plan would have failed, and the whole human race would have been irretrievably lost and plunged forever and ever into eternal torments, "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched"!



I had now reached the crisis. After pursuing this course of study and this line of reasoning for a period of about three years after finishing the book I have herein described, does any one wonder that I threw the whole thing overboard, Bible, inspiration, revelation, church and religion, into the scrap heap of superstition, legend, fable and mythology? I gave up the whole thing as a farce and a delusion, as "sounding brass and tinkling cymbals." I could no longer honestly preach such a gospel; I could not be a hypocrite. I withdrew from the church and ministry and turned my attention to secular pursuits. And having nowhere else to go, I naturally drifted into that state of mind which the world calls agnosticism.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **THE REACTION: A NEW CONFESSION OF FAITH**

At this time I knew nothing of a liberal church. If I had, I doubt if I was in a condition of mind to consider it. I was so utterly disgusted with ecclesiasticism as I knew it that I was but little prepared if at all, to give anything of the kind fair consideration. The pendulum had swung to the opposite extreme. I abandoned everything but God. I never doubted for a moment the existence of a Supreme Being. Nature and instinct taught me this. But who, or what, or where, this Supreme Being was, or what his attributes or characteristics were, I did not pretend to know, or care. I relegated it all to the realm of the unknown and unknowable.

For a while I went to church occasionally, merely for the sake of respectability, and not because I took any interest in common with it. I listened to the preaching with such patience and fortitude as I could command. I heard only the same old platitudes about a dying Christ and the flames of perdition I had heard all my life and preached for eight years myself. I often felt as if I would like to help the preacher out in his struggle to "divest himself of his thoughts." I finally quit going to church altogether, until I located where I had an opportunity to attend a Reformed Jewish synagogue, which I did quite often, and always heard broad-gauged, intellectual discourses.

As I have before said, up to this time, and for years thereafter, I had never read a distinctively "infidel" book, nor even a liberal religious one. My change of opinions had all come from an honest effort to seek proofs for the faith of my fathers, which I inherited. But I never ceased to be a student. My temporary antagonism to the church soon vanished. I simply viewed it with utter indifference, and somewhat of sympathy. I had no more creed to defend, and none to condemn. I had no desire whatever to propagate my own ideas or disturb any one else in theirs. I felt that if any one got any satisfaction out of his religious beliefs he was welcome to it. I would not disturb him for anything. I looked upon it as a harmless delusion, and if it made one any better, society was so much the gainer. But to me it was as "sounding brass and tinkling cymbals." But I cannot say that I was satisfied with my position. Man is a social as well as an emotional animal. Agnosticism is neither social nor emotional. It is cold-blooded and indifferent at its best. It is simply a bundle of doubts and negations. Men are bound together in social and fraternal ties by what they affirm and believe in common. But they care nothing for what they deny.

But having no creed to defend and no preconceived opinions to prove, and being of studious habits, I was now prepared to study in search of abstract truth for truth's own sake, ready to accept it from whatever source it might come, and follow it wherever it might lead.

Without arrogating to myself any special merit or credit for taking this course, I wish that all people would do the same. As I said in the very beginning of this book, most people inherit their religious beliefs, and there they stop. We are Baptists, or Methodists, or Presbyterians, or Catholics, because we were born so. We transmit our beliefs to our children, from generation to generation, each following the faith of his ancestors, without ever stopping to inquire why, or seek a reason. And if a thought is ever given to it, or any search made, it is but rarely for abstract truth, but for the proofs that support the inherited faith, the preconceived opinion. It is like one going into his house and bolting the door on the inside. Nothing is ever given out and nothing ever permitted to come in. This is exactly why for centuries the world was drenched in Christian blood, shed by Christian hands. Each had its infallible creed, to which all the world must bow—or take the consequences.

It took me several years to get myself settled with anything like a definite "creed of my own," tho I was never in the least disturbed about it, and only gave it such time as I could spare from a busy business and professional life. By this

time I had reached such definite conclusions as satisfied my own mind, tho I never,—after my "crisis,"—held any opinion, and do not now, that I am not willing to change at any time that evidence is furnished to justify it. In my search for truth I found myself confronted with certain facts that Agnosticism did not satisfactorily explain. These were facts of Nature, of Man as a part of it, of man's nature, habits, history, thoughts, conduct, and social relations,—in fact, all that pertains to the phenomena of Nature and Human Life and Relations. The conclusions I reached constitute.

## **MY NEW CONFESSION OF FAITH**

### ***THE UNIVERSE AND GOD***

The first of these was the physical universe. I had accepted the theory of evolution in a general way; yet I could not account for the marvelous organism of millions of worlds and suns and systems, of which our earth is but a mere atom, filling the infinity of space, beyond all human comprehension, revolving and whirling thru space, each in its allotted orbit, with such perfect order and regularity, and all in the most perfect harmony, governed by such immutable, perfect and universal law, upon the theory of the operation of blind, unintelligent force upon inert matter. Here was an effect. There must be a cause. The effect cannot be greater than the cause. Here is an infinite universe; there must be an infinite cause; and that cause cannot be less than Infinite Eternal Intelligence. This cause, for the want of a better name, we call God. I could thus easily account for the universe thru the processes of evolution, directed by eternal, intelligent will, operating thru eternal immutable and perfect law, upon eternal and indestructible matter. Whether correct or not, this satisfied my mind as to God and the universe.

I could sing with the Psalmist:

"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night showeth knowledge. Their line is gone out thru all the earth and their words to the end of the world. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard."

As I have before said, I never had any doubt about the existence of a

Supreme Being, and that the universe was in some way the product of his creative energy. I think the doctrine of evolution satisfactorily solves the "riddle of the universe," if it recognizes Infinite Spirit as well as Eternal Matter; and that this Infinite Spirit is in some way, tho beyond our comprehension, the real Force or Energy, both the Intelligence and Life, the Great Uncaused First Cause behind all phenomena, who, for the want of a better name we call God.

Perhaps it is impossible for any one to think of God without at the same time conceiving some sort of definition of him. Yet, God cannot be defined. He is infinite. And infinity cannot be defined in terms of the finite. Any attempt to define God is to limit Him. Our conceptions of God are at best limited, tho God himself is not. The finite mind cannot conceive unlimited space, nor eternal duration. We can conceive of them as *existing*; but we cannot conceive what they are. We can conceive of God as infinite; but we cannot conceive what infinity is. If we could, it would not be infinite, unless we are infinite. So all attempts to define God in terms of the finite are futile. And yet, when we look back over the past history of the human race and see what ruin has been wrought by this very thing it becomes appalling! All religious controversies, wars and bloodshed have had their ultimate source just here. Certain men have formed certain conceptions of God, of his character, his attributes, his will, and his purposes concerning mankind. These they have labelled, patented, copyrighted, and declared to the world to be correct, final and infallible, and demanded that all the world accept them on penalty of death!

To quote, in substance, from a recent author, we might as well try to make a meal of the stars and contain them all in our stomach at once as to comprehend God in his fullness. *God is what He is*, no matter what our opinions may be of him. But what any one of us *thinks God is*, that is what *God is to him*. This is all the definition of God that need be given. God is his own revelation. "The heavens declare the glory of God." Nature reveals God in greater power and splendor than any book.

What is *my* conception of God? Only this: God is the Life of the universe; and this includes the ALL. As what we call the spirit is the life in my body, and permeates the whole of it from the most central vital organs to the utmost extremities of nails and hair; so God—and He is Spirit—permeates the *whole universe*, and is the life of, or in it, as you please.

"All are but parts of one stupendous whole,

Whose body Nature is, and God the Soul."

He is manifest in the majesty of the universe and is seen in the beauties of the flowers. He is reflected in the painted wings of the birds, in the rippling leaf, in the blade of grass, in the dewdrop, in the snowflake, in all nature; and above all in man himself, in whom He dwells and lives. How noble and inspiring the thought that I, even I, am a part of the life of the infinite, eternal God! All this I take on trust—*by faith*—and confess freely that, while believing it I cannot comprehend it. But such a God must be eternally good. He could not be the monster that Jewish tradition and orthodox Christianity paint him, eternally hating his enemies, all of whom were his own creatures, and plunging into an eternal hell of fire and brimstone the larger part of his own children, created in his own image and likeness. While I cannot understand the "problems of his providence," I am sure that "the Judge of all the earth will do right." As to the perplexities that have grown out of the ideas of God's *foreknowledge*, *foreordination*, etc., my view is that no such a thing as *foreknowledge* can be attributed to God. To do so is to attribute to him time limitations. To the Infinite God there can be no such thing as past or future. All is the "*eternal present*" in which God is still at work, as much as ever before. I confess I cannot comprehend *how* this is; but I can comprehend *that* it is.

"Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never failing skill,  
He treasures up his bright designs,  
And works his sovereign will."

### **MAN**

"What is man that thou art mindful of him?" So far as we know, as a pure animal, he is the highest product, the climax of the processes of organic evolution. In addition to this, he is the only known creature on earth, or elsewhere, endowed with those God-like faculties of mind, thought, reason, will, —*soul*. As far as man's moral character and destiny are concerned, it matters as little how he came to be here, as it does who Cain's wife was. We are confronted with the serious fact that *we are here*; and that we are endowed with these

supreme faculties that differentiate us from the lower forms of life about us, and consequently entail upon us, not thru some supernatural revelation, but by natural instinct, certain moral and social responsibilities and obligations, not only to our own kind, but to all those myriad forms of life below us,—obligations and responsibilities which we cannot avoid or escape, except at our peril.

And as to these responsibilities, it is not material whether man is immortal or not. I once had serious doubts of this. But while I now believe it with a firm conviction that in my own mind amounts to moral certainty, yet I recognize that it is beyond the pale of ocular proof or physical demonstration. It pertains exclusively to the realm of faith.

"Strange is it not? that of the myriads who,  
Before us passed the door of darkness thru,  
Not one returns, to tell us of the road,  
Which to discover, we must travel too?"

And yet this faith is one of the most comforting and inspiring of all the objects of faith known to man. But he that is governed in his life and conduct, solely by the fear of some dire punishment in the after-life, or some hope of bribing the Infinite to give him a comfortable berth in heaven, is at best but a little and weak soul.

No need to go into any argument here upon the question of whether, "If a man die shall he live again?" Our social and moral obligations to live right with our fellowmen are none the less, whether there is an after-life or not. In fact no man can be right with God,—a part of whose life he is,—while wrong with his fellow-man.

### ***THE PROBLEM OF EVIL***

This brings us to a consideration of the problem of evil. "Ever since human intelligence became enlightened enough to grope for a meaning and purpose in human life, this problem of the existence of evil has been the burden of man." (John Fiske.) Out of some attempt to solve it, every religion on earth was born. I do not offer to solve this problem; but to try to take a rational view of it.

Good and evil are relative terms. How could we know anything about the one but thru its contrast with the other? If there were no such thing as evil, how could we be conscious of the good? How could we know that it was good? We cannot know anything except by its contrast with something else. Some element of unlikeness must appear before we can distinguish anything from something else. To quote again from Fiske: "If there were no color but red, it would be exactly the same thing as if there were no color at all." There could be no music except for variety and contrasts in sounds. If we had never tasted anything but sugar, could we know what bitterness is? But having tasted the bitter we then know what sweetness means. Likewise, if there was no such thing as moral evil in the world, we could not possibly know what moral goodness is. We could not know what happiness is if we did not have some knowledge of sorrow and pain. Just why this is so, I do not pretend to know. I am only stating facts as they are; and the great Creator, who is the author of both, if of either, knows; and we may know in proper time. Another pertinent question from Fiske may be asked here: "What would have been the worth of that primitive innocence portrayed in the myth of the garden of Eden? What would have been the moral value or significance of a race of human beings ignorant of evil, and doing beneficent acts with no more consciousness or volition than the deftly contrived machine that picks up raw material at one end, and turns out some finished product at the other? Clearly for strong and resolute men and women an Eden would be but a fool's paradise. How could anything fit to be called *character* ever have been produced there? But for tasting the forbidden fruit, in what respect could man have become a being of higher order than the beast of the field?"

The point is that the same law of evolution applies in the moral world as it does in the material. As the highest types of life have been developed only thru the processes of struggle with adverse elements, in which only the fittest, strongest and best adapted to its environment survived, so moral character is only developed thru the struggle with moral evil. Just as one cannot learn to swim on a parlor sofa, but must get in the water and struggle, so one must come in contact with, combat, struggle with, and overcome moral evil in order to develop the highest and strongest type of moral character.

"Heaven is not reached by a single bound;  
But we build the ladder by which we rise  
From the lowly earth to the vaulted skies,  
And rise to its summit round by round."

