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**LUDICROUS ASPECTS OF
CHRISTIANITY:**

**A Response To The Challenge Of The Bishop
Of Manchester.**

By Austin Holyoak

The Bishop of Manchester, in a speech delivered by him in Oldham in August, 1870, is reported to have said that "he could defy anyone to try to caricature the work, the character, or the person of the Lord Jesus Christ." He no doubt felt confident in throwing out such a challenge, as the attempt would be considered so atrociously impious that few men could be found with courage enough to incur the odium of such an act. We confess that we have not the temerity to wound the sensitiveness of the devoutly religious. What may be deemed of the nature of caricature in the following remarks the reader is requested to regard as merely the spontaneous utterance of one who is keenly alive to the ludicrous, and who is not awed by the belief that the Bible is an infallible volume. We find the New Testament, when read without the deceptive spectacles of *faith* as amusing, as extravagant, and as contradictory in many places as most books.

A system of religion, to be a moral guide to men, should be perfect in all its parts. It should not consist of a few precepts which might be followed under certain circumstances, the rest being made up of impossibilities and contradictions; but should be so comprehensive as to embrace all orders of men under all circumstances. And a divine exemplar to mankind, if such a being can be imagined, should possess every human virtue in perfection, and be absolutely without fault. We are told daily and hourly that Jesus Christ possesses these transcendent qualities, and is worthy of the homage and admiration of the world. We ask where this divine image is to be found, and are referred to the four Gospels in the New Testament. All that is there written was written by inspiration of God, and God therefore is the painter of the lineaments of his own Son. We will take it as such, and see what aspect Jesus presents when viewed in the light we are able to bring to bear upon his portrait. We shall follow a somewhat different plan to that adopted by M. Rénan. That great French writer has evidently gone to his task with the intention or anticipation of finding an almost perfect man, and he ends by believing he really sees one in Jesus. We have taken up the Gospels with the desire of finding what is actually there; and as it appears to us, so we will present it to the reader. We know that some will view the sayings and actions in a different light; but that is inevitable. No two persons ever see in the painted portrait of a friend or relative, precisely the same expression; yet they may be equally honest. Now we claim to be regarded as truthful in the following portraiture, though Jesus appears to us a very different man to what he appeared to M. Renan. Some may say we are flippant, but that we cannot help, though we may regret it. We must express ourselves in our own way, and we must be excused if we laugh at what seems ludicrous or

absurd.

We may be accused of a want of reverence, but we cannot feel reverence for what does not excite that feeling in us.

These pages are not critical—they do not pretend to be learned—they do not seek to explain away anything on the score of "forgeries" or "interpolations." They are based upon the supposition that the *Four* Gospels are each and collectively true, and without contradiction. No attempt is made to reconcile contradictions by rejecting all that does not harmonise. The Churches do not do so—they cling to all within the two covers of the "sacred book," and of course take the responsibility.

Nothing will be here set down that Jesus did not utter; no meaning will be put upon his words that they will not legitimately bear; we have judged of him as we find him in the general actions of his life. A devout believer will exclaim, with uplifted hands and eyes—"Oh, this is blasphemy; it is revolting to the moral sense; Christ was the Son of God, and therefore perfect. He could not be what you have represented him to be, or people long ago would have ceased to worship him. He is the one sublime character whose image fills the world, and before whom millions bow the head in reverent humility." Just so; that is where the delusion arises. Men have been taught that they must not think—that they must not doubt—that they must not examine the grounds of their faith—they must *believe*, and that the sin of unbelief is everlasting perdition. A halo of sanctity is thrown around this distorted image—there is a sacred mystery, a "holy of holies" into which common sense must not enter; and so devotees fall down at the threshold and worship, where they should stand erect in reliance on their own reason and judgment, and examine fearlessly for themselves into those doctrines on a belief in which their everlasting salvation is said to depend.

Jesus, the son of Mary, but not the son of Joseph, Mary's husband, was, according to his biographers, an illegitimate child—at least, his birth seems to have been brought about in a most illegitimate way. One Matthew, who pretends to know a great deal about this child, even before it was born, wishes his readers to infer that Jesus was descended in a direct line from that worthy man and favourite of God, King David, through exactly twenty-eight generations; that is, down to Joseph, who was not the father of Jesus at all. He was the son of the Holy Ghost, but who or what that was no man knows, and no one has been able to comprehend unto this day. Another biographer named Luke, more sensible than Matthew, like a modern Welshman traces Jesus's descent direct from Adam, who, being the first man, *was* probably a very distant relative of his.

