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THE CHRIST MYTH

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A STUDY

BY

your ELIZABETH E. EVANS. *don't (Litham)*

NEW YORK:
THE TRUTH SEEKER COMPANY,
28 LAFAYETTE PLACE.

1918

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To my Husband
EDWARD P. EVANS.

*Presented to the Library of the University
of Michigan, by the author
Elizabeth C. Mass.*

*What though the Story of the Cross
Be but a figment of the brain—
Is this for you and me a loss,
May it not be for all a gain?*

PREFACE

FROM the beginning of the Christian era there have been in each generation many persons who refused to believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ, and many others who, after being educated in that belief, rejected it in maturer years. Perhaps some of these doubted or disbelieved the whole story; but the question of actuality was not, formerly, a subject of discussion in pulpit and in print.

Napoleon I., in his conversations with Wieland, expressed his disbelief in the historical existence of Christ; but that declaration seems to have made but little impression upon his hearer, and was, apparently, received without comment by later readers of the statement, Napoleon not being considered an authority in such matters, although his logical faculty and mathematical genius were indisputable.

At present this question is vital and imperative. It lies at the basis of the whole structure of Biblical criticism, and the answer lurks between the lines in all the reports of modern investigation.

Preface

My own doubts were first awakened as far back as the year 1875, being the result of studies in a department of Christian doctrine having no connection with dogmas concerning the identity of Christ. At that time I did not know that his "historical existence" had ever been denied, although I had already, after long and painful mental conflict, given up my early belief in the Trinitarian creed. Those persons who have always regarded Christ as a mere man cannot imagine the shock experienced by a believer in his divinity when that faith gives way. Few have believed so firmly and entirely as I: not many, I trust, have suffered so intensely in renouncing that belief; and it is because I have found joy and peace in disbelieving, that I mention my personal experience in the hope of making the way easier for other souls tormented by doubt and goaded by the compelling power of Truth to be honest with themselves even at the sacrifice of what were once vital convictions, but which, through wider knowledge, have lost their meaning and their influence.

Belief in Jesus, when analyzed, proves to be largely sentimental, and differs in kind and degree with the disposition of the individual. In former times he was regarded more from the

Preface

standpoint of his divinity ; in these later days his humanity is made the prominent characteristic ; "Broad churchmen" and "muscular Christians" insist upon his "manliness;" benevolent affiliations claim him as "elder brother;" the erotic fancies of pallid nuns are stilled into pious awe in view of their high calling as "brides of Christ," while Protestant feminine enthusiasts dream of sitting on Jesus' knee and bestowing innocent endearments upon him ; his name is taken in vain at every unwelcome surprise or trifling accident, and reverent souls invoke his aid even when looking for a pin.

This chaos of opinion and sentiment does not by any means imply a general failure of belief in the main doctrines of Christianity. On the contrary, the Catholic church and the Protestant Trinitarian churches retain their formula of faith in its entirety, whatever may be the heresies into which individual members of their communion may fall. It remains to be seen whether these institutions can survive the assaults of unbelief in the form of historical discovery and scientific analysis.

Meantime the, as yet, comparatively few intrepid souls who pursue knowledge for its own sake, and accept its decisions without question

Preface

and without fear, must be content to live in spiritual isolation, each bearing a burden of individual reproach, each finding frequent occasion to exclaim :

“ I am of all most lone in loneliness—
I starve with hunger, treading out the corn,
I die in travail while these souls are born.”

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THE CHRIST MYTH

Mediators and Crinities

SCIENCE, as applied to historical investigation, has already demonstrated that there never has been any revelation of Deity to man, and that man knows nothing about a God, and nothing about a future state of existence.

Each of the developed religions of the world claims a divine origin for its Bible, and each considers its own Scriptures as the only authentic revelation; the pretensions of one being as good as, and no better than, another.

The idea of a God, a supreme ruler of the Universe, seems to have grown out of the experience of man in his attitude towards the powers of Nature, and to have found original expression in the worship of the Sun and of Sex.

The idea of a connecting link between Divinity and Man—a mediator—is common to all primitive religious cults, as is also the idea of a third Influence, a pervading Spirit, acting

The Christ Myth

in harmony with the other two sources of Eternal Being. The whole idea is the conception of an age when the Universe was supposed to be governed by a God, or by gods, capable of being propitiated by sacrifices and moved by prayers; consequently it no longer applies to an age which has discovered that the Universe is governed by immutable law.

Among the ancient Egyptians the Sun, the earth fructified by the sun, and the young, rising sun, constituted the Divine Family, as represented by Osiris, Isis, and Horus.

Osiris, the sun, disappearing every night and paling every winter, is raised every morning and every spring as Horus, who is at once the Son of God and God himself. Krishna among the East Indians; Bel among the Babylonians; Adonis, Hercules, Bacchus, among the Greeks, illustrate in like manner the changes of the seasons and personify the sovereignty of the Sun.

The same idea, that of a divine Son, born of the union of the Sun and the Earth, God and a woman, runs through all the myths which have gradually been evolved out of the spiritual questionings of man.

The idea of a suffering God atoning by his death for the sins of men, descending into the

Mediators and Trinities

abodes of darkness and rising again to bring life and immortality to light, is found in the oldest records of the human race in every part of the world. It is originally in all cases a personification of the Sun, and in all cases it is developed and embellished to apply to the spiritual needs and aspirations of man. The gods of Egypt, India, Greece, and Rome have long been offering their testimony to modern investigators, and continued search has brought forward the forgotten religious treasures of nations less active in the history of the world.

Extinct races show the cross upon the ruins of their temples: the Virgin Mother and the Divine Child sanctified the worship of primitive Peru; and in Siam, ages before the Christian era, the Son of God was incarnated for the salvation of mankind, and after he was restored to heaven and "desired to return to earth no more, Phra Indara laid his hand upon the brow of the lad and showed him the generations yet to come, rejoicing in his prayers and precepts, and Somannass, beholding, stretched his arms to the earth again."

The Triad theory, in its various applications, lies at the foundation of the later Trinity idea; as also the annual resuscitation of Nature sug-

The Christ Myth

gested a belief in the resurrection of the human dead.

The later developed system of Egyptian philosophy combined the three local representations of *Ra*, the Supreme Deity, into a Trinity: Ammon, Phtah, and Osiris; Ammon symbolizing the True; Phtah the Beautiful; Osiris the Good.

The primitive East Indian worshiped the Sun, the Moon, and the Firmament. Later, this triad became the Trinity, Brahma, Siva, and Vishnu, illustrative of the powers and processes of Nature.

The Buddhistic Trinity consisted of Buddha, Dharma (the Law), Samgha (the Society of Believers).

The Chinese Trinity was Heaven, Earth, the Emperor: or, Heaven, Earth, Man.

The Babylonian Trinity consisted of Ea, the Father; Marduc, the Son, and a Fire God, bearing various names (Gibil, Girru, Nusku), and performing the office of a Paraclete.

Many other primitive peoples, less known to history, held similar ideas respecting the Unseen, ideas either borrowed from surrounding foreign influences or accumulated through indigenous experience.

The Hebrews, after many experiments with

Christ and the Gospels

the cults of neighboring nations and victorious enemies, developed finally a strictly monotheistic religion, to which they have ever since adhered.

The Hebrew Scriptures which form the basis of the Jewish and Christian faiths have been proved to be a mass of mingled history and fable, largely borrowed from the records of older nations, and showing no evidence of superhuman wisdom in the varied contents.

The so-called New Testament, upon which Christianity is built, has been proved to be a collection of writings by unknown authors, not one of whom could have been contemporary with the events narrated, as the works did not appear until many years after the beginning of the Christian era, and the contents give evidence of a later origin.

Christ and the Gospels

THE religious system of Christianity centres around the person of Jesus Christ. But the opinions among Christians respecting that personality are numerous and widely different. The Catholic churches, both Greek and Roman, as also the majority of Protestant sects, regard Jesus Christ as God, the second person of the

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divine Trinity, of which all three persons are equal, coexistent, and coeternal. This form of belief is manifestly founded entirely upon the authority of supposed divine revelation, and has no support from human reason or from human experience. Other Christian sects regard Jesus as a divinely-inspired man, the son of God in a peculiar sense—a belief equally impossible to define; others, again, consider him a mere man, exceptionally wise and good, and therefore a worthy example for the whole human race to follow.

The prevalence of so many and so contradictory conceptions of the same character proves the lack of authentic knowledge in the premises, and recent discoveries have tended to negative the authority of Jesus as a spiritual leader, through the unavoidable suspicion, fast growing to a certainty, that no such being ever existed. This argument is founded principally upon the undeniable fact that there is no mention of Jesus in contemporary literature, either Jewish or Pagan. Authentic history is absolutely silent as to such a personality. The only record of his supposed life on earth is found in the Gospels of the New Testament, in certain epistles ascribed to Paul, in certain statements by the earliest "Fathers" of the

Christ and the Gospels

Christian church, in certain legends contained in the miscellaneous portions of the Jewish Talmud, and in a very few allusions by Pagan writers. But not one of these sources is contemporary with the career of Jesus. The earliest trace is to be found in epistles written more than half a century after the beginning of the Christian era, and asserted to be by Paul, who never saw Jesus, and knew nothing about him except by hearsay; the Pagan references were still later, and were made by men who were entirely ignorant of the actual circumstances; the Gospels were not composed until the latter part of the second century; the Synoptic Gospels are evidently compilations from unknown writings, and the Fourth Gospel, a still later work, differs widely from the others, and betrays a distinct purpose in its composition. The celebrated passage in Josephus, which was long considered the chief evidence in the case, is not a subject for discussion, as it is now acknowledged by all competent authorities to be an interpolation.

Christians are taught to believe that the Gospels of the New Testament are a complete work, inspired by God, and containing a full account of the life and ministry of Jesus. But the fact is that the books now regarded as

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canonical were chosen out of a mass of apocryphal writings, the choice depending upon the decision of a committee of men in no wise especially gifted with prescience for the task. The rejected works contain many legends of the infancy and youth of Jesus, in all of which he is shown to be endowed with superhuman power over the laws of nature, which power he displayed in a benevolent or malevolent spirit, according to his own views of the merits of the case. The only mention of him in Jewish records consists in a collection of legends manifestly built up in contradiction and in derision of the Christian claim of divinity for the founder of the new religion. Some of these legends are trivial, others malicious, others indecent. They describe Jesus as a mischievous imp in childhood and a dangerous rowdy as a man; their falsity is as obvious as the occasion of their existence, and they belong, like the legends of which they are the caricature, to a much later period than the supposed lifetime of Jesus.

Christians are taught that the four Gospels were written by the four disciples, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, whereas, those compositions were not known to the early Christians until nearly two hundred years after the supposed events which they record.

Christ and the Gospels

If those disciples ever really existed they certainly were not alive at that time, and there is no proof that they left any writings. There is a tradition that Matthew wrote a book entitled "Oracles of Our Lord," but if such a work ever existed it was not the Gospel called by his name.

Matthew's writings are said to have been translated into Greek, but the Gospel bears evidence of original Greek authorship, and is not a translation at all.

There is evidence that all the Gospels were borrowed from an earlier source, but whether that source was history or romance, and whether the author or the later compilers dressed up foreign and ancient materials in local and contemporary attire, cannot be known.

The earliest "Fathers" of the Christian church do not mention nor allude to any one of the Gospels, but they do quote from some other work or works in language similar to, and in substance sometimes agreeing with, sometimes differing from, the canonical Gospels.

It is a fact well known to Biblical critics that the early Christians were divided into various sects and parties, holding widely different opinions respecting the value of the New Tes-

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tament writings. Some rejected the so-called Pauline compositions altogether; others rejected the Gospels entirely or in part; others regarded the whole work as spurious. Marcion, the Gnostic Ascetic, whose collection is the earliest known, accepted ten of the Pauline epistles and the Gospel of Luke, and these only after being revised by himself.

It was a frequent complaint that the Christians altered their sacred texts to suit their convenience, and one of the most prominent leaders of one of the most powerful sects declared that the Gospels were made up out of vague rumors and borrowed legends.

Recent discoveries seem to confirm the suggestion that nascent Christianity took its rise from the ferment of Oriental and Grecian ideas then beginning to be mingled with Jewish beliefs, through the rapidly increasing intercourse between the far East and the shores of the Mediterranean, the intellectual impulse of which movement centered at Alexandria and spread as far as Rome.

It is a favorite assertion of orthodox divines and teachers that Christ came when the world was sunk in the lowest depths of ignorance and sin; humanity had reached the extreme of degradation; no help was to be found from any

Christ and the Gospels

source; the whole creation was groaning and travailing together.

But this is not a true picture of that remote time. The world was no worse then than it was before and has been ever since. Then, as now, ignorance bred violence; luxury bred vice; knowledge ameliorated manners, and virtue spread happiness and peace.

It is true, however, that the religious systems of Greece and Rome were in a state of decay. The wisest among the people had ceased to believe in the oracles and to worship the gods, and the masses instinctively recognized the indifference of their superiors, and lost confidence in what they had been taught, while unable, through ignorance, to solace themselves with the consolations of the learned. Like everything else in this world, religious systems have their period of birth, growth, decay, and death, and Greece and Rome were now awaiting a final change.

The Jewish religion also had become formal and lifeless, and added to spiritual apathy were the discontent and discouragement of a conquered race. Their hope lay in the promise of a **Messiah**, who should deliver them from the detested Roman yoke and restore the nation to more than its former splendor.

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The Two Genealogies of Christ

IN the Gospel of Matthew the first challenge to the critic is the genealogy purporting to be that of Jesus Christ.

That challenge is met without fear or favor in these days ; the wonder is that the subject remained unchallenged so long, and that its obvious falsity should have been excused and explained away by methods so absurd and so insincere as to cast serious doubt upon the honesty and also upon the intellectual capacity of its commentators.