The rise from a bestial to a moral plane involves the acquirement of a knowledge of both good and evil. The moral conscience thus developed plays the same role in the moral world that the consciousness of pain does in the physical. As this consciousness of pain is a monitor to warn us from physical danger, so the moral conscience is our monitor to keep us from moral evil. And the higher this moral conscience is developed, the more sensitive it becomes, the higher will its possessor rise in the moral scale. This is the law which Paul tells us is written in the hearts of all men, "their consciences meanwhile accusing or excusing them." This may seem a strange philosophy. But it comports with the facts of nature and life. The mystery of evil is not solved. But at least we have a rational, working hypothesis upon which to deal with it, as will further appear as we proceed.

## ***SIN***

Evil, at least in the physical world, exists separate and apart from sin. We will not speculate upon the metaphysical differences that may, or may not, exist between moral evil and personal guilt. But I wish to record briefly the views I ultimately arrived at concerning the nature and consequences of sin.

According to the orthodox doctrine, altho sin is defined in the New Testament as the "transgression of the law," it is something *more* than this;—a direct personal offence against God; and that therefore its penalties are punitive and



vindictive, designed to vindicate the person of God against insult and injury by disobedience to his law. Punishment was therefore believed to be administered judicially, according to the extent of the offense, that the sinner might be made to suffer *purely for suffering's sake*, measure for measure. I long ago abandoned this doctrine. I accept fully the New Testament teaching that "sin is the transgression of the law,"—not the law of Moses or any other penal code,—but the great universal, immutable law of Nature in the moral world. That God is the author of this law does not make its violation any more a personal offense against God than the violation of a State statute is a personal offense against the Governor, or legislature, or the judge that administers it. God cannot be personally sinned against. If so He is neither infinite nor immutable. To constitute a personal offense the person offended must take cognizance of it, which necessarily involves *a change of mind* toward the offender,—otherwise it is not an offense. The same condition would be involved in a second change of mind toward the offender, upon his repentance and forgiveness. Neither is consistent with any idea of infinity or immutability. Neither does God ever punish sin. Sin is its own punishment, and it operates automatically. No sin was ever committed that the sinner did not pay the penalty in full. From this there is no more escape than there is from the law of gravitation. If I put my hand into the fire I cannot avoid being burned. If I take poison I cannot avoid the consequences. The fact that there may be an antidote for the poison in no way destroys the truth of this fundamental law.

"The moving finger writes, and having writ  
Moves on; Nor all your piety nor wit  
Can lure it back to cancel half a line,  
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it."

Jesus illustrated this law fully and beautifully in the parable of the Prodigal Son, and I can do no better than quote its substance here. This young man left his father's house. This was not a personal offence against his father, altho the father may well have conjectured what would be the result. He was of age and had a right to go. He spent his funds in riotous living, and as a consequence was reduced to want and suffering, his punishment for his sin. To thus waste his funds was sin, *He punished himself* by his own conduct. His sufferings became so intense and severe that he resolved to abandon his present surroundings and return home at any cost, even to becoming a menial servant in his father's house.

Here we get a clear view of the *purpose* of punishment, not as vindictive, but remedial and corrective. The young man suffered until his sufferings accomplished their end in correcting and changing his life. As soon as this was done his punishment ended. Just so with all punishment for sin. It will continue until its remedial and corrective purpose is completed and no longer, whether in this life or some other. When the young man returned home his father received him, not as a servant, but a son. But remember, *his wasted fortune was not restored*. "Was he not freely forgiven?" Yes; but forgiveness does not blot out nor restore the past; nor absolve one from the natural consequences of his own acts already committed. It simply means a new opportunity and a new start, but with the handicap of the consequences of the past life. The returned prodigal was forgiven. He had the opportunity to begin life anew as a son, just as he was before. But his material resources represented in his squandered fortune, and the time he lost while squandering it, were lost forever! Be as diligent and frugal as he might, he could never, thru time or eternity, reach that attainment *which he might have reached*, had he used the same diligence and frugality from the start, in the use of his natural inheritance as his operating capital.

Hence, one sins, not against God, but most of all *against himself*, by violating the law of his own being, and of humanity. And the *consequences* of sins committed can never be escaped, in this world or any other. If this kind of gospel had been preached to humanity during all these past centuries of Christianity,—instead of a gospel that teaches that no matter how vile, wicked and sinful one may be, nor how long he may thus live in sin, if, in the last hour of life he will only "believe in Jesus," at death he will go sweeping thru the gates of heaven into eternal glory on a complete equality with the noblest saints and purest characters that ever lived on earth,—this world would now be much better than it is.

"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," whether divinely inspired or not, is as eternally true, certain, and unescapable in the moral world as are the stars in their courses. Man sins against society in transgressing those natural laws of social relations that bind society together. But even in this, while society suffers from his sins, the sinner himself must ultimately suffer for his own sins above all others.

The question has often been asked me, "If a man cannot sin against God, but only against himself and society, by what standard, gauge, or measure am I to determine what is right or wrong?" I think the Golden Rule answers that

question completely. All sins are either personal or social or both. A man may, by some sort of self-indulgence or abuse or by his own secret thoughts sin against himself *only*, from which he alone must suffer. He may also sin against society by doing some evil to or against some one else or against society as a whole, from which both he and others may suffer. A simple rule of conduct may be this: In view of any proposed course of conduct, word or act, these questions may be asked: "What may be the result? Will it in any way injure me, or any one else? Is any possible evil consequence, either to myself or any one else, likely to come of it?" If the answer is in the affirmative, it is wrong; otherwise not. These are my simple views of sin.

## **SALVATION**

What is salvation? Almost the universal answer of Christendom has been for eighteen centuries, escape from hell hereafter and the assurance of heaven. Yet, according to the record we have of him, Jesus never taught any such doctrine. It is true that he refers several times to the Gehena of the Jews, "where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched," but always as a natural consequence of some failure to do, or perform certain things that they should do; but never does he appeal to any one to do or perform anything *for the purpose of escaping it*.

Did the reader ever notice that in all the record we have of the sayings of Jesus, he is nowhere quoted as having ever said one word about the great, fundamental doctrines of Christianity, over which pagans and Christians wrangled for four centuries; and over which Christians have wrangled and fought with each other for fourteen centuries? Do we find where Jesus ever said one word about the Garden of Eden, the fall of Adam, original sin, total depravity, vicarious atonement, the mode of baptism, the Trinity, the possession of the Holy Spirit, or any form of ecclesiastical organization or church polity?

Salvation, and Jesus so taught, pertains to this life exclusively. It simply means *to save this life*,—not from physical death, nor hell hereafter,—but to its proper function, use and purpose, according to the will of God, as revealed in nature and human experience. In simpler words, it is to save this life from sin, wrong doing of every kind, and making of it the highest, noblest and best it is capable of.

This is what Jesus taught; and Jesus is the savior of mankind *only* in that he has taught mankind *how to live*,—not by dying for it. Thus to save this life to the highest, noblest and best of which it is capable, is to save it from sin unto righteousness; and this is to save it both here and hereafter. He that *continually lives right* cannot die wrong. And whatever the next life may be, it is but a continuation, a larger unfolding and fruition of this. Salvation is here, not hereafter.

### ***HEAVEN AND HELL***

But do I not believe in heaven and hell? Yes, and no. I believe in both, and neither. I do not believe in either the kind of heaven or hell I was taught in the church. Yet, I have already said that I did not believe any sin ever committed by man ever went unpunished, either here or hereafter, until the full penalty was paid, and the punishment had completed its remedial and corrective purpose. And I will say here that I do not believe any good deed or word ever performed or said by man ever went unrewarded up to the full value of its merit, either here or hereafter. But I believe both heaven and hell to be *conditions*,—not places,—and we have them both here in this life, and will have them hereafter. Each individual makes his own heaven, or his own hell, and carries it with him when he leaves this life. To quote from Omar Khayyam:

"I sent my Soul thru the invisible  
Some letter of that After-life to spell;  
And by and by my Soul returned to me  
And answered: I myself am Heaven and Hell;  
Heaven's but the vision of fulfilled desire,  
And Hell the shadow of a Soul on fire."

The idea of a literal lake of fire and brimstone to be the eternal abode of by far the larger part of the human race, according to the orthodox doctrine of Christianity, is not only unreasonable, but unthinkable. If it exists God must have made it; and such a thought is a caricature of God. Such a view of hell practically involves the necessity of the personal devil that has always been associated with it; and this is also both unreasonable and unthinkable. If such a

being exists he is either co-eternal with God—which is unreasonable—or God created him—which is unthinkable. The idea that there is in this universe two co-eternal antagonistic spirits in eternal warfare with each other challenges human credulity. If the Bible story of creation and the fall of man is true, as interpreted by orthodox Christianity, the devil got the best of God right from the start, and has held it ever since; and according to the current doctrines of the plan and means of salvation, will hold it eternally. This leads us inevitably to one of two conclusions: God is neither Infinite, Omniscient, nor Omnipotent, else He would not have permitted such a condition to come about, and permit Himself to be thus defeated in his plans and purposes, and lose eternally ninety percent of the highest product of his own creation, Man, whom He made in his own image and likeness. If we still insist that God is Infinite, Omniscient, and therefore knew in advance all that ever would take place, including the fall of Adam and its consequences, Omnipotent, and therefore able to prevent it, but did not, it only makes the matter worse.

But to take the other horn of the dilemma, that God *created* the devil first an angel in heaven, who afterwards led a rebellion in heaven and had to be cast out, and that hell was then created as a place in which to put him, but where it proved afterwards that he could not be kept, but got out and robbed God of the noblest product of his creative genius at the very threshold of creation, corrupting the very fountain of human life itself, whereby he became the ultimate possessor of nine-tenths of all the race forever, is only to make the matter still worse than before. He certainly was not Omniscient, and therefore able to foreknow what this newly created angel would ultimately do, else He would not have made him; nor was He Omnipotent, else He would have prevented it. But if it still be insisted—and unfortunately it is by far the greater part of Christianity—that God is, nevertheless and notwithstanding, Infinite, Omniscient and Omnipotent, and either deliberately planned or supinely sat by and permitted these things to take place, *then He is not* a God of goodness, love, justice, truth, mercy and benevolence, but an unthinkable monster, more diabolical and cruel than the wildest savage ever known to the earth, or the most ferocious beast of prey in the jungle. I might naturally fear such a God, but never love or respect, but eternally hate him.

I have already given my views of the story of Eden and the fall of man; that man never fell, but is still incomplete, but progressing onward and upward forever; that he was never, on the general average, higher or better than now; and as the years and ages go on he will continue thus to grow better and nobler,

making his own heaven as he goes along, and destroying his own hell by learning his lessons of suffering for wrong doing, and leaving it behind him. No, God did not make man in his own image, implant in his very nature that eternal aspiration upward that is possessed by every normal human being, and then make a devil to tempt and ruin him, and a hell in which to eternally torment him.

I quote again from Omar Khayyam:

"Oh, Thou who didst with pitfall and with gin  
Beset the road I was to wander in,  
Thou wilt not with predestined evil round  
Enmesh, and then impute my fall to sin.  
... "Ne'er a peevish boy  
Would break the bowl from which he drank in joy;  
And he that with his hand the vessel made  
Will not in after wrath destroy."

### ***REDEMPTION AND ATONEMENT***

It is hardly necessary to the purpose of this work, to say anything at all on these subjects. If man was never lost, kidnapped or stolen from God, he needed no *redeemer*, to *buy him back* with a price. If man never "fell" from the favor of God by disobedience, and thereby incurred his anger, illwill and wrath that sought vengeance on his life, he needed no one to mediate, propitiate or atone for him by shedding his own blood as a substitute. The whole doctrine of redemption and atonement falls flat when the doctrine of the fall of man is removed from under it. But as this is the very crux of the whole orthodox Christian system, the reader may be interested to know what conclusions I reached concerning it, after some years of study, as to both its origin and meaning. These conclusions I reached, not only from the study of the Bible, but from the study of history generally; and especially the history of religion, in other races as well as the Jews. It must be remembered that this doctrine of atonement by the shedding of blood, is—or rather was,—in one form or another, common to many ancient religions and nations. It was by no means exclusively Jewish or Christian. It probably had a common origin and purpose in all.

I have already intimated that all religious doctrine and practice had their

origin in man's attempt to solve the problem of evil, sin, suffering and death; and to remedy it. I will treat this more fully when I come to consider the subject of religion specifically.

