

# IF I WERE GOD

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DR. WILLIAM J. ROBINSON

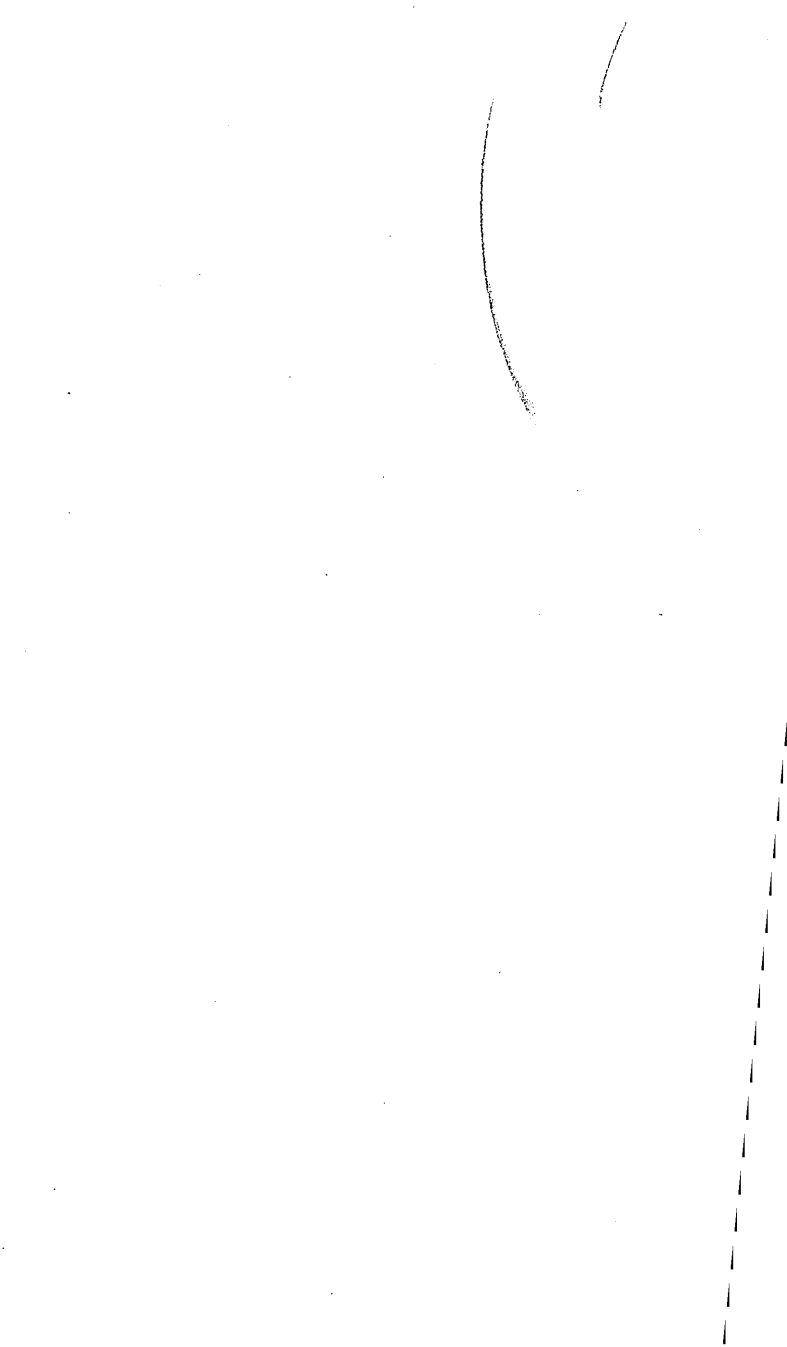
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IF I WERE GOD

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## DR. ROBINSON'S BOOKS

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SEX KNOWLEDGE FOR MEN  
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MARRIED LIFE AND HAPPINESS  
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TREATMENT OF GONORRHEA  
PRESCRIPTION INCOMPATIBILITIES  
THE OLDEST PROFESSION IN THE WORLD—PROSTITUTION

# IF I WERE GOD

A FREETHINKER'S FAITH

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INCORPORATING A DISCUSSION BETWEEN  
THE AUTHOR AND A CATHOLIC PRIEST

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By DR. WILLIAM J. ROBINSON

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
HARRY ELMER BARNES, PH.D.

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To

JOSEPH LEWIS

AND HIS FAITHFUL COMPANION

FAY,

VALIANT FIGHTERS IN THE BATTLE  
AGAINST SOUL-CORRODING SUPERSTITION  
AND BANEFUL IGNORANCE, THIS BOOK  
IS APPROPRIATELY AND AFFECTIONATELY  
DEDICATED BY THE AUTHOR



## PREFACE

NOT to the sneerers, not to the ribald and frivolous, not to those who, ignorant of both history and psychology, regard religion as a deliberately conceived fraud designedly foisted upon the people, but to the earnest searchers for Truth, lead where it may, is this little book, jotted down under the beautiful sky of the French Riviera, by the peaceful shores of the azure Mediterranean—truly a *côte d'azur*—offered; offered non-apologetically, yet reverently.

Mentone, France.



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## INTRODUCTION

BY HARRY ELMER BARNES, PH.D.

DR. WILLIAM J. ROBINSON is well known as one of the world's leading writers on the problems of sexology. Those familiar with his writings recognize that he is also a progressive reformer in many other phases of human interests and activities. He has consistently supported economic and social liberalism. He was one of the few pacifists who remained true to his convictions in wartime.

Not the least of his interests is the promulgation of general intellectual enlightenment. His exuberant praise of H. G. Wells' "World of William Clissold," indicated clearly his reaction in this field as illustrated by his appraisal of perhaps the foremost monument to intellectual emancipation in modern literature. It is his enthusiasm for cultural progress and mental freedom which has prompted Dr. Robinson to prepare this stimulating little book on the problem of religion in the modern world.

## INTRODUCTION

Orthodox religion is coming in for some weighty assaults at the present time from anthropologists, psychologists and historians. The results of this varied critique are being brought together by the Humanists in the most serious challenge which has ever been leveled against the conventional religionist. How little headway can be made against Humanism was well illustrated by the article of Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick in *Harper's Magazine* for December, 1929.

Most of these attacks upon orthodoxy have, however, been of a technical character or have been written in extensive and esoteric treatises which make little headway with the public in general. There is need for a clear and brief discussion of leading issues which will appeal directly to a large group of readers. It is to fill this need that Dr. Robinson has given us his "A Freethinker's Faith."

Dr. Robinson is well prepared to execute this task. He has read widely in the literature of religion. He has, in the course of his career, come into contact many times and in the most diverse ways with the evil effects of religion. No man is



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more likely to be wounded by the devotees of orthodoxy than the enlightened sexologist and the sincere pacifist. Dr. Robinson's career bears the scars of many felonious assaults by the fanatical exponents of private virtue and public slaughter. Yet he has been able to retain a remarkable objectivity in the face of such experiences. His appraisal of the evil effects of religion is far less severe and sweeping than the views of the present writer on this subject. Finally, Dr. Robinson writes in a juicy popular style which should recommend his book to the average reader who abhors dry abstractions.

Dr. Robinson states his purpose very clearly in the following words:

Because religion stands in the way of human progress, because it does not permit men to think boldly and logically, because it gives a reactionary priesthood not only spiritual but also material power over the people, because it is necessary that man shall learn to stand on his own feet not expecting salvation from the outside, because, finally, there is no hope of otherwise establishing universal friendship and brotherhood, it is necessary to eliminate dogmatic religion. This book was written to aid in bringing about this elimination.

## INTRODUCTION

Dr. Robinson wisely limits himself to a discussion of the cardinal points in supernatural orthodoxy, thus enabling him to deliver heavy and concentrated blows against the main defenses of conventional religion. Taking up the question of what we shall put in the place of the old time religion, he shows that there are many things in society like a headache which do not have to be replaced by another ache. There can be no substitute for religious superstition except sound knowledge and logical thinking. Linked with this subject is the problem of what we shall give the masses as the basis for social control and collective hope. Dr. Robinson makes it clear that it is high time that we ceased to give them the opium of religion and began to feed them the saving realities of secular knowledge. He is wise enough to see through the prevalent illusion that we must preserve orthodoxy indefinitely as the mob policeman.

Equally effectively does he puncture the notion that only a religious man can be a decent moral citizen. He shows that much which the religious fanatic regards as moral is cruel, savage and, fun-

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damentally, highly immoral. Likewise he makes it clear that some of the world's most useful citizens have been freethinkers, and many of them avowed atheists, while most criminals are religious. Finally, he makes it plain that a sound morality must be constructed on secular foundations rather than upon the basis of the superstitions of supernatural religion.

Dealing with the problem of God, the complex and intricate cosmos and the question of creation Dr. Robinson demonstrates that the more we learn about the nature of the physical universe the more difficult and insoluble becomes the problem of its origin and direction. We cannot fathom the mysteries of nature; therefore we are not likely to discover what is back of these mysteries.

Perhaps the most striking sections in the book are those dealing with the problem of "Providence" and the reconciliation of the notion of a good God and an evil world.

Dr. Robinson launches a devastating attack upon the conventional theory of Providence which holds that a beneficent Providence may

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hurl a hundred to death in a train wreck and save the single individual who has a hunch to cancel his trip. Of a kind is the theory that ill-luck makes us sick while Providence saves our life and restores us to health. Dr. Robinson demonstrates for all time that the conventional Christian doctrine of Providential interference in human affairs is one of the most arrogant, brutal, selfish and illogical illusions which has ever cursed the human race.

In his chapter on God and human affairs Dr. Robinson gives us an extensive and sane summary of the type of action which would reasonably be expected of a civilized and kindly deity, viewed from the human standpoint. And in succeeding chapters on atheism, agnosticism, pantheism and related subjects he shows convincingly enough the essential folly of any attempt to construct judgments of God from the human point of view. Yet it is extremely illuminating to contrast the course of human events, as they have actually taken place, and the facts of organic life with the least which might have been expected of a God who controlled human affairs with the

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slightest pretense to the traits of a gentleman and a scholar.

Dr. Robinson gives us a sane analysis of the "Jesus stereotype." He admits the probable good intentions of Jesus and his possible devotion to what he believed was right. Yet he shows fully the limitations of Jesus' knowledge, experience and outlook and exposes the utter folly of looking backward to Jesus as the peerless teacher of all time and the guide to social progress to-day. He has the courage to point out the liability of the Christian Church to civilization through the ages, but he is fair enough to acquit Jesus of all blame for an institution he had no intention of founding and which was so utterly foreign to the views attributed to Jesus in the gospel story.

We may heartily commend the volume to American readers as a concise assessment of religion in modern life. Its wide circulation should do much to dispel bigotry and intolerance. If it sweeps away orthodoxy in a relentless fashion, it prepares the way at the same time for any sensible humanistic cult based on scientific knowledge and secular ambitions.



## PART ONE

## THE ELDER MILL ON RELIGION

JOHN STUART MILL tells us in his autobiography that his father looked at religion "as the greatest enemy of morality first, by setting up fictitious excellences—belief in creeds, devotional feelings, and ceremonies, not connected with the good of humankind, and causing them to be accepted as substitutes for genuine virtues; but above all by radically vitiating the standard of morals, making it consist in doing the will of a being, on whom, indeed, it lavishes all the phrases of adulation, but whom, in sober truth, it depicts as eminently hateful. I have a hundred times heard him say that *all ages and nations have represented their gods as wicked* in a constantly increasing progression; that mankind had gone on adding trait after trait, till they reached the most perfect expression of wickedness which the human mind can devise, and have called this God, and prostrated themselves before it. The *ne plus ultra* of wickedness he considered to be embodied in what is commonly presented to mankind as the creed of Christianity. Think (he used to say) of a being who would make a hell—who would create the human race with the infallible foreknowledge, and therefore with the intention, that the great majority of them should be consigned to horrible and everlasting torment." James Mill, adds his son, knew quite well that Christians were not in fact, as demoralized by this monstrous creed as, if they were logically consistent, they ought to be. "The same slovenliness of thought (he said) and subjection of the reason to fears, wishes, and affections, which enable them to accept a theory involving a contradiction in terms, prevent them from perceiving the logical consequence of the theory."



## Chapter One

### FOREWORD

IN *What I Believe* published in 1927 (Eugenics Publishing Co.), the author presented his general Credo. In it he stated his beliefs in reference to all questions which interest the thinking man and woman of the twentieth century. Brief chapters were devoted to the subjects of Sex Morality, and Religion. But those two subjects are so large that they could not be adequately treated—discussed from every possible angle—in one small volume. Sex Morality and Religion are such vast subjects and of such exceeding importance, that they deserve to be treated separately. In *What I Believe*, I promised to treat those subjects in separate volumes. The subject of Sex Morality has been so treated in a recently published book called *Sex, Love and Morality*.

This present volume ventures to discuss Religion from the rational viewpoint. Without ribaldry or sneering contempt, yet with perfect

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frankness and in the simplest possible language, it discusses religion in its various phases, particularly in its relation to human life, to human happiness. I know how dear their religious beliefs, even the most absurd, are to the people who hold them, and it seems cruel to shake people in their cherished beliefs, to sow doubts in their minds about things which they hold as sacred truths; to some the ideas expressed in this book will, no doubt, cause a most painful shock, perhaps some genuine suffering. I am the last man in the world to shock people, to cause anybody to suffer. And yet, nevertheless, I am not deterred from publishing the Truth about Religion as I see it. I am doing so for four reasons:

*First and foremost*—I am as convinced as I am convinced of anything, that religion has had a most pernicious influence on humanity, and that humanity will not reach its highest development, will not be really happy until it has freed itself from the demoralizing evil of dogmatic, orthodox religion.

*Second*—As to shocking people: this is frequently the only way of spiritual progress. Only by shocking people out of their inertia, are you

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sometimes able to agitate them out of their mental sloth, to make them think, to direct their thinking into new channels. If everybody who entertained a new idea, perceived a new truth, had abstained from declaring it for fear of shocking the sensibilities of people who clung to old falsehoods, we would still be living mentally in that most awful period of the history of mankind, the Dark Ages.

*Third*—Those who are so sensitive to any free idea, that a discussion of religion from a rational viewpoint, causes them acute pain, will not read this book. Those intellectual infants consider *any* discussion of the truth of their religion as a sin; they read only books permitted them by their ecclesiastical superiors, and as this book is not likely to receive the *approbatur* of the Catholic or any other church, there is no danger of its falling into the hands of the supersensitive kindergarten infants. It is their good or ill fortune to walk in darkness—which they consider light—to the end of their days. This book is intended only for, and will reach only those who are in search of Truth, regardless of where and to what conclusions it may lead them.

*Fourth*—If I still had any doubts about the propriety of publishing this book, the last one of them would have been dissipated by the golden words of Herbert Spencer, which I have been in the habit of prefixing to many of my books, and which I will this time incorporate in my Foreword, so that no reader may miss them.

Says Herbert Spencer:

Whoever hesitates to utter that which he thinks the highest truth, lest it should be too much in advance of the time, may reassure himself by looking at his acts from an impersonal point of view. Let him duly realize the fact that opinion is the agency through which character adapts external arrangements to itself—that his opinion rightly forms part of this agency—is a unit of force, constituting, with other such units, the general power which works out social changes; and he will perceive that he may properly give full utterance to his innermost conviction; leaving it to produce what effect it may. It is not for nothing that he has in him these sympathies with some principles and repugnance to others. He, with all his capacities and aspirations, and beliefs, is not an accident, but a product of the time. He must remember that while he is a descendant of the past, he is a parent of the future; and that his thoughts are as children born to him, which he may not carelessly let die. . . . Not as adventitious therefore will the wise man regard the faith which is in him. The highest truth he sees he will fearlessly utter; knowing that, let what may come of it, he is thus playing his right part in the

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world—knowing that if he can effect the change he aims at, well: if not—well also; though not so well.

Spencer's words refer to Truth in general; to all truths. John Stuart Mill, another of Mankind's choice spirits, one of the wisest and noblest of men that have ever graced our planet, has expressed his opinion about the timeliness of telling the truth about religion in the following words:

“On religion in particular the time appears to me to have come, when it is the duty of all who, being qualified in point of knowledge, have on mature consideration satisfied themselves that the current opinions are not only false but hurtful, to make their dissent known; at least, if they are among those whose station or reputation, gives their opinion a chance of being attended to. Such an avowal would put an end, at once and for ever, to the vulgar prejudice, that what is called, very improperly, unbelief, is connected with any bad qualities either of mind or heart. The world would be astonished if it knew how great a proportion of its brightest ornaments—of those most distinguished even in popular estimation for wisdom and virtue—are complete

skeptics in religion; many of them refraining from avowal, less from personal considerations, than from a conscientious, though now in my opinion a most mistaken apprehension, lest by speaking out what would tend to weaken existing beliefs, and by consequence (as they suppose) existing restraints, they should do harm instead of good."