The genealogy in Matthew's Gospel may be briefly characterized as an utterly untrustworthy record.

It is not the genealogy of Jesus Christ, because it is that of Joseph, who, we are distinctly told, was not the father of Jesus ; it is not historically correct, according to the evidence of the Old Testament, and it is false as regards the number of generations asserted by Matthew to have existed between Abraham and Joseph. Luke, also, gives a genealogy which differs essentially from that of Matthew and from history, and is apologized for by Christian exegetists by equally dishonest arguments as those employed in the defense of Matthew.

The two genealogies have always been a

The Two Genealogies of Christ

stumbling-block to Christian commentators. Matthew asserts that there are fourteen generations from Abraham to David; fourteen from David to the Babylonian Exile, and fourteen from the Exile to Christ—forty-two in all. But, in reality, according to his reckoning, there are thirteen generations from Abraham to David; fourteen from David to the Exile, and twelve from the Exile to Joseph—thirteen, including Jesus, although Jesus is declared not to be the son of Joseph—making thirty-nine without Jesus, and forty with him.

Now, these blunders were perceived by even the earliest exegetists of the Gospels, and it is highly edifying, from an ethical point of view, to observe the various attempts to reconcile the glaring discrepancies. Jerome suggests a mistake of the genealogist with regard to two of the names in the second division, a perfectly gratuitous assumption. Jerome says also that Matthew omitted certain names because he wished to "make" each series consist of fourteen generations, and the persons omitted deserved the slight because they were wicked men.

Augustine counts one name twice, because when a series changes its direction the angle is reckoned twice; a principle which he applies to the Exile, but not to the Exodus.

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With the same ingenuity he accepts Jesus as descended from Joseph in order to make out forty generations, as this number denotes our temporal life, because there are four seasons in the year, and four sides to the world, and forty is ten times four, and ten is made up of a number proceeding from one to four. Augustine also notices the absence of the three names, and gives the same explanation as Jerome of the omission, as though the reason were sufficient and ought to be satisfactory to all concerned.

The mathematical argument was employed also by Archbishop Remigius of Rheims as late as 496, who reconciled himself to the reckoning of forty-two generations as denoting Holy Church, because forty-two is six times seven, and the number six means labor, and the number seven means rest.

This is as logical as the conclusion of Irenæus, who maintained that the number of the Gospels must be four, and only four, because "there are four quarters of the earth, and four principal winds, and the Church, which is the central pillar of the Truth, must send forth her quickening breath to the North and the South, to the East and the West."

The genealogy in Luke differs essentially

The Two Genealogies of Christ

from that in Matthew, and is even less correct with reference to the Old Testament record. In Matthew Joseph is said to be the son of Jacob; in Luke, the son of Heli, and an immense amount of ingenuity has been expended by the commentators to make a smooth story out of material so heterogeneous and so contradictory. It has been suggested that a Levirate marriage would account for the two names of Joseph's father; that the line of David passing, according to one genealogist, through the family of Solomon, according to the other, through the family of Nathan, would account for the difference in many of the generations; that, possibly, one genealogy was that of Joseph, the other of Mary. This last theory, however, was too plainly inadmissible, and most commentators preferred to find excuses for the silence respecting Mary's descent: It was not customary to give the genealogy of a woman; it was forbidden to a man to marry out of his own tribe; the same genealogy answered for both parties, etc.

The favorite argument, from the beginning, has been the omission of names because their owners were bad, and the substitution of names because their owners were good; a principle of heraldry which has never obtained outside

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of Holy Writ. Nowadays, the orthodox oracles are mute; they seem to have become aware that this is one of the subjects upon which "silence is golden."

Dean Milman, in his elaborate "History of Christianity," does not mention nor allude to the genealogies in any way or shape.

The truth is that neither of these records is of the slightest historical worth, and even if they were perfectly correct they would have no bearing upon the narrative, so long as Joseph is denied the paternity of Jesus.

Doctrine of Divine Paternity

WITH regard to that mysterious paternity, Matthew says that Joseph, having discovered the pregnancy of his betrothed wife, and being disposed to put her away, was reassured by an angel in a dream, and commanded to take the woman, with her God-begotten child, as a special favor from heaven.

Luke says that the Angel Gabriel was sent to the Virgin Mary to announce her approaching pregnancy, Joseph being entirely ignored in the matter. Now, both these stories could not be true; they contradict each other in every particular. And, from the standpoint of hu-

Doctrine of Divine Paternity

man knowledge and experience, neither of them could be true.

Every year, at Christmas, this fable is dinned into the ears of the Christian world, and formerly the great majority of those who heard it may have supposed that this is the only instance on record of a supernatural birth, and, therefore, being in the Bible, it must be true.

But, nowadays, both clergy and laity must know that the same distinction has been claimed for many persons, mythical and real; that the oldest religions are based upon exactly such an origin; that the deified founders of Oriental faiths were begotten by a god and conceived by a virgin; that not only the divinities of Greece and Rome descended frequently to earth to become fathers and mothers of fabulous demi-gods and heroes, but also historical personages famous for wisdom, or goodness, or worldly success, were popularly believed to be sons of God in a natural sense, even the reigning Roman emperor, Augustus Cæsar, the ruler of Judea at the time of the alleged birth of Jesus, being one of these favored mortals, while the same divine origin was claimed by and conceded to a long line of imperial successors.

The deification of the chief ruler is a charac-

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teristic of all early races and nations, the idea containing necessarily the suggestion of divine revelation and superhuman birth, and the tendency continued, under modified forms, to accompany the progress of civilization, until the ambitious claim to divine origin and honors on the part of the latest Roman emperors removed the principle from religion to politics, since which time the theory has existed only in a faint and continually fading notion of the divine right of kings.

In the time of the Roman empire the deification of men was a common occurrence. Augustus, Claudius, Nero, and others received divine honors; even the mother of Nero was designated as the "Mother of God." Atia, the mother of Augustus Cæsar, was said to have conceived him in the Temple of Apollo, and there were many legends of the dangers to which the child was exposed on account of the tidings that the future ruler of the world was born; while dreams and heavenly signs gave additional proof of the supernatural powers of Augustus.

Many miracles are told also of Vespasian at Alexandria through the power of the god Serapis. A blind man was cured by anointing his eyes with spittle, and a lame man by touching his feet.

Other Virgin-born Saviors

In the time of Josephus a prophecy was spread abroad of the coming of the future ruler of the world out of the imperial tent of Vespasian.

As for the Jews, their expectation of a Messiah, a victorious temporal ruler and a deliverer from the power of the Romans, was much stronger and more generally diffused during the century following the beginning of the Christian era than at the time of the supposed birth of Christ.

It is a significant fact that of the four evangelists only two make any claim to a divine paternity and a virgin maternity for Jesus : Mark speaks of him as the son of Joseph and his wife, and John regards him from the later Gnostic point of view, without reference to his earthly parentage and human birth.

Mark's Gospel is now generally considered the earliest, and the story of the supernatural birth in Matthew and Luke to have been a later addition, while the writer of John did not compile his narrative until after the development of Gnosticism in the new sect.

Other Virgin-born Saviors

ALTHOUGH there were so many examples of supernatural birth to serve as a pattern for the

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fable of Jesus, still various circumstances in the story of his life seem to suggest particular instances as the chief sources of the imaginary details.

These instances are Krishna, Mithra, and Buddha.

Matthew asserts that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, according to prophecy, and that soon after his birth wise men from the East, led by a star, came to the place to offer homage, thereby arousing the jealousy of Herod, who ordered the massacre of all the children in that region of the same age as the new-born Savior.

The Magi belong to the story of Mithra, a deity of the ancient Persians, originally a personification of the sun.

He was said to have been born of a virgin in a cave, on the twenty-fifth of December, an allegorical representation of the emergence of the sun from the darkness of the winter solstice. At the period of the composition of the Gospels the cult of Mithra was familiar to the Western nations, and had long been established in Rome.

The Roman catacombs contain a picture of the Virgin seated holding the infant Mithra on

Other Virgin-born Saviors

her lap, and before them three men in Persian dress are kneeling and offering gifts.

The Massacre of the Innocents is taken from the story of Krishna, the favorite deity of India, the eighth incarnation of Vishnu, and also a personification of the sun.

Krishna was miraculously conceived by divine agency, and his uncle, the Rajah of Madura, fearing to be supplanted in his kingdom, determined to slay the infant at its birth, but the plan being frustrated by the vigilance of Krishna's protectors, the rajah ordered the massacre of all the male children of the same age among his subjects. Such a deed might be performed under a despotic Indian ruler in ancient times, but not in a Roman province in the time of the Cæsars.

The pride and glory of the Romans was their carefully developed and rigorously executed system of law, and no Roman governor would have ventured to destroy a generation of the emperor's subjects at birth without leave and without record. If such a wholesale murder had been accomplished there would have been some mention of the event in profane history, and the silence of three of the four evangelists respecting the visit of the Magi and the succeeding massacre by Herod is sufficient proof of the mythical character of the story.

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The introduction of the shepherds by Luke is also a reminiscence of Krishna. Immediately after Devaki, the sacred mother, had given birth to Krishna, her husband, Vasudeva, carried away the infant to a friendly shepherd named Nanda, whose wife, Yacoda, had just been delivered of a daughter, and the children were exchanged. Nanda and his wife were at that time in a village near Madura, whither they had gone to pay their taxes, and Yacoda's time being come, they stayed there until after the birth of her child.

Vasudeva, on his way to them with the newborn Krishna, was obliged to cross a deep river, but the water was miraculously restrained so that it did not reach above his ankles, a legend which suggests the story of St. Christopher carrying the Christ-child through the flood. The errand of Nanda and his wife serves to explain Luke's assertion respecting the object of the journey of Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, which is contradicted by historical fact.

There was no law in the time of Herod requiring the Jews to be taxed in the manner described, and the census taken "when Cyrenius was governor of Syria" occurred several years later than the alleged time of the birth of Jesus. Moreover, the Roman law did not re-

Other Virgin-born Saviors

quire the imperial subjects to go to their native towns to be taxed; the census was taken at the residences and at the principal cities of each district. Women were not registered at all; therefore Mary's presence would not have been necessary even if Joseph had been obliged to go, and nothing but necessity would have been likely to cause her to undertake such a journey when far advanced in pregnancy. The evident object of the evangelist is to have the child born in Bethlehem because Micah had prophesied that the Messiah should be born there, or, rather, should "come out" of Bethlehem.

It is a proof that the Eastern story is the older, that the journey to pay the taxes is only incidental, and is not related of the principal characters.

Nanda and his wife carried the infant Krishna home with them, and he grew up among the shepherds. Luke's account of the appearance to the shepherds of the angel and the heavenly host with their rapturous hymns of praise is also a reminiscence of Krishna, at whose birth there was great joy in heaven; flowers were thrown down to earth, and celestial music greeted the Incarnated One.

It was after the adoption of Krishna by Nanda that the tyrant Kansa ordered the mas-

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sacre of the male children, and the deed was accomplished by evil spirits in the form of nurses who went through the land poisoning the infants with the milk of their breasts. Krishna saved himself by seizing the breast of his nurse with so much force as to kill her, and later he passed unharmed among the soldiers sent to destroy him by suddenly growing from an infant to the stature of a boy of ten years.

The character of these stories shows that they were older than the Christ-myth, and of native origin, whereas the Christian version betrays foreign and anachronistic features at every point.

The phallic sign upon the head of Krishna in his pictures and statues proves that he was a primitive deity, and the phallic rites pertaining to his worship, originally serious and pure, but degenerating into licentiousness, have nothing in common with the early Christian teaching, while the intellectual and spiritual phases of the Krishna cult might well have served as models for the elevated thought of a later period and a more developed foreign race.

It is possible that in all early cults the exceptional wisdom and goodness of some one man may have been the starting-point of worship, but it is certain that the developed religion was worship of the sun.

Other Virgin-born Saviors

Krishna may have been a heroic Indian prince among grateful and admiring subjects, but to succeeding generations he was the sun, with his wife Radha as the moon beside him, and a circle of youths and maidens, representing the Zodiac, dancing around the pair to the music of Krishna's flute.

The legend of his escape from his jealous uncle may be a historic fact or a figurative description of a solar eclipse; the sculptured massacre of his infant contemporaries may record the cruel deed of an Eastern despot, or a particularly severe epidemic among children, caused by the summer heat of the Indian sun. To us, in these days, the chief interest of the subject lies in its connection with the later Hebrew legend, a connection which cannot be denied nor explained away.

The star mentioned by Matthew may have been suggested by a transit which occurred about those days, or by some meteoric appearance in the heavens; but, in any case, there is neither historical nor scientific foundation for that feature of the narrative, and its astrological character points to Persia as its original home, and to Mithra as the object of the wise men's worship.

The choice of the Redeemer's birth-place can

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be traced to the same source. Luke mentions a stable as the refuge of the Virgin, and a manger as the cradle of the new-born infant. There are pictures of Krishna lying in a manger surrounded by shepherds and shepherdesses, oxen and asses. But other early writers, including several of the Fathers, decided upon a cave as the true place, a decision exactly in accordance with the legend of the birth of Mithra, of a virgin, in a cave, on the 25th of December, symbolizing the renewed birth of the sun after the winter solstice. This supposition is strengthened by the fact that the early Christians chose the Catacombs for their place of worship, not from necessity, but because their rites were borrowed from those of Mithra, in which a cave was an essential feature.