This extraordinary child Jesus, who in his own language was simply Joshua, came into the world to fulfil no end of prophecies. He was to be called Jesus, that he might save his people from their sins. But he did not do it, as the Jews have had amongst them since his time as great criminals as ever existed before. He was also to be named Emmanuel, "which, being interpreted, is God with us." But he never was called Emmanuel, so the second prophecy was fulfilled! He was born in a house in the first instance, and a star was seen to walk before certain wise men and direct them where he was. In the second instance he was born in a manger, in the stable of an inn where certain shepherds found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying. These were not wise men from the East, but poor ignorant shepherds from the neighbouring fields, and they were not led by a star, but had seen an angel of the Lord by night, who terrified them very much, and departed without telling them in which particular manger the Saviour was to be found. The angel appeared amid loud sounds of "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, and good-will towards men." If those glad tidings of great joy *were* heard then, they have never been heard since, for the advent of this child was the signal for war, and strife, and bloodshed among mankind, which have desolated every land where the Christian name has been spoken. After their fright was over, the shepherds consulted together, and resolved to go into Bethlehem, to look for "this thing which had come to pass." They alighted upon Joseph and his family all lying in a manger, much to the surprise of Mary, who evidently did not comprehend what the excitement was about, for we are told that "Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." So after all, who knows that they found the right babe at last? If such evidence as is here given were adduced in a court of law to prove the identity of a lost heir to an estate, it would never be allowed to go even to trial, but the grand jury would ignore the bill at once.

However, as Jesus was declared the rightful heir, we must accept that fact, and proceed to examine how far he administered the great estate to which he was born. Joseph was a very drowsy man, who had to be continually warned and roused by angels as to what he should do and the dangers which threatened him. Being made wide awake to the fact that Herod sought to kill the child, he suddenly fled into Egypt with his family, and there remained till the death of Herod, that another prophecy might be fulfilled, "Out of Egypt have I called my son." But he did not go into Egypt, but was taken back to Nazareth at eight days old, and there remained till he was a man. So the third prophecy was fulfilled!

Jesus is familiarly known by the name of the "meek and lowly," but this is a title which scarcely seems warranted by the narratives. From his youth upwards he gave signs of the possession of an imperious disposition and a vituperative tongue, and he on several occasions manifested a want of filial affection. His parents went to Jerusalem every year to the feast of the Passover, and at the age of twelve Jesus was taken. When the parents returned, the boy remained behind unknown to them, and they had got a day's journey on their way home before they missed him. They retraced their steps to Jerusalem in much trouble, and at last, after three days' search, found the truant comfortably seated in the temple in the midst of the doctors, holding a learned argument with them. When his mother saw him she asked him why he had caused them so much sorrow. Instead of showing any penitence, he pertly answered, "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" And Mary, though she knew he was the son of the Holy Ghost, had not the slightest idea what he meant.

When he "began to be about thirty years of age," he met with John Baptist, a strange sort of anchorite, who used to dress in camelshair and eat locusts and wild honey. From this cynic Jesus learnt much, especially the habit of calling names. When people presented themselves to John to be baptised, he greeted them in this loving way—"O generation of vipers, who hath warned *you* to flee from the wrath to come?" Jesus was baptised, and afterwards retailed much that John had said, especially his abusive phrases. At this ceremony of immersion the heavens opened to Jesus, and the Spirit of God descended like a dove and alighted upon him.

This Spirit assumes as many shapes as Satan himself, and altogether appears to be a very curious bird of passage. This baptism was not a happy thing to Jesus, for immediately afterwards he was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil, and he had to fast forty days and forty nights, and afterwards, we are gravely told, "he was an hungered," which is not a remarkable fact, seeing that he was a young man of very good appetite. We shall see, as we get farther on, that his love of eating and drinking was manifested on many carious occasions. The Old and New Testaments teem with accounts of feasts and carouses by the chosen of the Lord, and the Lord himself, to such a degree, that Christianity has not inaptly been termed the religion of gourmands. Jesus frequently manifests great readiness and smartness in reply, which is either an answer to the question addressed to him, or a very clever evasion of it. When the Devil had got Jesus, he said to him, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." The Devil evidently thought that to make something to eat would be the greatest temptation he could offer him. But Jesus evaded the task by saying, "It is written that man shall not live by bread alone." The Devil tried again, and took him to the pinnacle of a temple, and asked him to cast himself down, saying—"For it is written He shall give his angels charge concerning thee." Jesus said unto him, "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." The Devil tried a third time, and took him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of this world, and the *glory* of them, and promised him all if he would fall down and worship him. How could Jesus see from one spot all the kingdoms of the world? as no one looking straight before him can see round a globe; but if it was done by supernatural power, why take the trouble to go to the top of an exceeding high mountain? the *flat* country would have been a more suitable spot. He also saw the *glory* of them, which must have puzzled him greatly, for what is the glory of one place, is sometimes the shame of another, Jesus said, "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." The Devil deemed this conclusive, and thereupon took his departure.

After John the Baptist was cast into prison, Jesus went to reside in Capernaum, and there commenced to preach from John's text—"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." At the outset of his public career he was a copyist, and he remained so to the end of his life. He simply repeated other men's sayings, or elaborated the traditions and prophecies which were so prevalent among the Jews of his day. This kingdom of heaven did not mean something in another world somewhere in the clouds, but simply a new order of things here, and that more especially among the Jews. At times, it must be confessed, it is difficult to understand what it meant if not an improved mental state, and not a material kingdom at all. Jesus belonged to the working class, and his followers were of the lower orders, and he constantly preached against riches, which was very popular. His followers now appreciate his sublime example so much, that they get rich as fast as they can, especially the successors of the Apostles, who are content if they can only get princely incomes, and a palace wherein to lay their heads!