The general solution of this problem, if not the almost universal one, was, that men had offended the gods and incurred their anger and illwill; and for this reason the gods continually afflicted them thru life and ultimately destroyed them. Thus death was the final penalty for sin. The gods could be finally satisfied only with the life,—the blood,—of the transgressor. "For the blood is the life." This doctrine is not confined to Genesis and the Jews. In fact, the best Biblical scholars of today are of the opinion that this story of Eden and the fall were not originally Jewish at all; but that the tradition was learned during the exile in Babylonia and Persia, where, it has been learned from recent excavations, the tradition existed centuries before the time of the captivity. It is believed that this tradition so fitted into the Jewish history and gave them such a satisfactory solution of their own sufferings and misery that it was brought back by them, and, with some adaptations, incorporated into their own sacred literature as a part of their own history. Thus, Genesis is now believed by the best scholars and most competent critics, not to be the first book of the Bible written, but in its present form, one of the last written of the Old Testament. But this is a digression.

Quite early, however, tho the time and the exact reason why are both unknown, it is evident that man conceived the idea that, tho he could not escape ultimate death, yet, he might in some way appease the wrath of the gods, and thus at least mitigate his afflictions in this life, by offering them the life—the blood—of a substitute. Thus originated the practice of offering burnt offerings to the gods, so common among so many ancient tribes and nations besides Israel. It was believed that the gods would be satisfied, at least for the time being, with the blood of an innocent victim, especially if it was the best, or the most precious the offerer had. And from this grew the offering of human sacrifices, especially one's own children, as Abraham offering Isaac, Jephtha his daughter, and the practice in Israel so severely condemned by some of the earlier prophets, of making "their children pass the fire unto Moloch."

Other offerings in the course of time grew up, such as fruits, vegetables, incense, etc.; but no offering was acceptable as an *atonement for sin*, except the offering of blood. Thus Cain brought an offering "of the fruit of the ground" and Jehovah rejected it. But Abel came with "the firstlings of his flock and of the fat

thereof. And Jehovah had respect unto Abel and unto his offering."

The later Levitical ritual with its organized priesthood, tabernacle, temple, etc., was by no means the beginning of this idea of appeasing the wrath of Jehovah by blood atonement; but was only the more perfect and systematic organization and administration of it. Blood was considered so precious, because it was the life, that the children of Israel were forbidden to eat it on penalty of death. "For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your sins: for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life." Lev. xvii, 11.

I shall assume here that the reader is already sufficiently familiar with the practices of the Jews, as recorded thruout the Old Testament, concerning this matter of blood atonement, to render it unnecessary to go into further details. If he is not already familiar with it, he can easily become so.

The question has been asked, why *burn* the offering? Why was it not sufficient simply to shed the blood? Perhaps in the beginning this was the practice. There is nothing said about burning the offerings of either Cain or Abel. It is highly probable they were not burnt. Jehovah was satisfied with the mere *sight* of blood, the destruction of a life. But this, Cain did not offer. There was no *blood* in his fruit-offering; hence Jehovah was not only unappeased, but insulted. The first mention of "burnt-offerings" in the Bible is the offering made by Noah after the flood. From this on they are common. The purpose of burning the offering was simply to cook it,—to roast it. The offering was nearly always eaten. Sometimes only the fat, considered the choicest part, was burnt as an offering to the god; while the people and priests ate the balance, either roasted or boiled. See a full account of this in 1 Sam. ii, 12f. As man has always made his gods in his own image he imagined the gods, like himself, loved to eat. Therefore, in addition to appeasing the wrath of the god by the sight of the blood of the victim, his favor was supposed to be further obtained by feeding him. As the good host always sets the best he has before his guest, so the best part of the sacrificed victim was placed on the altar for the god. Altho invisible, it was firmly believed that the god consumed the burning flesh or fat, as it was reduced to smoke and ascended to heaven. The parties making the offering,—sometimes only an individual, or a family, but often the whole tribe,—ate the balance. They were therefore, "eating with the god," and consequently on good terms with him, just as eating together today is an indication of friendship, or the taking of salt together among certain savage tribes is a token of peace and friendship, or the



smoking from the common pipe among the early American Indians. Later in Israel, the whole offering was burnt. Jehovah was entitled to it all. Men had outgrown the idea of "eating with Jehovah."

We now come back more specifically to the *purpose* of this blood atonement. We have no account in all the Old Testament where it was ever offered with direct reference to a future life,—for the purpose of escaping hell. We have already seen that there is absolutely nothing in the story of Eden and the fall of man, upon which to predicate any thought of immortality after physical death, either a heaven or hell. We now come to note that there is nowhere any *direct* reference to a life after death, in any book of the Old Testament, written *before* the exile. The account of Saul having the witch of Endor call up Samuel after his death; and David's faith that he could go to his dead child, indeed indicate some belief at this time in an after-life; but nowhere is there the remotest reference to a hell, a separate place of torment for the wicked. In the case of Samuel being recalled to converse with Saul, he says, that altho Jehovah had departed from Saul, and notwithstanding Saul's great wickedness, "Tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me,"—the saintly Samuel, all in the same place. There are a few direct references to a future life, *in a few places only*, in some of the books written *during* or *after* the exile. But nowhere in the Old Testament do we find a single reference to the offering of the sacrifice of atonement with any reference whatever to a future life. To ancient Israel, Jehovah was a God of the present,—not the future. He did things *then*,—in the present tense. He was the God of the *living*,—not of the dead. And Jesus affirmed the same thing.

He was exclusively a God for this world and this life. The atoning sacrifice was offered to appease his wrath against them for their past sins, not the sin of the individual only, but the sins of the whole nation. The benefits they expected to receive from this remission of sins thru the blood of the atonement were *here* and *now*,—not in some future life.

We pass rapidly now to the time of the Christ. Altho the canonical books of the Old Testament give us no clue to any definite, fixed beliefs among the Jews concerning a future life, heaven, hell or the resurrection of the dead, yet, according to the New Testament literature, these views were all quite clearly defined, and generally believed among all the Jews, except the party of the Sadducees, relatively a very small party. Whence came these beliefs? If they had come by some divine revelation they would certainly have been recorded in some of their sacred books. But they were not. The only rational answer is that

they learned all these things from their Eastern masters during the captivity, where all these beliefs are now known to have been current centuries before the captivity, and brought them back on their return; and with some modifications incorporated them into their own system. Yet there is no indication in the New Testament, nor any contemporary literature now extant, that the atoning sacrifice that was continually offered in the temple, even down to the destruction of Jerusalem, was ever offered with any view, or reference to a future life; much less as a means of escaping hell.

We turn now to the Christ. It has already been said that he nowhere makes the least reference to a vicarious atonement to be made by himself for the sins of world. True, he warns his disciples that he must needs go up to Jerusalem, there to suffer and be put to death; but nowhere does he say that this death is to *redeem back* mankind from the devil; nor appease the wrath of God against mankind by the sight of his blood; nor to vindicate the majesty of a broken law, for the benefit of mankind. It is all but universally acknowledged that his disciples had no such conception of his mission, but followed him up to Jerusalem expecting to see him made King, sit on the "throne of David" and restore Israel to her pristine glory, according to the universal interpretation of the Messianic prophecies. After his tragic death, and alleged resurrection and ascension,—in which his disciples certainly implicitly believed, no matter what the actual facts may be,—we still hear not a word about his death being a vicarious atonement for sin. When Peter preached that great sermon on the day of Pentecost he says not one word about a vicarious atonement in the death of Christ, but lays the whole emphasis on his resurrection and ascension. Let the reader turn here to that sermon in the second chapter of Acts and read it; and he will find that the whole burden of Peter's sermon is to the effect, that since the Jews had put Jesus to death, he had broken the bonds of death and hades, they being powerless to hold him, and had ascended to the right hand of God, whereby he had conquered both death and hades, and for which "God hath made him both Lord and Christ." Note, that because of this resurrection and ascension he had *been made* both Lord and Christ,—and not by any virtue in his death itself. Not the remotest hint of vicarious atonement! The natural inference is—tho Peter is not quoted as saying so in so many words,—that men are to be saved from death and hades hereafter, because Jesus had escaped from both, and thus not only paved the way, but himself thereby became able to save others also.

As is well known, for half a century or more, the followers of the new faith, who for fifteen years were all Jews, or Jewish proselytes, looked with anxious

expectancy for the return of this Jesus, with the power and glory of heaven, to set up his earthly kingdom on the throne of David in Jerusalem. Not a word yet about saving men's souls from hell thru vicarious atonement. No need for a vicarious atonement to save men from hell hereafter, if they were soon to live on this earth forever—those who died before his return to be raised from the dead as he was, while those that remained were to be "caught up in the clouds to meet him in the air and live forever,"—under the benign reign of the Messiah of God.

But we are approaching its development. There appears upon the scene one Saul of Tarsus, afterwards known as Paul the Apostle. It is generally conceded that he never saw Jesus in his lifetime; in fact knew nothing of him while he lived. He early became a violent persecutor of the new sect, which for years was only another Jewish sect, as exclusively Jewish in its views and outlook as were the priests and Rabbis. But Paul was a well educated man, a scholar in his day,—and a philosopher. He was a Jew to the core, and lived and died one. We need not consider the story of his trip to Damascus, the supposed miracle on the way, and his conversion to the new faith. He soon became the greatest leader and exponent it had thus far produced; and he put a new interpretation on it, *entirely unchristian*, if we are to take the recorded teachings of the Christ himself as our standard for Christianity. And the Christianity of the world today is much more Pauline than Christian, judged by this standard.

This Paul operated independent of the other Apostles. He was a "free lance" and launched forth, both in a field, and with a doctrine all his own. He was thoroly familiar with the whole Jewish system. He knew all about the meaning and purpose of the sacrifice of atonement. Yet he was too wise not to know that there was no *intrinsic merit* in the blood of bulls and goats to cleanse from sin, or appease the divine wrath. Yet as a loyal Jew he certainly *believed* these to be of divine origin,—and that they must have a meaning deeper than the physical fact itself. He was a believer in the coming of the long-promised Messiah—to restore Israel. A man of his knowledge and foresight might well be able to read "the signs of the times," and see that the Jewish nation could but little longer maintain its separate identity against the overwhelming power of the growing Roman Empire. It must soon be swallowed up and its separate identity lost in the greater whole. No power in Israel seemed to be able to stem the tide of events. Remember that this was now some years after the crucifixion; and after Paul had changed his course towards the new sect, because of the events about Damascus,—no matter what they may have been. At any rate, it is quite clear, no matter what the reasons may have been that induced him to do so, that he had accepted

in good faith, as a veritable truth, the belief in the physical resurrection of the crucified Jesus. Paul tells us himself that after his escape from Damascus he went into Arabia for three years,—perhaps to try to think out some rational interpretation of the meaning of the events that he had felt himself forced to accept as true.

After this we find him passing thru Jerusalem, stopping a few weeks with Peter and the other Apostles to learn from them all he could; and then going on to his native city, Tarsus, where we lose sight of him for several years before we find him starting on his first great missionary journey from Antioch, in which we begin to get our first glimpses of the doctrine of vicarious atonement made for the sins of the world by the death of Jesus of Nazareth.

During these years of Paul's obscurity, both in Arabia and at Tarsus, what was he probably doing? We do not know. But is it unreasonable to conjecture that he must have spent at least a good portion of his time in profound study, to try to reconcile these new views with the past history, traditions and beliefs of his own people? If this new teaching meant only a new ethical standard of life; that men are saved by what they *are* and *do*, without any reference to *belief*, then the whole Jewish system of sacrifices had no meaning at all, and never did have. We can hardly conceive of Paul, educated as he was in all the lore and traditions of his people, accepting such a view as this. To him all the traditions and practices of his people were at least of divine origin; and hence must have a meaning of eternal significance. Yet, it must have been plain to him that in the natural course of events, as they were then clearly tending, it could not be long until the elaborate temple ritual, with *all* its sacrifices, oblation, burning bullocks and incense, must soon cease forever!

And now for the interpretation. All the ceremonial of Israel had a meaning; but it was symbolic, typical of some reality to come. The blood of bulls and lambs and goats could not in themselves atone for sin; but they could *point* to the "Lamb of Calvary," slain for the sins of the world. He that was without sin,—"the lamb without spot or blemish,"—was offered as a sacrifice for the sins of others. The law had its purpose, but it was now fulfilled, all its symbolic meaning was consummated in the death of Jesus, and now it must go. It was only a school master, to keep us in the way until the Christ should come. When this "lamb" was slain, God saw his shed blood, and was satisfied. His anger relented, his wrath cooled and the hand of mercy was extended, on the simple condition,—*of faith*. What was the meaning, intent and purpose of this vicarious

atonement? According to the belief of the time, that Jesus would soon return in the power and glory of heaven to set up his everlasting kingdom here on earth, it was to prepare a people for this kingdom. This kingdom was to be composed only of those who had been thus prepared for it, by the remission of their sins, thru this blood atonement. The earliest Christians, all of whom were Jews, led by Peter, held that this new kingdom was to be forever limited to Jews and Jewish proselytes. If any Gentile wanted to have any part or lot in this new kingdom, he must first become a Jew. But Paul took a broader view. To him the whole Jewish system was purely preliminary to a greater dispensation, which was now fulfilled; symbolic and typical of a greater reality which was now here; and had therefore fulfilled its purpose and was ended. All symbolic ceremonial was now past forever. There was no longer any distinction between Jew and Gentile as far as God's grace was concerned. The New Kingdom was open to all upon the same terms,—faith in Jesus as the Messiah of God, and this particular interpretation of his mission.