One of the principal feasts of the Krishna cult in India is the birthday of Krishna, or rather the day of his birth and baptism, which is celebrated on the sixth of January. This feast was said to have been established after the death of Kansa, and to have been ordered and arranged by Krishna himself. Many curious features of the ceremony seem to indicate a very ancient origin. The arguments used by Christian scholars in favor of a modern origin of the institution through the influence of

Other Virgin-born Saviors

Christianity have in reality no force. One of these arguments is the existence of pictures of Krishna and his mother which represent equally well the infant Jesus in the arms of Mary. But the supposed figures of the Madonna and Child, if borrowed at all, are more likely to have been copied from the Egyptian pictures of Isis and Horus. Another argument is the great prominence given in the doctrines of the Krishna cult to the necessity of faith, a doctrine which harmonizes exactly with the distinguishing feature of Christian theology. But the necessity of faith in religious worship is a natural development of religious sentiment, and is common to all forms of belief.

So, too, the keeping of Krishna's birthday is no proof of a connection with the Christian story. It is true that the oldest chronologically-fixed text concerning the Krishna feast dates from near the end of the thirteenth century of the Christian era, and the second fixed text is out of the second half of the fourteenth century. But this second text shows principally *astronomical*, not *ritual*, rules, and contains many quotations from earlier works. Even the scholars who are most inclined to suggest a connection with Christianity are obliged to acknowledge that the Hindu customs and the

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sources which describe them may be older than the known existing documents, and any unprejudiced investigator must confess that the elaborate and prolonged ceremonies of the Krishna feast and their wide difference from Christian observances are proofs of an extremely ancient origin. The fundamental idea of the celebration appears to have been astronomical, and the date to have been determined by the moon; as, according to some authorities, it occurred in January, according to others in July, August, or August-September, the selection depending upon the moon.

The Christian church did not begin to keep the birthday of Christ until the fourth century. Previous to that time there were various dates assigned to the event. Clement of Alexandria chose Nov. 19; others, May 20; others, April 19 or 20; others, March 28; others Jan. 5. Ephraim, the Syrian, chose Jan. 6, as did the Egyptians of the second half of the fourth century. In Alexandria the birthday and baptismal day were celebrated together, Jan. 6, until about 431, when the birthday was kept by itself, Dec. 25. This would seem to show the influence of the Krishna cult, superseded by the influence of the Mithra cult.

In Antioch, A. D. 386, John Chrysostom

Other Virgin-born Saviors

showed in a sermon that Christmas had not yet been kept ten years. Origen in the third century and Arnobius in the beginning of the fourth century were zealous against any birthday feast; the argument with each being the fact that the heathen celebrated the birthdays of their gods.

The finally established date of the birth, December 25, was decided by Rome, as was the assumed date of the conception, March 25, the time of the vernal equinox, and the starting into life of the earth in spring.

The selection of Dec. 25 as the month and day of the birth of Jesus was in conformity to heathen sun-worship, Dec. 25, according to Cæsar's calendar, being the birthday of the Sun.

There is no definite date for the year of the birth of Jesus. The contradictions in the various narratives are so great upon this point as to suggest the usual formula for children's fairy tales: "*Once upon a time.*" If he was born in the days of Herod the king, as Matthew asserts, it must have been several years before the beginning of the Christian era; while, according to Luke's statements, the event must have occurred seven or eight years after that date, for Cyrenius (or Quirinus) was not ap-

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pointed Roman legate until after the removal of Archelaus, the son of Herod the Great, and after the union of Judea and Samaria as the Roman province of Syria, in the year 760 (Roman reckoning). It is true that Quirinus was employed earlier (about 750) as governor of Syria, but he did not order any census at that time, and could not have done so, as Judea and Samaria were not yet included in the province.

John the Baptist

LUKE's introduction of John the Baptist as the conscious forerunner of Jesus, even from the womb, is an assumption contradicted by the later development of circumstances.

John the Baptist is indeed an historical character, but the story of his miraculous conception is a repetition of similar instances in the Old Testament, and there is no evidence for the statement of his relationship to Jesus.

The idea of a forerunner, or of a succession of prophetic characters, real or mythical, to prepare the way for the chief incarnation of Divinity, is common to all ancient religions.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke assert that Jesus was baptized by John, and that as soon as the ceremony was performed the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a

John the Baptist

dove, and the voice of God declared: "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," implying the union of Jesus with God the Father by reason of his supernatural birth. But Justin Martyr, in his account of the baptism, quotes the verse as it stands in the second Psalm:

"Thou art my beloved Son; this day have I begotten thee," implying that through that act Jesus received his consecration as the Messiah.

John, who regarded Christ as the Logos, and one with God from all eternity, does not mention the baptism, although he retains the legend of the descent of the Dove for the purpose of indentifying the Savior.

These widely-differing views of the nature of Christ reveal the gradual development of Christian belief, and prove that the Gospels were compiled at a later period than the middle of the second century; hence, of course, were not the work of the apostles whose names they bear.

The circumstance that John the Baptist, who had announced himself as sent to proclaim the approaching fulfilment of prophecy, and who openly recognized Jesus as the Messiah, continued to preach and to baptize after Jesus had entered upon his mission, and that during his

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last days in prison he sent his disciples to ask Jesus whether he were indeed "he that should come," betrays the lack of historical truth in the whole narration. John was indeed a reformer, and he was executed as a disturber of the public peace ; but there is no evidence that the private affairs of Herod had anything to do with his condemnation, and the story of his connection with Jesus appears to be entirely an invention.

Buddhistic Legends

THE episode of the slaughter at Bethlehem and the flight into Egypt seem to point to the story of Krishna as the chief source of the Gospel narrative ; in most other respects the legends concerning Buddha are equally similar.

It is generally believed that Buddha was a real person, a prince, a husband, and a father, who renounced the world and became a wandering teacher out of love and pity for his fellow-mortals. This is possible, but the legends concerning him are manifestly false, and even the more simple details of his early life will not bear the scrutiny of reason and common sense. The story of his sudden change from a happy favorite of fortune to an earnest self-sacrificing

Buddhistic Legends

devotee is beautiful and pathetic, but it is impossible that any human being ever lived to be thirty years old without knowing that old age, sickness, and death are the common lot.

The mythical stories concerning Buddha resemble those relating to Krishna; indeed, there is a family likeness in the presiding deities of all races and all times, and those personifications go back to the Sun—ALL OF THEM !

Buddha's mother was a virgin; Buddha was begotten through the power of the Highest; heaven and earth rejoiced at his birth and recognized in him the long-desired Savior. The wealth of Oriental imagination is lavished upon descriptions of the celestial joy which heralded that marvelous event and the terrestrial prosperity which accompanied the arrival of the Redeemer of the World.

Matthew asserts that immediately after the departure of the Wise Men the Holy Family fled to Egypt, and when they returned they settled in Nazareth, implying that they had never lived there before.

Luke says that Joseph and his wife belonged in Nazareth, and remained in Bethlehem only forty days, after which time they went up to Je-

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rusalem and presented the child in the Temple. Here again the story becomes intertwined with the legend of Buddha.

Soon after Buddha's birth the wisest and best men of the city went in a body to the king and proposed that the Infant should be carried to the Temple of the Gods in token of gratitude for the blessing bestowed. The king accepted the suggestion; the city was adorned as for a festival; crowds joined the procession; music filled the air; flowers fell from the sky; one hundred thousand deities drew the vehicle which carried the Divine Child; an earthquake announced the arrival at the Temple; the shower of blossoms was renewed; the images of the gods, even those of Indra and Brahma, descended from their places and hastened to welcome the Long-desired, and the magnificent ceremony ended with a hymn from the gods in praise of Buddha.

This form of rejoicing was in accordance with the sentiments and customs of the Orientals; their temple was open to all who wanted to praise or to pray; no bloody sacrifices stained the altars; flowers, fruits, and harmony expressed the gratitude and good will of the gentle-natured worshipers.

But Luke's account of the presentation in

The Temptation

the Temple is not in accordance with Jewish law and custom.

The woman, indeed, was required forty days after the birth of her child to present herself before the priest with a lamb for a burnt offering and a pigeon for a sin offering; but the father and the child were not expected to accompany her.

Also, the story of Simeon finds its origin in the legend of an aged Brahman who, having heard the divine hymns which announced the birth of Buddha, came down from his mountain hermitage to greet the Wondrous Child, and having recognized upon him the thirty-two signs of a remarkable being, and the eighty marks of a special incarnation, declared the infant to be the Buddha, the Savior from all evil, the Leader into Immortality, Freedom, and Light. Then the aged saint returned, as he had come, through the air, weeping, because he should not live to witness and enjoy the reign of salvation which had just begun.

The Temptation

THE story of the Temptation, which, taken as an actual occurrence, is full of impossibilities and absurdities, might be regarded as an allegory, descriptive of the trials which the

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new sect had to undergo in its opposition to the practices of the world ; but there is a more probable way of accounting for the fable by comparing its details with those of similar trials and similar victories in the experience of Zarathustra and of Buddha.

In both of these cases the devil appeared in person and offered the pleasures of sense and the gratification of all forms of ambition as the price of recognition of his sovereignty ; in both cases he was repelled and finally banished by quotations from Holy Writ ; in both cases the conquerors were afterwards refreshed and comforted through the ministry of angels.

Matthew says that Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights, and that his subsequent hunger was made the occasion of the devil's first attempt.

Mark says merely that Jesus was in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan. Luke repeats the assertion of Matthew that for forty days Jesus ate nothing. John does not mention the temptation nor the fasting.

Setting aside the manifest impossibility of any human being living forty days and forty nights without any nourishment whatever, the act of fasting and the principles underlying that act were entirely foreign to the precepts

Precocity, Prophecy, Celestial Rejoicing

and practices of Jesus. He ate and drank like other people, and so did his disciples.

His conduct as a reformer in this particular was so strongly in contrast to that of John the Baptist as to provoke question and comment among the crowds that followed him, and give his enemies a chance to slander him as "a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber." Hence there was neither reason nor excuse for a period of fasting as a preparation for his mission, whereas, in the case of Buddha, fasting was an essential feature of his Brahmanical training and an habitual sacrifice practiced by all Oriental teachers and required of all their disciples.

Precocity, Prophecy, Celestial Rejoicing, Etc.

THE story of Jesus being missed by his parents, who, after long seeking, found him in the Temple sitting among the doctors and discussing with them has its parallel in a legend of Buddha, according to which he was one day lost in a forest, and being sought for by his father the king and a company of courtiers was found sitting under a tree surrounded by *Rishis* (the saints and angels of the Indian heaven), who had descended from the sky to sing his praises.

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Confucius, also, is said to have played with sacred vessels in his infancy and imitated the religious rites which he witnessed in the Temple.

All such leaders are said to have been noted in childhood for their precocity. Buddha taught the gods wisdom while still in his mother's womb; as soon as he was born he set his feet towards the four corners of the earth to show that his mission was to all the world; in school he confounded his teachers by his universal knowledge, and as a man he excelled all his contemporaries in physical accomplishments and intellectual acquirements.

In the story of Buddha and of other ancient religious leaders the eventful incidents of their lives are made to correspond with isolated declarations of the sacred writings of their nation.

“That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet,” is the explanation of many a legend told of Buddha and Confucius, and even of Mohammed, as it certainly is the leading motive in the career of Jesus.

Even as after the baptism of Jesus the heavens opened and the Spirit of God de-

Precocity, Prophecy, Celestial Rejoicing

scended in the form of a dove, and a voice from heaven called out: "This is my beloved Son," etc.; so, after Buddha, sitting in contemplation under the tree of knowledge, received the full enlightenment for which he longed, the earth was filled with heavenly light, flowers fell from the sky, the earth quaked, gods and angels rejoiced.

The same expressions, "*beloved son*," etc., occur in various forms of the Buddha legend, as well as in the sacred writings of other religions.

Even as Jesus, renouncing the pleasures of the world, and at variance with the teachers of his time, sought out John the Baptist, and, dissatisfied also with his doctrine, recognized his own mission as leader in a new and better way, so Buddha, leaving wife and child and royal station, sought in vain among the wise men of his nation for desired enlightenment, and at last presented himself as pupil before the celebrated Brahman Rudrarka, only to find that here, too, he was disappointed, and must rely upon himself for further progress in wisdom and virtue. Also, as in the case of Jesus, five of his fellow-pupils left their teacher and followed him; but these deserted him when he reproved the excessive fasting enjoined by

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Brahmanical rules, returning at a later period, and after a wider experience of their spiritual needs.

After Buddha had given up fasting he bathed in the river Nairanjana, on which occasion thousands of celestial beings brought offerings of flowers and essences and the dust of sandalwood and the divine aloe, and strewed them upon the water so that the great river flowed full of delicious odors and brilliant blossoms.

The Buddha legend is built upon the belief that there were to be five manifestations of the Buddha on earth. Buddha (Siddhartha) was the fourth; the fifth is yet to come. Other legends give many more forerunners of Buddha.

The primitive Persian religion has four earlier manifestations of deity; Zarathustra (Zoroaster) being the fifth; the Mohammedans have five, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus; Mohammed being the sixth.

Disciples : The Doubter and the Traitor

It is a natural result of the announcement of a new religion, or a new theory of any kind, that certain individuals should attach themselves to the person or the ideals of the orig-

Disciples : The Doubter and the Traitor

inator with peculiar fervency, and that from among these enthusiasts the teacher himself should select a few as especially fitted to sympathize with his views and promulgate his doctrines.

There is, therefore, nothing strange in the statement that Jesus called a number of disciples to be his companions, and appointed a still larger band to carry his message beyond the narrow range of his own activities.

But it is a striking fact that the manner of the call, the number of the chosen, and the language used by the Master in addressing them, as well as some of the experiences of the disciples themselves, should follow closely the legends recorded of Buddha, legends which are undoubtedly much older than the beginning of the Christian era.