Jesus wanted followers, so he walked out by the sea of Galilee, and saw Peter and Andrew casting their nets. If they had been only fishing for small fry, he could not have more contemptuously addressed them. "And he said unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets and followed him." A curious phenomenon strikes one here. Peter and Andrew have never seen Jesus before; he does not tell them who he is; he explains no principles to them by which to enlist their sympathies and awaken conviction—he merely says, "follow me, and I will make you fishers of men," and in prospect of that delightful occupation they abandon their home and calling to accompany a stranger on a doubtful mission, Whatever fish may have come to their net afterwards, they certainly could never have caught two greater flat-fish than themselves. A more striking instance of blind following is not to be found upon record. Peter afterwards became the greatest fanatic of all the Disciples, and caused his Master some trouble through his excess of zeal. And this is the man to whom are entrusted the keys of heaven. No wonder the ignorant fanatics find a ready admission, whilst sensible people are excluded. And he too is the great predecessor of the Pope of Rome, the head of a Church which preaches the efficacy of saints' relics, the liquefaction of blood, and the truth of winking virgins. Fanaticism was at the foundation, and delusion and ignorance very naturally result. Others followed Jesus, forsaking their nets and their parents, and they went about all Galilee, Jesus preaching and curing all sorts of disease and sickness—and curious indeed were some of his cures, such as are not mentioned in any modern pharmacopoeia. Having vanquished great Satan himself on three occasions, the minor devils had no chance with him, and woe betide all who came before him inhabiting human beings. All these cures were performed that a prophecy might be fulfilled, "which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying-, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." But then he did nothing of the kind. And so that prophecy was fulfilled! To cure a disease is not to take it upon ourselves; if it were, the Royal College of Surgeons would soon become an institution of the past. You might love your neighbour as yourself, but to be expected to have the measles tor him, would cool the warmest friendship.

One style of cure Jesus had which may have been very efficacious, but it certainly was not delicate. Once a deaf man, who had an impediment in his speech, was brought to him to be healed. Jesus took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and spat and touched his tongue. And a blind man was brought to him, whom he took by the hand and led out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands on him, asked him if he saw aught And the man was restored to sight This kind of lubrication could scarcely be deemed pleasant.

Neither do we find an incentive to cleanliness in this, for we are told, "as he spake, a certain Pharisee besought him to dine with him; and he went in, and sat down to meat And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed before dinner. And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening wickedness. Ye fools, did not he that made that which is *without*, make that which it *within* also?" This may be very true, but it is also very dirty; and though it may satisfy the Son of God, would not be an excuse for any man who wished to be considered decent.

The fame of Jesus spread rapidly, and great multitudes flocked to hear him. One day he went up into a mountain, and addressed the people, but his discourse was of rather an extravagant description. As we understand matters in these days, what is the amount of truth contained in the following sentences?—

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed art they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

"Blessed an the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake."

This kingdom of heaven is past all comprehension. The poor in spirit have it, and the persecuted for righteousness' sake have it; and if these are the penalties to be paid for its possession, it is not worth the winning. Then is it possible or proper for any one to act in this way:—"If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out; if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off?" Who in his senses would think of doing so? Who would stand by and allow others to do it? And who lives according to this Christian principle, and who follows this precept:—"Resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also?" In the first place, it is grossly immoral *not* to resist evil; and in the second, all the world repudiates the doctrine of non-resistance under such circumstances. If any one smites us on the right cheek, do we not quickly turn and hit him on the left? It is a natural instinct, and to act otherwise is cowardice. Do the proceedings of our law courts furnish many instances of the adoption of this recommendation:—"And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also?" One half humanity would very soon be stripped by the other half. "And whoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." No one with any spirit or power of resistance would think of submitting to the *compulsion* of walking a mile with a person, much less of going two in the company of one whose society might be a nuisance. And if we are to give to every one that asketh, what are our vagrancy laws but a flagrant violation of Christianity? The injunction is here given without the slightest qualification, and is an encouragement to mendicancy the world over.

There are one or two precepts specially binding on Christians of the present day! This, for instance, is very much obeyed:—"And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, *and in the corners of the streets*, that they may be seen of men." This, we know, is universally observed by the followers of Jesus. It is obeyed by the ordained minister in his canonicals; the Primitive in his whitewashed tabernacle; the Methodist in his tub; the Revivalists in their delirious and epileptic gatherings; the Ranters in their camp meetings, and howling peregrinations through our country towns and villages; and above all, those highly gifted young men belonging to the Town Mission, who render the night hideous by their insane ravings at the corners of the streets and in the paths of public places. It is consoling to find the "salt of the earth" such consistent followers of their great Master. It is because *they* are the salt of the earth, that the world has got into such a precious pickle.

Bishops especially, and pluralists in particular, nurse in their hearts this saying: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth." No, poor men, they think too much about their heavenly Father! A few thousand! a year are quite sufficient for them. And Christian bankers and millionaires equally regard the injunction.