The present writer is convinced that a weakening, nay a destruction, of the existing religious beliefs, which are, at their best, nothing but crude superstitions, will do good instead of harm, and he therefore puts this little volume into the hands of earnest seekers of the Truth with complete confidence in its beneficent mission.

## Chapter Two

### THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

WHAT is the object of the book? If the word "sacred" is applicable to any occupation, trade, profession or art, it is applicable to Literature. In human enlightenment, in the upward progress of mankind, science alone occupies an equally high—some would say higher—place. I have always maintained that every book must have a purpose, must be written with a certain object in view. Literature stands on an entirely different level from music, painting and sculpture, and the attempt to put literature in the same category with the arts is absurd. As factors in human progress the three arts are quite unimportant; they are subsidiary; they can have no direct influence on the development of the human *mind* and its store of knowledge, its power to think, to doubt, to analyze. All this is the province of literature. And though a certain class of superficial writers claim that "art is for art's sake" and "writing

is for writing's sake," serious thinkers know that all real literature is propaganda, propaganda in the sense of preaching the truth, of showing life as it is, of endeavoring to raise mankind to a higher level. No book has a right to exist that has not some useful purpose, be the purpose to afford helpful amusement, to improve man's material condition, to elevate his moral and intellectual level, to uproot error and superstition, to spread old or preach new truths.

From this point of view, the purpose of this book is not far to seek: it is to teach the truth, the truth as I see it, about Religion. I could stop here. But this answer would not satisfy me, and so it might not satisfy some of the readers of this book. For one has a right to ask: Assuming that what you teach *is* the truth, is it a *useful* truth, is it a *necessary* truth? Or is it, perhaps an injurious truth? And if not injurious, is it perhaps a purely theoretical, fruitless truth? For I do not agree with those who maintain that truth can never be injurious, and even if injurious it must be told and preached at all hazards, on all occasions. Those people are truth fetichists. I agree rather with Josiah Royce, that "all search for



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truth is a practical activity, with an ethical purpose and that a purely theoretical truth, such as should guide no significant active process, is a barren absurdity." While searching for purely theoretical truths that have no practical application cannot be considered a blameable occupation (and one never knows when an abstract truth may become of highly practical significance), still it is not one that ever intrigued the present writer. Whatever he wrote always had a clear, graspable, practical purpose. And such a purpose is always inherent in the present discussion. While the subject of religion cannot be said to be of extraordinary, paramount, immediate interest, still it is a question we will have to grapple with and settle eventually, and we may as well start now.

That religion, even now, at this late day, directly interferes with progress cannot be denied. For instance, the importance, the world-need of birth control is now universally conceded by all liberal-minded people; but religion, particularly Roman Catholicism, stands firmly in the way, says nay to its faithful adherents and thus ef-

fectively interferes with the universal spread of this humanity-saving measure.

The belief in a God who is personally interested in human welfare, and who will reward present misery with future bliss, has a demoralizing effect on mankind. It is time that the human race learned to stand on its own feet, learned that its salvation depended upon itself, and itself only, and not on some extraneous force. The person whose mind is stuffed with religious dogmas and superstitions cannot be expected to think logically and rationally about anything (though there are exceptions and remarkable exceptions). How can you expect a person who believes in the finding powers (recovery of lost objects) of St. Anthony of Padua, in virgin births, in the resurrection of the dead, to be a logical thinker?

We know that in several countries the priest controls his parishioners, not only religiously but also politically and economically. The people are held deliberately in darkness by the priesthood which controls their lives and their conscience. The Breton peasant as well as the Breton noble, is as low mentally as the African bushman or Hottentot. They are more superstitious than

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were the inhabitants of Brittany two thousand years ago. And the bonds in which the priesthood holds the population can only be broken by freeing the people from all dogmatic religion. Not otherwise will complete intellectual freedom be attained.

And the most significant point is this: no universal brotherhood can be hoped for as long as different religions exist. One may speak of religious tolerance, and there is more of it now than there was in former centuries, but the Catholic still despises all other religions, considering Roman catholicism the only true faith, the Protestant looks with contempt at the Roman superstition. The Jew regards both as akin to idolatry, and all three regard Mohammedanism as a sort of low class fraud, etc. etc. And as long as this condition exists, real friendship between nations and individuals of different religions, real universal brotherhood cannot exist. It will be superficial, skin deep. Only freethinkers who have emerged from the different religions can be really and thoroughly friendly; they are the only ones who are not enchained, the only ones whom religious fetters do not hold and pull apart. And

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to bring about genuine international amity, complete universal brotherhood, all dogmatic religion must first be abolished.

To recapitulate: Because religion stands in the way of human progress, because it does not permit men to think boldly and logically, because it gives a reactionary priesthood not only spiritual but also material power over the people, because it is necessary that mankind learn to stand on its own feet, not expecting its salvation from outside; because, finally, there is no hope of otherwise establishing universal friendship and brotherhood, it is necessary to eliminate dogmatic religion. And to aid in bringing this elimination about this book is written. How far it will go in accomplishing this purpose, none can tell. But every little helps. And whenever I am doubtful about uttering and publishing my innermost thought on any subject, I have only to read Herbert Spencer's words cited in my foreword, and my doubts vanish.

### *Chapter Three*

#### WHAT WILL YOU GIVE THEM INSTEAD?

FATHER or Abbé L. is a Catholic priest of a very fine type. As sincere a believer, as truly pious a man as one can find in any religion. Yet, he is broadminded enough to agree to listen to other opinions than his own, and tolerant enough to respect sincere professors of other religions or of no religion at all. He is not afraid of heretical infection, and though we occupy antipodal positions on practically all vital questions, yet we not only tolerate, but *enjoy* each other's company. Perhaps, fundamentally, there is something similar, something congenial in our make-up. I know that on one point we feel very much alike: We are at one in our humanitarianism, in our desire and hope for human happiness, though we do not understand the same thing by happiness. And he knows that I never ridicule, never sneer at religion. For I know its historical origin, and I know

how sacred, how precious their religious beliefs are to some people.

Father L read the preceding chapter slowly and meditatively. When he had finished reading, he turned to me his deep-set, earnest, black eyes, and asked: "What are you going to give them instead?"

A discussion ensued, which I noted down as soon as it was over, and which I shall reproduce in the form of the dialogue, just as it took place.

*Father L:* What are you going to give them instead? If you take away from the people what you call their superstitions and their religion, what are you going to put in their place?

*Dr. R:* As far as their superstitions, their irrational, absurd beliefs are concerned, I would put nothing in their place. If we cure a man's leg of gangrene or remove a stone from his bladder, we put nothing in their place. It is enough to cure or to remove the noxious substance without supplying any substitute. If we clear a man's brain of his noxious superstitions, we need not bribe him with "something instead"; the brain becomes clear and has now room for decent, rational thoughts. As to the people's religion—

WHAT WILL YOU GIVE THEM INSTEAD?

*Father L:* Hold on a minute, please. Even superstitions which have become a part of a person's life you cannot uproot and sweep away, without causing damage, irreparable damage sometimes. You loaned me the other day a little book which I am free to say I enjoyed very much. You remember, in *Mr. Fortune's Maggot*, Mr. Fortune, the protestant missionary, makes the boy Lueli, his only convert, break and burn his idol. The missionary thought, as the boy professed to have become a Christian, he had no more business with a wooden idol. Lueli thought differently. He thought he could be a christian and worship his wooden god at the same time. As he dared not disobey the missionary, he destroyed the idol. What was the result? The boy became melancholy, began gradually to lose flesh and to pine away until he finally decided to drown himself. Such an effect did the loss of his god have on him. And it was only a piece of wood.

*Dr. R:* Yes, Father L. But, I fear, you have overlooked the fact that in this case the destruction of the idol was not a voluntary one; Lueli was not convinced that the idol was but a piece of wood; to him it was a god. And he destroyed it

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under pressure. Had the missionary succeeded in *convincing* him that it was a piece of wood, like any other piece of wood, he would have destroyed it with a smile. He mightn't even have cared to destroy it; he would probably have just thrown it away. Of course, I have no intention of using either force or pressure—I couldn't if I would, and wouldn't if I could—in freeing men and women from their superstitions: only, arguments, proofs, persuasion. . . . And people who become convinced that their notions were childish, that their beliefs were absurd, that they have outgrown them and stand ready to shed them, need nothing in their place. On the contrary, I can testify, that many of them feel a tremendous sense of relief, as if they had been freed from a chronic disease, from an incubus, as if a heavy weight had been lifted from their shoulders or their head. To some, for instance, the conviction that hell does not exist, that it is a silly, cruel superstition, comes as a great liberating thought. And they are from the bottom of their heart grateful to the man who cleared their mind of a noxious weed.

*Father L:* So far for superstitions. How about



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religion, a man's deep faith? You wouldn't take that away without giving the man some equivalent instead?

*Dr. R:* As far as by religion is understood the striving after an ideal, the yearning for higher things, the desire to do good, to be helpful, my religion answers the purpose fully, and is a superior substitute for dogmatic religion of whatever form.

*Father L:* And that is?

*Dr. R:* The Religion of Humanity. The yearning to make this sorry world a better place to live in, the desire to raise mankind to a higher spiritual and intellectual level, the hope of seeing every human being lead a nobler, more comfortable, more dignified life, the high aspiration to see all mankind live in peace, friendship and mutual esteem, in brief, whole-souled, unwavering loyalty to the Cause of Humanity is sufficient to fill our lives and to act as a beacon, as a guiding star to the noblest, most unselfish activity.

*Father L:* Do you think that this human ideal, without any deity in it, would be sufficient?

*Dr. R:* It has been found sufficient by some of the world's finest men and women. Not ascetic

“saints” who went into the desert to live a useless and in my opinion an ignoble life, but by men and women who labored unceasingly for mankind, who sacrificed their comfort and their worldly goods, who risked their liberty and their lives—and often lost both—for their ideal, which was to free their fellow beings from an intolerable tyranny, to free them from the chains of ignorance and superstition, or to raise their standard of living. *No religion in the world* can show such noble, such zealous, such self-sacrificing disciples and courageous martyrs as does the Religion of Humanity.

*Father L:* Why, hasn't every religion had its martyrs, ready to die in defending their faith?

*Dr. R:* No, it is not the same, and I believe you will have to admit it. I leave out of consideration the difference in the *object*: the difference in dying for a vague phantom, for an abstract idea, for a shibboleth, and the dying for one's real, living fellow beings. I leave that out of consideration. The real difference is here: when the deeply religious Jew let himself be cut to pieces or to be slowly burned at the stake rather than deny his God, when the religious Christian or Mussulman

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occasionally did the same, they were supported by fanaticism, they were guided in their course of action by two things—by fear and hope; fear, that if they denied their God they would suffer eternal torments in hell; hope, that if they remained steadfast to their faith, if they suffered martyrdom for their religion, they would be rewarded in heaven by a life of eternal bliss. They had something to look forward to. The revolutionary humanitarians, however, who were generally also freethinkers, atheists in religion, had no rewards to look forward to. They knew that if they had to spend their lives in solitary confinement, they would not be compensated for their tortures here by paradise in heaven. They knew that if they went to the gallows or the block, that that ended it. Their earthly career was over, and there was no other. Yet, with their eyes open, with a full knowledge of what awaited them—the rack and wheel of the inquisition, the stake, the gallows or the executioner's ax, the dark dungeon or the frozen wastes and the dreadful mines of Siberia—those men and women went forward and sacrificed their youth, their liberty and their lives for the ideal, the ideal of a better

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humanity that they worshipped. Can any other religion show such heroes and such martyrs? For you will have to admit that *martyrdom that knows there is to be no reward in heaven, that looks for no gifts in the hereafter, is more sublime than the sacrifice that believes it is going to be compensated by eternally lasting bliss or pleasure.*

*Father L remained silent.*

*Dr. R:* Let me read you an extract from a letter. It will show you how an unbeliever, an absolute atheist, can be utterly filled, saturated with the Religion of Humanity, how he can devote his entire life to it, and how, when he can no longer work for humanity, life loses all meaning for him; loses it to such a degree that he prefers to quit the stage. This extract is from a letter written by a great Russian revolutionary—by Adolph Jaffe. During Lenin's life he was Russian ambassador to Germany; later, he was envoy to Japan. He was considered one of the most brilliant lights of the Russian revolution. His entire life—from the age of fourteen—he worked for the liberation of Russia. When the dictatorship passed into the hands of Stalin, a man of the

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type of Mussolini, Jaffe was deprived of every position, of all influence, and, what is more, of all possibility of any activity. No longer able to be of any use to humanity, and being in ill health which was greatly aggravated by the brutality of the Stalin régime, Jaffe decided to commit suicide; he was only 44 years old. On the eve of his suicide, he wrote a letter to Trotzky, and it is from this letter that I am going to read you a paragraph or two.

“More than thirty years ago I embraced the philosophy that human life has meaning only to the degree that, and so long as, it is lived in the service of something infinite. For us humanity is infinite. The rest is finite: and to work for the rest is therefore meaningless. Even if humanity too must have a purpose beyond itself, that purpose will appear in so remote a future that for us humanity may be considered as an absolute infinite. It is in this only that I have always seen the meaning of life. And now taking a glance backward over my past, of which twenty-seven years were spent in the ranks of our party, it seems to me that I have the right to say that during all my conscious life, I have been faithful

to this philosophy. I have lived according to this meaning of life: work and struggle for the good of humanity. I think I have the right to say that not a day of my life has been meaningless. . . . But now, it seems, comes the time when my life loses its meaning and in consequence I feel obliged to abandon it, to bring it to an end."

And so, at the age of forty-four, he put a pistol to his temple, and left the scene. Had he been willing to compromise, to bow to the powers that be, he would have been given proper medical attention, and he might still be living in peace and comfort. But sincere humanitarians do not traffic with their convictions, and prefer imprisonment or death to a betrayal of their faith. Does the Christian, Jewish or any other religion show any nobler martyrs, or as noble and as great?

Father L remained silent, puffing at his little pipe—the only luxury he permitted himself. Then, with a slight break in his voice, somewhat hesitatingly, he asked the question that follows:

## Chapter Four

### WHAT WILL YOU GIVE THE MASSES?

*Father L:* Assuming that the exceptional, the élite of a nation need no revealed religion, that a high ideal or what you call the Religion of Humanity suffices for them, what will you give the masses of the people? What will you give the common, ignorant, brutish masses? A vague ideal would not suffice them. They need something definite, something anthropomorphic; something that is capable of punishing or of rewarding them.

*Dr. R:* You used one word in your question which would be sufficient for my answer. In speaking of the masses, you characterized them as being brutish. That shows that in spite of two thousand years of religion, in spite of the fear of eternal punishment, the masses are still brutish, or at least act brutishly. Could non-religion show a more lamentable result? We verily believe that by giving the people a proper, rational education, by teaching them, as far as possible, to think

freely, logically, we could show better results. They would be freed of their ignorance, they would discard their brutishness much sooner than they seem to be doing under the influence of revealed religion. In fact, many of us maintain that the people's ignorance and brutishness are not merely an accompaniment but a direct consequence of this priestly, religious bringing up.

Another point.—A great portion of the masses, of the "common" people, take their beliefs, and their conduct from the upper, or so-called upper classes. If the people saw that the upper classes get along without superstitious beliefs and childish rites, and they behave decently, humanely, honestly, treat their fellow beings fairly and squarely, they would follow suit and behave similarly. There is no question that a great deal of the present wave of criminality in the masses is due to the criminality, corruption and hypocrisy in high places. What the moral decay is due to in high places is another question, which I shall not discuss with you here, except to say—that in my opinion it is due to the War. War is *invariably* followed by an increase in corruption, crime and general moral decay.



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In discussing human affairs, one should not speak dogmatically about things that haven't been. The results are sometimes quite different from those imagined or logically expected. So without being dogmatic about it, I would express my belief that even the masses could very well get along without any dogmatic or revealed religion; not only could get along, but would be better off for it. Their material condition would certainly improve more rapidly.

*Father L (Rather surprised)*: How so? Why?