Buddha, at the commencement of his mission, chose five disciples; later, five more; of these three were particularly favored; one was the beloved disciple, one proved to be a doubter, another a traitor. Among the less intimate followers was a rich merchant, who had given up all his possessions for his faith. Besides the ten companions of Buddha there were sixty who acted as missionaries of the new doctrine.

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At first the only ceremony of admission was Buddha's "*Welcome!*" and the command, "*Follow me;*" at a more developed period applicants were put on probation, and subjected to a trial of their faith. Confucius chose seventy disciples as his immediate followers; those more remote numbered three thousand.

The Beatitudes

MANY Christians in every age, becoming weary of the internal strife over doctrine and ceremonial which has disturbed the peace of the church from the beginning, have taken refuge in the practical precepts and benevolent expressions of Jesus in his "Sermon on the Mount," not knowing that earlier teachers had uttered the same wisdom under similar circumstances, and not reflecting that in so far as the rules of common morality are concerned, the same precepts would occur to every normal and rational human being in any age and any place.

The Beatitudes are, in their sentiments, a condensation of the wisdom of Oriental thinkers and Grecian philosophers and Roman moralists; in their language they are almost word for word an echo of Buddha's message when he announced himself as the savior of men. While

The Beatitudes

Buddha was living in and near the city Radschagriha his favorite resort was a neighboring mountain (*Gridhrakuta*, Vulture mountain), which, on account of his sermon upon the seven conditions of salvation, was called "*The Mount of the Seven Beatitudes*."

And the promises and warnings and advice of Buddha in his various discourses on mountain and on plain answer precisely to the various discourses of Jesus—allowing for the differences of epoch and race and environment.

The later narrative is, to all appearance, an adaptation of the earlier.

The fact that Matthew selects a mountain as the scene of the sermon; that Mark divides the material of that discourse into many portions, delivered in various places; that Luke distinctly mentions the incident as occurring in a plain, after Jesus had descended from the mountain, and that John ignores the story altogether, is sufficient proof that the gospels were not written by eye-witnesses of the events recorded; while the general resemblance between the three synoptical books shows that they were all borrowed from some earlier source, their discrepancies being accounted for by difference in imaginative force and power of expression in the several writers.

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The Creation of the Christ

THE most probable explanation of the mystery is the supposition that some learned and gifted writer of that epoch fully conversant with ancient mythology, Grecian philosophy, and Oriental theosophy, imbued with reverent admiration for the legendary character of Buddha, and profoundly dissatisfied with the prevalent standards of belief and custom among Romans and Jews, conceived the idea of rehabilitating the person and attributes of the Indian deity, not only as the sinless and benevolent teacher, but also as a suffering and atoning sacrifice, an impressive contrast to the selfish luxury and boundless arrogance displayed by persons in power, and especially by the Roman emperors, who, not content with the glories of an earthly ruler, claimed divine honors from their oppressed and degenerated subjects.

For a long time previous to the supposed existence and career of Jesus, the idea of generosity as opposed to egotism, gentleness as opposed to arrogance, humility as opposed to pride, above all, the willing sacrifice of the individual for the good of the race, had developed into an ideal in the best and loftiest minds, both Jewish and Pagan.

To this moral ideal was gradually associated

The Creation of the Christ

the Greek conception of the divine *Logos*, the voluntary link of communication between the invisible Deity and aspiring humanity.

It needed only poetical imagination and dramatic skill to create out of these elements the model man, the suffering Savior, whose pathetic story has ostensibly dominated a portion of the race for nearly two thousand years.

In the time of the Cæsars all thinking men were disenchanted, dissatisfied, disgusted. The more the rulers demanded entire submission and divine honor, the more did wise men despise such claims and cherish their own personal and intellectual freedom. They renounced the world; they lived in retirement; they denied themselves the pleasures of sense; they looked with scorn upon time-servers, and with pity upon the oppressed; they were happy in the knowledge that they themselves were impervious to the caprices of fortune.

These sentiments were not all of their own devising. A long line of thinkers, reaching back to the farthest known limits of space and duration of time, had left records of their wisdom and goodness in maxims which could never be forgotten, because they answered to the consciousness of every sincere mind in each suc-

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ceeding age ; and, exactly in this corner of the earth, whence a new moral force was about to spring, such influences had long been gathering peculiar strength.

During a period of more than five hundred years before the Christian era, a brilliant array of Greek philosophers had conserved and augmented the wisdom of the ages, and these teachers, especially Heraclitus, Zeno, Plato, and Socrates, found worthy followers in Epicuretus and Seneca, and, most efficient of all for the incorporation of their central idea, the Jewish scholar and author, Philo.

Philo's work was to Judaize pagan philosophy, to clothe the Greek *Logos* with priestly power, to harmonize the Greek philosophical system of renunciation, as a corrective of human frailty, with the system of Jewish law, and to prepare the way for the promulgation of these ideas in the writings attributed to Paul and John. Christianity, mainly through the influence of Philo, was merely a continuation and a modification of the philosophy taught by Heraclitus, Plato, and the Stoics, while the theory of Anaxagoras that the world is ruled by spirit left the new creed open to the influence of mythological superstition.

Many Parallel Legends

Borrowed Miracles

THE accounts of the many miracles wrought by Jesus resemble similar stories told of similar mythological personages in other ages and in various parts of the world.

What is noticeable about them in this connection is the difference in statement between the narrators and the fact that the two most remarkable miracles of all—the giving of sight to a man born blind and the restoring to life of a man who had been dead and buried four days—are mentioned only by John, although the other disciples were present on both occasions.

In the account of the healing of the man born blind, the question asked by the disciples betrays the origin of the story. “Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

Such a suggestion has no meaning when uttered by a Jew, but to a believer in the transmigration of souls the query would be natural and pertinent, and the story appears to be a modification of a well-known Buddhistic parable.

Many Parallel Legends

MANY features of the Fourth Gospel show that it was a later production than the other

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three, and that the earlier material was used only so far and in such ways as the taste or the design of the writer required.

A striking instance of carelessness in this respect is the repetition of the story of the banishment of the merchants and the money-changers from the Temple. Matthew, Mark, and Luke place this incident at the end of the career of Jesus, just after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem and just before the Passover and the final tragedy. In this connection the incident is probable and the impression powerful. The person who had lately entered the city at the head of a great multitude of enthusiastic followers, and whose influence upon the community was a subject of fear among the rulers and of wonder among the people, such a person might venture to attack long-existing evils in the Temple itself, and conscious intruders might flee before his angry eye and reproving voice, while that daring deed would naturally react to his injury in the approaching conflict with the authorities; but, placed where John narrates it, at the very beginning of his career, it has neither meaning nor effect. According to John, Jesus, on his first appearance in Jerusalem, went, an entire stranger, into the Temple, and, armed with a whip, pro-

Many Parallel Legends

ceeded forthwith to banish the buyers and sellers by main force. Of course, such a clearing-out could be only temporary, and Jesus at every subsequent visit must have had the mortification of witnessing the same scenes without being able to hinder the profanation.

THE Transfiguration finds a parallel in the light which streamed from Buddha's body as he lay dying under a tree—a light so brilliant as to outshine the glitter of a gold-embroidered robe in which a pious disciple had just enveloped him.

In the case of Jesus, as in that of Buddha, the illumination occurred in connection with the announcement of approaching death.

But a still a more striking similarity is found in the Transfiguration of Krishna before his beloved disciple, Arjuna, as related in the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

THE Gospel of Buddha contains the story of a Prodigal Son, who, after wandering fifty years, returned to his father's house, which he found changed into a princely abode, his father in the meantime having attained to wealth and honor. He did not recognize his father and

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fled from the place, but his father knew him, and sent for him, offering him high wages as a servant. The son worked acceptably, and soon the father called him into the palace, clothed him in princely robes, and bade him consider himself an adopted son. But the son, accustomed to a lowly life, preferred to remain in his hut, and when later the father offered to make him heir to the estate, he refused the gift, whereupon the father related the whole story before the king and his ministers and the community, and openly acknowledged his son as his heir.

This story was not told by Buddha himself, but by a company of his disciples in illustration of their own early ignorance and their gradual elevation to wisdom and happiness through the teachings of Buddha.

THE story of the Woman of Samaria finds a striking parallel in a Buddha legend.

Ananda, the beloved disciple of Buddha, being one day thirsty while wandering through the land, met a young girl who was drawing water from a fountain, and asked her for a drink. She, belonging to a despised caste (children of a Brahman mother and a low-class father), replied that she was not permitted to

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approach a saint. He answered: "My sister, I did not ask you about your caste, nor about your family. I asked you for a drink of water." This gentle reply completely won the maiden's heart, and Buddha coming by, converted her dawning affection into zeal for the general good through the practice of his system of unselfish morality.

ALSO, a woman who was a sinner, hearing that Buddha was in the vicinity, went to meet him with a gorgeous following, and after hearing him preach, invited him to dine at her house the next day. He came, and after the meal she seated herself in a low chair beside him and humbly offered him her house as an asylum for the Order of Mendicants, of which he was the head. Her gift was accepted, and she was rewarded with promises of salvation.

Among the Krishna legends is one which tells of two sorrowful women of the lowest caste, virtuous, indeed, but poor and despised, who, in spite of opposition and reproof, succeeded in reaching the presence of Krishna, and anointed his head with fragrant ointment, receiving the reward of their piety in the miraculous cure of their sterility.

Out of these two instances grew, apparently,

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the Gospel story of the woman and the box of spikenard.

Not only in a number of striking incidents is the connection between the legends of Buddha and Jesus demonstrated, but the similarity extends to the smallest particulars throughout the whole narrative. Situations, discourses, cures, advice, parables, figures of speech, even forms of expression, are so like as to imply copy and not coincidence.

In the closing scenes of the drama, the Trial, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension, the resemblance with Buddha ceases, and the case is to be tried more upon its own merits. Here, too, the evidence vanishes upon investigation.

Violations of the Unities

THE theory that the personal history of Jesus was originally adapted by some ingenious writer from current legends respecting Oriental incarnated deities receives support from the fact that not only do the principal incidents of the active career of Jesus follow such legends, but the circumstances of the closing scenes of his life betray ignorance of the actual social conditions of that portion of the Roman empire, and even of its topographical features.

Violations of the Unities

The whole tragedy is thoroughly dramatic, and, like all entirely fictitious narratives, betrays its lack of reality by frequent lapses from probability and truth.

It is in the highest degree unlikely that the multitudes which cried "*Hosanna!*" one day, should cry "*Crucify him!*" a few hours afterwards, and even if there were two parties in the city the followers of Jesus would surely have rallied to defend him when attacked. Furthermore, the secret agreement between the authorities and Judas was quite unnecessary, as was also the arrest by night in a lonely place.

Jesus could have been taken anywhere, at any time. He wandered about the city and the country accompanied by only a few insignificant disciples who were unarmed and totally without influence of any kind.

According to the story, he had already escaped violence by rendering himself invisible; his enemies being sometimes the chief priests and their confederates; sometimes the common people, who on other occasions are said to have "heard him gladly."

The betrayal by Judas and his subsequent fate are told in different ways. According to one statement, Judas hanged himself as soon

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as he realized what he had done ; according to another, he threw himself down in despair and burst asunder.

An Impossible Trial

THE account of the trial is a libel upon both Jewish and Roman law. The Sanhedrim was composed of seventy-one members, chosen for their wisdom and uprightness. However great may have been their prejudices against Jesus, it is not possible that the whole body would have acted in defiance of their laws and customs ; and this argument applies with still greater force to the Roman authorities, whose administration was guided and guarded by laws so wise and so strict that they still form the basis of the legislative system of all enlightened nations.

According to the story, the Jews tried, convicted, and sentenced Jesus in their own court, without reference to the Romans. He was not brought before Pilate until after the Sanhedrim had condemned him, which was illegal.

Again, he was examined before being tried, a proceeding expressly forbidden by Jewish law.

Again, he was tried at night, and the trial began and ended in one session, both circum-

An Impossible Trial

stances being in direct opposition to law and custom.

Again, he was condemned and executed within two days, and the trial ended the day before the Sabbath, in both cases a defiance of the law.

Again, he was required to act as a witness against himself, also forbidden by Jewish law.

A Jew was never allowed to give testimony in his own case, and was never condemned upon his own confession.

Again, the judges acted as prosecutors, hunting up condemnatory evidence and securing false witnesses, conduct unheard of on the part of administrators of justice in any court, in any land.

Again, no opportunity was offered for the defense of the prisoner, an entirely unprecedented omission, the Jewish law giving every possible assistance to an accused person to establish his innocence.

Again, the offense charged against Jesus was not a capital crime. It was not blasphemy to claim to be the Messiah, nor to call himself the Son of God, and even if he had pronounced the Divine Name, which was the Jewish idea of blasphemy, he could not have been condemned to be crucified; for that form of execution was

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not recognized by Jewish law. The Jews had only four forms of capital punishment—stoning, burning, beheading, and strangling. A false prophet was to be strangled, a blasphemer stoned. The body of a criminal stoned to death might be further dishonored by being tied to a stake, but no Jew could be crucified alive at that period of the national history.

The illegalities are quite as striking in the alleged trial by Roman law.

In the first place, no prisoner was ever scourged before trial as Pilate is said to have scourged Jesus.

Again, the insults and indignities heaped upon Jesus before the court, the scarlet robe, the crown of thorns, the spitting and beating, the taunts and scornful outcries could not have occurred in a Roman court of law, where the prisoner was always carefully protected both before and after conviction.

This feature of the drama suggests a curious historical item recorded by Philo on the occasion of the landing of King Agrippa in the harbor of Alexandria, where the rabble insulted the royal visitor by dressing up an idiotic vagrant named Karabas as a mock king and

An Impossible Trial

setting him upon a high place with a crown of papyrus leaves upon his head and a reed by way of sceptre in his hand, while a crowd of young men with sticks for lances surrounded him as a guard, and others carried on the jest by approaching the monarch with due solemnity to crave his mercy and ask his advice upon matters of state.