This is a Christian country, and we are a Christian people, and our various provident and benefit societies and savings' banks tell how we esteem this command: "Take no thought for the morrow, saying, What shall we eat? or, what shall we drink? or, wherewithal shall we be clothed?" We don't think of the morrow merely, but of years to come, and he who is the most careful in providing for the future, is most honoured amongst men.

Now all these impracticable and extravagant commands are taken from the much-vaunted Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus said, whosoever heard them, and obeyed them, he would liken unto a *wise* man; but whosoever obeyed them not, he would liken unto a foolish man. It may be an honour to be deemed foolish in such a case; but what shall we say of the professing Christian, who considers himself so much superior to the Freethinker, and who boasts of his principles being the checks which keep him moral, and says that if it had not been for his blessed Saviour the world would have been lost? Why, out of the mouth of Jesus himself he is proved to be a hypocrite and foolish, for he does what is solemnly condemned, and leaves undone what is strictly enjoined. "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people *were* astonished at his doctrine." And can any rational inquirer be astonished at that? On reading over these Gospels calmly, and seeing what are attributed to Jesus as his sayings and doings, one is amazed at the credulity of the world in allowing such a stupendous delusion as the Christian religion to be palmed upon it as something divine derived direct from Deity.

After this startling sermon, great multitudes followed Jesus, and wherever he went he healed the sick and performed miracles, but he generally enjoined the convalescents not to mention to any one what he had done. The reason for this is not given, but if one may make a conjecture, it was either because he had really worked no cure at all, or else he was afraid of having too many demands made upon his time. We are told that when "Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side" of the water, that he might get away from them. Before he departed, a disciple said unto him, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead." Is this an instance of meekness?

When on board the ship, a great storm came on, and the sailors were afraid of being wrecked. So they awoke Jesus, telling him of their danger. He first chided them, and then scolded the winds and the waves, which at once subsided. When he was come to the other side, into the country of the Gergesenes, he was met by two men possessed with devils, who asked him if he had come to torment them before their time? And singular to say, the devils also, from the *interior*, entered into conversation with Jesus, asking as a favour, that if they were cast out, they might be allowed to go into a herd of swine which were feeding some distance off. Why they should choose such an abode is not apparent; but having permission to go, they at once entered into possession, much to the astonishment of the poor porkies, who took fright and ran violently down a steep hill into the sea, and all, to the number of 2,000, perished in the waters. O unhappy pigs! O miserable devils!

the Son of man, whom you had never injured, worked your speedy destruction. "And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of *their* coasts." They had more desire to save their bacon than to see miracles worked at the expense of their pigs. Jesus entered into a ship and came over to his own city, where a certain ruler came and worshipped him, saying that his daughter was dead, but making the request that she should be raised to life again. When Jesus entered the ruler's house, he said, "Give place, for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth." And they laughed him to scorn. But when the house was cleared he took the girl by the hand, and the maid arose. This was regarded as a miracle, but it could not be, because Jesus said the girl only slept, and it is not possible that a perfect God could tell an untruth.

After this Jesus called together his twelve disciples, and gave them instructions what to do. He said:—"Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves; for the workman is worthy of his meat. And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, inquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go hence. And when ye come into a house, salute it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment than for that city." But it is doubtful if he meant the land of Sodom and Gomorrha, or Tyre and Sidon. However, though we may overlook this uncertainty, we cannot the fact, that a threat of destroying cities is held out if his disciples are not received and fed by people upon whom they have not the slightest claim. This advice would justify the order of 'Mendicant Friars in their lazy habit of living upon all who are willing to support them. He also added—"Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." Have not the Jesuits carried out this advice? And then he gave utterance to this painful truth to which the blood-stained pages of history can testify:—"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came *not* to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than, me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me." There has been no peace, and there can be none, in the world, so long as the contradictory and impossible doctrines of Jesus of Nazareth are taught as infallible truth. House has been divided against house, the father's hand lifted against the child, and the mother's loving tenderness turned to bitterest hate, because of differences of opinion upon Christian dogmas.

While Jesus was making one of his incoherent speeches, somebody told him that his mother and brothers were without, desiring to speak with him. "But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren." There is here manifested a want of natural affection unbecoming any man, and which justifies M. Rénan in saying, notwithstanding his great reverence for Jesus, that he was more loved than loving. There is scarcely a trace of affection throughout his life, from his childhood to his death. He was mystical and fanatical, like all who seek to set themselves up as inspired teachers.

One day Jesus sat by the sea-side and talked to the people in parables. He is answerable for the following:—"For whosoever hath to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath *not*, from him shall be taken away even that he hath." He says immediately after, as a sort of apology, "Therefore speak I to then in parables, because they seeing, see not; and hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand."

It would be a miracle greater than that worked among the pigs, if anyone did understand. This sort of talk must have been indulged in for amusement—it could not have had any serious purport, or if it had, it is too profound to be understood.