This opening of the gates to all the world on equal terms produced a bitter controversy between Peter and Paul and led to a sharp and well defined division in the early church, which continues to this day. The Roman Church is Petrine, narrow, exclusive and given to much elaborate ceremonial, as were the ancient Jews; while Protestantism is generally Pauline, much broader, generally freer from ceremonial, and as a rule much more truly Catholic; yet often narrow enough.

As time went on, and Jesus did not return as expected, faith in his early coming waned; and the idea began to grow that his real Kingdom was not for this world at all, but a heavenly one hereafter. By this time the Apostle Paul was dead and the Fourth Gospel had appeared, supposed to be written by the Apostle John, in which the Master was quoted as saying, "My kingdom is not of this world." Thus the idea took form, grew and developed that the real mission of the Messiah, after all, was not the establishment of a kingdom here on earth, but a heavenly kingdom hereafter; and hence that his death was a vicarious atonement made by the shedding of his blood, to satisfy the divine vengeance against sin, and save souls from hell hereafter; and thus fit them for this heavenly kingdom.

And ever since this doctrine became thus established, by the middle of the second century, almost the whole emphasis and entire energies of the church, Catholic and Protestant, have been directed, not towards making this a better world by making mankind better, building up, developing, purifying and

uplifting human character; but toward saving them from a hell hereafter. And what little energy the church had left after this, has been spent, and is still being spent, in never-ending controversy among themselves over *just how to do it*.

Thus the doctrine of vicarious atonement, thru blood, and blood alone, had its origin in the lowest paganism, away back in the infancy of the human race, was transmitted down thru Judaism, and transplanted from it into Christianity.

But I cannot leave this subject without a few remarks on the various meanings that have been attached to the idea of vicarious atonement, since it became an integral part of the Christian system. We have already seen that the original pagan meaning of blood atonement was based upon the idea that the gods were angry and out for vengeance, and nothing but blood would appease them; but that the blood of a proper substitute would answer this purpose. But the earliest Christian doctrine of the atonement made by Christ was in the nature of redemption. In fact the term became so deeply rooted and grounded in early Christian nomenclature that it has never been fully eliminated. But its use is much less now than formerly. The theory was based upon tradition, partly scriptural and partly not, that in the affair of Eden the devil fairly outwitted God and became rightfully entitled to the souls of all mankind forever; but that on account of the great war in heaven, in which the devil and his angels were cast out by the "Eternal Son" of God (see Milton's "Paradise Lost"), the devil held a bitter grudge against this son, and offered to bargain with God and give him back all the souls of mankind for the soul of this son. So God, knowing the power of his son to break the bands of death and hell,—which the devil did not know,—accepted the bargain; and in due time, as agreed upon, the Son of God came into the world, died on the cross and went to hell, in fulfillment of this contract; and thus liberated all the souls already there, and obtained a conditional release of all the balance of mankind,—the condition of faith,—and then suddenly broke the bands of death and hell and escaped back to heaven. But he literally fulfilled his contract as originally made. Thus we find the old church creeds reciting—and still reciting—that "he was crucified, dead, buried and descended into hell, and the third day rose," etc. This idea may look strange to present day Christians; but all they have to do is to consult the early church literature to find that it was almost the universal belief as to the meaning of the atonement during the first few centuries of Christianity.

The next view that gradually developed as the older one waned, was the old Jewish idea of *substituted suffering* and to which was added that of imputed

righteousness. That is to say, that in order to save mankind and yet appease the divine wrath, and satisfy the vengeance of an offended God, God sent his son into the world to bear the brunt of his wrath instead of mankind, and tho innocent, to suffer as tho guilty; and finally to die as a malefactor, tho innocent of sin; and because of the dignity and character of the victim and the intensity of his sufferings in both life and death, they were sufficient in both quality and quantity to satisfy the divine vengeance against all mankind; *provided* man would avail himself of these provisions for his release by accepting by faith the Son of God as his suffering substitute; whereupon, God would forgive the sins of the faithful and *impute* to them the benefits of the righteousness of Christ. This doctrine of the atonement dominated the Middle Ages. Upon it was based the doctrine of supererogation, whereby the surplus stock of good works of the holy saints might be laid up for the benefit of the less worthy, who might receive the benefits of them thru the process of indulgences, sold by the church for a money consideration. It is still held in a somewhat modified form in a large part of Christendom to this day.

The more modern doctrine of the atonement is that called the Governmental Theory. That is to say, that God was not so mad with mankind after all; but having once ordained the law that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die," the law could neither be abrogated nor suspended, but must have its penalty. As no mortal man could fulfill it for any one but himself, and that only by his eternal death, only the Son of God could satisfy it for mankind. Therefore the Eternal Son of God became incarnate in human flesh, but still remained "Very God of Very God," in order that he might meet the demands of this divine law for all mankind, by not being amenable to it himself, being without sin; and yet by his sufferings and death paying its penalty in full for the whole human race; subject, however, to the appropriation of its benefits by the individual, thru faith. In a measure this is the same as that of the substitution theory; but it does not go to the extent of the doctrine of imputed righteousness.

The only exception to it is in the Roman church, and here the exception is apparent rather than real. In the Roman church salvation is *by faith in the church*, the benefits of which are transmitted to the individual thru the sacraments of the church; but in the ancient church, and in practically all modern Protestant churches, saving faith is held to be individual and personal; and must be not only faith in the atoning sacrifice made by Jesus Christ on the cross for all mankind; but it must be faith *in the correct view of the atonement*. Hence, no matter which of the views I have herein outlined may be correct, those who have held to either

of the others are all lost. This is the only logical conclusion any one can reach who insists that salvation is impossible except by accepting any prescribed creed. Only those who possess and accept the *right creed* can be saved. All the balance of mankind must be lost forever. To take either of these views of the atonement, or all of them together, as the only means by which mankind can be saved from hell is to make God a complete failure from beginning to end. As we have already seen, the orthodox view of creation makes God either a failure or a monster. The attempt to reform man thru the process of elimination by the flood proved a failure. And now if the success of God's last attempt to save mankind thru the death of his son, is limited to any interpretation orthodox Christianity has ever placed upon it, it is the most stupendous failure of all.

There is but one rational interpretation of any doctrine of salvation by vicarious atonement; and that is that the atonement must be automatically as far-reaching and comprehensive in its results as the sin it is designed to remedy. If sin entered into the world because of the offence of Adam, the head of the race, and thus passed upon all men, without their knowledge or consent, simply because they were descendants of Adam, any scheme of redemption, atonement, or salvation that purports in any way to remedy, or obviate the consequences of this original sin, in order to be just must be equally as broad and comprehensive, and operate as automatically and unconditionally in its remedial effects, as did Adam's sin in its consequences.

I have thus gone at some length into this doctrine of atonement and redemption. Perhaps I have wearied the reader. But as it is the most fundamental doctrine of the whole orthodox Christian system, and has been such a bone of contention in all the ages of the Christian church, and was such a stumbling block to me for so long a time, I felt that my "Confession of Faith" would be incomplete if I did not go into it in some detail.

My final conclusion is, that man never fell, but always has been and still is imperfect and incomplete, but ever striving upward. As man was never lost or stolen from God, he needed no redeemer to buy him back. As he was never an enemy to God, but always his child, God was never angry with him; hence he needed neither mediator, nor any one to make any atonement for him.



## CHAPTER VII

### A NEW INTERPRETATION OF RELIGION

What is religion? This over which men have waged the fiercest controversies known to human history; that has been the source of more strife and bloodshed than any other single cause known to mankind; and perhaps, in one way or another, more than all other causes combined, previous to the recent World War. It will be remembered that I said after finishing my special course of study on the origin, authorship, history and character of the Bible and the processes of reasoning which it inspired, "that I gave the whole thing up, inspiration, revelation, church and religion, as a farce and a delusion, as 'sounding brass and tinkling cymbals'; and cast it all into the scrap-heap of superstition, legend, fable and mythology." But after several years of study and observation I changed my mind again. I found that what I had always been taught and understood to be religion was not religion at all, but only a *form of religious expression*. Creeds and beliefs I found were not religion, but the products of religion. That subtle emotional experience which I had always been taught was religion, I found was itself but a form of religious expression. I learned that religion was not something one could "get," by repentance, faith, prayer, etc., as I had been taught and taught myself for years; but something every normal human being on earth had by nature, and could not get rid of.

Then what is religion? While it is the simplest thing on earth, it is yet perhaps the hardest to define; especially by one person for another. Its very simplicity eludes definition. In trying to define it I shall use in part the definitions given by others, as these are more expressive than any words of my own that I can frame: "Religion essentially consists of man's apprehension of his relation to an invisible power or powers, able to influence his destiny, to which he is necessarily subject; together with the feelings, desires and actions which this apprehension calls forth." Another definition that is perhaps more direct and simple than the above is this: "Religion is an impulse imbedded in the heart of man which compels him to strive upward. It is a yearning of the soul in man to transcend its own narrow limits, and to soar to the heights of supreme excellence, where it may become identified with the noble, the lofty, the divine." Another has said that "Religion is simply the zest of life." To these I will add that I understand religion to be that *inner urge* in all humanity that pushes it onward and upward; that inspires in man the desire to rise above his present station and

attainments, and improve his condition; that spirit within man that has lifted him from the lowest savagery to the highest attainments in civilization, refinement and culture that man has yet reached; and will still lead him on to heights yet invisible and undreamed of.

This *inner urge* is common to all humanity, different only in degree, and not in kind. It is possessed by the lowest savage, tho often in latent form, yet capable of being touched and aroused into life and action, as thousands of modern examples attest, as a result of some form of missionary effort. From the time that man first emerged above the brute, stood erect, looked up, beheld the phenomena of nature about him, thought, and recognized that *somehow* and *somewhere* there was a Power above, beyond and greater than himself; and conceived in his own mind, however crude, the first faint spark of an aspiration to improve and better his condition, man became a religious being, and has been such ever since, varying only in degree, not in kind.

All religion is therefore one and the same. There may be many religions. But back of all these is religion. Religion is one in its origin. It is a part of the fundamental essence of human character. It is inseparable from the faculties of thought, reason and will. It is one and the same with these. Man without these faculties of thought, reason and will would not be man at all, but a brute. So without this *inner urge*, and the faculty of *aspiration upward*, which I have defined as the very fundamental essence of religion, man would still only be a brute. He would not be man at all. Religion is one in its origin because it is an essential characteristic of all human nature.

All religion is one in that it recognizes SOMETHING above man. I use this word advisedly. If I had said, "Because all men recognize the existence of God, or a Supreme Being," I would have been misunderstood and the statement challenged. Men have become so habituated to calling all other men atheists who do not accept their particular definition of God, that I omit the word entirely until I can further define my meaning. Because Voltaire did not believe in the God of Moses and the Pope, he was dubbed an atheist, altho he was a devoutly religious man, and built a chapel at his own expense on his estate and dedicated it "to the worship of God." Man instinctively recognizes *something* above him. It is immaterial by what name this may be called; whether Jehovah, Elohim, Allah, Heaven, Nirvana, or Jove; nor what attributes we give it, whether we call it Person or Principle, the Great Unknown or the Ultimate Cause; or whether it be a mere abstract Ideal, the creation of one's own fancy; it is still that "*Something*"

which man recognizes as above him, toward which he aspires and hopes to attain.

Man also instinctively recognizes that he sustains some sort of personal relationship to this "Something," that for want of a better name, we call God. It is necessary in this connection to repeat what we have already said: That very early in the history of the human race man was led to this conclusion, concerning his relationship and obligation to God, thru his effort to interpret and solve the problem of evil, or his own sufferings from it, and his ultimate death. The only possible method he had of interpreting these problems was drawn from his own nature and experience. He knew himself as being alive, as a conscious individual, capable of exercising will and exerting force. Thus when he heard the roaring thunders, saw the clouds floating overhead, and the flashes of lightning among them, felt the force of the wind and the falling rain; in fact all the phenomena of nature and life about him, including his own aches, pains, diseases, suffering, and the ultimate death of his kind, he could only interpret these things in terms of living personality, some great, powerful individual, or individuals behind, and directing it all. These became man's first gods.