To say nothing of the remarkable resemblance between the names *Barabbas* and *Karabas*, it is certain that while such buffoonery might at a later period have been tolerated by a disaffected ruler in the streets of Alexandria, nothing of the kind could have happened in a law court at Jerusalem under a governor appointed by and responsible to the emperor at Rome.

To return to the Gospel narratives.

It is impossible that Pilate should have condemned to death a man whom he believed to be innocent, and against whom no sufficient accusation was offered.

The alleged offense was not a crime in Roman law, and if Jesus had been guilty of treason he would not have been delivered to the Jews for punishment. Indeed, the falsity of the account is manifest by the contradiction involved in the surrender of Jesus to the Jews,

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and his subsequent crucifixion by the Romans. Moreover, under any circumstances, Jesus was exempt from crucifixion, because that form of punishment was rarely used, and then only in the case of a criminal of the lowest class, and only for the crimes of robbery, piracy, and assassination. The charges against Jesus as a Jew would have been a matter of indifference to Roman judges, and blasphemy was not a capital offense in the Roman code.

The description of the crucifixion is equally void of probability. The officials could not legally compel a passer-by to carry the cross for a criminal, and the passer-by would not have been likely to accept such an undertaking.

The inscription on a cross always declared the crime for which the accused suffered; but in this case no crime was indicated, and the inscription is quoted in four different ways by the four narrators.

Even the time of the crucifixion is not fixed. Mark says it was nine o'clock in the morning; John says the sentence was passed at noon; consequently the execution must have occurred later.

Again, the body of a crucified criminal was left on the cross until it decayed or was de-

After the Crucifixion

stroyed by birds, and it was guarded to prevent it being carried away. But the body of Jesus was taken down immediately after death and buried by his friends without opposition from his enemies or from the Roman authorities.

Again, death upon the cross was a lingering death of several days, or even a week, and more from starvation than from pain. Yet Jesus is said to have died at the end of six hours—a statement which, if true, would detract greatly from the magnitude of the sacrifice.

Finally, there were no such places as Gethsemane and Calvary, and no places answering to their description are to be found in the neighborhood of Jerusalem. Even Christian authors who believe the event are obliged to acknowledge the lack of evidence here.

In this case, as in several other incidents of the Gospel story, the original writer would appear to have been a stranger to the face of the country of Judea, as well as to its social and political character.

After the Crucifixion

THE account of what happened after the crucifixion is a mass of absurdities and contradictions which must have been long ago re-

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jected upon its own testimony, if readers of scripture had been free to exercise their rational judgment as in the examination of other literature.

Matthew says that there was darkness over all the land from the sixth to the ninth hour (noon till 3 P.M.), which would seem to imply that the crucifixion took place at nine in the morning, as Mark declares, otherwise, if Christ hung six hours on the cross, the darkness would have passed away before his death, according to the reckoning of John.

Matthew says also that at the moment of Christ's death "the veil of the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent and 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." Mark mentions only the rending of the veil of the Temple and the three-hours' darkness; Luke the same; John does not mention any miraculous occurrence.

Now, if there was a total darkness of three hours over the land, whether caused by miracle or by a natural eclipse, the incident would have been noticed and recorded in profane his-

After the Crucifixion

tory, as would also an earthquake, and a rending of rocks, and a convulsion sufficiently strong to open graves. The most astounding statement is that of Matthew, in asserting that many dead bodies arose and showed themselves to the living. It is significant that they are said not to have appeared in the city until after the resurrection of Jesus, although the graves were open from the time of his death.

With regard to the burial, Matthew, Mark, and Luke say that Joseph of Arimathea wrapped the body in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, and the next day the women brought spices for the burial. John says that Nicodemus accompanied Joseph in his quest for the body, and brought with him about a hundred pounds' weight of myrrh and aloes, which they put into the linen when it was wound about the body of Jesus.

The absurdity of using a hundred pounds of material so light as myrrh and aloes for one dead body is equaled only by that of using a pound of ointment for anointing the feet of the same body while alive, as Mary is said to have done, according to the same extravagant narrator.

With regard to the resurrection the several writers contradict each other upon almost every

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point. They disagree as to the time and the manner and the agency of the discovery. One says several women came first to the sepulchre; another says two women came; another, three; another, that Mary Magdalene came alone. One says it was dark; another, dawn; another, sunrise. One says an angel rolled away the stone from the sepulchre and sat upon it; another says there was an angel sitting inside the tomb; another, that there were two angels, both standing up; another, that there were two angels, both sitting down.

So with regard to the appearance of Jesus after his resurrection. One says that the two Marys heard the news from the angel sitting outside of the sepulchre; another, that it was the angel inside who told them; another, that it was the two angels who were standing up; another, that Jesus himself told Mary Magdalene.

So also with the meeting of Jesus with his disciples. According to Matthew, the angel, and afterwards Jesus himself, sent word to the disciples to go into Galilee to meet their risen Lord, and they went and met him there, and worshiped him, and received his parting blessing. According to Mark, the "young man" "clothed in a long white garment" gave the same message, but the meeting is not described.

An Unverified Uprising of Citizens

The further account by Mark is of no value, as the whole of the final passage, from the tenth to the twentieth verse, is now acknowledged to be spurious.

Luke says nothing about an appointment in Galilee, but mentions the meeting in Emmaus, and the later appearance to the eleven.

John tells of two appearances to the disciples, with the interval of a week, and a still later visit on the seashore, where Jesus dined with them on fish and bread.

An Unverified Uprising of Citizens

THE Ascension is not mentioned by Matthew, Mark, and John. Luke says simply that Jesus, in blessing his disciples at Bethany, was parted from them and carried up into heaven, and in the Acts of the Apostles it is asserted that "he was taken up and a cloud received him out of their sight."

This miraculous disappearance was not any more wonderful than his miraculous appearing and disappearing at his several meetings with his disciples; but if such a thing had really happened it would not only have been noted down with minuteness by all the lookers-on, but it would have been known and commented upon by outsiders.

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The question of immortality is one of equal interest to the whole race, and the chief priests and the Roman governor would have been as glad as any one else to be assured that a man had really risen from the dead. Just here comes in the testimony of Matthew's Gospel that "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."

Whatever degree of prejudice might have prevented the enemies of Jesus from believing in such assertions respecting him, there was nothing to hinder the recognition of that company of resuscitated citizens, and the promulgation of the glad tidings of their continued existence.

Such an event would have been heralded over the whole known world, and could never have been forgotten by secular history. Yet, beyond that daring assertion of Matthew, there is not a word in any record, and the phenomenon appears to have left no trace among the witnesses.

Inadequate Explanations

THE explanation given by many commentators that the disciples were so excited that they

Post-Ascension Discrepancies

imagined what did not really exist, is not a sufficient excuse for the manifest falsity of the statements. If, as Christians declare, the Gospels are the word of God, the Testament of Jesus Christ to his followers throughout all time, there ought to be no doubt as to the truth of its contents, no ambiguity in its assertions, no conflict with reason demanded of recipients in accepting its declarations.

Another favorite argument of the apologists for the discrepancies of the story is that such variations are in reality a proof of its truth, inasmuch as each observer would, by the natural constitution of his mind, see the facts differently and be more struck by some incidents than by others.

But this argument has no force when it is remembered that the statements are not made by eye-witnesses, but were the composition of unknown authors, writing many years after the period described.

Post-ascension Discrepancies

THE New Testament story of what happened after the ascension is as unreliable as the preceding narrative.

In the Acts of the Apostles the Ascension is said to have taken place forty days after the

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Resurrection, instead of the same day, as Luke declares, and from Mount Olivet, instead of from Bethany; discrepancies which could not have occurred in any relation of a fact. Also, the account of the death of Judas differs essentially from that of Matthew.

The whole composition teems with superstitious legends and inculcates a false morality. It appears to have been written principally for the purpose of asserting the superiority of Peter, as head of the Apostles and first teacher of the Gentiles, in conformity with the words of Jesus which indicated Peter as the Rock upon which the Christian church was to be built.

A comparison of the narrative of the Acts with the supposed autobiographical records of Paul in the Epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, and Galatians, betrays the striking contradiction between the two accounts, as also the object of the unknown writer of the Acts in his narration of circumstances and events. The Epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, and Galatians are the only ones of the Pauline Epistles which modern criticism considers authentic, and these also are beginning to be regarded with suspicion in consequence of doubts concerning the identity of Paul.

Post-Ascension Discrepancies

It is not and cannot now be known who wrote any of these books; the Apostles are not historical characters to begin with, and they certainly were not the authors of the compilations which are called by their names, and which bear evidence of having been written at a much later period than the lifetime of persons contemporary with the supposed career of Jesus.

Many Christian theologians of the present day acknowledge the utter lack of authentic knowledge respecting the derivation of the New Testament writings, but such scholars are apt to advocate the preeminent authority of ecclesiastical tradition in matters of faith.

"Hear the church" is their prescription for the cure of skepticism and the removal of doubt. Unfortunately for their argument, many of the works ascribed to the early Christian Fathers are open to like suspicion as regards their authenticity; moreover, there is abundant historical testimony to the fact that each and all of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity had to pass through a long period of opposition and combat before being adopted by the majority of believers; while the developed ritual of the Catholic church has been discovered to be a modified copy of the Buddhistic

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ceremonial which was in existence centuries before the Christ-myth was invented.

Myth, Forgery, and Human Credulity

NOT only the Gospels, but also the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles, were written long after the supposed occurrence of the events described.

The earliest date allowed by conservative critics for the Acts is some time after the destruction of Jerusalem, that is, more than fifty years after the supposed crucifixion of Christ; other critics place the date at about the year one hundred of the Christian era; others, again, declare that the Pauline Epistles belong to the latter part of the second century. A noted critic of the present day declares the "Epistle to the Hebrews" to be a forgery, written in the fourth or fifth century, by some unknown adherent of the priestly party, probably a monk, and composed entirely in the interests of the already developed hierarchy. Even if the earliest date be chosen—fifty years after the supposed crucifixion—it must be granted that many beliefs might have sprung up, many phantasies have been created, many myths established within that space of time, especially in an age when printing was un-

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known and written records were comparatively few, besides being exposed to mistake by scribes and to alteration on the part of commentators.

But, it will be asked, how could such a fable obtain credence and become the foundation of a sect of believers so firm in the faith that they could endure persecution and welcome martyrdom in its defense ?

To this it may be answered that, as history shows, there is no limit to human credulity; also, it is evident that the fable was of gradual growth.

It must be remembered that we have no authentic knowledge whatever of the beginnings of Christianity. We do not know when nor where the first movement which resulted in the Christian church occurred, but the facts of history seem to show that not many years after the date assigned as the commencement of the Christian era a small company of earnest souls agreed in a protest, both theoretical and practical, against the social luxury and political corruption and religious indifference of the age. This company (whether at the beginning or later cannot now be determined) chose for their

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leader and example Christ Jesus, who answered to the ideal of the later philosophers, even to Seneca's imaginary philanthropist, scorned, insulted, and suffering martyrdom upon the cross, and who emulated the deities of other lands in rising from the dead and ascending into heaven.

The processes by which these legends crystallized around this Ideal cannot now be traced, but it is certain that the Christ of the developed church was not the Christ of the first Christians.

The Ebionites, or Nazarenes, were apparently the earliest representatives of the new sect, and they adhered to the established Jewish beliefs, excepting that they regarded the Messiah as having already appeared in the person of Jesus, whom they regarded as a mere man born in the natural way, and worthy to be called the son of God by reason of his holy life and his excellent qualities. It is noticeable that among the earliest members of the new community the miraculous birth of Jesus was never mentioned; the great central doctrine was his resurrection, and this idea also was evidently of gradual growth, and was not accepted by all. The peculiar sanctity of Jesus was ascribed to his having been anointed of God,

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and the anointing was supposed to have occurred at his baptism. Also, with regard to his death, it was said that the Jews slew him and hanged him on a tree, and again that he was taken down from the tree: expressions which do not imply crucifixion, but rather the legal execution for such crimes as the one alleged, that is, stoning to death and the exposure of the dead body upon a stake, or a tree, or even a cross. Several Jewish legends declare that Jesus was stoned and afterwards hung up. One of these legends transfers the execution to Lydda, during an insurrection in that city—another proof that there is no authentic historical evidence of any such event.

Although in later times the cross became a symbol of degradation as an instrument of criminal punishment, it possessed originally a sacred signification as an emblem of noble self-sacrifice for the good of others. The best and loveliest among the people were sacrificed to the Sun; kings were uplifted to turn away Divine wrath from the nation, and fathers devoted their innocent sons in order to ensure victory to an endangered army or to save a besieged city through this offering upon the cross “against the sun.”