When Jesus learnt the execution of John the Baptist, he departed into a desert place, but the multitude heard of him, and followed him out of the cities. And when evening came, the disciples asked him to send the multitude away, that they might go into the villages and buy themselves victuals. We do not usually find villages in *desert* places; but that was quite as possible in this case as what followed. Jesus said they need not go, and told the disciples to give to the people to eat. They said, We have here but five loaves and two fishes. He said, Bring them hither to me. And then looking up to heaven, he blessed and brake, and distributed to the multitude. Now out of this very small commissariat, about five thousand men, besides women and children, ate and were filled, and left twelve baskets full of fragments at the end of the feast. All we can deplore is, that the age of miracles is past. If anyone could do this now, what a number of attached followers he would have, no matter what his speculative opinions might be. He might believe in the eternity of punishments; in three Gods in one, or one in three; in election, predestination, or transmigration of souls—in short, in anything or nothing; if he could only feed his flock by casting his eyes up to heaven, he would soon empty all the churches and chapels in the kingdom. As Rénan very powerfully points out, no miracle ever yet took place under scientific conditions; and till one of this description is wrought under such conditions, we must be allowed to suspend our judgment. We do not say it did not take place, but we don't believe it. It is true it does not say what kind of fishes the two were which served to fill five thousand men, *besides* women and children, who probably ran the number up to eight thousand. Perhaps the fishes were whales, as the whole story is so "very like a whale" that any suggested solution of the astounding tale is legitimate. This miracle was once discussed by a society in Chicago, and the 'cute American intellect found a key to the mystery, for they *resolved*—"That the multitude must certainly have made their repast off *multiplication tables!*"

After this stupendous feat, Jesus constrained his disciples to get into the ship and go across the water, whilst he remained behind to get rid of his well fed friends. And when night came, the ship was tossed by the storm. And in the fourth watch Jesus went unto them walking on the sea. When his disciples saw him they said he was a spirit, and cried out for fear. But Jesus said, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. Then the enthusiastic Peter said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. Jesus said, Come; to which Peter responded by stepping out of the ship; but he could not float, and began to sink rapidly, and would have perished if his master had not put out his hand and saved him. If this system of aquatic locomotion could be

instituted now, it would supersede all lifeboats. But we have little *faith* in these days of scientific facts, and it requires an immense amount of that commodity to be able to attempt even what was said to have been accomplished by the founders of our national religion.

Jesus did not confine his creative abilities to the solid comforts of life, but exercised them upon the liquid luxuries of existence. Being invited to a wedding, and there being no wine, his mother, with a woman's natural solicitude on such an occasion, said to him, "They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come." Now, what such a churlish answer had to do with the simple remark made by his mother, we leave to gentle Christians to say. However, after a time he became more amiable; and, no doubt, reflecting upon the disappointment of those who had come to a marriage feast, and found nothing but water to drink, he took compassion on them, and turned the water into wine, to the extent of "six water pots, containing two or three firkins apiece." "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him." Well they might; and we fear that any man in these days who should do such things, would have many followers, in spite of all the preaching of all the teetotallers, who, strange to say, for the most part profess to be good Christians, notwithstanding that Christ, when he had the opportunity of rebuking wine bibbing, did not do so, but encouraged it by supplying the very beverage which teetotallers so vehemently condemn.

When Jesus came into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am? He was anxious to know what people thought of him now that he was become so famous. "And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?" Of course Peter was ready to crown all, and he said—"Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God." For which Jesus blessed Peter, and promised him the keys of the kingdom of heaven; but they soon fell to quarrelling, when Jesus said that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Peter rebuked him, and said it should not be; but Jesus turned upon him, and said, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me." It was not very dignified or in good taste after Peter had imparted such an important fact to him, which was done by a revelation of his Father which is in heaven.. But such was the manner of Jesus.

When he left Galilee, and came into Judæa, he resolved to go to Jerusalem; and when he was come to the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples to a village on a very questionable errand. It was to perform no less an act than the appropriation of a donkey and her colt. He told them that, if any one said aught unto them, they were to say, "The Lord hath need of them." That kind of answer would scarcely be deemed satisfactory in these days, especially to a policeman. He would very likely reply, If the Lord hath need of the ass, the magistrate hath need of thee; and if the instigator of the deed were not the actual thief, he would be charged as an accessory before the fact, and would be provided with board and lodging at the expense of the county for at least twelve months. This was done that another prophecy might be fulfilled, which said, "Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy king cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass." But this prophet must have been an ass, or he would have known that even the Son of man would find it difficult to sit upon two asses of such unequal size at the same time. Apart from the absurdity of the story, it is an example of very loose notions indeed of the rights of property, which, if stated of Mahomet, of Joseph Smith the Mormon, or any other founder of a religious sect, would be quoted as a proof of his obliquity of moral vision. After this successful exploit of taking unto himself other people's goods, Jesus became quite daring; and when he got to Jerusalem he went into the temple of God, where he found a number of people carrying on their usual business. He had no more right there than they had—in fact, not so much, as he was a stranger to the city. But, notwithstanding this, he got a rope, and thrashed every one out of the place, upsetting the tables and chairs, and creating such a consternation as only a Bedlamite broken loose would be likely to produce. Though this was immediately after the appropriation of the two donkeys, upon which he had actually ridden to the temple, he called all the tradespeople dishonest, and accused them of having turned the place into a den of thieves. Whatever it might have been before he came, certainly one would think the designation not inappropriate after the arrival of himself and his disciples. He was not arrested on the spot for this act of assault and battery; but what should we think of the City Police Commissioner if he neglected to order into custody any mad enthusiast who might so conduct himself on the Stock Exchange? But he would not, and the enthusiast's vagaries and his visit to the police cell would be a very little time apart. It would be no use his alleging that he was about his Father's business, and that he was fulfilling prophecy—that would only aggravate the offence. He would be told that if his father did not take better care of him, the county asylum would; and the prophet would very soon be "wanted" who had instigated such folly.