*Dr. R*: While no longer enslaved by religion to the same degree that they were two centuries ago, there are still millions of people who are held back from progress and from its indispensable antecedent, protest, by their religion, by the injunctions of their priests. Thus, for instance, careful and expert economists have reached the conclusion that birth control, the limitation of offspring, is a measure of the highest importance for the race; that without it there is little hope of improvement for the people at large; that it is necessary for economic and for eugenic reasons; indispensable for the nation and for the individual. Yet, there are thousands of workers

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of your denomination who will not accept birth control because they claim—they have so been told by your priests—that it is a sin, that it is against the Catholic religion. The British Labor Party will not incorporate birth control in its platform for fear of losing the Catholic vote. Still more glaring: many workers bear their miserable lot without murmur or protest, because they believe that their destiny is predetermined by God, that it is a sin to grumble, that the existence of millionaires and paupers is prearranged by the almighty, and besides, they hope to be rewarded in heaven for their sufferings here below. It is this slave philosophy that keeps them dormant, and in case of a struggle between the people and their masters, makes them join the latter. Your bloody rebellions in the Vendée, the senseless sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of lives for the foul Bourbons, was instigated, pardon me, by your clergy, and was carried on by the stupidly religious peasants whom the clergy held in their grip. And the world over, it is the religious workman and peasant who are the bulwark of reaction and of economic slavery. Spain is a good example. What did your Napoleon say?

## WHAT WILL YOU GIVE THE MASSES?

Let me look it up. I have it here somewhere. Here it is:

“What is it,” he said, “that makes the poor man think it quite natural that there are fires in my parlour while he is dying of cold? That I have ten coats in my wardrobe while he goes naked? That at each of my meals enough is served to feed his family for a week? It is simply religion which tells him that in another life I shall be only his equal, and that he actually has more chances of being happy there than I. Yes, we must see to it that the floors of the churches are open to all, and that it does not cost the poor man much to have prayers said on his tomb.”

Yes, it was your own Napoleon, that great beneficent and malignant genius, who said it. And it is because of this that, though an atheist, a non-believer in God and doubting even the historicity of Christ, he concluded the concordat with the pope, took the Catholic clergy, whom as a son of the French Revolution he hated and despised, to his heart and opened the churches wide, and forbade anti-christian propaganda.

And a modern clever writer (C. E. M. Joad) puts the matter epigrammatically thus:

“Men whose lives are miserable and oppressed will either rise in revolt against their misery and servitude, or console themselves with the prospect of generous compensation hereafter. If steps are taken to ensure that their faith is sufficiently lively, they will look to the next world to supply them with the divine equivalents of the champagne and cigars they are missing in this one; an expectation which confers obvious advantages upon those whom it enables to monopolize the champagne and cigars. Tack on the further belief that riches and power in this world are the best guarantees of torment and anguish in the next, and the utility of religion to “the stronger” is sufficiently manifest. The parable of the needle’s eye and the story of Lazarus have been responsible for a political and social quietism among the many, which do credit to the political acumen of the early governing class realists who slipped them into the text of the New Testament.”

In short, those who claim that “religion is the opium of the people,” do not seem to be so far from the truth. Indeed, they seem to have struck the nail on the head.

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*Father L:* "Religion the opium of the people?"  
How cruel. Our Voltaire should have said it.

*Dr. R:* It was Karl Marx who said it first. I saw it among the mottoes on the walls of the Ernst Haeckel Institute, And the bolshevists, I am told, have had it affixed on the doors of the churches.

*Father L:* It is a cruel and unjust motto. But do you, physicians, not value highly the virtues of opium?

*Dr. R:* Yes, as an occasional, temporary measure to relieve pain. But if given unwisely it masks the nature of the disease, so that the proper treatment cannot be applied. And if administered frequently, it renders the person an opium addict and demoralizes him, physically, mentally and morally. No, if religion is really the opium of the people, then it is a very bad thing, even though it relieves suffering now and then, soothes anguish and inspires with hope—things that I am the last person to deny. For I saw this action many times with my own eyes.

It was getting late. It was close on midnight. Father L. had to say early mass—he did not have

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many hours before him. I had another hour's work before me before going to bed. And so we parted, making an arrangement to meet and to continue the discussion the following evening.

## *Chapter Five*

### HOW ABOUT MORALITY?

THE first question Father L asked me when we met again was, if I did not really believe that, if religion could be abolished,—“Which fortunately it could not,” there would be a great increase in immorality and crime. There would be such a loosening of all moral restraint that life would become unsafe, that all social intercourse would become irksome, distrustful, and therefore disagreeable. Especially, he believed, would there be an enormous increase in crimes against property—stealing, robbery, burglary would be hourly occurrences. There would also be more murders.—“In short, it seems to me pretty certain that immorality and crime would be greatly on the increase. Don't you think so?”

*Dr. R:* As I stated before, one has no right to speak dogmatically about what would happen if such and such changes took place in the body politic; but there are two important, relevant

points to bear in mind. The first point is that crime and immorality exist now to quite a depressing extent; have existed all the time, before and after the advent of Christianity; and it is a well known fact that practically all criminals are religious men; there is not only absolutely, but proportionately a much smaller number of criminals among freethinkers. The statistics of all prisons and penitentiaries prove that. Nor has religion, particularly the Christian religion, abolished or diminished cruelty; it has rather increased it. For proof you have only to regard the Spanish and other inquisitions, the massacres of so-called heretical sects, like your Albigensians, and the numerous bloody, ruthless religious wars which had almost devastated Europe. And the greatest crime of all history, the recent bloody orgy, was instigated, carried on and deliberately prolonged by Christian nations and Christian statesmen. Yes, this point is to be borne in mind: the greatest amount of crime, individual and collective, is committed by religious people, by people who *are* and sincerely believe themselves to be religious.

The second important point is: We all know



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people, people in humble positions and people of world fame, who are thorough freethinkers, unequivocal atheists and agnostics, and who are so moral, lead such a pure, noble existence, devote their whole lives so whole-souledly to the welfare of the community, of humanity, that the most bigoted religionist would not dare call them immoral, or impute to them the possibility of crime or of a dishonorable act. To mention but a few names: Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, James Mill, John Stuart Mill, Jeremy Bentham, Henry Thomas Buckle, Thomas Henry Huxley, John Tyndall, Edward Gibbon, H. G. Wells, Bertrand Russell, Prince Kropotkin, Max Nordau, your own Condorcet, August Comte, Ernest Renan, Elisée Reclus, the great Norwegian, Fridtjof Nansen, Swante Arrhenius, the great Germans, Rudolph Virchow, Robert Koch, Paul Ehrlich, Ernst Haeckel, Albert Einstein, our own Lester F. Wald, Robert G. Ingersoll, Mark Twain, Thomas Edison—I mention the names just as they come into my head.—In every nation you will find agnostics and atheists who were not only at the head of the race in intellect and scientific achievements, in original discoveries

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that improved material comfort and saved millions of lives, but who lived such noble, modest, moral, self-sacrificing lives that had they been Christians, they would have been canonized as saints. With all due respect, I must say that the life of any one of the men I have mentioned has been more moral and *more useful* to mankind than that of any Christian saint or apostle you could mention.

*Father L:* Is it not possible that the people you mention were moral, though unbelievers, because in their early childhood the tenets of religion and morality were so impressed on their plastic minds that when grown up, even though their *ideas* underwent a change, their feelings remained essentially religious and moral? Let me read a paragraph which I copied from one of the books you yourself were kind enough to loan me.—Here Father L took out from his back coat pocket a bulky wallet filled with clippings and furnished with an alphabetical thumb index, found a small sheet of paper and read the following, written in a very small fine hand:

“The family that consciously and sensibly gives religious training will so fix religious beliefs

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in the habits and the minds of the children, that a lifetime of attack and of attempts to modify will have little effect except to develop a broader and more reasonable religious belief than ordinarily develops with higher intellectual training. Simple religious practices of Bible reading and prayer that become a sacred and intimate part of family life, especially if the acts of the parents in every walk of life harmonize with the religious training, have such a strong influence upon the child who develops these attitudes for the most part before school age, that little in life can exert sufficient force to make him stray far from the fundamental faith of his parents, though the interpretation of the symbols and practices may change as each child comes into other environment."

Don't you agree with the above quotation?

*Dr. R:* I cannot say that I agree, nor can I say that I disagree. This is still a mooted point with me. Only this I can say: Several of the men I mentioned above were not brought up religiously, nor did they bring up their children on any religious diet. This is true, for instance, of John Stuart Mill, of Darwin, and of Huxley. I

believe that high moral principles can be inculcated without any religious background.

*Father L:* So would you bring up children without any religion at all, without telling them anything about God, the Bible and so forth?

*Dr. R:* I cannot answer this question with a yes or no. In one of my recent books (*What I Believe*) I stated frankly that on this point I have not reached a definite decision. On the one hand, it seems to me that men who had a religious bringing up in childhood—like myself—and who, by their own mental efforts, broke the chains of tradition and superstition are better men than those who *at no time* had any religious faith, any conception of an omnipotent, omniscient supreme being. On the other hand, it seems cruel to inculcate into children's minds falsehoods, and then let them struggle and free themselves from the net by their own efforts. Not everybody is strong enough to accomplish this feat, and so a large proportion would remain in the meshes of the net as long as they lived. Besides, I do not see how we could instruct children and make them believe things in which we do not believe ourselves.

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It seems to me most children would see through the fraud, for fraud it would be.

*Father L:* Granting, for the sake of argument that there would be no great difference in general morality, will you not admit that in one special branch, in sexual morality, there would be a great change, a terrible change for the worse? All sexual restraint would be broken.

*Dr. R:* You know quite well, as a father confessor, that all the adulterous women that go to confession—and there is quite a number of them—are religious. It is also a well-known fact that by far the greatest number of prostitutes are not only superstitious, but religious. And the vast majority of men who indulge in illicit sexual relations, ante- or extra-marital, are certainly not freethinkers or atheists. In brief, religion does not seem to act as an effective check against what you call sexual immorality. You know even priests and even the popes themselves in the middle ages. . . .

*Father L:* Yes, yes, but wouldn't there be much greater looseness than there is now? Wouldn't sexual immorality become universal?

*Dr. R:* *Mon bon père*, this is a point I cannot

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well discuss with you, for as you know, in the sexual sphere, what you consider as immoral may not be immoral according to my code of ethics. Most likely there would be more of so-called illicit indulgence; monogamy would be less iron-clad; and divorce would be a much simpler matter; but whether this would constitute an evil or a good, will always depend upon one's point of view. But as I dislike hypocrisy in any cause, I will admit that with the break up of religious orthodoxy there will be much greater freedom in sex relations, between men and women.

And here our conversation for that evening ended.

## Chapter Six

### FAITH AND HAPPINESS, OR THE PRAGMATIC VALUE OF RELIGION

IT WAS a week before I saw Father L. again. Both he and I were very busy. But the other evening we met once more, and our discussion, which seemed to interest my young clerical friend more than it did me—I had traversed that road so many times in my youth—was resumed.

*Father L:* Leaving aside the question of the truth of divine religion, on which point we shall never agree, don't you admit that, true or false, religion contributes greatly to the happiness of mankind? That thousands, nay, millions of men and women would be much more unhappy than they are but for the comfort and the consolation of religion? Would you not greatly increase the sum-total of human misery if you took away from people their religion? In other words, do you not admit the great, incalculable, what you Americans call, pragmatic value of faith in a

supreme being, in a divine power, in an eternal and omnipotent God?

*Dr. R:* I should be the last person in the world to deny what is so evident to every observer, that faith is a great comfort and support to numberless men and women. I know cases where the only thing that prevented a mother, for instance, from going to pieces at the death of a beloved and only son, was the belief that it was God's will, that God knew what he was doing and we had no right to grumble or to question his ways; that belief, as well as the hope that she and her son would meet in heaven, helped her, strengthened her, allowed her to carry on. I also imagine that death must be less of a terror to the sincere and loyal believer who has no sins on his conscience than it is to the unbeliever—except if he belong to the stoic philosophers—who knows or believes that death ends it all.

But there is another side to the medal. For every good believer who is at peace with the deity because he has always followed God's commands and has no sins to burden him, there are ten or a hundred believers who live in constant anxiety, in fear of future punishment, because they have



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committed some sin (which from a moral standpoint may not be a sin at all) or have violated some silly taboo of which all religions are full to overflowing. There are just as many childish, utterly silly taboos in the Christian, Jewish and Mussulman religions as there are in the primitive, idol worshipping savage myths. And for one profoundly religious believer who meets death with serenity because he has lived strictly according to the behests of his religion, has no sins to answer for and therefore expects to spend the rest of eternity in paradise, there are hundreds or thousands who meet death in cowardly trembling, because they have some sins on their conscience and are afraid that they will roast in hell.

No, taking everything into consideration, I believe that, on the whole, the freethinker, be he pantheist, agnostic or atheist, the man who has liberated his mind of the belief in an anthropomorphic, vengeful God, has broken the shackles of superstition and taboo, is a happier, more peaceful-minded person. He has not the comforts of religion, but neither has he its terrors—and the latter generally outweigh the former. He has not

the hope of heaven, but neither has he the terror of hell.

And even you, Father L, will have to admit, in the abstract at least, that a freethinker, or non-believer, who leads a righteous, socially useful and even self-sacrificing life, is a more moral man than the believer who leads such a life because he expects a reward or is afraid of punishment. It seems to me that a man *who is good because he is good*, is better than a man who is good because he expects an eternal bouquet or wishes to avoid hellfire. Don't you think so?

Father L. smiled. "You are a skillful dialectician," was all he said. And at this point, our good-natured discussion on that evening came to an end.

## Chapter Seven

### THIS MARVELOUS UNIVERSE: WHO CREATED IT?

ONE evening, standing on the balcony, looking up at the myriad stars in the southern sky, Father L. said: "Isn't it all marvelous?"

"Marvelous?" I answered, "So marvelous that one's head begins to swim, one gets dizzy if he permits himself to think about it deeply and long. And for this reason I force myself not to think about the mystery and marvel of the universe—especially as thinking does not lead anywhere. The ultimate mystery of the universe, its beginning, its *how*, we will probably *never* uncover."

*Father L.*: So you recognize that there is a marvel and a mystery in the creation of the world? I thought the world to you was a simple, material thing and nothing more.

*Dr. R.*: To me the world is full of mysteries and of marvels. There are myriads of them. We are surrounded by them on every side. We can-

not open our eyes or our ears without being struck by profound mysteries, by unexplainable marvels, by riddles that strain our brain to the exhaustion point. We are used to the things, because we see them every day, and therefore they no longer amaze us; but when we begin to think of them, when we try to fathom their essence—we stand as nonplussed as the most primitive of savages. We have some idea of the *proximate* causes of things, we have learned to handle some of the forces of nature and we have made them serve us, but of their *essence*, we know no more than we did one hundred thousand years ago. I turn into this room which is pitch dark; I lightly push a button and the room is flooded with light. Of course, we are all used to it, and we no longer pay any attention to it; to me it is just as much of a marvel as it ever was, and it never fails to excite my admiration. The same is true, as far as I am concerned, of the telephone, phonograph, cinema and, most marvelous of all, the radio with its constant improvements. Just think of it: you barely touch a key and in less than half a second the effect of it is felt in Australia. Yes, we have learned to handle electricity and the ether, but

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as to their real essence, as I said, we know nothing, and probably shall never know anything. We are nearer now to the mystery of the atom than we were ever before—and when we know all about the atom and the electron, we shall still know nothing.