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The Rhapsodies of John the Revelator

THE Apocalypse is believed by many scholars to be the composition of an unknown author who wrote soon after the death of Nero and during the short reign of Galba, being stimulated to the work by the events of the Jewish war, and by the suggestion that Nero was soon to return as Antichrist, and cause still greater persecution of the Christians, until conquered by Christ at his second coming, when the millennium would begin, and after a thousand-years' peace the Devil would again be let loose, and finally be overcome and destroyed. The standpoint of the writer is decidedly that of the Jewish-Christian party of the new sect, and his object was to strengthen the faith of Christians and enable them to endure approaching martyrdom. Under the circumstances it is not difficult to develop such a meaning out of the fantastic pictures of the Apocalypse, and it is quite probable that contemporary events and impending calamities may have stimulated the imagination of the unknown author, but so far as the form of this remarkable composition is concerned, it is a reproduction of still more ancient prophetic rhapsodies conceived by primitive peoples still farther East. The heaven and hell of Revelation, the New Jerusalem, the devil chained

Rhapsodies of John the Revelator

and unchained, the celestial inhabitants, the material splendors in gold and precious stones, the monsters of the animal kingdom, the serpent, the white horse—these are all to be found in Egyptian, Persian, and Indian lore, the antiquity of which is unquestionable, while various features suggest the weird allegories of Ezekiel and other prophets of the Jewish scriptures. In India Buddhistic wisdom foretells the tenth incarnation of Vishnu, *Kalki*, who will appear riding on a white horse, his mission being to destroy the world and deliver all souls from sin; while the Brahmanistic religion holds as an article of faith the belief that shortly before the final destruction of the world there will be a terrible struggle between the Evil and the Good, when the evil spirits which soon after the creation rose up in heaven against the authority of Brahma, will make another attempt to overthrow the Supreme Power and regain their liberty. The prince of the evil spirits, under the form of a horse, will carry ruin and destruction throughout the globe until conquered and destroyed forever by Krishna, who will return to the earth to restore peace and secure the triumph of good over evil.

The scientific researches now in progress

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appear to have already established the fact that Christianity is nothing more nor less than an outgrowth of earlier religions, and that there are no reliable historical data for the existence of its supposed Founder and his immediate followers.

The Sacrament of the Eucharist

THE Lord's Supper (whether viewed as a profound mystery or as a simple memorial) is the most binding ceremonial of every Christian community. It is believed to have been instituted by Christ himself as the emblem of his broken body and shed blood, and is everywhere received by the faithful with reverent gratitude and solemn awe. But a closer investigation of the alleged circumstances changes the character of that act. Matthew, Mark, and Luke describe the supper as being the Feast of the Passover; John makes it an ordinary meal of the night before in order to cause the death of Jesus to occur at the exact time of the Feast, and thus represent him as the Paschal Lamb sacrificed for the sins of the whole world.

A wider survey reveals the fact that the sacrament of the Eucharist, as developed in the early church and handed down through the ages, is a repetition of similar ceremonies of

The Sacrament of the Eucharist

earlier origin among ancient peoples, containing in each case the idea of death to sin and resurrection to righteousness through a celebration of the emblems of the awakening of nature to new life under the increasing force of the sun's rays in spring. Bread and wine were the naturally-suggested emblems chosen for the rite.

The Greeks celebrated the mysteries of Ceres and Bacchus as bestowers and protectors of grain and grapes; the Aztecs partook with solemnity of a sacred perforated cake, and, most similar of all to the "Holy Communion" of the Christians, was the Haoma sacrifice of the Persians, a resemblance so striking as to draw from the early fathers of the church the complaint that the Devil had played a trick upon Christ in teaching the Parsis to caricature the Eucharist in their Soma sacrifice.

Haoma was originally the extracted juice of the Soma plant (*Asclepias acida*), an intoxicating liquid which the ancient Aryans poured upon their sacrificial fire, and also drank themselves, as a symbol of divine life and immortality.

The sacrifice was originally Brahmanic. The ancient Indians when about to engage in predatory excursions invoked the aid of Indra by

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a Soma-sacrifice, and intoxicated themselves with the drink by way of preparation for their lawless deeds. Their successes were attributed to the help of Indra. As the Iranian settlers among them were the chief sufferers, they naturally abhorred this worship, but they believed in its efficacy, nevertheless; and in their own new religion they adopted a sacred drink, although one less intoxicating. Zarathustra was opposed to the Brahmanic cult, and never mentioned the reformed Haoma; but after his time the custom became established, and, according to certain legends, he sanctioned the ceremony.

Later, the liquid became spiritualized as a deity, or special genius, and the sacrifice developed into a solemn rite in recognition of the invisible benefactors of the human race. It is related that Haoma, become a divinity remarkable for beauty, was inquired of by Zarathustra as to the origin of the sacrifice, and was told that *Vivaghas*, who first prepared the Haoma from the Soma plant, was rewarded by becoming the father of *Yima*, the Adam of the Paradise of the Parsi mythology, under whose rule man and beast were immortal, and to whom was revealed the *Ahura* doctrine, although he was not able to impart that knowledge. Three

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other heroes in succession prepared the *Haoma*, the last being the father of Zarathustra.

The developed ceremony of the Parsis consisted in the eating of a small round cake of consecrated bread and the drinking of a sip of consecrated wine, corresponding exactly to the wafer and cup of the Eucharist in the Roman Catholic church, excepting that among the Parsis the laity partook of both elements, as the Protestants now do, and as, probably, the early Christians did. When it is remembered that at the time of the beginning of the Christian era, and for several centuries afterwards, the religion of Persia was familiar to the eastern colonies of the Roman empire, the similarity of the religious rites ceases to be remarkable, and does not need to be accounted for as a proof of Satanic influence.

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IF such a man as the New Testament represents Jesus to have been had really lived and labored at the stated times and places there would have been some trace of his existence among the records of his contemporaries. An insignificant brawler could not have aroused the animosity of the Jewish Sanhedrim to the extent of demanding his crucifixion, and the

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illegal condemnation and execution of a celebrated teacher could not have taken place without protest from honorable citizens and without notice or comment in the history of the time. Yet in the whole range of Jewish and Pagan literature of that period there is not a word, not an allusion which applies to the person of Jesus or to the events which are said to have happened on his account.

Philo was living at that time, writing diligently, and watching intently the moral and political phases of that restless age; many other noted men in Alexandria, in Rome, in Athens, would have hailed such a phenomenon as is claimed to have appeared in Judea, and would have left a tribute to his glory for the edification of succeeding generations. Josephus was born only a few years after the supposed tragedy, and his later elaborate histories would have included that wonderful episode if it had ever taken place. Hillel was a distinguished teacher in Jerusalem at the very time when Jesus is supposed to have been preparing for his mission, and Gamaliel, the grandson of Hillel, was near enough to the event to have been influenced by it.

We know about those men and many others, but neither they nor we know anything about

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Jesus. The passage in Virgil which has been forced into a prophecy of the coming Messiah was really addressed to the son of Virgil's intimate friend, and when Tacitus alludes to the Messiah expected by the Jews he is speaking of the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, while his mention of the Christ who suffered under Pontius Pilate is of no value as evidence, it having been written long after the supposed event, besides being evidently borrowed from a foreign source; and in the striking passage in Seneca, where he enumerates *crucifixion* among the forms of martyrdom which distinguish the men who sacrifice themselves for the general good, he does not refer to any individual instance, but merely suggests extremes of degradation and of suffering which his Ideal Man would be able to endure and overcome through the power of his conscious virtue.

The writings of Seneca and those of many of his contemporaries, as also those of his immediate predecessors, show that the *Ideal* which had long been the subject of reverent meditation and imaginative creation in the minds of the learned and good, took more and more the real and practical form of human incorporation, the mental picture of an active incarnation. Seneca's *Ideal* in the character of a

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steadfastly virtuous, patiently-enduring man among men, and Philo's *Logos*, imbuing the Jewish high priest with divine authority, combined to rehabilitate Oriental deities for the needs of Occidental worshipers. Jesus is Osiris, Horus, Krishna, Mithra, Hercules, Adonis, Buddha, intellectualized by passing through the refining processes of Greek philosophy and spiritualized by the awakened sense of the interdependence of humanity and the real equality of the race before physical and moral law. For society was not obliged to wait for the teachings of Jesus to learn that all mankind are brethren. That fundamental rule of humanity was the burden of the message told anew by each reformer, and never more clearly and fervently than by philosophers contemporary with the Christian era.

Various Conceptions of the Logos and the Mediator

THE ideas and the language of the most striking passages in the Epistles, the portions most fondly cherished as especially edifying to Christian believers, are exactly similar to many exhortations of various Greek philosophers and Roman moralists, the circumstances forbidding any possibility of plagiarism on the part of those heathen authors. And most of all was

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the new system indebted to Philo, the contemporary Jewish scholar, learned in all the wisdom of the Greeks. Philo's conception of God as the Pure Essence, in whom all creation can find peace and rest and joy, was a great advance upon the ordinary Jewish conception of God as Jehovah, the Protector and Avenger of the Jews especially. The decline of belief in the efficacy of sacrifice for the remission of sins among both Jews and Pagans led to the development of conscience and the desire to mortify the flesh for the good of the spirit. To Philo, as to other thinkers who had lost faith in the outward forms of religion, this world was a wilderness, life a pilgrimage, and perfect happiness the reward in another state of existence. He sympathized with Greek philosophers and Roman sages in their aspirations after virtue, and accepted their idea of the *Logos* as the law of nature, manifest and welcome to every sincere and earnest soul. A man, he says, possessed of such ideas, goes through the world undisturbed by its pomps, its follies, its opinions, bears trials with calmness, and accepts the variation of fortune, knowing that the Divine dwells in eternal order. The wise man can always smile, for all his joy is in God alone; and such wise men exist, although they are rare.

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Philo's ideas respecting the Jewish law, the Sabbath, circumcision, and the eventual recall of the Jews to more than their early power and influence are the same as those which animate the so-called Pauline Epistles. He disapproved of the severity of ascetic practices; he admired the system and work of the Essenes.

According to Philo, the world is as one state, ruled by the *Logos*; but his kingdom is not of this world; it is in the soul of a righteous man.

The most exalted spirits are able to raise themselves to the pure essence and find peace and joy which earthly conditions cannot disturb; but weaker natures need a helper in a Being who, coming from above, can dwell below and lift their souls to God. The majority of mankind, in their passage along the slippery path of life, are sure to fall, and would perish if it were not for a mediator between themselves and God. The ideas of Plato, combined with their practical application by the Stoics, enabled Philo to personify the *Logos* as the Son of God, the helper of the weak, the essence of wisdom for those who thirst for knowledge. Also, Philo's Jewish training enabled him to see in the *Logos* the true high priest who offers the cup of eternal grace, he

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himself being the vivifying draught. As under the Jewish law the high priest, entering the holy of holies, wearing the symbols of his office, bore with him the sins and sorrows of the whole people, and appealed to the *Logos*, the Mediator, for the grace of forgiveness and reconciliation, so the true high priest, the *Logos* himself, represents in himself the whole human race, and harmonizes the contrast between the sinless and the sinner. Many of the ideas and sentiments of Philo find an echo in the sayings of Jesus and in the teachings of the Epistles. His theory of the return of the Son to the bosom of the Father is exactly that of Christianity. He considered that the manifestation of God in the *Logos* is for the benefit of those who are not strong enough to contemplate God himself, and when all are elevated to the recognition of the one God the work of the *Logos* is finished. In his essays upon the ancient history of the Jews he explained the visitation of angels, as to Hagar in the desert and to the tribes in the wilderness, to have been appearances of the *Logos*, just as Christians afterwards ascribed such interpositions to Christ, in the form of an angel, anticipating, by benevolence towards individuals, his future mission as deliverer of the whole race.

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The way for the rise of Christianity was already prepared in the recognition of the emptiness of hereditary privileges, of the worth of the individual, as opposed to the favors conferred by position, rank, riches, and favor; the advantages of heavenly rest over earthly splendor; the failure of the old religious ceremonies in view of the growing desire of the human soul for spiritual communion with Deity, and Philo gave clear and strong expression to these sentiments. His writings, combining Greek philosophy with Jewish principles, gave exactly the right stimulus for the creation of the Christian legend and the outgrowing Christian system.

In the creation of such a character as Jesus it was necessary that the contrast with the splendor of the Roman emperor should be striking and complete. The power of the Cæsars, culminating in Augustus, enabled them to claim divine honors from the people, already disposed to see in them chosen agents of celestial sovereignty. Rome, according to the expression of Valerius Maximus, recognized in the Cæsars the mediators between heaven and earth. And that was before Christianity introduced its anointed Mediator. The strife between these two representatives, the one of

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earthly, the other of heavenly sovereignty, continued until the power of Rome was broken, but it began long before the spiritual power was personified, and it grew out of Greek philosophy.

Augustus Cæsar tried, as high priest of religion, to restore the ancient beliefs of Rome, but in the meantime many teachers and followers of Greek, Oriental, and African cults had settled in Rome, and the people, high and low, were attracted by these new ideas and new forms, and became familiar with the principles of individual searching of conscience, renunciation of the world, and abstention from the outward services of the temples. Inward peace as the one thing needful was recognized long before it was declared in the Gospels. The chief teacher of that time was Seneca, and he repeated and applied the maxims of earlier philosophers. The safety of the soul was the one worthy object. These precepts became increasingly valuable the more the people were oppressed and impoverished by the aggressions of the imperial power, aided by a corrupt and degenerate aristocracy. At the time when the Gospels were written the Ideal of the thinkers was a God-man, either developed out of natural power or out of the union of heaven and earth.

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Seneca's conception of perfected humanity was a combination of the wise man of the Platonists and Stoics and the gentle sufferer who endures insult and sorrow, a character growing out of the experiences of the Civil war, and to this combination of qualities was added the peace and joy imparted by the moral teachings of Epicurus, as furnishing the best consolation for the renunciation of worldly ambitions and pleasures.

Lucretius and Manilius also spoke of humanity as seeking its own likeness in the Divine. Both of these writers instance what they call godlike men, and Lucretius did not hesitate to pronounce Epicurus a god.

The New Testament Epistles show plainly that their authors were men conversant with classical literature. Many expressions are evidently borrowed from such sources, and the style of certain parallel passages indicates that the original was Seneca's, and that his language was adapted to other circumstances by the unknown plagiarists.