Jesus did not remain in the city during the night—it was not prudent after such an advent in the morning, but he went and lodged in Bethany, a little way out of town. In returning next morning he was hungry, so, when he came to a fig-tree, he looked at it hoping to find some fruit on it, but there was none, as it was not the right season. We should forgive an excited hungry man here if he, in a moment of forgetfulness, looked for apples in winter; but if he began to curse the tree for not bearing fruit out of season, we should think he was mad past doubt. Yet this is exactly what Jesus did; and not only so, but he withered the tree that it should not bear fruit thenceforward forever. His disciples marvelled at what he had done, as well they might. "Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." No persons have ever yet had the requisite amount of faith to remove mountains; and the less they try such credulity on fruit trees, the better for our orchards. Nobody does or can believe such insane talk. Jesus went to the temple again, and whilst he was preaching, the Chief Priests and elders came and asked him by what authority he did such things. In true Quaker style he answered them by asking a question, which had the merit of being impossible of solution. He said—"The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?" They said: "We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things." That seemed to silence his interrogators, but it did not answer them. It was a favourite way with this Messiah; and we remain as much in the dark to this hour as did the Chief Priests and elders. This method of evasion is also exemplified in the case of the tribute money. When asked whether it was lawful to render tribute unto Cæsar, he said, looking at a coin, "Whose is this image and superscription?" They said, Cæsar's.

"Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's." Rénan says on this point—"To establish as a principle that we must recognise the legitimacy of a power by the inscription on its coins, to proclaim that the perfect man pays tribute with scorn, and without question, was to destroy Republicanism in the ancient form, and to favour all tyranny. Christianity, in this sense, has contributed much to weaken the sense of duty of the citizen, and to deliver the world into the absolute power of existing circumstances." But we are not surprised that he should so readily teach the payment of tribute, considering how easy he found it to pay tribute himself; for the ludicrous account given in Matthew, in the same chapter which describes the transfiguration, shows Jesus discharging his own liability and that of Peter in the most original manner imaginable. Not wishing to offend the tax collectors, he said to Peter—"Go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: take that, and give unto them for me and thee." If fish of this description swam in rivers now, they would be preserved to the exclusion of the most delicious members of the finny tribe. Every man would be an angler, and fishing-tackle making would be the most lucrative trade known. Take another instance of evasion. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, so they put a question to Jesus on that point. They instanced a woman who had been married to seven brothers in succession, all of whom had died. Therefore, in the resurrection, they asked whose wife she would be out of the seven when they met again. This was quickly disposed of, for "Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven." If this is so, what becomes of the hope which believers in immortality have that in heaven they will be joined again to those they have lost on earth? This great consolation of the Christian is founded on a delusion. Jesus also supplemented his statement with this remarkable declaration, "But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is *not* the God of the *dead*, but of the *living*," What then is the use of Catholic prayers for the souls of those in Purgatory? What is the utility of our burial service, which goes upon the supposition that God will attend to our requests as touching the dead we are about to consign to the grave? Freethinkers and rational thinkers discard the whole ceremony as a mockery. When once dead, the particles which composed our bodies are dissolved, and pass into new combinations—we never live again.

After he had done all his preaching, and had thoroughly aroused the ire of the authorities and most of the people of Jerusalem against him, he began to fear that he would have to suffer for it, and he told his disciples so. After they had supped together in the house of one of the friends, they departed to the Mount of Olives outside the city, and Jesus said they would all be offended with him because of that night. Peter the loquacious declared, that though all men might be offended because of him, he would never be. Jesus had no great opinion of Peter's steadfastness, and told him, notwithstanding his protestations of attachment, that before the cock crew he would deny him thrice. Peter asseverated again: "Though I should die with ye, yet will I not deny thee." Poor Peter's word, like his judgment, however, was not to be relied upon, for the very next day he denied all knowledge of Jesus, and when pressed for an answer, he began to curse and to swear that he had never seen him. Soon after this the Garden of Gethsemane, into which they had entered; was surrounded by a multitude with staves and with swords, and Jesus was arrested, Peter the dauntless did make some resistance, and cut off the ear of Malchus, a servant of the High Priest; but the loss was only temporary, for we are told that Jesus immediately "touched his ear, and healed him," and if this does not mean that he stuck the ear on again, what does it mean? When Jesus was arrested in the Garden, all the disciples, escaped as quickly as possible, but Peter followed at a distance; and when Jesus was taken to the house of Caiaphas the High Priest, Peter entered and mixed with the servants. He was soon recognised as a follower of Jesus; but when accused of the fact, he stoutly denied it three times, the last with oaths, like the low-bred man he was; for though he had been consorting with Jesus a long time, he had not learnt refinement of manners, which is not wonderful, as Jesus certainly did not set an example of choiceness of language, his favourite mode of speech being to call people fools, and to launch curses at them. But Peter had to fulfil a prophecy—namely, that he would deny his master *thrice*, before the cock crew *twice*, which he did before the cock crew *once*. And so that prophecy was fulfilled!