But it is not at all necessary to go and look for marvels and mysteries in the latest wonderful discoveries of the human mind—everything before us, everything in nature, every blade of grass, every flower, every insect, every ameba is a marvel and a mystery. When I was quite young, and by this I mean between five and twelve years of age, the *why* of things was always with me. Why should one flower be red, another one white, a third violet, etc.? Why should such a flower have so many sepals and petals, another one so many stamens and pistils, etc.? Of course, we were told that it is all heredity; seeds from roses will yield roses, violets—violets, orchids—orchids, etc. But what was it that caused the different varieties of flowers and why? And why should seeds be able to suck up from the same soil such different, such wonderfully varied and variously combined coloring matters? No theory of evolu-

tion, no natural selection can ever explain the variety of shapes and coloring of the millions of varieties of vegetable life; no more than they can explain the flea and the hippopotamus, the colibri and the elephant, the ant and the whale, the guinea pig and Isaac Newton, the gibbering chimpanzee and Albert Einstein. We know they are here, oh, yes that we know very well, we know their mode of life, etc., but how and why they came about—about all this we know nothing. Nothing but unsatisfactory guesses, not very plausible theories. To me, at least, they are nothing but guesses, and very unsatisfactory ones at that. And when we come to the mode of life of certain animals—bees, ants (the white termites), beavers, salmon and so forth, we are utterly in the dark as to the *how* of it. The migration and spawning of fish, the exodus of the fresh water eels to the center of the Atlantic ocean to deposit their eggs and sperm, the antics of the famous South Sea Palolo worm who appears on the surface of the ocean but once a year, and namely always at the last quarter of the November moon, etc., etc., always filled me with amazement. We speak of instinct—but that word is

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merely a cover for our ignorance. What is instinct? How did it come about? Who first instilled it into the respective animals? No answer. And though the question as to what came first, the chicken or the egg, always excites derision, as if it were a silly or a childish question, it is really a very profound and a very important question, and until we can answer it scientifically, satisfactorily, we will remain in ignorance as to the nature, the beginning, the how of this marvelous universe.

I visited yesterday the aquarium at Monte Carlo, or rather, Monaco. It does not come up to our aquarium in New York. No other aquarium does. But that is not the point. When I looked at the various fishes and other deep water creatures, when I visualized the wonderfully colored and crazily shaped living things in the aquaria of New York and Honolulu, I felt that no theory of evolution has so far furnished a satisfactory explanation of this multiplicity and diversity of life. Why should this fish be flat and round like a pancake and have the colors of a peacock, while the one yonder is as long and thin as a snake and of the color of mud?

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I passed this morning the tall cactus plant on the veranda. It had a number of muddy green warts on its surface, to which I gave a passing glance. They looked exactly like ugly warts. I passed an hour later, *Just one hour later*, and a number of those ugly warts were opened up and metamorphosed into *beautiful*, multicolored, very long petaled flowers. I stood there in amazement. And as I stood and stood there and admired nature's handiwork, which no human hand and brain could duplicate, several more of these "warts" which were the cactus buds, began to open up before my very eyes. And this unfolding of the cactus flower, the rapid conversion of an insignificant wart into a thing of marvelous beauty filled me with wonder and awe. I could have kneeled before this marvel—if I were a believer I would have.

I often stand in deep ecstasy before a sunset, such as we have in summer in Capbreton, for instance; but there isn't that element of mystery, of the marvelous, in it that there is in the unfolding of a flower. The sunset is a thing of indescribably marvelous beauty—such as no painter can ever dare hope to reproduce, but the colors



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are conditioned by physical laws which are well understood. But when one thinks of the mysterious power which at a given moment forces the bud to open up and to become a flower—or the power that makes the chick peck at the shell of the egg and break its prison just at the right hour—one cannot help being overawed, or at least amazed, or nonplussed. And when one looks closely and deeply into the facts of physical heredity only—amazement overwhelms him.

Examine or think of the spermatozoon, of that minute, invisible to the naked eye, speck of matter, thousands of which could be placed comfortably on the head of a pin, an utterly insignificant, featureless, characterless bit of protoplasm, a hundred million of which are thrown off in each ejaculation, though only one of them takes part in the fertilization of the ovum. Examine the spermatozoa of a thousand or of a million men under the most powerful microscope that we possess. They all look alike. Analyze them chemically—all show the same chemical composition. And yet, each of these specks carries in itself the full physical characteristics and many of the intellectual and spiritual qualities of the man

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who has secreted them. It is incredible, incomprehensible, we stand amazed before the fact, but a fact it is, that each minute spermatozoon is a minute but complete replica of the man! Here spermatozoon No. 1 has fertilized an ovum; the result is a human being with a white skin, blond hair, blue eyes, an aquiline, highbridged nose, fine, slender hands, nearly six feet tall, and showing, as he grows up, a remarkable talent both for mathematics and for music. And he has a peculiar little dimple, almost a little hole in the lobule of the left ear. Spermatozoon No. 2 has fertilized an ovum, and the result is a child who as a man is five feet two inches in height, has coal black hair, black bushy eyebrows, black eyes, a big fleshy nose, short stubby fingers, and shows no talent for science, for music or for anything else. Now, why this difference? Very simple, Spermatozoon No. 1 came from a man who had a white skin, blond hair, blue eyes, an aquiline, highbridged nose, fine slender hands, was six feet tall, had a deep little depression in the lobule of his left ear, and was very proficient both in mathematics and music. While spermatozoon No. 2 came from a man who was five feet tall, had coal black hair

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and eyes, a big fleshy nose, short stubby fingers, and had no talent for anything except selling real estate. And so with every spermatozoon. We can find no difference between spermatozoa No. 3, 4, and 5, and yet No. 3 results in a child who grows up a big negro of enormous strength, No. 4 into a delicate little Jap, and No. 5 into a red Indian. And so forth, and so forth. The fact that each speck of protoplasm constituting the spermatozoon carries in itself all the potentialities of the future man and woman, and that each adult man carries in himself, in his testes and seminal vesicles, billions of complete replicas of himself, always filled me and always will fill me with unutterable wonder, amazement and awe.

And what do we know of the essence of human feelings? Love, for instance. What do we know about the real essence of the love of one sex for another? Those who claim that love is merely sexual craving, "an appetite needing assuagement" do not know what they are saying. Sex is at the foundation of love, but it is only a part, a small part of it. If love were nothing but sex craving, the problem of the sexes would be a very simple one. Any woman would satisfy any man

and vice versa. We would not have the emotional storms, the sex tragedies, the unappeasable agonies, the murders and the suicides that are witnessed in every civilized country and which constitute the most eagerly devoured pabulum in our daily press.

And even when we say sexual craving, sex urge, do we really explain anything? The words stand for a fact, but has the *how* of the fact been accounted for? How and why did the sex urge come to be and how did it come to gain such a power, such an overmastering dominance?

And when I regard these myriads of sparkling stars, each one a universe in itself, each one inhabited by living creatures—the most elementary common sense, the most mediocre reasoning faculty cannot assume or presume that just only our grain of sand called the earth, has life on it and all other universes are dead and empty—when I regard the milky way, then, indeed, my head begins to turn and I get a sense of dizziness at the mystery and marvel of it all.

*Father L:* And yet, permeated as you are with the feeling that this is a marvelous universe, that we are surrounded by mystery on all sides, sens-

## THIS MARVELOUS UNIVERSE

ing as you do the wonder of it all, you refuse to recognize a Creator, who is responsible for it all, who has created it all!

*Dr. R:* I do not see that the assumption of a creator advances us in the slightest degree towards the solution of the mystery. The question that I used to ask in my early adolescence, "who created the Creator?" still remains unanswered. To say that the Creator has created himself seems the supreme acme of absurdity. Even in the stage of adolescence, my reason told me that that was an absurd answer, *for nothing can create itself*. If you will say God has always existed, so why can we not say the universe with all its marvels and mysteries has always existed? In what way do you explain the universe any better than we do? On the contrary, by assuming—without any proofs or reasonable arguments to substantiate your assumption—an Intelligent Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Omniscient, Anthropomorphic and Anthropocentric Creator, you only complicate the mystery. You only make confusion more confounded, and you prepare a rich soil for superstition and for countless terrors and taboos. We can do much better without him.

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I have not the slightest desire to make a convert of you, to persuade you to my way of thinking, but as an honest man, don't you admit that there is logic in my reasoning, that I have an intellectual and moral right to my belief or, if you wish to call it so, my non-belief? Briefly my argument is this: If a power which you call God has created itself or himself, which power afterward created the universe, then the universe could have created itself. If the power that you call God did not create itself or himself but *always* existed, then we can say that the universe also *always existed*.

As to the argument that we have no right to discuss the question of the origin of God, the man who makes this statement puts himself out of the pale of intelligent human beings and with him we really have nothing to argue. We maintain that there is no question too sacred for discussion. Only falsehoods are afraid of analysis. Truth is not afraid of the fiercest light.

## Chapter Eight

### WHERE OUR DISCUSSION TOOK PLACE

THOUGH not very relevant to the subject I will state right here that these discussions with Father L. took place in one of the loveliest gems of the French Riviera, namely Mentone, where I sought refuge from the drizzly, wet atmosphere of the Paris winter. Paris is the loveliest city in the whole world, but I do not like its winters, even though they are not so severe as our winters in New York. The Abbé L. had some obstinate bronchial trouble with a suspicion of tuberculosis, and he was sent to spend the months of January, February and March in the mild climate of Mentone. Our discussions generally took place in the open air, either in the garden of my hotel or in the *jardin public*; sometimes on the balcony of my room; and it was on the balcony of my room with the azure cloudless sky above me and the equally azure rippleless Mediterranean in front of me that I penned most of these notes.

## IF I WERE GOD

The next time I saw Father L. was in a professional capacity. I was called up at 2 A. M. The message was that Father L. begs my pardon for disturbing me, but would appreciate it deeply if I would call on him, as he was suffering great agony. I dressed immediately and went. He lived but two blocks away in a modest hotel. I found him bathed in a cold sweat with an expression of agony on his face, twisting and rolling on the floor, and muttering a prayer. I asked him where the pain was, and had no difficulty in making the diagnosis of renal colic. In ten minutes he was relieved of his pain and I helped him to his bed. I asked him what he considered more efficient in the relief of renal colic—prayer, or the injection I gave him. He answered: God has his own ways of relieving pain.—“But can you find any special reason why he should want you to have such pain?” He smiled but did not answer. Father L.’s sickness lasted several weeks; the renal colic was followed by pyelitis, and it took energetic treatment before the pus disappeared from the urine. During that time I visited him almost daily, and in a perfectly friendly manner we discussed various topics, chiefly, though



## WHERE OUR DISCUSSION TOOK PLACE

not exclusively, of a religious character. I told him that I did not have the slightest desire to convert him to my point of view, but if we did discuss, I felt obliged to speak and present the truth as I saw it, even if it did hurt his feelings. We were either not to discuss any religious questions at all, or we were to discuss them with perfect freedom, as we would discuss any other questions. He said he did not mind how freely I spoke; he believed in my uprightness and sincerity and he was interested in hearing the arguments as presented personally by an earnest freethinker.

And so our discussions continued, sometimes while basking in the sun in the Public Gardens, sometimes while sipping a soft drink at the *Casino Municipal*, but generally while walking leisurely along the Promenade du Midi along the shore of the blessed Mediterranean. Sometimes we would prolong our promenade along the Baie de Garavan to the very frontier of Italy where several armed black-shirted fascists were keeping guard and demanded your passport and visa if you wanted to cross the sacred line and enter the once pleasant and hospitable, but now rowdy and terrorized land of Mussolini. I used to love to

listen to his soft, caressing voice with the slightly Marseillesian accent (pronouncing the silent e at the end of words), sometimes wondering how a perfectly sane mind could believe things which were to me supreme absurdities, and affording me additional proof of the belief that the brain consisted of separate logic-tight compartments which permit a person to be perfectly logical on some subjects and practically insane on others.

On one point we agreed: in our dislike of Mussolini, whose braggadocio and war menacing gestures filled him with as much disgust as they did me. And his gentle nature also caused him to dislike war.—Once, while walking on the Promenade du Midi, we met several one-armed men (there are a great many of these in France, and they are known as *Manchots*) and one man who had lost both legs and one arm and was wheeled in a little barrow—all of them victims of the war. And so we naturally began to discuss the last war and war in general. And I said that if there was one thing which would simply *not let me* believe in an omnipotent and all-wise and all-loving God, it was the existence of war, and I added the further rather bromidic remark that

## WHERE OUR DISCUSSION TOOK PLACE

if I were God this would be a quite different, a much better and happier world.

“If you were God,” he said slowly. “I would be interested in reading a concise statement from you picturing the world as you would have made it if you had been God.” It was time to return to our respective hotels, for luncheon hour was near. And I told him that I had a free evening, that that morning I had mailed all the manuscript for the *April Critic and Guide*, and that it would give me pleasure to write out a little essay on the subject and to submit it to him. The next morning, I brought him the pages that follow, and which are making Part II of this little book.



## **PART TWO**

The belief in an Omnipotent and benevolent God derives much of its popularity from the gratifying importance that it confers upon human life. We know that our lives are immensely insignificant. We know this for a fact, and yet the knowledge is to most of us intolerable. We cannot endure that we should be of no account to anybody, and it is a natural process, therefore, to invent an immensely important and powerful being whose main purpose it is to watch over our welfare, and to guide and assist our footsteps. We conceive him as a terribly jealous and watchful gentleman, who carefully notes down the misdeeds of our enemies with a view to settling their accounts in an after life, and as carefully registers our own unrequited merit with a view to settling our account in somewhat different terms. In war time he inevitably takes the same view of the rights and wrongs of the dispute as we do ourselves and can be relied upon in due course to see that right coincides with might. By making our lives and welfare a matter of interest and care to a being of such tremendous importance, we undoubtedly add to the significance of human life: and when we tack on the notion that this Being has expressly created us in his own image, even the demands of human conceit are in a fair way to being satisfied.—JOAD.

## Chapter Nine

### IF I WERE GOD

*Si j'étais Dieu.*

Si j'étais Dieu, la mort serait sans proie,  
Les hommes seraient bons, j'abolirais l'adieu,  
Et nous ne verserions que des larmes de joie  
Si j'étais Dieu.

Si j'étais Dieu, de beaux fruits sans écorces  
Mûriraient; le travail ne serait plus qu'un jeu,  
Car nous n'agirions plus que pour sentir nos forces,  
Si j'étais Dieu.

Si j'étais Dieu, pour toi, celle que j'aime,  
Je déploierais un ciel toujours frais, toujours bleu,  
Mais je te laisserais, ô mon ange, la même,  
Si j'étais Dieu.

SULLY PRUDHOMME.

THE GOD of the sincere orthodox believer is an omnipotent, all-wise and loving God. There are no limitations whatever to his power to do anything that he wants to do, and he loves mankind with a boundless love. In fact, as so many believers express it, *God is Love*. If he is omnipotent and loving—and we cannot imagine him other-

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wise, for if he were not omnipotent, he could not have created the world, and if he were not filled with love for mankind, we could not worship him; in other words, if he were not omnipotent and loving, he would not be God—then there are certain things which are quite incomprehensible, which deserve the severest criticism, and which I would have managed quite differently, if I were God.

If I had been God in the first instance, I would have managed things quite differently, and if God gave me his omnipotence for an hour, I would eliminate many horrible things for which he is responsible. For one thing we must admit: God being omnipotent, and *nothing* in the universe taking place without his knowledge and consent, *nothing* being capable of existence without his creative power, he must be held responsible for *everything*.

Yes, if I were God, I would eliminate many senseless, horrible things, and the first thing I would eliminate from the universe, or rather from the human race, would be Cruelty. Can you think what an enormous difference it would make, how much incalculable misery would dis-



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appear at once, if cruelty were eliminated from the human heart? There are people now, and there always have been some, to whom the idea, the sentiment of cruelty is so abhorrent as to be quite unthinkable in connection with them. Not only could they not be cruel and cause suffering to a child or to an adult man and woman, they could not be cruel to any living thing, no matter how humble in the animal scale. There are such human beings; now, why could not *all* mankind, every human being be that way? God being omnipotent, capable of creating or not creating anything, why could he not have created a human race without any cruelty in its character? See what it would have eliminated—it would have eliminated all war. A man being incapable of being cruel, of causing suffering to another human being, would certainly be incapable of sticking a bayonet into him; and of shattering him with a bullet; so there would have been no wars or wholesale murders! Also, there would have been no private murders. Also, there would have been no such infamous institutions as the Spanish and other Inquisitions where people were tortured most horribly and then slowly roasted to

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death. There would have been no dark dungeons into which human beings were thrown down and made to undergo indescribable agonies for years and years, often forgotten in their living graves until driven insane or released by death.

See what horrible misery mankind would have escaped during the past hundred thousand years, if God, in creating man had created him without the ingredient of cruelty in his make-up. And do you really think, does anyone think, that it was a fine, decent, sporting thing of God to do to create men cruel, so that they may cut one another's throats, murder one another retail, slaughter one another wholesale, and cause one another unspeakable physical tortures and unutterable mental agonies? Would a *loving* father, who could do otherwise, deliberately engender children who would hate, fight and murder one another? Would he? No, decidedly it was not a fine, sporting thing in God to create so many men with a cruel make-up, when it would have been *just as easy* (bear in mind the word *omnipotent*) to create all men kindhearted and generous.