There are on record many instances of lives as self-denying and as pure among the Pagans as can be numbered among Christians saints. The times were ripe for a leader among such scattered examples of excellence, for a deified

Conceptions of Logos and Mediator

incarnation of a long-worshipped ideal, as the central figure of a gradually coalescing society, apart from the great body of the community and in opposition to its aims and practices.

The Jews were at that time a despised and persecuted people, fallen from their former prosperity, and become by conquest a Roman colony, thereby offering the necessary contrast for the nationality of the desired Antithesis to the worldly glories of the Roman emperor.

And it was a Jew, Philo, the Alexandrian scholar and philosopher, who had most to do with the creation of the Christ idea, through his combination of the Greek *Logos* with the divine authority of the Hebrew high priest, while his conception of moral qualities and benevolent activities, such as are ascribed to Jesus, was the same as that of all the Greek and Roman sages, as well as of many wise and good men in Orient and Occident unknown to fame.

The era of humanity had already dawned in the teaching and example of the Greek and Roman philosophers, and Christianity was anticipated in their abhorrence of slavery and their proclamation of the brotherhood of man.

In the time of Augustus societies were

The Christ Myth

formed for discussion and controversial debate, principally upon questions of morality, and in these meetings the highest ethical standards were recommended and enforced by earnest orators. Fictitious instances were related and apposite cases supposed in order to provide material for rhetorical discussion, thus preparing the way for the many miraculous legends concerning the saints of early Christianity, and also for the ready adoption of ancient foreign legends and myths.

The Stoics constituted a mystical society of saintly personages, working in common and devoted to an ideal of perfection impossible to realize in themselves, but helpful as the aim and example of their endeavors.

In time the desire developed to embody that ideal in a recognizable form as leader and guide. Seneca also aimed at the personification of the ideal, and Epicurus gave the sentiment distinct expression. "We must search for some noble man whom we may have continually before our eyes, so that we may live as though he were looking at us, and act as though he were watching all we do. We need a Protector and Teacher. Many sins are avoided when a witness is close by. The soul must have some one to regard with reverence whose

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influence sanctifies its inmost emotions. Even the thought of such a Helper gives elevating and calming strength. He is Watcher, Example, and Norm, without whom the character cannot be harmonized."

Seneca makes many attempts to describe what he calls the Soul of Virtue, and declares that so perfect a character is a possibility among men. He quotes Cato's conduct under certain circumstances as illustrative of his theory. When Cato was struck in the face he was not angry; he did not avenge himself; he did not even forgive the culprit; he merely said that he had not been insulted. "*Nailed to the cross, chained, mutilated, offered as a sacrifice,*" the ideal philanthropist is able to endure with patience through divine help. Such beings derive their strength from the Deity to whom they belong, and with whom they are in constant intercourse. The heaven-descended soul is in connection with men, but still always joined to its Source.

Seneca advises the cherishing of a hope that victory in the form of a wise man will finally appear, because humanity requires that the exemplification of perfection should be visible.

"It lies within the nature of humanity," he says, "that a Person may exist whom nothing

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can conquer, against whom destiny is powerless."

Some Christian scholars may see in these remarks the influence of a supposed acquaintance of Seneca with the Apostle Paul, or, at least, with Christianity; but it is more likely that Seneca's ideas prompted the declarations of the New Testament writers. Seneca was born only two years after the supposed birth of Jesus, and lived more than thirty years after the supposed death of Jesus; if he had referred to the supposed founder of Christianity he would have said so, and would not have chosen Cato as the illustration of his theory.

Philo endowed the *Logos* of Heraclitus with the authority of a priestly mediator, who, floating between earth and heaven, brings God and man together; Seneca places this mediator as a suffering man among men. Philo, from his Jewish standpoint, made the *Logos* the priestly intercessor; Seneca, from the standpoint of his stoical society, believed in the possibility of a perfect man as savior and guide of weaker men.

The later combination of Oriental and Occidental ideas, of Jewish and Roman thought, of Philo and Seneca, of the *Logos* of Heraclitus and the wise man of the Stoics, gave the outline of the Being whom these philosophers were seeking.

Not a Perfect Example

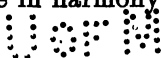
Jesus Not a Perfect Example

CHRISTIANS are constantly exhorted to regard the life of Jesus Christ on earth as the Perfect Example for their own lives, and to obey his teaching in every particular to the best of their ability. This being the case, it is worth while to examine that life and that doctrine in the light of practical existence in this world, existence which is essentially the same now and here as it was there and then.

Of the infancy and childhood and early youth of Jesus, the time when habits are formed and instruction is most needed, we have no record, excepting the condensed statement in Luke's Gospel that "the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him," and that he was subject to his parents and "increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man."

The Apocryphal Gospels are full of miraculous displays of power, but on that very account the doings of Jesus are not a help for ordinary mortals.

The Canonical Gospels agree in representing Jesus as an itinerant teacher, going wherever he chose, staying as long as he liked, and in various instances imparting advice in harmony with



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his own exceptional mode of living, but entirely at variance with principles applying to the case of active citizens of this work-a-day world. The entire section of the Sermon on the Mount from the twenty-fifth verse to the end of the sixth chapter is false morality, false economy, and false philosophy.

The lazy or fanatical individuals who have essayed to develop that theory in their own experience have invariably come to ruin or have imposed themselves as a burden upon their industrious and charitably-disposed neighbors. It might answer for a man without family ties, and having neither business nor profession, to roam the country day by day, taking no thought for the morrow; and it would be easy for a man who could turn water into wine and feed five thousand persons with five loaves and two fishes, having twelve baskets of fragments left over, to provide food and drink for himself and his disciples, when not furnished by the hospitality of strangers; but outside of that charmed circle his followers have never been able to attempt living by faith alone without either failing utterly or laying themselves open to the charge of swindling.

To advise his disciples to start upon a mission without money, without shoes, without a



Not a Perfect Example

change of clothing, to demand hospitality without offer of recompense, and if rejected to call down upon those strangers a doom worse than that of Sodom and Gomorrah, is plainly the wild talk of a fanatic, and even if so one-sided a plan could obtain in that time and place, it is certainly out of accord with a wider civilization; whereas Christians claim that the commands of Jesus are applicable to every human being in every age.

Of the same nature with these absurd directions is the declaration of Jesus that he had "not where to lay his head," an expression which preachers are fond of amplifying into mournful descriptions of the abject poverty of Jesus which forced him to be content with the bare earth for his bed and a stone for his pillow, and the sky for a roof above his lonely resting-place.

The statement made a fine climax for a dramatic tale, but it could not be the narration of a fact in such a climate as that of Judea.

So also with the numerous descriptions of the travels of Jesus. In reality, every time "he entered into a ship and passed over," somebody had to pay the fare, and it was not every day that he could sit at meat as a guest in the houses of wealthy publicans and Phar-

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isees. In short, so far as an example of daily living is concerned, we are shown the picture of a man whose career was that of a wandering mendicant, having no visible means of support, and acting upon the theory that the world owed him a living, a career which in these days would soon come to an end, either through the pressure of adverse public opinion or by means of the direct interposition of the police.

The only instance recorded of Jesus in connection with money is that of his being called upon to pay a tax in Capernaum. He objected to the demand on the ground of being a native, but, fearing offense, ordered one of his disciples to go down to the sea and throw a line, and in the mouth of the first fish taken would be found the money demanded. It is unnecessary to add that this manner of paying debts does not work outside of the Gospels.

One incident of the Gospels would seem to have strayed in from apocryphal records. It is where (Matthew xxi, 18-22) Jesus, being hungry, looked for figs upon a tree growing near the road, and not finding any, cursed the tree and made it wither and die. The story distinctly states that it was not yet the season for fruit. Why, then, should Jesus

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blame the tree for not yielding figs when he happened to want them? The commentary following upon that incident is equally absurd. The disciples are told that if they only have faith they can remove a mountain and cast it into the sea, an undertaking which no man in his senses would attempt. Some Christians try to explain this part of the narrative by considering the fig-tree as an allegorical representation of Jewish obstinacy, bringing its own punishment, and the other assertion as merely a strong reminder of the necessity of unquestioning faith in religious belief, but such excuses are not sufficient. The narrative professes to be a true account of the sayings and doings of the Son of God on earth, and the facts remain that a fig-tree cannot be expected to bear fruit out of season, and that no man can by his mere word remove a mountain and cast it into the sea.

Many of the sayings of Jesus will not bear the test of application to the affairs of real life; many others are only an echo of earlier maxims. All reformers have advised their followers to bear no malice and to forgive injuries, but the instructions of Jesus to offer the other cheek to the smiter and reward the

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thief with a double booty, and go two miles out of the way when asked to go only one, is to recommend a poverty of spirit which would inevitably encourage vice, and thus increase the misery of human existence.

Jesus undoubtedly believed and taught that the end of the world was at hand, and that he himself would appear again in power and great glory before the existing generation should have passed away.

The earliest Christians also held this belief, and passed it on to their successive converts, and the infant church feared and trembled in view of the approaching catastrophe until the end of the first thousand years of the Christian era.

The magnificent cathedrals which are a wonder and delight to us to-day are the thank-offering of pious souls for the prolongation of the existence of the human race upon God's footstool.

The declaration ascribed to Jesus by Luke, "If any man come to me and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple;" as also the same idea in the milder form chosen

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by Matthew: "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," express the opinion of a rigorous ascetic in sympathy with the already long-established communities of the Essenes of Judea and the Therapeutics of Egypt.

Both of these sects were well known to the scholars of that time, and were highly respected and greatly admired by some, especially by Philo.

The incident related in Matthew viii, 21, 22, seems to point to a still later period, when the rule of the cloister had begun to assert its authority above all natural ties.

"And another of his disciples
Said unto him, 'Lord, suffer me
First to go and bury my father.'
And Jesus said unto him,
'Follow me; and let the dead
Bury their dead.'"

The *Logos* of Philo was too ethereal to answer all the demands of feeble humanity. The God-man must live and suffer and die among and for the people in order to make the sacrifice complete. And just here came in a spiritual survival of primitive worship which personified the fading autumn, the dead winter, the awakening spring, and the revived power of

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the Orb of Day in the thrilling story of the humiliation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of the Sun of Righteousness.

Thus we have for the formation of the fictitious character of Jesus Christ the chief divinities of the ancient Egyptian, Indian, Greek, and Roman nations; the *Logos* of the early Greek philosophers, and the Ideal of contemporary scholars. Even at that very time there existed a living embodiment of ideal attributes in the person of Apollonius of Tyana, a philosopher of the school of Pythagoras, who, after having visited Assyria and India, and learned the wisdom of Magians and Brahmans, returned to Ionia and became widely celebrated as a teacher of philosophy and morals. From the beginning of his public career he was the object of general admiration and reverence; he found favor with Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian, and was followed everywhere by crowds of believing hearers. He settled finally in Ephesus, where he opened a Pythagorean school, and died there nearly a hundred years old.

As usual in such cases the facts of his life were embellished and transfigured by abundant legends. His birth was said to have been supernaturally foretold and announced, and his

What Is There Left ?

maturity was credited with the gift of perceiving future events and of working miracles. Among other wonders was the casting out of a devil from a man possessed, and the restoring to life of a dead woman. As early as the third century a Greek statesman, Hierokles, brought forward the story of Apollonius in opposition to the Christian story of Jesus ; but that work was lost, and is now known only through the criticism of its argument by Eusebius.

The legends of Krishna and of Buddha furnished the material for the miraculous conception and birth of the Redeemer ; the maxims of all the great reformers are combined in his moral code ; the career of the Sun, which from the beginning has risen upon the evil and the good, is demonstrated in that otherwise inexplicable sacrifice upon the cross, with its impossible sequel of resurrection and ascension.

What Is There Left ?

FOR a long time previous to the beginning of the Christian era there had been regular and frequent intercourse between Eastern nations and the Roman empire. The religion of Persia had established its altars in Rome, and the religion of Buddha (in its very nature prose-

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lyting but not persecuting) was represented in city and province by learned and cultivated priests whose influence was felt by high and low among the people. And Brahmans came also, with their wealth of legends, and especially their story of God Krishna, whose name suggested the Greek epithet for the Anointed One, while his benevolent deeds and wise teachings answered to the moral standards of the philosophers; in short, all forms of human attempts to discover the Unknowable were concentrated and united in this latest, and probably last, development of anthropomorphic religion.

The cross, originally a phallic symbol, later an instrument for the sacrifice of offerings to the sun god, and, latest of all, the most abhorred means of execution for the lowest criminals, became, in the supposed crucifixion of Jesus, not only a reminiscence of old beliefs in the judicial sacrifice of the Sun of Righteousness, but also an illustration of the extreme of shame and suffering which the ideal man is willing to endure in the cause of virtue.

Just as the Brahmans represented their god Krishna as a crucified man with a wreath of sunbeams around his head, just as the ancient Assyrians represented their sun god Baal as a

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man surrounded by an aureole, and with outstretched arms, thus forming a perfect cross, so the Romans revered a crucified incarnation of the god Sol, and many ancient Italian pictures of Jesus as a crucified Savior bear the inscription "*Deo Soli*," which may mean "*To the only God*," or "*To the God Sol*."

Exactly when and how all these borrowed elements combined to offer to the world the man Christ Jesus cannot now be known. It is supposed by some scholars that a real personage is the foundation of every mythical incarnation, and it may be so, but facts seem to show that such characters may be entirely imaginative creations; at least, that they may have been borrowed as myths, without reference to the unknown foreign original.

It is possible that some obscure man, "some Jewish peasant with a genius for religion" (as many "liberal" Christians nowadays are fond of saying), sat for the portrait of the idealized and deified Jesus; but it is not likely, because if he had been so insignificant as not to be distinguishable by the history of that time he could not have challenged the revenge of the Jewish theocracy and the severity of the Roman imperial power; whereas, if he had been of so much importance as to create so

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great a ferment he would have been known to history. His deified prototypes are too far back to be identified, but the time and the circumstances of his supposed career were comparatively modern.