When Jesus was first examined on the charge of blasphemy he remained silent, and would not answer any questions put to him. Then Caiaphas said—"I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou be Christ, the Son of God." Jesus at last replied—"Thou hast said," which may fairly be interpreted to mean, "You say I am, not I." This is in keeping with his usual evasive mode of answering, as before pointed out. Especially as he continued—"Nevertheless I say unto you, *Hereafter* shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." This was declared blasphemous, and we know how excited bigoted people get when that word is pronounced. So they struck the enthusiast, as he had struck others in the temple. In the morning he was bound and led before Pilate the governor, who asked him, "Art thou the king of the Jews?" He again answered, "Thou sayest" And when the Chief Priests and elders repeated their charges, he still refused to answer them, which surprised Pilate. However, Pilate saw no harm in what he had done, and was anxious to set him at liberty; but the priests, as is usual with them, persisted in their demands of vengeance against one who had offended them. Then Jesus was delivered over to the soldiers to be crucified, which was a very barbarous mode of execution. He was cruelly treated by the soldiers, who were incited thereto by the priests. He died the death of a malefactor, but his end was brought about by his own wild and extravagant conduct. In these days he would have been confined as a lunatic, but in that barbarous time, and under the influence of priests, he was tortured to death. No one can contemplate his fate, whatever his faults may have been, without feelings of sorrow. But if his death was to fulfil prophecy, and to save a lost and ruined world, we ought to regard it with exultation and great joy, and not only observe Good Friday as a national holiday, but every Friday as a public festival. But who, on calmly reading the narrative, and dismissing from his mind the fables taught him in his childhood, can see anything supernatural in Jesus' life and death? He displayed through life all the infirmities and littlenesses of a man, and he died like one who had brought about his own death by his own acts. When on the cross, and no doubt in mortal agony, he exclaimed, in the utterness of despair, like one who had long trusted to a delusion, and when too late had found out his mistake—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The Chief Priests and elders, the

people about, and even the two thieves who were dying with him, jeered him for his folly, saying, "He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God." But there was no deliverance from heaven for him more than for any other man.

Jesus had acted so extravagantly from the time he entered on public life that it is not surprising that his followers were infected by his example, and it is to them we are indebted for the re-appearance of Jesus after he was dead and buried. He himself said that he was to fulfil the prophecy of Jonas, for, as he was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so should the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Yet he never went into the heart of the earth, but was laid in a tomb or cave with a door to it; and he was not even there three days and three nights, but only two nights, and not two days altogether. And so that prophecy was fulfilled! Jesus prophesied his own resurrection only, but the earthquake which followed his death was no respecter of persons, for when the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and the earth did quake, and the rocks were rent, the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. No orthodox, Christians doubt for a moment that Jesus rose again from the dead, because he was to do so, and he was the Son of God; but do they believe these unknown saints revisited the glimpses of the moon, and experienced a resurrection equal to that of Jesus, for no purpose at all, and for no merit of their own? Yet we have no more authority for the one than the other, and no reason to believe one more than the other. Toward the end of the Sabbath (that is, Saturday evening) came Mary Magdalene, with the other Mary, to see the sepulchre where Jesus was laid, and another earthquake took place, and the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment like snow. He told the women that Jesus had risen, and asked them to see the place where the Lord lay. But whether they looked or not we are not told, but they ran away with fear and great joy to tell the disciples. And as they went, whom should they meet but Jesus himself, who said to them, "All hail." But then there is some little confusion in this infallible narrative. It was not towards the end of Saturday, but very early in the morning of Sunday, at the rising of the sun, that the women came, and for the purpose of anointing the body. And the stone was still against the door, and they said, Who shall roll us away the stone? But when they looked again the stone was away, and on entering the sepulchre they saw a young man dressed in white sitting *inside*, and no angel with a lightning face sitting *outside*. The women fled with terror, but told no man what they had seen; and it is a mystery to this day how that which was never told to any one is known to nearly all the world. Jesus did not meet the two Marys, but appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils. She went and told the disciples about the resurrection, but they believed her not. He appeared afterwards to two of his disciples, but they did not believe in his resurrection, neither did the eleven disciples, to whom he appeared. If they who knew him intimately did not believe in it after only three days' absence from them, shall we, after a lapse of eighteen hundred years, put faith in this clumsy, impossible, and absurd fable? But perhaps the condition he attached to the belief may have something to do with the faith of so many people in these days. He said, after upbraiding his disciples for their unbelief and hardness of heart—"He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." That threat, fulminated from thousands of pulpits, has frightened timid and weak people in nearly every age of the Christian era. But then again there were not two women but many who went to the sepulchre, and they found the stone away; and when they entered they saw two men in shining garments, and the women did not conceal what they had seen, but went and told all the disciples, but they were not believed. This time the lively Peter ran to the tomb to look for himself, and saw nothing but the linen clothes lying by themselves. After that two of the disciples went to Emmaus, where Jesus himself joined them, but they knew him not, and did not believe the story of his resurrection. He then rebuked them in his usual sweet and placid style, by exclaiming, "O fools, and slow of heart," and beginning at Moses and all the prophets, "he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself," which must have been a tolerably long discourse for one so recently out of the grave. They asked him to stop with them and have something to eat, which, his appetite being as good as ever, he consented to do; and it was his mode of breaking bread and blessing it that convinced them that he was Jesus. And he then vanished out of their sight. They went to Jerusalem and told the others what they had seen, and while they were talking Jesus stood in the midst of them; but they did not know him again, but took him to be a spirit. He said—"Behold my hands and my feet, that it is myself; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have." And while they yet believed not for joy and wondered, he said unto them, "Have ye here any meat?" He was again hungry, and they gave him a piece of broiled fish and a honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them. That was enough to convince them a second time. "And he led them out as far as Bethany, and he lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven," with the broiled fish on his stomach, where he entered into joy everlasting.