Man also interpreted his own relation to the gods, and theirs to him, in the same terms that defined his relations toward his fellowmen. He recognized the fact that some of his fellowmen sometimes did him an injury, or committed some offense against him; that this offense or injury aroused in him a spirit of resentment, a desire for vengeance in kind, even to the taking of the life of the man who had injured, or seriously offended him. Man made his gods in his own image. He believed these gods to be like himself. Thus, man interpreted his own sufferings to mean that he was out of right relations with the gods; that he had personally offended them,—or, one or more of them in some way, according to the source from which he conceived some particular affliction to come. When the individual was conscious of his own innocence, he concluded that some of his ancestors had grievously offended the god, who relentlessly pursued his posterity and inflicted on them the penalties due for the sins of this ancestor. Hence the doctrine of inherited or original Sin. Man then set about to devise some means to appease the wrath of the gods, and thus restore harmonious relations with them. A volume might be written here, but we *must* proceed with the next proposition.

All religion is therefore one in its ultimate purpose, and objective end: To attain to its ideal, or harmonize with its objective. In other words: To attain unto

right relations with God. Lest I be misunderstood, I will repeat: It is immaterial what this God may be, Jehovah, Allah, Nirvana or Jove; Person, Principle, or Abstract Ideal. It is that which man *in his mind* sets before him, toward which he aspires and strives to attain. Remember that what we *think* God to be, that is what God is to us.

We have now reached the point where divisions arise, where religion branches out into religions. "Wherewith shall I come before Jehovah, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves a year old? Will Jehovah be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

"What must I do to be saved?" This has, in one form or another, at one time or another, been the burden of almost every soul among men. How can man attain unto right relations with his God? This is the great question of the ages. *Keep in mind* that it is immaterial who or what this god may be, how crude or how refined, from the lowest fetish to the highest spiritual conception, the fundamental question remains ever the same: How shall man get right with his God? What must man do to be saved?

To answer this question has been the purpose of every system of religion known to mankind, and every sect, order and denomination known to every system. And here is where confusion begins. Some one evolves a formula, means, or method that he believes meets the case. Some others are persuaded to accept it and the sect grows. In the mean time some other person has evolved another; and some other still another, and so on, and on, and on, *ad infinitum*; all having the same purpose in view, and each claiming to be the *only right one*, or at least, the *best one*. And it is immaterial how erroneous, crude, or even barbarous one may look to the devotees of the other; in fundamental purpose they are all the same. The Hindu mother who casts her babe into the Ganges as food for the crocodiles, as a sacrifice to her gods, does it with as sublime a motive as any Christian mother ever bowed before the altar of her own church,—and for the same purpose: To get right with her God. The Parsee wife, who burns herself to ashes upon the funeral pyre of her dead husband, does it for the same purpose: To get right with her God. The devotee who throws his body before the wheels of the Juggernaut to have it crushed as an act of devotion, does it for the same purpose: To get right with his God. The devout Mohammedan who bows himself to the earth five times a day, and says his prayers with his face

towards Mecca, does it for the same purpose: To get right with Allah. The savage who repeats his incantations to his fetish that he has probably made with his own hands, does it for the same purpose: To get right with God as he conceives him. The Chinese that burns his sticks before the image in his Joss-house, does it for the same purpose: To get right with his God. And so on *ad infinitum*, the same central purpose running thru it all, whether Hindu or Parsee, Buddhist or Janist, Confucian or Shintoist, Jew or Gentile, Mohammedan or Christian, Catholic or Protestant, Methodist or Baptist, Presbyterian or Lutheran, Calvinist or Arminian, Unitarian or Trinitarian, one and all, have one and the same ultimate object: To get into right relations with God, each according to his own conception of God, and what he understands to be his will concerning him. However, in the more rational interpretation of religion in these later times, the element of fear of punishment hereafter has been almost, if not entirely eliminated; and the religious objective is made the highest, noblest, purest, and best possible life in this world, for *its own intrinsic worth*, and without any reference to any future life, resting firmly in the faith that he who lives right cannot die wrong.

Hence, religion does not consist in creeds, dogmas, or beliefs; nor in forms, ordinances, ceremonies, or sacraments, as I was early taught to believe. But these are, one and all, but so many varying *forms of expression* which religion takes. They are all only so many different ways, means and methods religion takes to attain to its ultimate purpose and aim. They are only so many different paths which different men take in their search for God.

And is there but *one* true path to God, while all the others only lead to hell? And if so, *which* is the right one? Ah, herein lies the fruitful source of most of the world's tragedies and sufferings! It was this that burned John Huss, Savonarola and Bruno. It was this that lighted the fires of Smithfield and hung helpless, silly women in New England, as witches. But thank God, it is abating and the dawn of a better day is in sight.

I have long since come to believe that all who honestly, sincerely, and diligently seek God will ultimately find him, in some way, at some time, when God sees best to reveal himself, no matter what method may be pursued. I do not mean that all methods are equally good; no, not by any means. The quest for God may be helped or hindered, advanced or delayed, accordingly as the methods of search may be correct or erroneous. But I do mean to say that I do not believe the Infinite God, who knows the hearts of men, and will ultimately

judge them by this standard, will forever hide, and deny himself to any, in whose heart He sees honesty, purity, and sincerity of purpose and motive, because in their finite judgment, they were unable to intellectually determine just which was the right, or best way;—and this, whether the searcher be Hindu, Chinese, Pagan or Parsee; Hottentot or Arab, savage or philosopher; Christian, Mohammedan or Buddhist; or any one else on earth. "Man looketh upon the outward appearance; but God looketh upon the heart." And they that diligently, honestly and earnestly seek after him will find him,—somewhere, somehow—in this life or some other, And when found, it will not be "in far-off realms of space," but in one's own heart.

"The outward God he findeth not,  
Who finds not God within."

## **THE BIBLE**

From the foregoing it is quite clear that religion is not something miraculously revealed from heaven, handed down in a package already bound up, complete and finished, ready for use; but that in its origin, essence and purpose it is natural and common to all humanity alike. Its present status is but the result of its progressive development, from its crudest forms in early humanity, to the present day. While forever remaining one and the same in its origin, essence and purpose, it has undergone changes in its forms of expression, its means and methods, in all ages as mankind has progressively developed upward. What we call the great systems of religion, such as Buddhism, Christianity, Mohammedanism, and others are but so many different forms of expression thru which religion manifests itself in human life; and the various sects and denominations in all these systems are but further subdivisions in these forms of expression, according to different desires, tastes and opinions among different people. Hence, religion was not produced by the Bible, nor is it in any way dependent upon the Bible as a source of authority, but just the opposite. Religion was long before the Bible and itself produced the Bible; and the Bible derives its sole authority from religion.

Here is perhaps as good a place as any to answer the question that has often been asked me: "If the Bible is not the ultimate source of authority in religion, what and where is it?" Just the same to you and me today that it was to Noah,

Abraham, Moses, the prophets, apostles, and all others in all ages. "But were not these men divinely inspired?" No more than you or I *may be*, even if we are not in fact. This subject will be fully elucidated when I come to treat specifically of inspiration and revelation in the next subdivision. The answer to this question about the source of authority in religion is clearly indicated in the very definition I have given of religion, and I only make it more specific here to avoid any misunderstanding of my position on it. If "religion is a natural impulse imbedded in the heart of man which compels him to strive upward"; if it is the "zest of Life"; if it is "that *inner urge* in all humanity that ever pushes it onward and upward"; these natural impulses themselves constitute the sole source of authority in religion. Thomas Paine once said: "All religions are good that teach men to be good." To which might well be added: That religion alone is best which teaches men to live the best lives. Life, not creed, is the final test of religion. To perceive what is right and what is wrong, to cleave to the right and avoid the wrong, is the highest, noblest and best expression of religion. Now, there is no single universal standard of right and wrong that is universally the same in its application to human life, in all ages, at all times, and under all circumstances and conditions. Life is progressive; and as it moves on new conditions arise, new relations develop, new problems present themselves, and new and changing standards come with them. For example, human slavery and polygamy were both practiced in the days of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, and Solomon, and for centuries afterwards; and according to the Bible, with the divine sanction and approval. The simple facts are, that according to the standards of those ages, according to the social development of the race at that time there was no moral turpitude in those practices. But who would dare defend them now? And yet these, or most of them—and I say it reverently and sincerely—were doubtless *good men*, judged by the standards of their time; and devoutly religious.

Coming directly now to the answer to the question: The ultimate, final authority in all matters of religion is the *individual conscience*, the inner light, that law written in the hearts of all men, aided and assisted by all the light of the present day, which includes all the light of the past that has come down to us, both in the Bible and from all other courses, history, science and the record of human experiences generally interpreted and applied by human reason. That "natural impulse imbedded in the heart of man which compels him to strive upward"; that "inner urge that ever pushes him onward and upward," will not only start him in the right way of life, but will remain with him and guide him to the end, if he will but hear and obey its voice, interpreted by reason.

The reader will recall the opinion I reached concerning the Bible after my special course of study and the process of reasoning that followed it. But after fifteen years of continued study I changed my opinion about it again. When I took a different perspective I got a different view. First, I was confronted with the fact that *the Bible is here*. And while all my inherited opinions as to its origin, meaning and purpose were gone forever, the second question remained unanswered: *How came it here?* After all these years of study and investigation I found an answer to this question satisfactory to myself, which I have already indicated above, but will here more fully elaborate as a part of my New Confession of Faith.

The Old Testament is but a record preserved and handed down to us, first of events, legends, opinions and beliefs that existed in crude form as traditions, long before a line of it was written; and thereafter, for a period covering approximately a thousand years, it is a record, tho evidently imperfect, of the progressive development of the Jewish race, nation and religion, which are so inseparably bound together that they cannot be separated. Let us go a little more into detail. No one claims that a line of the Old Testament was written before Moses. (And it is here immaterial whether Moses wrote the Pentateuch or not. The Jews believed he did.) Yet the Jewish system of religion, at least in its fundamental features, had been in existence since Abraham, some five hundred years before, to say nothing of previous peoples back to Noah, or even to Adam and his sons. Yet none of these had any Bible whatever. If it is claimed by any one that Moses was the originator of the Jewish system, it leaves Abraham and all his posterity, down to the time of Moses, but pious pagans. But according to the record, Moses added nothing to the *principles* of religious worship as practiced by Abraham and the other patriarchs. He simply reorganized, systematized, refined and somewhat elaborated the ancient system of worship, and at most reduced it to regularity and order.

It was quite natural that Moses should then reduce to writing the traditions and practices of his people, and make a more or less complete record of their laws, regulations, and civil and religious institutions; and especially of that system of religious worship which he had not originated, but organized, systematized and reduced to more perfect order, so that all this might be preserved for the benefit of the people thereafter. This was the beginning of the sacred literature of the Jews which, when completed in its present form, was called the Bible—meaning simply, The Books.



After this, tho the Jewish system of religion, according to the Jews themselves, was finished and complete, they had but five books of written scripture,—the Pentateuch. Yet thirty-four additional books were afterwards written and added to these. Can these later books be quoted as *authority* for that which existed, in some instances, a thousand years before they were written? Certainly not. But the facts are plain. The system of religion already existing, but continually progressing, gave rise to these subsequent books, which are merely a record of the progress, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, practices, etc., of this peculiar and intensely religious people.

Thus we see that the Old Testament is a *growth* produced by, and recording the historic development of the Jewish race, nation and religion. It is simply the *literature* of a people. Its various parts were written by representatives of the people themselves, many of whose names are unknown, at various times covering a period of a thousand years, under many varying conditions and circumstances. It records in part their history, traditions, legends, myths, their beliefs, superstitions, hopes, fears, ideals and aspirations; and the legendary deeds of their national heroes, just as we find them in the literature of ancient Greece, Rome, England or Scandinavia. It contains books of law, ritual, maxims, hymns, poetry, drama, letters, sermons, denunciations, rebukes, warnings, arguments, anecdotes and biography. No literature on earth is more multifarious in its contents. That it contains many contradictions, errors, inconsistencies and incredible statements is nothing to its discredit from this viewpoint of its origin. The wonder is that there are not more. But that it contains only what the various writers of its different parts, at the time they wrote, honestly thought and *believed* to be true, may be freely admitted without in the least derogating from its true value, or adding supernatural sanctity to it. The Old Testament considered simply as a collection of ancient Jewish literature, reveals to us today many of the stages in the national, racial and religious evolution of ancient Israel, just as the literature of any nation or people reveals the same thing concerning them,—no more and no less.