And I say again: If I were God, the first thing

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I would abolish, eliminate, annihilate, would be Cruelty. I think and think and think, and cannot think of a single thing, a single circumstance where cruelty was, is or ever could be of the smallest bit of use. I know we are told that God's ways are inscrutable and that we must not criticize and try to understand; yet, Reason has been given us in order that we may try to understand, and on this point I must be firm; and I must say that anybody who dares to try to make us believe that there is some good in cruelty is either an ignoble sophist or—pardon me—just a fool.

And, before I go any further, I wish to make one point clear: I am not writing this for the sake of facetiousness or ribaldry. I often laugh at a man's political or social-economic creed. I never laugh at a man's religious opinions, childish or idiotic as these may be. For my own religious ideas were once childish and I know how deeply I felt about them and I therefore know how other people cherish theirs. No, I am jotting down these thoughts in all earnestness, and even *reverence*, for the purpose of making people think; for the purpose of making them adopt, if possible, a gentler, finer, more generous

and more loving God than the one they have been worshipping. As each man creates his God in his own image, perhaps on giving the matter earnest thought, they will be shocked at their own images, and at the God they have created for themselves, and will attempt to change both.

So, then, to say it once more, the first thing I would utterly abolish, banish from men's hearts, would be Cruelty. And I wish to say that Cruelty applies to the human race only. Animals and even the so-called ferocious beasts are not cruel. And when we speak of beastly cruelty, as cruel as a beast, it is a libel on the beast. When a carnivorous beast is hungry, it pounces upon its victim, kills it and is done with it; it does not cunningly devise tortures and agonies lasting for days, weeks and years. And except perhaps in the case of the cat and the mouse, we cannot speak of cruelty in animals. Cruelty is a specific human attribute with which the omnipotent God in his loving-kindness has endowed mankind.

The thing next to cruelty that I would eliminate is Hate. Hate is not synonymous with cruelty. A man can be cruel without hating, and a man can hate without being cruel. But hate is

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a vile thing, poisoning human relations, noxious alike to the hater and the hated. And why millions of people should go about with hate in their hearts, hating their neighbors, hating even their closest relatives—there is no hatred more intense than that which prevails in some families—is a mystery that only God, who is all loving-kindness, can solve. But he does not seem to be willing to solve it for us, and we are fully entitled to ask: Couldn't the omnipotent, all-loving God have filled the human heart with love instead of with hate? Being omnipotent, the one would have been just as easy for him as the other. So why choose Hate instead of Love? It seems kind of contradictory or inconsistent in a God that is all Love. Don't you think so?

I say, "I would eliminate," "I would abolish." I use this tense assuming that I was to become God now. But if I had been God in the first instance, if I had had the job from the very beginning, before it was given to the present God, I simply would not have created those ugly things, Cruelty and Hate, along with many other horrible monsters which we will discuss presently, and I would therefore not feel under the neces-

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sity of eliminating or abolishing them. There would be nothing ugly or cruel to eliminate or to abolish.

Along with Hate I would eliminate—or would have non-created—racial and religious antagonisms. Hate and hatred is directed against a definite person or persons, for definite reasons, stupid and false as these reasons may be. Racial and religious antagonism is hatred directed against an entire race, nation or religious confession—just stupid antagonism without any sense or reason. Again, I, with my poor reason, fail to see why he had to instill such a thing into the hearts of men. How much bloodshed, how much misery, how much destruction has been caused by just this one thing—racial and religious antagonism? Being omnipotent, could he not have created international amity and universal friendship instead?—Personally, if I had been God to start with, I would have made but one race, one nation. But if for some inscrutable reason the present God thought it necessary to create several races or nations, or to diversify the one original human race into several branches, he certainly could have made them live in mutual

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love and respect; instead of as at present in mutual hatred. No, that was not nice of him at all, and I'll say that, no matter what the priests may say to the contrary, no matter what sophistical arguments they may use. It was not nice of him at all to make several races and then make them fly at each other's throats. Not nice, God.

If I had been God, I should certainly not have been so cruel as to create the cruellest of all human emotions—sexual jealousy. Of all the sensations the human soul is capable of, none can cause such horrible agonies, such exquisite torture, such incurable, unsoothable suffering as can sexual jealousy. And I fail to see why it was necessary to create such a sentiment in the human heart. Those who try to find reasons and excuses for God's cruellest blunders say that sexual jealousy was useful and even necessary, because it was instrumental in establishing monogamy.

To this we reply, First—it has failed to do it. There is no country in the world in which real monogamy prevails. There is secrecy, there is hypocrisy, but no real monogamy. Second—it is a question if monogamy is really the best and *only* form of sex relationship for all people.

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Third, it, i.e., jealousy, has broken up more homes than it has held together. Fourth—if monogamy could be established only by a cruelly ferocious sentiment which leads to nameless agony, to suicide and to murder, then the game was not and is not worth the candle. Fifth—God, being omnipotent (never fail to bear this in mind) could very easily have established monogamy by other means than that of sexual jealousy. He could have instilled into the human heart such a strong monogamous feeling that once married, the man and the woman could simply have no desire for or thoughts of any other woman or man. Now, couldn't he have done that? Also, he could have arranged it so that love should always be mutual. So that there would be no case of unrequited love. *Also*, that no person could fall in love with another person whose heart was already otherwise engaged. How much misery would have been avoided!

**FEAR.** I have been trying for a long time to find some use for fear, but my efforts have remained utterly fruitless. No man can be a happy man or a good man as long as he is afraid. No



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woman, no child can. I would eliminate every trace of fear—do not confound fear with prudence—from the heart of every man, woman and child that walks on earth.

“But people must have fear of something!” Why must they? Where is the good in it? “They must fear God.” Why must they? Isn’t it better that they should just love him and not fear him? Which children generally grow up better men and women—those that love and respect their parents and obey them out of love and respect, or those that tremble before their parents and do what they are told out of fear of punishment? No, there is no reason at all why we should *fear* God, and only a cruel, sadistic God would want his children to fear him. A loving parent does not want his children to fear him, and a loving God would not want it either. “People must be afraid of God, afraid of punishment, otherwise they would be cruel, would commit many sins and crimes.” Why would they, if God, instead of cruelty and hate, had filled their hearts with gentleness and love? No, there is no reason, excuse or use for fear. It is a cruelly noxious sentiment, and if I were God, I would obliterate

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it so completely that not a trace of it would remain. And, of course, if I had been God from the beginning, Fear would not have been one of my creations. The human race would not know what fear means, what the word signifies.

And so, out of sentiments or what some people call instincts, I would eliminate, or would have guarded against creating, the above five: Cruelty, Hate, Racial Antagonism, Jealousy and Fear. I would obliterate every trace of them. Instead of cruelty, I would fill every human heart with gentleness and kindness, instead of hate—affection, instead of racial antagonism—mutual respect and amity, instead of jealousy—perfect love and confidence, instead of fear—courage. How much happier, how much more decent a world this would have been!

But a number of other changes would be necessary before this could be a perfect world. I do not know just what God was about when he created the earth and its most important inhabitant, man. He must have been nodding. He certainly was not fully awake, or, loving mankind as he does, he could not have created so many cruel, ugly things which make man's life a nightmare, and in

many cases, a continuous torture from the cradle to the grave.

POVERTY. Why, for instance, has he created poverty? Why should people suffer the gnawing pangs of hunger, or be forced to eat poor, monotonous food, why should they wear shameful rags and be obliged to live in dark, cramped hovels or to wander about and sleep in the streets? What would you think of a father who would throw some of his children into the street to beg or starve or to become criminals? What would you think of such a father, particularly if you knew that the father had everything in abundance and that he could supply all his children, if he so wanted, with everything in plenty? Why couldn't God have arranged matters so (don't forget that he is *omnipotent*), that everybody without exception should have sufficient food, the necessary clothes according to climate and a decent comfortable shelter? I do not say he should have furnished this to everybody without their working for it. On the contrary, work is good for man, and complete idleness is perhaps worse than too much work. But God certainly could have man-

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aged it so that every human being might have his congenial work—which should give him a decent living, without fear of anybody, without dependence on anybody. Poverty is a vile thing which makes people mean, small, sordid, avaricious—and now and then directly leads to crime. And so, I would abolish poverty. It was not a fine, generous God who has permitted poverty to exist for so many millions of years, and if I were God, I would obliterate every trace of it.

LUXURY. But along with poverty, I would also abolish luxury, excessive wealth. Poverty is bad; excessive wealth is also bad. It leads to idleness, to vice, to crime, to *Power*, which is a dangerous thing in the hands of most men; for in the greatest majority of instances, power leads to oppression, to enslavement, to injustice. And it is really difficult, if not impossible, for the most reverent of men, for the most sincere believer, to think of God as Just, when he sees the terrible wretchedness, the heart-breaking poverty on the one hand, and the wasteful, exhibitionistic wealth and luxury on the other. And it is the source of that vile institution—slavery. Even

now, when slavery as an institution has been abolished, the poor man is practically a slave. And without any fault of the poor, without any merit of the rich. A really just God could not have done such things with his senses fully alert. As I said, he must have been nodding when he permitted such unjust inequality: some men to die of hunger, and others to burst from excess.

GERMS. If I were God, I would at once destroy, utterly annihilate all pathogenic or disease breeding germs. I cannot see of what use, what service they are to humanity. What motive guided God when he created the germs of diphtheria, scarlet fever, whooping cough, tuberculosis, tetanus (or lockjaw), cancer (if the cause of cancer is a germ) and numerous others, is to me an unsolvable mystery. Bear in mind that we are talking from the point of view of man. A germ may be as important to itself as man is to himself, but it is for man and not the germ that we hold the brief—in this discussion. I cannot see the *human* purpose of the Klebs-Loeffler bacillus, the bacillus which causes diphtheria. I do not see why God should have created it at all

and why he should have given it the right to steal into a child's throat, develop there a nasty membrane and strangle the child to death. I remember well a little sister I had; she was a lovely, beautiful child; everybody's delight. Suddenly she was struck down with that disease. How she suffered, how she choked, how painfully she struggled for breath! It was more than any one could stand. It was agony to watch her. Diphtheria antitoxin had not yet been invented, the doctor in the small town could perform no tracheotomy or intubation, and so the child struggled for days until it died in dreadful agonies. I was then nine or ten years old. I asked my religious father, why the good God did such a thing. He said we must not ask such questions; the good God knew the reason, but nobody else could know it. I remember that this answer did not satisfy me, young as I was. I know the answer that a priest gave when asked the same question in a similar case. "God's ways are inscrutable. Perhaps he took that child away in order to save her greater suffering when she grew up; perhaps she would have been a great sinner or a criminal; and so he took her away when she was still innocent, and her soul was pure

and free from sin." Can you fathom the depth of the perversity of a mind that would invent such an excuse or would be satisfied with such an answer? God choked the little girl to death at the age of two and a half in order to save her from suffering or sin when she grew up! But why should she suffer and be a wretched sinner when she grew up, when everything depends on God? God being omnipotent, why couldn't he make her grow up a fine, lovely woman and live to a happy old age? And if he knew *and he did know*,—for God is omniscient—that that child would grow up a sinner and that in order to save her from sin he would have to choke the life out of her at the age of two, why did he create her at all? Why was it necessary that she be born at all? No, I can reason fairly calmly and preserve a judicial attitude in discussions, but certain arguments make me nauseous, and the above excuse for murdering children with diphtheria poison is one of them.

There is another excuse given for the existence of germs and of the diseases they cause. God created them in order to give the human intellect work, in order to make man search and

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find antidotes to overcome their ravages. This, also, is the excuse of a perverted mind. If germs and their diseases did not exist, there would be no necessity to search for antidotes and for weapons to overcome them. As to exercise for the human intellect, there are enough fields and opportunities for it, without the need of first causing untold human misery and then engaging it in the endeavor to overcome that misery. The human mind can exercise its power and ingenuity in such sciences as astronomy, mathematics, physics, chemistry, geology, botany etc., etc.—all splendid and enchantingly interesting fields and unconnected with human agony. The excuse is on a par with the argument that finds some good in War; some surgeons had the stupidity to assert that the millions of wounded in the war increased the knowledge of military surgery, hence war brings some benefit. Yes, but if there were no war, there would be no necessity for military surgery! As to the accidents in civil life, they are of a different character, and, besides, ninety per cent of all accidents are quite easily preventable. It is greed, rush and sadistic disregard of other people's safety that are responsible for



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most accidents, and all those factors can be eliminated.

The above referred to case of the beautiful child, choking to death from diphtheria, was one of the several factors that shook my faith in God's omnipotence, wisdom and love for the human race.

I remember a young man, who gave great promise and was the idol of his parents. He was moderate in all things, lived a hygienic life, and strictly "according to the laws of nature." Suddenly at the age of nineteen he contracted tuberculosis—nobody knows how—and in six months he was dead. And he was a sincerely religious young man, too. Now, why was it necessary? Why was it necessary to slay that young man at such an early age and strike his parents a blow from which they have never recovered?

I saw once a man afflicted with tetanus (lock-jaw). It was the only case I ever saw and I hope never to see another one as long as I live. The man, who was a working man and had worked very hard all his life, stepped on a rusty nail, and soon the symptoms of lockjaw showed themselves. The jaws were locked so tight that they

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could not be pried open in order to give him some food, or to administer medicine. He had such violent backward convulsions that the head touched his heels and it looked as if his spinal column would break. The chloral and the bromides that were administered per rectum had very little effect. Tetanus antitoxin was unknown yet—and so with a distorted face, a convulsed body, suffering agonies for several days, which would have drawn tears from a Spanish inquisitor like Torquemada, he expired. Now, what excuse is there for such villainy? Why cause a living being such agonies? I would not suffer a mouse to undergo such agonies; and yet here we see a “just,” “merciful,” “loving” God inflict such agonies on a poor human being who believed in him implicitly and who never caused any other being any harm. Is that right?

I trust that what I write will some day be published and be read by reasonable human beings, and I ask in all sincerity any reasonable or even half-reasonable man or woman: What would you think of any human father who would knowingly, deliberately inflict on a number of his children, some of them still infants, some adoles-

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cents, horrible, painful, disfiguring diseases which would carry off many of them into premature graves, before they have had a chance to enjoy or even to taste life? What epithet would you apply to such a father?

And it is not only individual disease. Why are there horrible epidemics, the plagues, the Black Deaths, the pests, the choleras that ravaged and decimated Europe in the fourteenth, seventeenth and other centuries, so that there were not enough people to bury the dead? What is the sense in creating life and then destroying it in torture and agony? Have you read a description of the plague or the Black Death? If you haven't, do so. Would a reasonable, loving, *human* being send such scourges on his fellow creatures? And if no decent human being would do such a thing, why should the All-Wise, All-Loving, Omnipotent God permit himself such amusements?

**DISEASES IN GENERAL.** What I said about germs and germ diseases applies, with almost, though not quite, the same force to disease in general. I say it does not apply with quite the

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same force, because germ diseases are always unmerited. The person who gets infected with a germ disease is always "innocent." While in the case of other diseases, the patient is sometimes to blame. For instance, if a man gets obese and sick from overeating and from too sedentary a life, it is more or less the man's own fault. God cannot be directly blamed for it. The same is true in the case of the excessive use of alcohol, addiction to narcotics, sexual excesses, etc. They are diseases induced by the person's own lack of will-power, and here God can only be blamed indirectly, for having endowed his favorite creation, Man, with such a weak will. But when diphtheria germs get lodgment in a child's throat, or tubercle bacilli in a man's lungs or brain or spinal marrow, the victims are not to blame; God alone is to blame. For this reason I separated the germ diseases from the other ills. But even in the case of the latter God could have been more kind, more generous. And if I were God I would certainly abolish by far the greater number of all diseases. I might retain just a few as a warning against foolish excesses.

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**PAIN.** Pain usually accompanies disease, but there is disease without pain, and there is pain, even atrocious pain without disease. I have searched diligently, but have failed to find any sense or reason in pain, and if I were God, I would abolish physical pain absolutely. Those philosophers who consider this the best of all possible worlds, and try to find an excuse for everything that *is*, no matter how self-evidently stupid, noxious and noisome the thing may be, find, of course, an excuse and a reason for pain also.