And, when we take away from this Person (as must be taken away) his supernatural birth, his superhuman powers, his borrowed teachings, his unlawful execution, his impossible resurrection and ascension—what is there left?

A beautiful Ideal, such as philanthropic fancy has often created, or a benevolent man, such as has often existed and still exists.

Even before this climax of discovery Christianity as a "revealed" religion was dead. The fatal blow was struck when the Bible began to be studied according to the rules of scientific criticism. Orthodoxy fell with the exposure of the origin of the myth of the six days of creation, and distrust has increased with every new result of investigation, until at present there are very few thoughtful persons who believe what they were taught in childhood to believe. A developed conscience cannot be satisfied with a vicarious sacrifice, and an educated sense of justice refuses to accept an innocent victim as atonement for guilt.

Advantages of Knowing the Truth

Advantages of Knowing the Truth

ONE chief advantage of a final rejection of the Christ myth is that persecution of the Jews will cease at once and forever.

Christians have hitherto appeared to consider that they were doing God service and fulfilling prophecy in pursuing the chosen people with every possible demonstration of hatred and contempt. Civilization, enlightenment, education, culture, all these have failed to cure Christian prejudice in this direction; not even the eminent services of the Jews in worldly matters and their brilliant record in moral achievements have secured them from injustice and cruelty on the part of their Christian fellow-citizens, and there seemed to be no promise of a better future on earth for the despised race.

But if and when this anachronistic theory of a crucified God shall be recognized as unfounded and absurd, then (and probably not till then) will the outrage be ended.

When the people cease to worship a dead Jew they will no longer desire to persecute living Jews, and when they perceive that the Christian idol is merely a fictitious character, the Jews will be granted their rightful place in the family of nations.

Such a result is worth all the pain it will

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cost the present generation to abandon the temples and altars hallowed by so many tender associations and sacred memories.

Another incalculable advantage will be the setting free of many timid souls from the bondage of dissimulation and deceit. There are to-day thousands of professing Christians who are either tormented by doubts respecting the fundamental doctrines of Christianity or are entirely skeptical as regards the whole system, while they outwardly continue their membership with church or sect and use their influence for the propagation of ideas which have no meaning to their own minds. Worst of all, many of these hypocrites are priests and teachers of religion, deriving their support from the revenues of the institution they despise and leading a flock of followers in ways which they themselves no longer tread with confidence.

It will not be long before the great mass of the people will recognize how little religious faith has had to do with the material, intellectual, and moral progress of the race in Christendom. To hear Christians talk one might suppose that all the modern discoveries of science, all the accumulated contributions to useful knowledge, all the increased and increas-

Ecclesiastical Foundations Removed

ing amenities of social life are due to the influence of Jesus of Nazareth; the fact being that the ignorance and vice and disease and oppression and cruelty which characterized what are called the Dark Ages were just as much and no more to be attributed to the same source.

The progress of the race is due to the increase of knowledge, and the increase of knowledge is due to the fact that the majority of human beings live in climates which demand and reward exertion, both physical and intellectual. Christianity has nothing to do with the question. Neither at the poles nor at the equator can be developed the wisdom which elevates and saves the race.

Ecclesiastical Foundations Removed

THE wider and deeper investigations go in these matters the more certain it becomes that there is no firm foundation for any of the religious systems which are included under the name of Christianity.

The Catholic church, Greek and Roman, which is undeniably the oldest form of the developed Christian faith, betrays its composite origin; the various sects which have broken away from that gigantic institution are attempts, more or less successful, to formulate the impulses of

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humanity and the rules of morality into a binding creed and obligatory observances; all of these carry within their very organization their sentence of increasing weakness and ultimate decay.

Formerly all varieties and vagaries of faith went back to the Bible for authority and support, but now even that first and last resource is giving way. Christian scholars and Christian clergy and the educated Christian laity recognize this fact; but they are trying with all their might to keep the knowledge back from the less enlightened masses of the people, partly out of an honest dread of the consequences, a plausible fear that to remove the restraints of dogmatic religion would be to let in a flood of license in every form, social, political, and moral.

They need not be afraid. Faith is already dead, and there is more danger in prolonging this interim without an Ideal than there would be in frankly proclaiming the altars vacant and calling upon the people to cultivate with open eyes and unfettered minds the morality which was always the only vital and enduring factor in every religion.

The change in the prevailing sentiment respecting these subjects is obvious from the present tone of pulpit utterances. Formerly

Ecclesiastical Foundations Removed

doctrines were minutely examined, carefully discussed, earnestly recommended. Nowadays preachers avoid decisive assertions concerning disputed points, and confine themselves mostly to practical reflections upon the duties devolving upon Christians as members of the great human family, addresses which every sincere listener must own to be applicable and wise.

True, those sects which employ a liturgical form of worship continue to use the old forms, which, to most minds, are become a dead letter. But the salt has lost its savor in all denominations wherever the members have kept up with the progress of intelligence.

How many orthodox church-goers believe that Jesus was born of a virgin? How many physicians, matrons, mature persons of both sexes, in any community, can accept such a fable as truth?

How many believe in the resurrection of the dead? If that doctrine has been proved to be true, why do preachers talk so much about it, and try to bring arguments in its favor, and why do philosophers attempt to support the theory by analogies, and why is the general hope strengthened from time to time by the published announcement that such and such a shining light in literature or science believed firmly in a future life?

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It is plain that not one of us knows anything about this matter, and it is certain that we should know much more about the world we are now in and be much better able to fulfil our duty in the life we are now living, if we would cease wasting our time and weakening our thought in vain imaginings with respect to eternity and heaven.

And why any longer should churches be built and preachers be installed and the community be taxed to support a religious institution which is of no use as a guiding and restraining force? Nowadays everybody can read the books from which the theologians derive their material; specialists among the laity go farther and deeper than the clergy in their investigations of the sources of theological wisdom, and parishoners who are bearing the burden and heat of the day know more than the priest can tell them of the spiritual experiences of practical life. To justify the presence of churches and clerics an altar and a sacrifice are necessary, and these no longer exist.

It is true that on entering the precincts of a magnificent church or temple the surroundings tend to elevate the thoughts and produce a solemnity of mind which is inspiring, not only for the moment, but in its after effects. But the

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same emotion in a still higher degree is, or ought to be, experienced upon opening the door of a magnificent library or theatre, or in visiting the wards of a hospital or the operating-room of a great clinic.

In all cases the motive influence is the same—the recognition of a space devoted to the improvement of mankind; and, in proportion as we become freed from the sentimentality of superstition, will the appliances for the education of the intellect, the cultivation of the esthetic taste, the relief of suffering, the furtherance of physical health, appeal more strongly to our best and highest sympathies than the accessories of a fantastic fable or the worship of an impossible God can ever do.

After all, the only sure test of any principle or system of principles is the effect produced, and it is now time to examine the influence of Christianity upon the race.

In view of the present condition of the Christian world in this the last year of the nineteenth century, the most charitable conclusion would be that Christianity has no influence whatever, certainly no specific influence, upon the moral nature of man. It would also be the conclusion nearest the truth.

Any mature and thoughtful person who has

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traveled extensively and come in contact with many people of various races and nationalities and creeds must often be forced to observe how under every form of government and every mode of belief, some characters are eminently good, some eminently bad, and the great majority neither very bad nor very good. The differences and grades of difference between individuals everywhere are in reality determined, not by opinions concerning the Unknown and Unknowable, but by the accidents of birth, ancestry, education, and environment. The annals of Christianity, when examined in an unprejudiced spirit, are for the most part a shameful record of selfishness and weakness. The few glorious examples of bravery and strength, the few lovely instances of innocence and purity, can be matched in any heathen community; the alternations of noble aspiration and ignoble impulse which define the course of ordinary lives are common to dwellers in every clime and to believers in every sort of deity.

But, it will be urged, Christian nations excel all others in the administration of justice, in the furtherance of education, in the amelioration of disease, in the prevention of crime, in the cultivation of the arts of peace, in appreciation of the sanctity of the family.

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In the first place, every branch of this argument is open to dispute. Facts show that even in the countries most thoroughly and aggressively Christian justice is bought and sold, education hindered, disease fostered through ignorance; superstition, and vice, crime instigated by injustice, peace disturbed by war, the most sacred ties desecrated by secret or open profligacy.

In the second place, the alleged superiority of Christian nations is not due to the prevailing religion, but to the developments of science, and every successive improvement by this means has been decried and combated by the Christian church before being adopted and claimed as a new proof of divine favoritism.

The faults and defects of Christian civilization are not due to the spirit of Christianity, but Christianity in its development is partly responsible for the conditions which create and perpetuate such evils. The precepts of the Sermon on the Mount are lost sight of in the constitution of modern society, and the communism of the earliest Christians is condemned by the Christian church and the Christian state whenever an attempt is made to remedy the glaring injustice of the classes against the masses by a return to primitive equality.

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As regards a recognition of the Brotherhood of Man, which is the summing up of all the precepts of morality, Christianity can by no means substantiate a claim to be the originator and the exemplifier of that sentiment, which is as old as the race, and has always been felt and acted upon by the noblest individuals in every generation. Slavery was condemned and denounced before the Gospel was ever preached; benevolence was the theme of every known philanthropist before the Christian era, and from the beginning down to our own day every new discovery of lands and peoples has brought to light the same generous instincts in degrees commensurate with the extent of development in each case.

The question to be decided is not whether the precepts of Jesus tend to purify and enoble human character. We all know that they do, and that they share this power with the maxims of all other reformers. The question is: Are we in possession of authentic testimony to the reality and truth of the statements upon which Christianity is built and the church of Christ established? And in the light of our present knowledge the answer is and must be, No. The story of Jesus is a myth; the doctrines of Christianity are an anachro-

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nistic invention; the ritual of the church is a borrowed medley; the legends of theology are a mixture of pious frauds and ignorant fancies; sacerdotal authority is a vain pretension; one man knows exactly as much as another about God and eternity, and that much is absolutely nothing.

Many persons are conscious that these things are so; many more are tormented with doubts and terrors; very few are firm in the old beliefs, and those few believe still because they shut their eyes and ears to the accumulating evidence of the falsity of the system upon which their faith is based.

The Problem of the Future

WHAT then?

Shall we rebel because we have no power to fashion the universe according to the pattern which our forefathers set for us?

Shall we despair because we do not know whence we came, nor why we are here, nor whither we go when we depart hence?

Shall we spend our time in rioting and drunkenness because this may be the only life we have to live? •

Shall we deal unrighteously with our neighbor because there may be no one to call us to account?

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Shall we do evil and not good because we are no longer threatened with hell fire?

On the contrary, if this life be the only one for us, it behooves us to make it as happy as possible for ourselves and for others, and the only way to be happy is to be good.

The world is full of unrest; the old Ideals have lost their influence, and from all quarters comes the cry for a new religion. And a new religion is prophesied and promised.

Attempts are even now being made to formulate modern ideas into systems which each of the several founders endeavors to hope may develop into the "Religion of the Future."

A discussion of these various schemes is not here in place; for the present subject the only point of interest is the fact of the already widespread and rapidly increasing conviction that Christianity has had its day, and that its sun is setting to rise no more forever. There are many who would fain turn back the shadow upon this dial of the world's progress. Even with the evidence plain before their eyes of the impotency of the religion of the Cross, they prognosticate the reign of anarchy as soon as the restraints of religion are removed. But the shadow cannot be turned back, and the (as yet) comparatively small number of individ-

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uals who have freed themselves entirely from spiritual tyranny and are living (in Christian parlance) "without God and without hope in the world," are in reality among the most useful members of society, and are by no means the unhappiest of their species.

Why should they be unhappy if their intentions are honest and their time is usefully spent? They are alive, and it is good to be alive. As for a prospect after death, they know that nothing which has once existed is annihilated; it must endure in some form forever—and so they trust themselves to Nature, which placed them here without their knowledge or desire, and will continue its work in conformity with laws which they did not make and cannot alter.

The entire helplessness of man in view of death is his best preservative against fear.

In the meantime there is enough to do. The evils which superstition has brought upon the race must be counteracted and removed; this world, until now so full of the habitations of cruelty, must become a happy home for all mankind alike; knowledge, untrammelled by prejudice, must be increased and spread abroad; universal peace must guarantee uni-

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versal progress, and unselfish love must be the ground-tone of the prevailing harmony.

This end has never been, and never can be, attained by means of religion, but it is possible of attainment through the cultivation, by natural processes, of the best natural impulses.

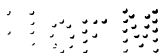
All the poets have dreamed of perfected humanity; all philosophers and sages and reformers have uttered wise maxims for the conduct of life; but superstition has always added thereto the rewards and punishments of eternity, so that the hopes and fears thus excited have chilled and blighted the labors and the fruits of time.

Every sentient being must desire immortality; every one of us hopes for endless reunion with kindred spirits beloved on earth, for opportunity to correct mistakes, to explain misunderstandings, to finish interrupted work, to acquire unlimited knowledge, to solve perplexing mysteries—in a word, to love and learn and enjoy forever and ever.

Whether all this is to be our privilege we do not and cannot know; only this is certain, that our help is needed in this world at present, while, as regards the future, good work here is the best preparation for complete fruition hereafter.

The Problem of the Future

So long as human beings live and suffer and enjoy in this, the only world open to our present knowledge, the BROTHERHOOD OF MAN will be the highest possible Ideal, and the effort to realize that Ideal will be the noblest and most satisfactory occupation of every individual intelligence. The end can be attained only by learning and obeying the eternal laws of Nature, as these are demonstrated through the discoveries of Science.



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