Turning now for a moment to the New Testament: Is it the source and authority for Christianity? Or just the reverse? Which was first of the two? That which goes before is the cause of that which comes after,—not the reverse. If Christianity is to be considered as a separate and distinct system of religion, based upon divine authority, the system was finished, full and complete with the resurrection and ascension of Christ—for the argument's sake, admitting these to be facts. Hence Christianity would have existed as a fact just the same, whether a

line of the New Testament had ever been written or not. As a matter of fact, not a line of it was written for twenty-five or thirty years after these events, and it was not completed for a hundred years thereafter. Therefore the New Testament did not produce Christianity; nor is it the authority upon which it is based, but just the opposite. Christianity produced the New Testament and is the authority upon which it is based.

So the New Testament, like the Old, is just literature,—no more. It records what the authors of its various parts, in the light of their time, and with the knowledge they possessed, as common, fallible, mortal men like ourselves, honestly thought, felt, hoped and believed was the truth. It gives us the only historical sketch we have of the origin and early development of that system of religion that in one form or another now dominates a third part of the human race. And as such it is the most valuable book the world possesses today. But it is no more the "infallible Word of God" than the Old Testament, Herodotus, Josephus, Plato or Plutarch.

The conclusion of the whole matter is: The Bible is not the supernaturally inspired, infallible word of God, given by him as the source and final authority for religion, outside of which and since its close there is no more revelation; but it was written by fallible men of like passions with ourselves, who wrote,—not as they were infallibly and inerrantly guided by the Holy Spirit, but—as they were moved by the same impulses, passions and motives that have moved men in all ages to write their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, hopes, fears, aspirations and views of life. Thus, as has already been said, the Bible is a *product* of religion instead of being its source and authority. Thus the literature of the Jewish race and the early Christians *grew*. In course of time the thirty-nine books containing our present Old Testament were brought together in one collection. We do not know just when. Afterwards the twenty-seven books of our New Testament were collected in the same way. Age and tradition first embalmed them in an air of sanctity; and then superstition made of them a fetish. Until this "spell" is broken there can be no hope of anything like unity in the religious world. Until this fetish of a "once for all divine and infallible revelation, completed and handed down from heaven" is abandoned, there will continue to be "diversities of interpretation," and consequently divisions, controversies, bickerings, persecutions and recriminations will continue among mankind, and wars will continue among nations.

It may be said here that all the other sacred literature of the world, the Bibles

of other systems of religion, the Zend Avesta, the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Koran, and others, had their origin in exactly the same source and manner as did our Bible; and attained sanctity and authority among their respective followers in exactly the same way. But we need not go into it in detail.

But when we return to our first proposition, that all religion in its origin, fundamental essence and ultimate purpose is not only one and the same, but is *natural* and common to all humanity; that its processes are a continual revelation in nature and human experience in man's continuous progress onward and upward in the scale of human attainment; and that the Bible, and all other literature of its kind, merely records a part of these processes and revelations in nature and experience, by which we are able to read the footprints of human progress in the past, and that these various writers, mostly unknown, merely recorded what they saw, felt, believed or understood at that time to be the truth; then all these difficulties of interpretation and sources of division vanish, and these books take on a new value and importance that they never otherwise attain.

With this view of its origin and purpose the Bible readily takes and holds its place as the most remarkable and invaluable book the world has ever known, or perhaps ever will know. It becomes at once an inexhaustible treasure-house of knowledge indispensable to the world's highest thought and progress,—knowledge which cannot be obtained anywhere else. In this view its many contradictions, discrepancies, errors of fact, and incredible statements become at once of little force and easily accounted for; and when we consider the various ages in which its parts were written, the many different authors of its different parts, the standards of human knowledge and attainment in these times, the wonder is that there are not more. The Bible is thus the greatest book of *religious instruction* that the world knows, or ever has known. It contains inexhaustible treasures of religious thought, feeling, emotion and experience, of every conceivable type and variety, which makes it indeed "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness." It is an inexhaustible mine of the richest and purest gold, fused in the fires of human experience in many ages. But the gold is mixed with the sand and dirt and rocks and rubbish of the human frailties and weaknesses of the ages in which it was accumulated in this mine. The pure gold must be separated from this dross in the crucible of *present day* human intelligence, reason and experience. It is like a great river that has wound its course thru many countries and as many different kinds of soil, receiving tributaries from many different sources and directions. It contains much pure water; but it is impregnated with the sand and dirt and mud

of the channels thru which it has passed. It must be filtered and these elements eliminated before it can be put to its highest and best use. As a great book of religious instruction it contains riches in human experience and inspiration from which any and all may draw something to fit their particular case and need. But to get the highest value, each must separate the gold from the dross, the pure water from the sand and mud, according to his particular case and need. Used in this way and for this purpose, the Bible will doubtless remain the world's greatest book of religious instruction and inspiration. But to persist in the claim, in the light of present-day knowledge, that the whole of it is a divine revelation, supernaturally given from heaven, and infallibly and inerrantly true, is to perpetuate confusion and discord among men, and cause the wisest and best among them to discredit it altogether, as many of them have already done. But to reverence it for what it really is, a record of the religious evolution of the most intensely religious nation of antiquity, a great race that has contributed more to the religious life of the world than any other, is a credit to the intelligence of any one. To enshrine it in superstition, and make it a fetish, is idolatry.

## **INSPIRATION AND REVELATION**

I am a strong believer in inspiration. But I believe it to be, like religion, natural, in a greater or less degree, to all peoples, in all ages and at all times; and *not* something miraculous and supernatural, limited to a select few, of a single race, in a long past age, and since then has forever ceased. It is perhaps hard to define inspiration according to this view of it. Like religion, its very simplicity and universality eludes any exact definition; especially by one person for another. That it has often been manifest in much greater degree in some persons than in others; and in these much stronger at some times than at others, is not to be doubted for a moment. It is no more a uniform condition than human attainment in intelligence and character are uniform.

The simple dictionary definition will perhaps be adequate for our purpose,— at least as a starting point: "The inbreathing or imparting of an idea, emotion, or mental or spiritual influence; the elevating, creative influence of genius; also, that which is so inbreathed or imparted." It is that elevation of mental conception usually produced by intense concentration of mind, deep earnestness of thought, intense interest and zeal in a special subject or cause, or by some objective environment. A few simple illustrations will convey my meaning better than any lengthy metaphysical analysis. One night a long time ago, some sage philosopher was looking out upon the heavens, contemplating the beauties of the stars in their majesty and glory. These *inspired* a train of thought in his mind that found utterance in the nineteenth Psalm: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork...." This is inspiration if there ever was such a thing; and yet there is nothing miraculous or supernatural about it. It is as natural as the raindrops that fall from the clouds.

On another occasion some devout and intensely religious saint, but at the same time probably a great sufferer from some adverse fortune, beheld a shepherd taking care of his sheep, providing for them food and water, caring for the sick and lame and nursing them back to strength, leading them out to pasture thru the narrow defiles of the mountains, amidst many dangers, yet guarding them diligently against all. And this sight gave rise to reflections on the divine providence that found expression in that sublime and beautiful Twenty-third Psalm:

"The Lord is *my* shepherd; I shall not want.  
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;  
He leadeth me beside still waters;  
He restoreth my soul."

What is there in all the world's literature more inspired and more inspiring than this? And yet it is no more miraculous nor supernatural in its origin than the shepherd caring for his sheep.

Inspiration is simply a condition or state of mind. It is purely psychological in its nature, and may be produced by a great variety of causes; but is not supernatural. To some extent, and in some degree, but by no means always equal, it has been common among all peoples of the past; and at all periods of their history. Specimens of it have come down to us in this age, enshrined and

preserved in the literature, music and art of these peoples. It is as common among men today as it ever was in any past age. It is embodied in some degree, in most, if not all the literature, art and music of all ages; but by no means to the same extent in all. There are passages in Dante, Goethe, Shakespeare, Milton, Browning, Emerson, Carlyle, Bryant, Longfellow, Lowell, and a thousand others, ancient and modern, that are just as much the products of inspiration as the Twenty-third Psalm or the Sermon on the Mount. But no one would pretend to say that *all* that these men wrote was equally inspired, or of equal value.

What then is to be the test of inspiration? How are we to know what is inspired from what is not? There is no absolute and infallible test. The rule I have generally followed is what may be termed, the test of reproduction. The test of the perfect life of an oak is the production of an acorn that will produce another oak. The test of all complete and perfect animal life is its power to reproduce itself in the perpetuation of its own species. The test of inspiration is whether or not it reproduces its kind:—Does it inspire? Who can read the Twenty-third Psalm, or the Sermon on the Mount, the parable of the Lost Sheep, or the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians without feeling the spirit of inspiration in his own soul? Therefore these must be inspired, because they inspire others. Who can read Emerson's essay on Spiritual Laws, or The Over-Soul, and not be inspired? or Longfellow's Resignation? or Bryant's Lines to a Water-fowl, or Thanatopsis, and not be inspired? Then these must have been inspired, or they could not inspire. Who today can sing the Star Spangled Banner, Geo. F. Root's Battle Cry of Freedom, or Julia Ward Howe's Battle Hymn of the Republic, without feeling a thrill of inspiration that stirs the very depths of the soul? Then, these must have been inspired. Time and space fail me to mention even any of the great orators of history from Demosthenes to Woodrow Wilson, who by the power of their eloquence have been able to so inspire men to action as to change the course of empires and the destiny of nations. The secret of all this is that these men were themselves inspired,—not by some miraculous supernatural influence,—but by the natural intensity of their own earnestness, sincere devotion to, and all-absorbing interest in the cause they espoused, until they *lost themselves* in their cause, and became thus inspired, and inspired others.

Yes, inspiration is as common and potent in the world today as it ever has been in any age of the past. Its spirit still "enters into holy souls, making them friends of God and prophets."

Just a few words about Revelation will suffice. Revelation has been generally looked upon as almost synonymous if not identical, with inspiration; or so intimately connected with it that they could not be separated. What might be distinctively called revelation was the product, or out-put of inspiration. Whatever truth may still remain as to these relations, since we have seen that inspiration is not something miraculous and supernatural, but purely and wholly natural, there can be no such a thing as revelation in any miraculous or supernatural sense. And yet, all that man has ever learned, accomplished, attained to, or achieved is a revelation. Man, with all his boasted knowledge and achievement, has never created anything; all that man has ever done, at his best, has been to discover and utilize things and forces that are as old as the universe itself. All the discoveries he has ever made, all the knowledge he has ever gained, all that he has ever accomplished or achieved, has been the result of a continuous, unfolding revelation from the dawn of time to the present day; by which he has been able to discover, utilize and appropriate to his own use and benefit, that which has existed, in one form or another, eternally—all of which is a revelation, divine, but not miraculous.

A few centuries ago Copernicus gave us a new view of the universe. This was revelation. But the universe had existed in exactly the same form and relations since "the morning stars sang together." A little later Newton revealed to us the law of gravitation. This was the first man ever knew of it. But the law had existed just the same since the chaos was first reduced to cosmos. The potential power of steam as a mechanical force was just as great in the days of Noah or Abraham as it is today. But it remained for Robert Fulton, but a little over a century ago, to apply it to practical use; and this was just as much a divine revelation as the call of Abraham, or the vision of Moses on the Mount. The same is true of electricity. All the multifarious uses to which it has ever been applied, were just as potent in the days of Shalmanezzer or Solomon as they are today. Every discovery and new use to which it has been applied since the day that Franklin drew it from the clouds and corked it up in a bottle, has only been so many new divine revelations; as much so as the vision of Paul before the gate of Damascus, or John on the Isle of Patmos. In fact more so.

And on *ad infinitum*. All the progress man has ever made or ever will make is only the result of this divine revelation ever unfolding itself to him, just as fast, and no faster than he is able to appropriate and use it. Thus God reveals himself to man, not miraculously, but naturally and *thru nature itself*, just in proportion to man's ability to understand, receive and appropriate it. Jesus is quoted as

saying: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth." Did that spirit of truth ever come? And if so when, if ever, was it withdrawn? He said in another place that it should remain forever. Yes, I believe that same spirit of truth is still in the world today and has been ever since man has been here, guiding men into the way of truth just in proportion to their ability to receive it. And also, all truth is divine, because all truth comes from the same source—God. The truth concerning the universe, the laws of nature in the material world are thus just as divine, as are the moral laws governing man in his social relations, or those governing his relations to God. And the great storehouse of Nature has not yet revealed even an infinitesimal part of her infinite riches for man's use and benefit, that are yet to be revealed as man progresses onward and upward. Instead of having reached the zenith of man's discoveries and achievements, and therefore a finished revelation, we have not yet passed the dawn. The heavens still declare the glory of God; but the scientist, philosopher, and astronomer of today sees much more in them than does the savage, or did the author of the Nineteenth Psalm. And as man goes on he will see more and more of God in Nature, and understand him better, until the final fruition of his hope and faith is reached. Inspiration and revelation are thus both living realities, as much so now as at any time in the past, and will continue so while mankind continues to inhabit this planet.