Pain, they tell us, is a danger signal, it warns us of the approach of disease; without the admonition that pain gives us, we would let ourselves go until the disease was too far advanced to be curable. Now, first of all, as I would abolish practically all disease, there would be no use of any danger signals to warn us of the approach of disease; second, if God created pain as a danger signal, why are there serious, life-endangering diseases which are not accompanied by pain? There are many cases of kidney disease, of heart disease, or diabetes, in which pain is no accompaniment, and we become aware of the existence

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of these diseases by other symptoms, sometimes accidentally, sometimes when it is too late to do anything. Third, what good does it do a patient with advanced cancer to suffer continuous, atrocious, excruciating pain? What is the pain a warning of? If God were really good, there would, of course, be no such a thing as cancer; but if for some inscrutable reason, he were determined to have a certain number of people afflicted with and die of cancer, he could at least let them die peacefully, painlessly. And, fourth, the greatest, the most excruciating pain a human being is called upon to endure is not with any disease at all, but in the accompaniment of a perfectly normal, physiological process, namely: Childbirth.

If I dared to enter into a heated argument with God, I would ask him respectfully but firmly to give me a straightforward, unequivocal answer why he had to accompany childbirth in the human female with such atrocious pain. Why? Having a child is no sin, so why should the mother suffer so? God himself wanted the human race to be fruitful, to multiply and replenish the earth, so why should he penalize the

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act of childbirth, why should it be accompanied by such excruciating suffering that many a woman who went through the experience once never wants to go through it again? Where is the sense and the reason of pain in labor? And the echo answers: nowhere. There is no sense and no reason in it, and therefore we poor humans are searching and searching to find out ways of diminishing or abolishing the pain, the atrocious, tearing, excruciating pain that God has inflicted upon woman who is but fulfilling a biological commandment: to perpetuate the human race.

**CRIME, SIN AND WAR.** This is perhaps the most important of all the topics we have discussed so far and it is necessary to examine it carefully without prejudice, but also without fear; we must go to the root of the matter, regardless of what conclusions we may reach. It is useless to discuss God unless we assume that God is Omnipotent, Omniscient and is lovingly interested in the human race. The Omnipotence is a *sine qua non*. If he is not omnipotent he is no God. But there is no difficulty in assuming his omnipotence. A being that has created himself,

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the boundless universe with its millions of worlds and with everything, living and non-living in them is certainly Omnipotent. He can do *everything*. And whatever he does is good. Whatever he does has a reason, and nothing that happens, happens without his knowledge, without his consent, without his will. Nothing can happen if he does not wish it to happen. Not a sparrow falls to the ground, not a hair falls from a man's head without God's will. If a man is tall or short, fat or slim, beautiful or ugly, wise or stupid, kind or vicious, saintly or criminal, a millionaire or a beggar, if he lives in a palace or pines away in a solitary prison cell, if he sits on a throne or dies in the electric chair, if he is an all-round athlete or is disfigured and eaten up with disease, if he lives to be a hundred or dies at the age of twenty, it is all *because God wills it so*. There is no way out of it.

Now, I will ask you another question: What would you think of a human father who acted with his children the way God acts with his? The father, whom we will call Mr. A., has fourteen children—ten sons and four daughters. It is *in the power* of Mr. A. to have all his children grow



up fine, noble, healthy and happy. But Mr. A. doesn't want to use his power for beneficent purposes; he lets the children grow up anyway they please and does not raise a finger to save them from disease, sin and crime. He looks on with perfect indifference. And here is the result. Of the four daughters, little Jeanne gets broncho-pneumonia and dies at the age of five. Margaret is carried off by rapid consumption at the age of twenty; Ernie falls into evil ways, becomes a prostitute and throws herself into the river at the age of thirty; only one of the daughters marries and lives a useful and fairly happy life.

Of the sons, one died in childhood of diphtheria, one died of general paralysis of the insane before he was thirty. Two of the sons became bitter enemies, fought frequently and finally they got at each other with knives, with the result that both were left dying on the ground, and both soon expired. One became a thief and a forger and spent many years in prison; one committed murder for the purpose of robbery, was caught and hanged. Of the four remaining sons, two became workmen who made a meager living but lived peacefully; one was a successful painter,

and one became a famous writer who not only wrote delightful books but devoted his life to the amelioration of mankind's lot.

Now, bear in mind that it was in the father's power to make all his children happy and useful men and women; and yet he did not want to do it, but for some reason he preferred the greater number of his children to live shamefully, miserably and to die horrible, shameful deaths. What do you think of such a father? Don't you consider him a horrible monster? To bring children into the world and then *condemn* them to a life of suffering and a death of horror—can there be any greater crime? And what shall we think of God who deliberately condemns *millions* of human beings to a life of hard labor, senseless drudgery, slavery both literally and practically, hunger, cold, disease, sin, crime, prison and violent death? What shall we think of a God who could, if he wanted to, make everybody fine, decent, useful and happy, and yet persists in wilfully condemning hundreds of thousands of people to be morons, idiots or vicious criminals?

There is no way out of the dilemma, and though the argument may have been used a thou-

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sand times, it has never been answered. And it hasn't been answered, because it is unanswerable. It is like this: Either God is Omnipotent, the controller of everything, the determiner of every happening, or he is not. If he is not, then he is no God, and you act childishly, as childishly as the primitive savage who worships his wooden idol, in worshipping and praying to him. If, however, he is Omnipotent, if he does control and is responsible for everything that takes place in the human race, then what shall we think of him? What shall we think of a god who creates, let us say, Johnny Smith (an actual example), who is born into a poverty-stricken family; he is put out into the street at an early age; he gets in with bad company, learns to steal, is sent to a Reformatory; he gets out hardened and venomous; can hold no job for any length of time, becomes a thief, and a burglar, passes several years in prison; on leaving prison, he resumes his old trade, is chased and caught by a policeman, in the ensuing struggle the policeman is killed and Johnny Smith ends his life, at the age of thirty, in the electric chair. What shall we think of a God who permits, who *does* such things? For

we agreed that he does everything and is responsible for everything. When he could just as well have had Johnny Smith grow up a fine, noble and happy man—ah, it is too damnable! Johnny Smith did not ask to be brought into the world, and to condemn an innocent human being to such a life of crime and misery—no, it is not Johnny Smith who is the criminal!

And what shall we think of a God who incites one nation against another, who makes dozens of nations fly at each other's throats until millions of the physically soundest men lie rotting in the ground, until fifty million are disfigured, mutilated and crippled, until billions of hard won material goods are destroyed, until hate fills and hangs over the world like a thick, black impenetrable cloud—what shall we think of a God that does such a thing? What was the sense of it? What was the reason? What the purpose?

I know that there are some men, ministers of God they call themselves, who try to find an excuse even for war; even for the last war. They say God brought about the war to punish men for their levity, for their sins; and they justify God; they find no word of criticism against him for

this most horrible of all crimes. Well, a man who will justify God for the last war, has such a low perverted mind, is himself such a cruel, sadistic degenerate, that no argument with him is possible. The idea of destroying and mutilating a hundred million men for their alleged sins, for sins which *God himself is responsible for*, for, of course, if he had wanted to, he could have prevented them! No, there is no excuse for the last war, there is no excuse for any war.

And no matter how you try, you *cannot* wriggle out of this dilemma; you are bound to take either of the horns: Either—and this is the more charitable horn of the dilemma—God is not omnipotent, but on the contrary, quite impotent, quite powerless to influence human affairs, to ameliorate the lot of humanity; in that case he is a useless God to whom to pray is just as futile as it is to pray to a wooden idol, or to a statue of the virgin Mary. Or, he *is* omnipotent, and he *could* prevent human misery and disease and crime and war, *could, but doesn't want to*—and in that case, he is such a cruel, malignant monster, that the *human* imagination recoils in horror. Which horn of the dilemma will you take?

There is no third way out for the believer. Of course, the non-believer who denies altogether the existence of God is not confronted with either horn of the above dilemma. But that is a point, the discussion of which we will leave for later.

In the meantime, I will say most emphatically that if I had been God from the very beginning, there would be no such a thing as crime, sin, or war, and if I were made God now, I would abolish these scourges, without leaving the faintest trace of them. And how much better, how much happier, how much more beautiful a world this would be!

There are a number of other things that I should not have created if I had been the creator of the Universe or that I would wipe out, abolish, uproot, if I were given the position of God now. Let us enumerate some of those evil things.

**SUPERSTITION.** Superstition is a noxious, poisonous weed which fills the victim with fear, with terror and gives the cunning fraud, the shrewd and unscrupulous priest, the power over the glib and the credulous. God, who has created the world and who knows that the universe is

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regulated by definite laws, knows very well that there are no miracles; he knows that there is no paradise and no hell,—and he should not have permitted the heads of the foolish and the ignorant to be terrorized by such nonsense. Every human intelligence should have been so saturated with the law of *cause and effect*, that a belief in miracles, in supernatural forces, in divine intervention, in Providence, were quite impossible; every mind should have been so constructed as to refuse belief in anything without adequate proof. For instance, if anybody talks about hell and purgatory and burning flames and eternal torment the listener should demand *proofs*. Where did the priest get his information? What proof can he offer that those things exist? How long would superstition, belief in hell, belief in the relics of saints, last, if people demanded *proofs* of the statements of their priests and leaders? Yes, I would abolish all superstitions and would instil into the people the law of cause and effect and the demands for proof.

CHURCH, RELIGION, INTOLERANCE. What I am going to say may, at first glance, appear rather strange; but it will be quite clear when I present

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my reasons. It may seem strange for God to object to church and to religion, yet if I had been God, I would have created neither church nor religion as the word is generally understood, and the world would have thus escaped the poisonous weed of intolerance resulting therefrom. God has need of neither church nor of any dogmatic religion, and the worship that men have rendered him, the worship with its human and animal sacrifices, its prostrations, genuflexions, prayers, processions, candles and so forth, are to him both ridiculous and obnoxious; and man needs neither church nor dogmatic ceremonial religion in order to believe in or to worship God. A silent thought in one's home, during work, while in bed or on the street, is sufficient. As God is omnipresent and omniscient, it is all the same to him where and when you worship him, whether you pray to him in words, sing to him in psalms or communicate with him in unuttered thoughts.

If church religion consisted merely of foolish ceremonies and childish trappings, one could overlook it. Let the infantile adults amuse themselves anyway they please, if in doing so they hurt nobody. But the great tragedy of mankind



is that out of this church religion grew the most frightful intolerance, so that religion became one of the greatest curses of humanity, perhaps its most deadly scourge. There was no refined form of cruelty, there was no dastardly villainy, there was no devilish torture, there was no cruel manner of death that was not practiced in the name of religion by people who considered themselves the guardians and priests of religion. The oceans of blood that have been shed in the name of religion cannot be measured or fathomed—they are too wide and too deep.

And though it be heartbreaking to say it, the truth demands that it be said: Of all the world's religions, the cruelest, the most pitiless has been Christianity. Not the founder of it is to be blamed; his disciples and followers bear the bloody guilt. The insane and inhuman Crusades, the Albigensian, Waldensian and Catharian massacres, massacres to complete extermination in which neither man nor woman nor infant was spared ("slay all, God will know his own"), the St. Bartholomew night of horrors, the inquisition in which thousands upon thousands of fine and innocent men were subjected to blood-curdling

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tortures, broken on the wheel and roasted to death, the dungeons and *oubliettes*, sometimes more cruel than death, which awaited anybody who dared to give expression to a new thought or to the hope of a better future, the fearful thirty years' war, etc., etc.—all these horrors were committed in the name of religion, by human beasts who claimed to be saintly and gentle followers of the gentle Jesus.

With a fair knowledge of universal history, I am bound to admit that no other religion has been responsible for so much suffering, so much cruelty, so much bloodshed as Christianity. It bears the heaviest blood guilt. And there is nothing to counterbalance it. In the history of the past two thousand years, there is not a *single* instance of a great humane act on the part of the church; there is not an instance where the church stood up boldly for the people to defend it against the robbery and oppression of the feudal barons or the kings. Even Luther took sides with the oppressors and advised the crushing of the peasants when they dared to demand a share of the fruits of their labor. Not once did the church stand up—and at a time when she had the power

to make nations obey her commands—and command peace instead of war. On the contrary, she encouraged war and blessed indiscriminately the banners of all warring Christian nations. In short, the church has never shown itself a real friend of humanity; at best it was hypocritical lip-service; but always boldly and openly it was on the side of the enemies of mankind, on the side of the robber barons, kings, emperors, czars or whatever title the tyrant oppressors happened to bear.

We are told by the church apologists that during the middle ages the priests and the monks kept up the torch of learning, that being the only literate people, they brought back the study of the classics. Historically speaking, this is about the most impudent statement that one could imagine. It is the church that retarded human progress at least one thousand years, it is the church that put a thick, impenetrable pall over the sun of learning and of science, so that humanity was enveloped in utter darkness, and if the priests and monks later learned to read and to write (from the Arabs, Jews and Greeks exiled from Constantinople after 1453), it is because they

wanted to keep the power in their hands; the people they did not permit to learn either to read or to write. *Even the reading of the bible, bear in mind, was considered a crime.* We are told that the priests and monks built hospitals and gave alms to the poor. Having gotten enormous tracts of the best land into their hands, so that the people were starving, they were willing to throw a bone occasionally to the latter. It cost them nothing, and it gave them a reputation for charity. They built enormous monasteries with well-filled cellars and lived on the fat of the land while the people lived in wretched hovels, working their lives away for a crust of bread. The beasts, the domestic animals lived a more comfortable life than did the men, women and children of the people. And the church never, never raised a finger to ameliorate their condition. It kept them in superstitious darkness and helped the temporal lords—for a long period the spiritual were also the temporal lords—to keep them in fear, subjection and slavery.

I have no Rabelaisian, Voltairean, Diderotean or d'Holbachian anti-church, anti-priest feeling. I know that there are sincerely religious

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people, lay and clerical, Catholic and Protestant, Jewish, Mohammedan, Buddhist, etc., who are perfectly humane and gentle and with whom I could well work together; but they are so not because, but in spite of their religion. And as an unbiased historian, I must maintain that organized religion, the organized church has always been the practically unmitigated curse of humanity.

And I have therefore very good reasons for saying that if I had been God to start with, I would have avoided, like the pest, religion and church. Love, kindness, justice, fair play are a good enough religion for everybody, and these things need no churches, no ceremonies, no dogmas, and certainly exclude every possibility of intolerance which has been the cause, one of the great causes, of Human Misery. If you, if anybody, can prove the contrary, I should like you or anybody to try it. I should like at least one clear, unimpeachable example where the church, when it had the power, stood up bravely to defend a people against and to free it from its oppressors; one single example where the church prevented a war, or stopped one, not merely ex-

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pressed a pious wish that Christians ought not to cut each other's throats, but actually commanded its followers to throw down their arms and to stop fighting—on the pain of excommunication. No, the church has never been pacifist. It was always militarist. And it stood by the side of, blessed and supported even such unspeakably loathsome, vilely criminal, boundlessly dishonorable creatures as Louis XV or Ferdinand Bomba! And I repeat and emphasize, the church has been a practically unmitigated curse to humanity. Its ministers have been enemies of the human race, cowards and corrupters. When a priest dared to stand up and to denounce the evil, he was burned—like Savonarola. And Calas and Chevalier de la Barre—I shall not give you their stories—they are too nerve-racking; but you may look them up if you are interested. No, God made one of his great mistakes when he permitted the church and organized religion to be born.

*And So . . .*

And so if I were God, Omnipotent, Omniscient, Loving God, I would have managed things

differently. I would not have permitted any cruelty in the world, which means in the human race; there would be no hate in it, no racial antagonism, no jealousy, no fear, no poverty, no excessive wealth, no infectious or other diseases, no pain, certainly no pain in childbirth, no crime, no war, no superstition, and no organized dogmatic religion with its religious intolerance which has been the cause of suffering incalculable and bloodshed immeasurable.

Don't you think, with all those evils eliminated, and their contraries taking their places, that this would be a much better, a much finer, a much nobler and a much happier world to live in? And if this is so, haven't I the right, walking on the shores of the Mediterranean, to think that God has botched his job most dreadfully? And haven't all of God's children, or the children born of woman, a right to grumble against God's blunders—against his incompetence, or what is still worse, his callousness?

If you think differently, I wish you would state your viewpoint, giving the *reasons* for your opinions, as I have given the reasons for mine.

\* \* \*

## IF I WERE GOD

When Father L. returned the manuscript the following day, I asked him if he found any weak spots in it, if he had any counter-arguments to make. And this was his answer:

“From the *human* point of view, your arguments are unanswerable. Its logic is sound and your reasoning has no flaws in it. But faith is stronger than reason, and whoever has faith is immune against all arguments. God may have other reasons, other purposes which we poor mortals are too small to understand or to grasp. His ways are inscrutable.”