The foregoing will certainly be declared "blasphemous" by all true believers, and will no doubt be pronounced a "caricature" of Jesus by even Unitarians. But the fault does not lie with us—it is in the text, which we did not make. We are not responsible for the representation, for we have scrupulously followed the inspired delineations of the Evangelists. Let us briefly sum up this biography.

Jesus was the Son of God, and not the son of his mother's husband, and his mother remained a virgin notwithstanding his conception and birth, although she strangely offered the usual sacrifice when the days of her purification were accomplished.

He was descended from the royal line of David, that is, Joseph the husband of his mother was so descended; but then Joseph was not his father at all.

The miraculous boy was to fulfil many prophecies; but although he often purposely acted in order to fulfil them, several given as illustrations are singularly wide of the mark.

At twelve years of age he was a match for learned doctors in disputation, and could pertly rebuke his mother for inquiring where he had been for three days and three nights.

He was baptised at thirty by John, who taught him rudeness of manners; and though a dove descended direct from heaven, and alighted on his head, he was immediately taken by the spirit into very dangerous places, was kept a remarkably long time without food, and was very strangely tempted by the Devil in person.

He became a great talker, dealt largely in mystical language, and gathered followers from the poorest, most ignorant, and most credulous of his countrymen.

He cured all sorts of diseases and afflictions, though there is no evidence that he ever underwent a medical training.

He worked miracles, as became an Eastern founder of a sect, but his achievements scarcely rank as high as the tricks of an Indian juggler.

He was uneducated, and never, so far as the record goes, wrote a line in his life; but as a preacher he was famous, and always succeeded in making his hearers marvel at his strange doctrines—doctrines so contradictory that no sane man can follow them.

He was vituperative in his language, austere in his manners, undutiful and repelling to his mother.

He appropriated other persons' property, and immediately after violently assaulted a large number of men, whom he charged with being dishonest.

When asked questions touching vital points of his own doctrines, he usually gave evasive answers.

He promised his disciples all sorts of wonderful powers if they would believe in him, and he promised also to come in a cloud with great glory before that generation passed away; but having risen from the grave, and ascended into heaven, he has not returned in a cloud with glory up to the time of our going to press.

He ultimately met the death of a malefactor, and in the last moments of agony his fanaticism was strong upon him, for he promised to the thief who flattered him that he would meet him that day in paradise, though he did not go there himself till about six weeks afterwards.

After his death he was brought to life again, thus defying all the laws of physiology. When but just out of the grave, his powers of preaching were as strong as ever, and his appetite as vigorous as though he had returned from a long journey; and after partaking of a singular repast, and before he had had time to digest it, he ascended into the clouds without the aid of a balloon, and was seen no more.

All this, with much more of the same incredible nature, is taught as infallible truth by some of the best educated men the Universities can produce, and belief in the whole of it is necessary to "respectability" in this life, and to salvation in a life after death. How educated men can believe it, is a mystery which we trust the School Boards of the future will be able to unravel; at present we find it as insoluble as all the other sublime mysteries of Christianity, for we cannot believe that a University training necessarily makes men hypocrites, and we are loth to believe that on one most important subject it necessarily makes them imbecile.

There would be fewer believers if there were more inquirers. The advocates of Bible reading in Elementary Schools must feel that there is danger to the faith lurking in the future if that "precious book" is read and not "expounded." Dogmatic teaching is the stronghold of the religion of Christendom. The "plain, unvarnished tale" of the Four Gospels would carry with it its own condemnation, for the best refutation of Christianity is a true knowledge of Christ.

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