All the progress, achievement and attainment mankind has ever made, from the days of the Cave Man and the Stone Age to the present time, are but the products, results, fruits of this inspiration and revelation, that has ever impelled and led mankind onward and upward. I firmly believe that the future holds in store a civilization, social status, human achievement, intellectual and moral attainment on this planet, as far above the present as this is above that of the Cave Man; and as inconceivable to us now as this was to him; and all this will be but the product, result, fruit of this eternal, never-ending process of inspiration and revelation that has brought mankind to where he is today.

## **CHAPTER VIII**

### **JESUS OF NAZARETH**



We have now reached the most interesting, if not the most vital part of this Confession of Faith. Thus far I have said almost nothing about the Man of Nazareth. "What then shall I do unto Jesus, who is called Christ?" The temptation is very great here to elaborate at some length upon my views of this, the most unique character in all history. I would like to give my views in full, with all the arguments, pro and con, as to his personality, character and mission. But this would extend this work to an undue length. Some day I may write it more fully in another book. I must be content now to give as briefly as possible the conclusions I have reached, without going into any very detailed arguments to support them.

What do we know about Jesus anyway? He never wrote a line that we have any record of, except a few words in the sand when the Jews brought a sinful woman before him to accuse her; and we know not what these words were. We have no record that he ever authorized any one else to write anything for, or about him. We have three short biographies of him that were written anywhere from fifty to eighty years after his death, the exact date of neither being known. The authors of two of these—Mark and Luke—it is admitted were not Apostles; and there is no evidence that either of them ever knew Jesus in his lifetime. It is admitted that each of them got all his information from another, and that one of them got his information from a person—Paul—who himself never knew Jesus in the flesh. It is admitted that the other—Matthew—as we now have it, is not the original writing of the Apostle of that name; that the original is entirely lost, and no one knows what additions or eliminations it underwent in its translation and transcription into another language. Years later a fourth biography appeared by an unknown author,—tradition being the only evidence that it was written by the Apostle John—so entirely different in its general make-up and contents, that but for the *name* of its subject and a very few passages in it, no one would ever take it to be about the same person that formed the subject of the other three.

When these four are taken together, and all repetitions and duplications are eliminated, it would leave us with a small pamphlet of some sixty or seventy pages as our only record of this most remarkable character of all history. None of the epistolary writings throw any light on the life, doings, sayings or personality of Jesus. They only deal with deductions drawn from or based upon it. When we add to this the fact that at least fifty years had elapsed, after the events described had happened, before a line of it—at least in its present form—was written; and that in an age when few people could write and no accurate records were preserved, and when those that did then write, wrote only from memory or

tradition; and when we further consider the varying and often very different accounts given by the different writers of the events they describe, differences in both the doings and sayings of Jesus, altho these are mostly only matters of minor detail, yet we become more and more convinced that we have no means of knowing for certain just what Jesus did; nor whether or not he uttered the exact words that the writers put into his mouth. Compare today the memory of any individual as to the exact details of some event, even that he personally witnessed, fifty years ago; especially as to the exact words used on any particular occasion, and we will have more than a fair example of the imperfection of human memory. Add to this the fact that this was in a very superstitious age, when every wonder was translated into a supernatural miracle, and our perplexity only becomes the greater. The doctrine of infallible guidance by divine inspiration is out of the question. If there was no other evidence against such an idea, the internal contents of these books themselves would forever destroy it.

Then, what do we *know* about Jesus? Very little. I do not accuse these writers of any deliberate misrepresentation, conscious fraud or forgery. They undoubtedly wrote what they honestly and sincerely believed at the time to be the truth. But they wrote simply as fallible men like ourselves. Their means of information in many cases was doubtless very meager and uncertain. They doubtless did the best they could under the circumstances. They wrote the truth as they understood it to be truth, just as any other historian or biographer would do today.

And what they wrote is all we know. It is the only basis we have upon which we can form any judgment as to who or what Jesus of Nazareth was. What Paul may have thought of him, and the system of theology he built thereon, is of but little value. What the Church Fathers may have thought, in the light of the age in which they lived, and their own standard of intellectual attainments, is of less. We have got to fall back upon the four gospels, and interpret them, not in the light of the superstitious age in which they were written; not assuming them to be exact truth; for in view of the fact of their own contradictions of each other on material and vital points this is impossible; but in the full light of this age of science and exact knowledge; of a more highly developed intelligence, and a deeper and more accurate reasoning power. With these records as a basis, or starting point, we must work out the problem for ourselves: Who and what was Jesus?

First, he was a Jew,—born, lived and died a Jew. There is no evidence that he ever rejected, or abrogated the religion of his fathers. That he tried to reform it, inject into it a deeper spiritual life, a more rational and higher ethical standard, will more fully appear as we proceed. He came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it,—not by dying on the cross, for the law nowhere says, or even intimates, anything about anybody dying on a cross or anywhere else. He came to fulfill it by living up to its full ethical and spiritual import, and teaching others to do so. "Moses had summed up the law in ten commandments, the Pharisees of the time of Jesus had made of these ten thousand—to be exact, six hundred and thirteen—and Jesus reduced them to two,"—and kept them. This is how he fulfilled the law.

Next, Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary by the same process of natural generation by which all other human beings come into the world. Paul, the earliest and most elaborate writer of the New Testament, nowhere gives us the remotest hint that he had ever heard of any such a thing as the supernatural birth; and it is wholly unthinkable that if such had been the truth he should have been ignorant of it; or that if it sustained such a vital relation to the Christian system of religion to which he devoted his whole life, he should never in the remotest manner refer to it.

Mark's gospel, written to the best of our knowledge about fifty years after the death of Jesus, nowhere refers to it. As we have already seen, we do not know what the Apostle Matthew may have written, as we do not have his original writing at all. The early Ebionite copies of the Greek translation and transcription did not contain the first two chapters, and consequently no reference to the supernatural birth. We are left to fall back on Luke and we will have to examine his story a little in detail. In all of its details, including the genealogy, it is quite different from that in Matthew. Luke alone mentions the visit to Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years old, and in which he was missed from the company when they started on the return home. When Joseph and Mary found him in the temple, she is quoted as saying, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." Now, if Jesus was *not* really the son of Joseph, but of the Holy Ghost, his mother certainly knew it; and if so her statement, "*thy father* and I have sought thee sorrowing," was not only a deliberate untruth; but if Jesus was God, he also knew it was an untruth. Another inconsistency in the story is, that if Jesus was thus the son of the Holy Ghost, and therefore God, and his mother knew it, why should she worry about his being missing from the caravan? Couldn't God take care of himself and find

his way back to Nazareth at any time he wished to go? On another occasion, mentioned by all the synoptics, when Jesus was teaching, his mother and brethren are reported as calling for him, evidently for the purpose of restraining him in his work, or persuading him to desist,—and this is the interpretation that has been most generally given to these passages, and the answer which Jesus gave supports it as correct,—such a course is entirely inconsistent with any conception that his mother at the time *knew* him to be the supernaturally born Son of God.

Turning now to the Fourth Gospel, we have not only an entirely different character, but an entirely different philosophy as to his life and mission. Not a word is said or anywhere hinted about a divine birth. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... and the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." To state it in the simplest words I can command, the theory of the Fourth Gospel is that of the old Alexandrian philosophy of the incarnation of the Divine Logos, or Word, or message from God, in human flesh, applied to Jesus of Nazareth. His pure and simple manhood is recognized, into which, in some mystical manner, nowhere explained, the Divine Logos, or Word, or Life, or God Himself, entered into *the man* Jesus, whereby he became the Son of God and the Messiah,—and not by the process of miraculous generation in the flesh. The old Ebionite doctrine was that this Divine Logos, or Word, or Spirit of God entered Jesus at his baptism, and that he thereby became the Messiah, distinctively "the Son of God" by divine selection, and not by supernatural generation.

There is no evidence that his disciples during his lifetime ever had the slightest conception that he had a supernatural birth. When Philip tells Nathaniel that he has found the Messiah of whom Moses and the prophets wrote, he also tells him that this Messiah is "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

Even after the death of Jesus the disciples seem to have had no knowledge of any supernatural birth. The two on their way to Emmaus, after the crucifixion, express their disappointment: "We hoped that it was he who should redeem Israel." No such expression of disappointment can possibly be reconciled with any thought that this Jesus who had so recently been crucified was the "eternal Son of God" incarnated in human flesh. On the day of Pentecost Peter speaks of him in no higher terms than "A man approved of God."

If Jesus was supernaturally born, as a matter of course his mother knew it all

the time; yet during the whole life of Jesus she is nowhere mentioned as giving the slightest intimation of it; but on the contrary all the record we have of anything she did do or say would naturally lead to just the opposite conclusion. Of course no one else knew anything about it. Taking it naturally for granted, that at least at the beginning, his disciples knew nothing of it, if they ever learned it afterwards, there must have been some special time, condition or circumstance under which they came into possession of these remarkable facts. Yet, there is not a hint in the New Testament about any such time, place, circumstance or incident.

How then did the idea of a supernatural birth and the deification of Jesus come about, if it was not a real fact? Very simply and quite naturally. Any one acquainted with ancient history knows that in that age of the world, and for centuries before, it had been almost a universal custom, especially in Greece and the Roman empire, to attribute some supernatural origin to, and deify their heroes,—sometimes while they were yet alive, but most certainly after their death. Just so, after the death of this remarkable man, and his cult continued to gather adherents, time and distance lent perspective, and he naturally grew larger and greater in their estimation, until, naturally and inevitably, permeated by the universal thought of the age in which they lived, they gradually came to look more and more upon their great master as being something more than ordinarily human, until this thought gradually ripened into his deification; and of course to be consistent with this he *must have been*, like all other deified heroes, supernaturally born. And out of this the legend of Bethlehem, in both its forms, in Matthew and Luke, somehow grew,—nobody knows exactly how. It is just like many other myths of past ages. The first we know of them they are full grown and complete; yet, like all other things, they *must* have had a natural and gradual growth.

As to where he was born we do not know, nor is it material. It is by far the most probable that he was born at Nazareth where his parents lived. The legend that he was born at Bethlehem was doubtless a pure conjecture, made necessary by those who accepted him as the Messiah of Hebrew prophecy, to make it correspond with the prophetic declaration that the Messiah should be born at Bethlehem of Judah. This fully accounts for the Bethlehem story as the place of his birth. The fact is they are all purely conjectural, made to fit into some preconceived notion of his personality or character. We have no reliable account whatever of his birth or early life.

We now come to consider the man,—yes, the man Christ Jesus. We have already said he was a Jew and lived and died one, with apparently no thought or purpose other than to reform and correct the abuses into which his people had lapsed, and revive and intensify the deep spiritual and ethical meaning of religion. Born of the most intensely religious race of all antiquity, he was the most intensely religious of his race. He perceived a new conception of God, not as the arbitrary ruler and vindictive judge of his people, but as the universal Father of all men, not anthropomorphic, but Infinite Spirit, whose greatest attributes were love, justice, mercy and truth, expressed in the great term Fatherhood; and that all men are children of the great Father, and therefore brothers. This expresses his fundamental philosophy and working basis of life. Upon it he undertook to build up and establish, not a new system of religion, but a new order of life. The central idea in this was man's direct relationship to God. In his own life he embodied a perfect example of his ideal. He thus became not God incarnate bodily in human flesh, nor the Son of God in any *different* sense than all are sons of God—except perhaps in degree and not in kind—but the most complete reflection and interpretation of God in terms of human life that the world had ever known before his time, has ever known since, or perhaps ever will know. But this last statement is saying more than any man can know for certain. We know not what God may yet have to reveal to mankind, nor how He will reveal it.

His course of life and teaching naturally brought him into direct conflict with the prevailing order of his time. We need not discuss that in detail. It soon led to a violent and tragic death, before he had fairly begun his work. We cannot form any guess what *might have been* the result if he had been permitted to live out a normal life and continue his teaching. He only met the same fate that many prophets before him had met, and many more since. If he should appear today here in America and pursue the same course toward public institutions and popular beliefs and practices, he would meet with a reception little different from what he met in Palestine nineteen hundred years ago. He might not indeed be crucified on a cross; but he would stand a good chance to be cast into jail and sent to a penitentiary for a term of years for sedition and attempting to interfere with the established order. And no persons would be more active in his prosecution than some of the modern Pharisees who occupy high places in that great institution that bears his name. If he had appeared in Europe some four or five hundred years ago, he would have been almost dead certain to meet the same fate of John Huss, Savonarola and Giordano Bruno. But now, as then, the poor, down-trodden and oppressed would doubtless hear him gladly.