What can one reply to such a statement?



## **PART THREE**

But it is not the minds of heretics that are deteriorated most by the ban placed on all inquiry which does not end in the orthodox conclusions. The greatest harm done is to those who are not heretics, and whose whole mental development is cramped and their reason cowed by the fear of heresy. Who can compute what the world loses in the multitude of promising intellects combined with timid characters who dare not follow out any bold, vigorous, independent train of thought lest it should land them in something which would admit of being considered irreligious or immoral? . . . No one can be a great thinker who does not recognize that as a thinker it is his first duty to follow his intellect to whatever conclusions it may lead. Truth gains more even by the errors of one who, with due study and preparation, thinks for himself than by the true opinions of those who only hold them because they do not suffer themselves to think. Not that it is solely or chiefly to form great thinkers that freedom of thinking is required. On the contrary, it is as much and even more indispensable to enable average human beings to attain the mental stature which they are capable of. There have been, and may again be, great individual thinkers in a general atmosphere of mental slavery. But there never has been, and never will be, in that atmosphere an intellectually active people.— J. S. MILL—*On Liberty*.

Much religion springs from the desire to lick the boots of some higher power, and apart altogether from the cruder conceptions of residence in heaven as a reward for belief and doing good, and in hell as a punishment for disbelief and doing ill, the identification of human goodness with the performance of God's will must necessarily tend to substitute as the motive for morality the desire to do God's will for the purer desire to do good as such.—JOAD.

## Chapter Ten

### ATHEISM VERSUS PANTHEISM

Little do these men know what Atheism is. Not one man in a thousand has either strength of mind or goodness of heart to be an Atheist. I repeat it—Not one man in a thousand has either goodness of heart or strength of mind to be an Atheist.—SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE.

\* \* \*

“It is not the truth that suffers from the most searching investigation. They suffer who will not undertake it, and who would hinder others from seeking it.”—REV. D. J. CLIFFORD.

MANY MORE were the discussions between Father L. and myself. In peaceful, lovely Mentone there was little else to do except to walk on the shores of the Mediterranean and to talk while walking. But I fear that this manuscript is getting too lengthy, and so I shall have to practice condensation, using in some instances the form of essay. The chapters on Providence and on Jesus did not constitute topics of our discussions. I add them for the sake of completeness, so that this volume may represent my rounded views on the subject of Religion.

\* \* \*

*Father L.:* Of all the marvels you have enumerated, the greatest marvel to me is how intelligent people aware of the marvels of the universe can believe that all this just "became," just "happened," that it was not created by an intelligent force, a force so mighty that its very contemplation renders us dizzy, makes us tremble. Putting aside any discussion concerning an anthropomorphic and anthropocentric God, don't you see, don't you acknowledge a supreme Being, a Supreme Intelligent Power which fills and controls the universe?

*Dr. R.:* That there is a mighty power in the universe, a tremendous immeasurable, incalculable force which holds things together, which moves things, whether the movement is one of the planets in their orbits or that of my little finger, whether the holding together is that of a mass of matter such as the sun, or a lump of sugar, goes without saying. Nobody has ever attempted to deny that. Without that force there would be real chaos, though for anything to exist which could be called chaos, force is also necessary. Yes, a power exists, which seems to hold

## ATHEISM VERSUS PANTHEISM

and to move the world according to a certain definite system. But when you speak of the force or power as Intelligent, I cannot follow you. In order to be intelligent, one must possess an organ of intelligence; and I cannot imagine some vague force permeating, filling the entire universe and possessing something which does what we call thinking, directing. I confess frankly that I can much more readily conceive an anthropomorphic God such as I was taught to believe in as a child, a God with a Golden Crown and a long white beard, sitting on a golden chair, and ruling the Universe like an Almighty Omniscient director and judge than I can conceive of a *power* possessing intelligence and purpose. I simply can't grasp it, no more than I can grasp all the separate natural forces, such as gravitation, electricity, magnetism, growth and decay, the ebb and tide, possessing intelligence. It may denote some defects in my mental make-up, but as I am talking with you not to hide things, but to speak frankly all my thoughts, I must tell you just what my opinion is concerning an *Intelligent Power* pervading the universe.

*Father L:* So you reject deism and pantheism, the same as you do all revealed personal religion?

*Dr. R:* Sorry, but I do, most decidedly. And I shall be still more frank with you and tell you that I believe there is a great deal of hypocrisy about pantheism. Also, no doubt a little cowardice. I mean to say that it is my opinion that many pantheists, theists or deists were really out-and-out atheists, but to soothe public opinion, to spare people's feeling, or out of social or business considerations, they did not wish to be called by that name, which in former years carried, and even now still carries, a great deal of odium with it. The supreme wit of the first half of the nineteenth century, Heinrich Heine said: "Pantheism is simply atheism ashamed." And that profound humanitarian thinker, Max Nordau, expressed a similar thought: "Theism, he said, is atheism in an evening suit." I am in full accord with these opinions. And I assert that there is no middle ground, one must either be an orthodox believer or an atheist.

There is no stopping place between orthodox religion, or its synonym, superstition, be that re-

## ATHEISM VERSUS PANTHEISM

ligion worship of a painted wooden idol, of Jehovah, of the Trinity, of Mohammed, of Buddha, etc., and atheism. All the other refined forms of belief, deism, theism, pantheism, skepticism, agnosticism, humanism, are just makeshifts, subterfuges, which mean little and satisfy nobody—or, at any rate, satisfy very few. And while in politics, in economics, in all social fields, I am for the middle ground, I believe that in religion, there is no middle ground. You have to be a believer or a—non-believer, you cannot be both at the same time.

## Chapter Eleven

### THE ALLEGED UNIVERSALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS BELIEF OR THE SO-CALLED RELIGIOUS INSTINCT

*Father L:* But isn't it strange that at all times, from the very beginning of history, among all peoples, in every part of the world, people always worshipped God, acknowledged some kind of supreme being, professed some sort of religion? Doesn't this show that every human being has what may be truly called a religious instinct?

*Dr. R:* The idea of the universality of a religious instinct is a common error due to faulty, non-critical thinking. It is all a matter of upbringing, of ideas inculcated—and not inborn—in early childhood. Answer this, Father L: how many Mohammedans become Christians? How many Christians become Jews? How many Catholics become Protestants? Practically none. Just a few isolated instances. Which irrefutably



## THE SO-CALLED RELIGIOUS INSTINCT

proves that people have the religious beliefs in which they are *brought up*. If they were brought up without any religion, they would have no religious "instinct." There is no such a thing as a religious instinct. And this is not merely guesswork, an *a priori* dictum, it is a statement based on experience. I know several families in which the children were brought up without any religion, and not only did they not show any trace of a religious "instinct," they could not even conceive of such a thing as God, and they could not understand how other people could be so absurd, so childish as to believe in God or in a power which controlled the universe and took an interest in the fate of the human race. Some of the non-believers from childhood, i.e., those who never had any religious conceptions considered religious believers as slightly insane, something like we regard those who believe that they can communicate and talk with the spirits of the dead.

No, there is no such a thing as a universal religious instinct.

## Chapter Twelve

### PROVIDENCE

(*Providence*—Divine interposition in human affairs. The care exercised by God over the Universe.)

IT WAS May 15, 1912—just one month to the day from the tragic night of the sinking of the *Titanic*. A patient, whom I had been treating several years before and of whom I had lost track, came into the office to consult me again for some slight trouble. In spite of the slight trouble, he was in a happy buoyant mood. After the consultation was over, he told me: "You know, for the past month I have been a very happy man, and never again shall I doubt the omnipresence of Divine Providence!" I waited for him to go on, and he told me, in a tone of unconcealed glee, that he had intended to take the *Titanic*, but almost at the last moment—but a day or two before—an obstacle arose, he could not finish the business that he had on hand, and he cancelled his reservation. And he went home

## PROVIDENCE

a week later on a French boat. "There you see. It was the hand of Providence. If I had taken the *Titanic*, I might be now at the bottom of the Ocean." And he told the story with a certain pride, as if it was he who had done something heroic.

A man has a right to be a fool, but some men abuse the privilege; and my patient belonged to this class, and with such people I never *argue*. I know too well that it would be a waste of time. I could have told him that if he had such a belief in Providence, then if Providence wanted him to live, he would have been among the living even if he had taken the *Titanic*, but, of course, you can't expect logic from superstitious fools. So I only asked him: "How about the 1503 men and women who went down with the *Titanic* and are now at the bottom of the sea—where was Providence in their case?" He hemmed a bit. I saw clearly what was in his mind, but he just couldn't make himself say it. I said it for him: "I suppose you think that in the case of those 1503, God or Providence just wanted them to get drowned."

I saw by his expression that I read his thoughts aright. "And how about the 703 who were saved?"

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Did God just want them saved? If he did, why didn't he have them cancel their sailing as he did in your case—a million is just as easy to God as one—and instead of subjecting them to the horror of imminent death for hours—a horror from which some people will never be entirely free as long as they live? No, Mr. G.—I do not wish to argue the matter with you, but I cannot help telling you that God or Providence had *nothing whatever* to do with the sinking of the *Titanic*. The great tragedy was due to the carelessness of some of the officers, to the fact that some of them were drunk, drunk with champagne poured into them by some of the millionaire passengers, and the criminal lack of life-saving apparatus. If it was God that deliberately made the boat crash into the iceberg and caused unutterable horror to 2200 people, 1500 of whom he sent to a watery grave, then he must be a damnably cruel God, and the existence of such a monster I cannot admit. You see, though a freethinker, I am more charitable than you." He went away, not quite pleased, and I never saw him again.

I can listen to the silliest puerility, to the absurdest, wildest superstition, to the most gro-

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tesque religious bunk, and be just slightly amused; but there is one thing that riles me, that arouses my ire, and that is when some damned fool, who comes out safe and sound from some terrible accident in which hundreds or thousands of people had lost their lives, tells me that his miserable carcass was saved by the direct intervention of God; by the all-wise, loving interposition of divine providence. For this is the acme, both the zenith and the nadir, of stupid, vulgar, dastardly egotism. That thousands perished miserably is all right. Providence is not to be criticized, grumbled at, or held responsible, but because *he* was saved—Providence is to be praised, sung paeans to, and imbecile ex-votes are to be nailed to the walls of the church.

Yes, of all the religious imbecilities, this is the most nauseating. Yet, we come across it very frequently. After the sinking of the *Lusitania*, there were quite a number of imbeciles who ascribed their change of mind about sailing on that ill-fated vessel to Providence. That their decisions not to sail on the *Lusitania* were most likely caused by the warning that the German ambassador caused to be published in the American news-

papers never entered their thick heads. If the idea did enter thir mind, they discarded it in favor of Providence. That 1400 people perished most lamentably on that May 7, 1915, that didn't matter. Providence was asleep or was just amusing itself by drowning innocent men, women and children like rats; but because *he* didn't go on the *Lusitania*—Providence be praised!

Only the other day, a young Frenchwoman told me she couldn't see how one could doubt the goodness of God and not believe in Providence. One Friday in 1915—she was at that time only twelve years old—she was sent out to buy a loaf of bread. She always used to get it at a bakery a block away to the left; but for some reason or other—God must have whispered to her not to go there this day—she went to the bakery a block away to the right. And while she was gone, a German bomb fell on that left-hand bakery, destroyed the building and eighteen people were killed. Had she gone to that bakery. . . . But how about those eighteen poor people? Why did Providence just save her, and let the others be shattered to bits? *Ah, monsieur, On ne peut pas demander pourquoi*: God's ways

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are not our ways. Can a lower grade of imbecility be imagined?

But it must not be assumed that it is only people at a low level of intelligence or education that speak so of Providence, think of it as a being that is interested in the smallest details of our lives, that knows everything we are doing, that makes us poor or rich, that controls our success or failure in business, that sends us stomach-aches and boils and cures us of them when it thinks we have had them long enough, that makes us slip on a banana peel and break our leg, or manoeuvres so that we find a purse full of money, etc., etc., etc. Far from it. Some men of the highest culture, some great writers speak of Providence in a way that is disgusting and nauseating to a clear, freethinking, analytical mind.

I was between thirteen and fourteen years old. I was reading Victor Hugo's *The History of a Crime*. One of the deputies or barricade fighters was to be arrested and he was running away trying to hide somewhere in order to escape arrest. He finally came to some garden; the gate in that garden was usually locked; but in his desperation he pushed the gate and found that

it was open. Hugo then asks who left that gate open? And he answers: Providence! I remember very well, when I came to that answer I called out loud: Imbecile! At that time I admired Hugo. I considered him one of the world's greatest writers, and one of the world's greatest geniuses. But, nevertheless, this seemed to me so idiotic. It was such a shock to my intelligence, that I could not refrain from calling him an imbecile out loud. Just think of it, I reasoned then, and the reasoning will hold good now; God permits Louis Napoleon to commit the crime of the *coup d'état*; he lets him destroy the constitution; he lets him, i.e., his hirelings, swoop down in the middle of the night on hundreds of deputies and carry them off half dressed to prison; he permits all these crimes, including exile and bloodshed; but in order to permit one revolutionist to escape he goes down personally and lifts the latch or unlocks the lock of a certain garden. Isn't it childish, isn't it imbecile? Yes, it was imbecile then, according to my notions of a boy in his early teens, it is imbecile now.

And it is certainly time that intelligent people, people who *are* capable of some reasoning, ceased



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to refer to Providence as to some intelligent Being that is interested in and controls all our doings, little and big, picayune and important, and knows and influences the thoughts and feelings of every one of the two billion human beings on the face of the globe. Nay, it is time that this meaningless word, Providence, went out of use altogether, were eliminated from every language.

And it is particularly discouraging and offensive to see thinkers and unbelievers bandy about that word. A man like Emil Ludwig, for instance, who is a freethinker, speaks of Providence controlling the fates of nations. This is just as imbecile as Hugo's Providence leaving the gate open. It is bad enough to speak of Determinism which rules nations and individuals (the world is not ruled by any determinism), but for a man like Ludwig to use the word Providence is utterly inexcusable.

The man who believed that it was Providence that made him change his reservation on the *Titanic* possesses no superior mentality than the savage who believes that the wooden idol will grant his requests if he puts a bead of strings around its neck.

## *Chapter Thirteen*

### JESUS OF NAZARETH

THE QUESTION of the historicity of Jesus, whether Jesus ever existed or not, whether what we are taught about his life, and death is history or pure myth, has never interested me very deeply. For, if myth, the influence of the myth has been as great as if it had been a thoroughly demonstrated historical fact. And for that matter, are not all religions based partly or wholly on myths? That there is not a single unimpeachable piece of historical evidence that Jesus existed, I am well aware; but this does not much matter. The myth did and is still doing its work, and for argument's sake, we may assume that Jesus did exist.

Of course, with people who are convinced that Jesus was of divine origin, was God himself, we have nothing to argue, nothing to discuss. In this case the chasm is so wide as to be impassable. But with those who accept and are willing to re-

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gard Jesus as a human being, stripped of any halo of divinity or sanctity, we may exchange a few remarks.

Assuming even that Jesus lived, we have no authentic picture of him; we do not really know what sort of man he was. We can only take him as he is pictured in and as he emerges from the New Testament. And judging him by his words and acts as reported in the four gospels, he does not emerge as a superlatively wise man, nor even as a superlatively kind and good man. We must emphasize, of course, that we have no proof that he said the things that he is reported to have said; but we have to take them as reported in the gospels, or not at all. And thus taking them, we are forced to the conclusion that among humanity's leaders and saviours, he occupies a rather secondary, yes, a rather unenviable place. He has said many foolish things, and many wicked things; while among his sayings about love and forgiveness there is not a single original thought, nothing that has not been said and better said by other religious leaders many centuries before.

It is, therefore, my opinion that Jesus has not

brought a single original contribution to the treasury of human thought and conduct, and I cannot help feeling that in speaking of Jesus as humanity's foremost leader and saviour and the world's greatest thinker, there is a good deal of hypocrisy or self-hypnosis. I can well understand a religious believer thinking and speaking of Jesus in this manner; but this sort of talk is not uncommon even among freethinkers and atheists—and here it becomes very objectionable. A good deal is made of the Golden Rule, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do you even so to them," as if it had been an original saying of Christ's. But that saying was known and repeated a thousand years before Jesus was born, and as Alfred W. Martin of the Ethical Culture Society has pointed out, is to be found in every one of the great religions:

*The Hindu:* "The true rule is to guard and do by the things of others as you do by your own."