There is no reliable evidence that he ever claimed to be the Messiah of Hebrew prophecy. He is quoted on several occasions as having accepted the appellation when applied to him by others. On one occasion only is he quoted as having affirmatively declared himself the Messiah; and that was to the woman of Samaria, and the whole circumstance of it renders it incredible. It would certainly be a very unusual course to take, for the Jewish Messiah to come and announce himself as such, not to the Jews themselves, but to a very obscure, not to say disreputable woman, of the most despised race known to the Jews.

It was however quite natural that, after his followers had universally accepted him as the Jewish Messiah, they should recall some occasional remarks that he may have made, upon which to base this belief; and that these remarks would finally take more concrete form, until when written, fifty to a hundred years after they were uttered, they were perhaps entirely different from anything Jesus ever said. As a matter of fact there is nothing in the life or teachings of Jesus, as recorded in the New Testament, that at all corresponds to the personality or character of the Messiah of Hebrew prophecy. And may I add here, that the Messiah of Hebrew prophecy, for whose coming the Jews were looking at that time, and for which most of the Jews have been looking ever since, is but a fiction and a myth, born entirely out of the patriotic devotion and fervid poetic fancy of the Old Hebrew prophets? In the days of Israel's adversity, when all the really unquestioned Messianic prophecies were uttered, the mind of prophet and people turned back to the golden days of David's glorious reign; and in their intense patriotism and unflinching faith in Jehovah, they hoped and *believed* that he would some day raise up a King of the line and house of David that would restore the ancient glory of Israel; and so they prophesied—"the wish being father to the thought." And this is all there is to Old Testament Messianic prophecy. And a great many of the most intelligent Jews of the Reformed School of today are beginning to think the same.

But if there was ever a true prophet of God, a man in whom the God-life in human form was truly manifest, a man supremely divine,—not by miraculous generation, but by spiritual union with God, whereby God indeed became manifest in human flesh,—that man was Jesus of Nazareth. And as such he becomes the eternal example for all mankind after him. As a man he justly commands the highest homage that the world can give to man. But make him God, and the chain that connects him with man is at once broken. If Jesus was God, and therefore incapable of temptation or sin, the temptation and triumph in the wilderness becomes a farce, without any meaning to mankind whatever. But

as a mortal man struggling with and overcoming the strongest temptations of life, it has infinite significance to all mankind. If he overcame as a man, so may I. As a god, the sweat of Gethsemane and the agony of the Cross are but mockery—not equal to a single pin-prick in a whole mortal life. But as a man, struggling with the last enemy, with eternity before him, a means of escape at hand, but deliberately devoting his life and his all in the most excruciatingly torturous manner known to human ingenuity in cruelty, it becomes a spectacle to command the awe and admiration of angels.

Jesus is indeed the savior of the world, not by having *redeemed* mankind with the purchase-price of his own blood; but by his life and words in teaching men how to live, and by his death how to die, if necessary, for the right.

I know of no more fitting close to this my view of Jesus, than a quotation from Ernest Renan's *Apostrophe to Jesus*. Ernest Renan was called an infidel because he abandoned the church of his fathers, and with it the deity of Jesus. But he found in Jesus the supreme model of all human life, the most perfect and complete reflection of the God-life in mankind the world has ever known.

"Repose now in thy glory, noble founder. Thy work is finished; thy divinity is established. Fear no more to see the edifice of thy labors fall by any fault. Henceforth beyond the reach of frailty, thou shalt witness from the heights of divine peace the infinite results of thy acts. At the price of a few hours of suffering, which did not even reach thy grand soul, thou hast brought the most complete immortality. For thousands of years the world will depend on thee: Banner of our contests, thou shalt be the standard about which the hottest battle will be given. A thousand times more alive, a thousand times more beloved, since thy death than during thy passage here below, thou shalt become the cornerstone of humanity so entirely, that to tear thy name from this world would be to rend it to its foundation. Complete conqueror of death, take possession of thy kingdom, whither shall follow thee, by the royal road which thou hast traced, ages of followers."

## **LIBERTY**

### ***MY NEW CHURCH RELATIONS AND SECOND CALL TO THE MINISTRY***



I have thus outlined, perhaps at greater length than was necessary, the processes thru which I passed in my religious life from my early childhood to mature middle life. I have shown how I was born in the bondage of orthodoxy; and how I was ultimately driven to abandon, not only it, but religion altogether. I then outlined the processes thru which I passed that led me to a satisfactory settlement in my own mind, of the problems embraced in the general and comprehensive term Religion, which I have tried to describe as "My New Confession of Faith." From the time I left the church and ministry until I reached the conclusions herein outlined, was about fifteen years. I reached them purely by my own investigations, not knowing that there was a church on earth that would accept me in its fellowship while holding them. I could not perjure myself by subscribing to a creed which I not only did not believe, but despised, merely for the sake of the social prestige or business advantage such church membership might give me, as I have known some to do, and was often importuned to do myself. Whatever other shortcoming may be charged to my account, it can never be said of me that I was untrue to my own moral convictions in these matters; altho this tenacity to principle, or as it was often called, "hard-headed stubbornness," has more than once caused me embarrassment, and put me at some disadvantage in business. I could not "let the tongue say what the heart denied."

My views of the church itself had also necessarily changed with my changed views of its theology. I no longer looked upon it as an institution of supernatural sanctity and authority. To me it is simply The Assembly. Any assembly of people gathered together for the worship of God is a true church. It does not depend upon any particular form of organization, the maintenance and administration of any particular ordinances, or so-called sacraments. It does not depend upon "Succession,"—Apostolic, Baptismal, Ordination, organization or otherwise. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." This is all that is essential to a true church. It depends upon unity of purpose, rather than uniformity of belief. Hence, any assembly of people, anywhere, united together for the worship of God, striving to live better lives themselves, and to help others to do the same, and thus make this world better and human life happier, meets all the essentials of a true church of God, regardless of any form of organization, ordinance, sacrament, creed, belief or ecclesiastical pedigree.

But for years,—as will presently appear,—I did not know that any church existed, that would come any way near meeting this definition. I naturally

supposed that any organization calling itself a church was based upon belief in the Bible as the infallible word of God, and the sole source of authority in all matters of religion. This I had completely abandoned and could never go back to it. In fact I did not trouble myself to inquire for a possible church fellowship. I supposed I was forever barred from any church membership whatever, except that I felt a welcome in attending the Reformed Jewish synagogue, where the preaching was on a high intellectual plane, sane and rational, dealing with modern problems instead of ancient creeds and dogmas; and I liked this. But I was not a Jew; and I knew I could never accept their theology. All I could ever expect was to be a welcome visitor, "a stranger within the gate."

However, I must go back a little. Some few years after I left the ministry of the Methodist Church, and while still living not far from the last church I served, a friend one day asked why I had left the Church and ministry. I told him very briefly a few of my doctrinal difficulties; to which he replied, "Ashley, you are a Unitarian." I thought but little of it. I was not really interested in churches any more anyway. But he handed me a pamphlet to read and told me he was a Unitarian back in Ohio where he came from. I read the pamphlet at his request. I do not now remember what it was, or just what it was about. But I was impressed with the fact that the views therein expressed were very similar to my own; and if that was Unitarianism I was also probably a Unitarian. But still it aroused no special interest as there was no Unitarian church anywhere about. If there had been, I might then have been led to investigate further. But years went by, and all the perceptible effect was that I would occasionally think how nearly I must be a Unitarian, until I finally determined that if I ever had an opportunity I would investigate the matter further.

In the summer of 1912, business relations led me to move to Dallas, Texas. Passing on the street one day, I noticed the sign, First Unitarian Church. A new inspiration came to me. I now had an opportunity to investigate just how near my religious convictions coincided with those of this church. When the church opened after the summer vacation I began to attend its services, only occasionally at first, reading in the meantime much of its literature kept at the church for free distribution. I became intensely interested and by the spring of 1913 I was a regular attendant. The more I read the more I found myself in substantial accord with what I understood to be the salient points of twentieth century Unitarianism. I found especially these points that impressed me very deeply: It had no creed. It had no specific statement of beliefs. It had no doctrinal standard or test of religious faith as a condition of church membership.

It not only permitted, but encouraged the greatest freedom of thought and the most searching investigation of all subjects presented for consideration, believing firmly that truth had nothing to fear from such a course. I found it had no test of membership but that of human character. I found a man was judged by what *he is*, and not by what he thinks or believes. I found its service to be reverent and dignified, but free from useless ceremonial. The preaching by Rev. George Gilmour, its minister, I found to be profound and scholarly, yet deeply spiritual and inspiring, dealing primarily with present-day religious and social problems rather than creeds, dogmas or beliefs. I was profoundly surprised and much gratified to find a church and people and minister so broad, so liberal and so fraternal as I found this First Unitarian Church in Dallas. I soon found that whether I agreed with all other Unitarians or not, I at least had here a free and cordial fellowship for the worship of God and the service of man, without any ecclesiastical harness to put on, or any strings to limit me to prescribed bounds. A new light dawned upon me. The bondage of orthodoxy I had broken years ago. But I wandered for years in the desert of agnosticism, famishing and unfed. I had found in my own heart the bread of life; but I had no table at which to spread it—and man being a social animal as well as a religious one, cannot live alone.

My name was soon on the membership roll of this church, where I hope it will remain until I am translated, no matter where else I may serve and place it. It was here that I first found my bearings and placed my feet on the solid rock of rational religion. The supreme satisfaction, the peace of mind, serene content, and supernal joy of this situation I shall not attempt to describe. Those that were born in a liberal faith and have never known anything else can neither understand nor appreciate it. It is indeed a new birth, a new light, a new life of freedom, fellowship and fraternity in a common service for God and humanity.

### **THE NEW CALL TO PREACH**

I have before described what I once interpreted as a "divine call to preach." It was the new-born enthusiasm of one who felt himself "a brand snatched from the eternal burning" to proclaim the same deliverance to what he believed to be a lost and ruined world; to warn sinners to "flee from the wrath to come." It was then the consuming passion of a soul on fire with zeal for the salvation of all mankind from what he believed to be an overwhelming and eternal destruction that awaited them, and might come upon them at any moment without warning.

And now, having tasted of the sweets of liberty, I desired "to proclaim liberty thruout the land to all the inhabitants thereof," the same liberty to those yet in the bondage of fear from which I had escaped and to those who were still wandering in the deserts of doubt, looking for a haven of rest, and not knowing that it was so near. I knew that the great masses were inside of the houses in which they were born, with the doors all bolted and the windows fastened down. Not a ray of light is permitted to enter there, because a new thought might explode their delusions and disturb their repose. For these there is little hope.

But I knew there were yet thousands—I had met and talked with many of them—who, as I was for years, were wandering in the deserts, hungering for the bread of life, looking for a fellowship where they might have freedom of thought and conscience, and yet join with others of like minds in the free worship of Nature's one great God.

I would address myself to these. I was so long one of them, I thought my experience might be of benefit. It would aid me in helping them. I would tell my story of bondage, of deliverance, of wandering in the deserts of doubt, of the dawning light, of the full blaze of the sun of liberty, of freedom and fellowship in the worship of God and the service of mankind.

I have now spent five years in this service, the happiest and best years of my life. They have been crowned with some degree of success. I am not yet old. I hope to be able to devote at least a score of years yet to this happy service. Having escaped from Bondage to Liberty myself, my only ambition now is to carry the message of deliverance to others, until they shall likewise find freedom in The Fatherhood of God, The Brotherhood of Man, The Leadership of Jesus, Salvation by Character instead of Creed, and the hope of the Progress of Mankind Onward and Upward Forever. My only regret is that I did not discover this way of light and liberty long before, so that I might have had more years to devote to this happy service.

## **AN AFTERWORD**

Dear reader, my story is finished. I have had but one motive in writing it: A hope that I may in some way help others who are still in the meshes of ecclesiastical bondage, or disturbing doubts, to find the way of light and liberty

in a rational religious faith. To what extent I have succeeded or failed, only the future and my readers can determine. If you have derived any benefit from it; if I have been able to cast any ray of light along your pathway; if it has helped you to solve any problem that has perplexed you, I am fully repaid for the labor of writing it. I have not said nearly all that is in my heart, nor all I would like to say, but all the compass of this work would permit. But if I have stirred up in the mind of the reader a desire to know more of the questions so briefly discussed herein, and to press his investigations further for this purpose, I have little doubt as to what will be the ultimate result.

And just one more thing, dear reader: If this book has been of any benefit to you; if it has helped to clear up any doubts in your mind, and point the way toward light and liberty in your own life and experience, may it not do as much for others? It may be the saving of a life from Bondage to Liberty; to that "peace that passeth understanding," in a rational religious faith, based, not upon dogma or creed, but upon man's fundamental nature and need, interpreted and applied by that highest and best light that man has, ENLIGHTENED REASON, for the same God who is the Author of Religion is also the Author of Reason.

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