*The Buddhist:* "One should seek for others the happiness one desires for oneself." (A much finer saying, by the way, than the Christian Golden Rule.)

*The Zoroastrian:* "Do as you would be done by."

*The Confucian:* "What you do not wish done to yourself, do not to others."

*The Mohammedan:* "Let none of you treat your brother in a way he himself would dislike to be treated." (Also finer than the saying in the New Testament.)

*The Jewish:* "Whatsoever you do not wish your neighbor to do to you, do not unto him."

And the noble and gentle Hillel who lived some seventy-five years before Jesus said: "What is unpleasant to thyself, that do not to thy neighbor; this is the whole Law, all else is but exposition."

"Love thy neighbor as thyself," is ascribed to Jesus, but exactly these same words are found in the Old Testament (Levit. XIX, 18).

"Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." This is not only a silly, impractical saying because it is contrary to the fundamental essence of human—and all animal—nature, but it is *ignoble*. Why should a man, if insulted and beaten by a ruffian, not defend himself, but swallow the

insult, and humiliate himself to receive further insults and blows? This injunction was of great value to all kings, despots, tyrants, robber barons and various other sadistic beasts. This "resist not evil" was perniciously influential in perpetuating evil. The same is true of the next saying (Matthew v. 40): "And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also." Excellent teaching: let the poor who are robbed by the rich permit themselves to be robbed without hindrance, without an attempt even to stop the robbery. And the injunction about giving to Caesar what is Caesar's helped to keep the people in slavery and subjection.

Now listen to the Prince of Peace: (Matthew x, 34-36), "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they in his own household," etc.! Fine words for a gentle humanitarian!

And then, unlike many religious leaders, he did not use merely persuasion. He used threats and

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menaced with hell. "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." This is sheer fanaticism unworthy of a really noble leader. Why should people break up their homes, forsake their parents or their children and follow an itinerant preacher? And "ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell?" "Depart from me, ye cursed into everlasting fire." "It is better for these to enter into life maimed, than having the hands to go into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched; where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched." For one who loves mankind with an all-embracing love, who came into the world to "save" mankind, these are not nice words to use.

Jesus may be considered from two viewpoints; as a personality, and from the point of view of the influence he has exerted on mankind.

1. Studying his personality, as it is depicted by his chroniclers—we have no other sources—we reach the conclusion that he was a sincere and well-meaning man, somewhat psychopathic, of a mediocre mentality, who shared in all the super-

stitutions, even the very lowest, of his age. He contributed nothing whatever to the intellectual or spiritual treasury of mankind. There is not a single valuable saying of his that had not been said by other religious leaders centuries before. In character, he did not reach the sublime nobility of Confucius, Lao-Tze, Buddha, Socrates or Hillel. Had he not been crucified, he probably would have never been heard of. His crucifixion which has been exploited by his followers for the past nineteen centuries, cannot but excite pity in the breasts of every humane individual, but not any more so than does the fate of *thousands* of other men who underwent much greater tortures, suffered more cruel deaths in their attempt to free humanity from its mental thralldom and physical slavery. And these deaths and tortures were inflicted by the very church which calls itself after Christ, who is supposed to have taught love, gentleness, and forgiveness, and by the states who professed christianity as their official religion.

*À propos* of the crucifixion. When I was yet very young, certain points bothered me, which I couldn't possibly explain and which I could not



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see how pious Christians explained: If Jesus was divine, if he could perform such great miracles, if he could get out of his tomb and ascend to heaven *after* he was dead, why couldn't he get away from the cross, disappear and ascend to heaven *before* he was killed? And then again, if he was God, why in his agony, did he exclaim, "God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It seems so incongruous. First, how can God, or God's son be crucified? Second, if God the Father, wants his son to be crucified, he has a certain reason for it. God is omnipotent and all-wise and does nothing without a reason, and nothing can be done without his consent, so why question him?

If an absolute proof were needed that Jesus was nothing but a poor ordinary man, this heart-cry of his in the hour of his agony is such a proof. But the brutish, religious minds won't see it. When this unanswerable argument is presented to them, they close their eyes and their ears—and their minds.

I recently came across an article of Stephen Leslie in which the author touches upon this very point.

"Think only," says he, "of the last words on

the cross as reported in the Gospel according to St. Matthew: 'My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Nothing can be more terribly pathetic if we read it as the despairing utterance of a martyr yielding at the last moment to a hideous doubt. But if it be taken as the utterance of a divine being, what can we make of it? I will not give the obvious answer."

Nor is it necessary. None are so blind as those who will not see, none so stupid as those who refuse even to *listen* to an argument which threatens to shake or to shatter their superstitions.

I have stated my impression of the personality of Jesus. As to the influence he—or the myth about him—has had on mankind, it has been most pernicious and disastrous—more pernicious, more disastrous, more tragic than that of any other man that has ever lived. Of course, for this disastrous influence he is not responsible; it is the organized church that has called itself Christian that carries this responsibility. But on this point we needn't dwell. Even the half-educated and the dull-witted know what misery organized religion has been responsible for. But he who does not know what villainies the church has commit-

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ted in Spain, Italy, France, Mexico, etc., or he who goes farther and denies that the church has been responsible for indescribable atrocities will not be enlightened by this or by any other book.

## Chapter Fourteen

### THE PUNISHMENT OF SKEPTICS, AGNOSTICS AND ATHEISTS

THE PRIESTS and other unthinking believers tell us that God will severely *punish* those who are not quite sure of his existence (skeptics), those who say they don't know whether he exists or not (agnostics) or those who deny his existence categorically and absolutely (atheists). The religionists who make these assertions are either stupid or vicious and therefore ascribe their own meanness and vindictiveness to God. Why should God punish those who doubt or deny his existence? Isn't it all his doings? We know that a man is not responsible for his feelings or his opinions. A man feels or thinks a certain way because God wishes him to feel and to think that way. It is all pre-determined. It all happens with God's will and knowledge. So why should God punish a man for thinking the way God himself has determined he should think? We know very well that if God

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in his omnipotence wanted to, there would not be a single human being doubting or denying his existence. He could from time to time give such a sign, show such a miracle—the orthodox believes that God can accomplish miracles whenever he wants to—that it would simply be *impossible* to doubt his existence. If he doesn't do it, if he has created man in such a manner that the minds of some question or deny his existence, it follows most clearly that God is satisfied that his existence should be doubted or denied. Isn't that so? Is it or is it not? One thing is therefore certain: whether God exists or not, those who question or deny his existence will not be punished for it. Skeptics, agnostics or atheists can sleep peacefully on that score.

P. S. Really wouldn't it be too unsportsmanlike, too unfair to punish a man for an idea which we ourself have put in his head?

## Chapter Fifteen

### HELL AND PARADISE

(*Hell*—a place of eternal punishment, of never ceasing, never relaxing torture and torment.)

I NEED not, of course, emphasize or even mention that I do not believe in the existence of Hell. There is no Hell. An exceedingly cunning and supremely cruel mind has conceived the idea of the orthodox Hell, and only an infantile, brutish mind can believe in its reality.

But whenever I hear a priest or preacher or a ruffian like Billy Sunday picture to the people the torments of hell in lurid colors and terrifying language, I feel great inclination to force into their hands a transcript of the little story of *The Priest and The Devil* which Feodor Dostoievsky, one of the world's greatest literary geniuses, wrote as a prisoner in Siberia upon the walls of his prison. Here is the little poignant story.

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### *The Priest and The Devil*

“Hello, you little fat father!” the devil said to the priest. “What made you lie so to those poor, misled people? What tortures of hell did you depict? Don’t you know they are already suffering the tortures of hell in their earthly lives? Don’t you know that you and the authorities of the State are my representatives on earth? It is you that make them suffer the pains of hell with which you threaten them. Don’t you know this? Well, then, come with me!”

The devil grabbed the priest by the collar, lifted him high in the air, and carried him to a factory, to an iron foundry. He saw the workmen there running and hurrying to and fro, and toiling in the scorching heat. Very soon the thick, heavy air and the heat are too much for the priest. With tears in his eyes, he pleads with the devil: “Let me go. Let me leave this hell!”

“Oh, my dear friend, I must show you many more places.” The devil gets hold of him again and drags him off to a farm. There he sees workmen threshing the grain. The dust and heat are insufferable. The overseer carries a knout, and

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unmercifully beats anyone who falls to the ground overcome by hard toil or hunger.

Next the priest is taken to the huts where these same workers live with their families—dirty, cold, smoky, ill-smelling holes. The devil grins. He points out the poverty and hardships which are at home here.

“Well, isn’t this enough?” he asks. And it seems as if even he, the devil, pities the people. The pious servant of God can hardly bear it. With uplifted hands he begs: “Let me go away from here. Yes, Yes! This is hell on earth!”

“Well, then, you see. And you still promise them another hell. You torment them, torture them to death mentally when they are already all but dead physically. Come on! I will show you one more hell—one more, the very worst.”

He took him to a prison and showed him a dungeon, with its foul air and the many human forms, robbed of all health and energy, lying on the floor, covered with vermin that were devouring their poor, naked, emaciated bodies.

“Take off your silken clothes,” said the devil to the priest, “put on your ankles heavy chains such as these poor unfortunates wear; lie down



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on the cold and filthy floor—and then talk to them about a hell that still awaits them!”

“No, no!” answered the priest, “I cannot think of anything more dreadful than this. I entreat you, let me go away from here!”

“Yes, this is hell. There can be no worse hell than this. Did you not know it? Did you not know that these men and women whom you are frightening with the picture of a hell hereafter—did you not know that they are in hell right here, before they die?”

I have an idea that after reading this little story neither the oily-tongued priest or pastor nor the loud-mouthed ruffian of the Billy Sunday type would babble or vociferate so much about hell.

No, there is no hell. But I confess, confidentially, that now and then, in reading history, I feel a twinge of regret that there isn't. Let us leave ancient and medieval history as being a bit remote from us. Let us take the last three or four centuries only. When one reads of the villainies, the incredible injustices, the devilishly contrived

tortures, the shameless treacheries, the individual murders committed and the oceans of blood uselessly and gratuitously shed by such fiends as Catherine de Medicis, Charles X, the Dukes de Guise, Philip the Second, the Duke of Alva, Torquemada, Tilly, Wallenstein, Henry the Eighth and his beautiful daughter Mary, Pope Alexander the Sixth and his fine son Cesar Borgia, Ivan the Terrible, Louis XIII, Louis XIV, Louis XV, Nicholas the First, George the Fourth, Ferdinand Bomba, Mussolini, Horthy, Bethlen and some smaller fry, like Sazonov, Isvolsky, Petliura, etc., one cannot help a feeling of regret that there is not a hell in which those criminals and fiends in human form could, *conscious of their guilt*, undergo at least some of the tortures and sufferings which they brought upon humanity.

But there isn't.

The only hell there is, is hell on earth. Unfortunately those least deserving it are often in it; those richly meriting it generally escape it altogether.

## HELL AND PARADISE

### PARADISE

(*Paradise*—the place of eternal bliss and delight, where the souls of the saved await resurrection.)

As fortunately there is no Hell in which human beings, or their souls, are roasted and tortured for endless centuries—life on this earth is hell enough for most—so unfortunately there is no Paradise either, in which those who suffered hell on earth or those who sacrificed their liberty and their lives for the sake of humanity could lead a life of restful peace and serene comfort. Which is a pity.

For, almost from the very earliest records of human history there have been men who with their eyes open, with a full knowledge of what awaited them, risked their lives and their liberties, underwent the tortures of the lash the dungeon, the rack and the Spanish boot, suffered death by the ax, the gallows and the stake, in order to raise humanity from its pitiful state, in order to free it from the chains of physical tyranny and spiritual slavery, to give it a little material comfort and to let in a ray of light into its mental darkness. If there were a God and if he were

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a just, loving God, these Saints of Humanity, these true Saviours, would be rewarded after their death by a sojourn in Paradise where they would reap their eternal reward for their self-sacrificing devotion, for the cruel suffering they underwent while on earth. But, alas! there is no more Paradise than there is a Hell.

## *Chapter Sixteen*

### THE EXISTENCE OR NON-EXISTENCE OF GOD

I ASSUMED in the previous pages that God exists, and I have proved, I believe beyond the possibility of successful contradiction, that from the very believer's point of view, if God exists he must be either a powerless, useless God, or a very cruel, monstrous God. I have proved, that assuming the existence of God there is no way out of it: either horn of the dilemma must be accepted.

But there is another way out: to assume the non-existence of any God. And this is the only way. It is the only belief—a non-belief is also a belief—that independent, courageous thinkers can hold. Here it will be necessary to be boldly outspoken, for a little while. This is one of those topics, which if treated at all, are to be handled frankly, courageously, without mincing words and without hemming and hawing; otherwise they are to be let alone altogether. And it must be stated frankly, that to the genuine free-

thinker, the belief in the existence of a God, who interests himself in the smallest details of the life of every human being, who consciously controls a person's destiny, his health or disease, his accidents, his talents, his successes and failures, his earning capacity, his poverty or wealth, and finally the hour and manner of his death, is so absurd, so grotesque, as to amount to a sort of insanity. He knows very well, the freethinker or atheist does, that the millions who hold this belief are not insane in the ordinary sense of the word; they may be even very clever, cultured and truly educated, but this belief is nevertheless insane. A child may hold such beliefs, may believe in Santa Claus, in fairies, in hobgoblins, in gnomes, etc., and not be called insane; we say the child is childish; and we call his beliefs childish. But when a fully so-called adult reasoning person holds such unreasonable, unproved, grotesque beliefs, we have a right to call them insane. However, if you object to the adjective insane, we will use—unless we forget—the word childish or infantile.

And the freethinker further maintains that there is not the slightest difference between the Christian, Jew and Mohammedan praying to

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God for rain, for wind, for good crops, for success in business, for saving a dying child from death, etc., and the Roman of three thousand years ago who prayed to Jupiter, or the savage of five thousand years ago who prayed to the sun, to a stone, or to an idol which he himself had whittled out from a piece of wood. Not the slightest difference—not only no difference in kind; not even in degree. This point is worthy of special emphasis. We, as psychologists, know that prayer, no matter to whom or to what offered, brings relief. It is a form—one of several—of catharsis, and will often soothe a tortured soul; but the belief that it is Jehovah, Jesus, the Virgin Mary of the prophet Mohammed that actually intercedes and brings about the thing prayed for is absolutely equivalent to the belief of the primitive savage that it is his wooden stick or god that has cured him from his disease or answered his prayer or made his enemy die or brought him the good fortune he was asking for. Not the slightest difference. Upon this point it is important to insist.

Thousands of examples could be given that the religionist of to-day, even if cultured and

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educated, does not differ in his beliefs and superstitions from the savage of five or ten thousand years ago. One or two will have to suffice. The writer knows a Frenchwoman—she is *chic*, clever, cultured. A fine musician and singer, and sparkling in repartee. This cultured Frenchwoman believes that if you lose a thing and put up a candle to St. Anthony of Padua, he finds the thing for you, or helps you to find it. No argument would shake her in her belief. She once lost a little pearl necklace which she looked for for days and days unsuccessfully. She then put up a candle to St. Anthony, and two days later, she found the necklace. And this, to her, is an unimpeachable, unshakable argument. She would mislay something in the house; she would then say: "St. Anthony of Padua, help me to find the scissors or the wrist-watch," or whatever it might be; and if she finds it the credit is given to St. Anthony. Half a dozen times she lost things and went to church and put up candles and the things were *not* found. This does not make any difference with her. It simply means that *those* things St. Anthony didn't want her to find; he knew that for some reason it was better for her not to find them; but if he had



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wanted, she would have found them. And if she lost a hundred things more and failed to recover them in spite of offering a hundred candles to St. Anthony of Padua, this would not shake her belief in Anthony as a finder of lost or stolen things. The law of cause and effect has not touched her at all. When I ask her, *how* can a dead saint help you to find your things, and do you think this would be a respectable occupation for a saint to bother with everybody's pearl necklace, hair comb, buttonhook, etc., she answers with a superior smile: "Oh, you don't understand, for you have no faith." Now, in what respect is such a brain, capable of such an absurd belief, different from the brain of a savage of five or ten thousand years ago?

I know another woman, whose sister's child died. When she gave birth to a child, she dedicated it to the Virgin Mary and vowed to dress it all in blue to the age of five; and she is convinced, unshakably convinced, that her boy lived because she dressed him only in blue. If she had dressed him in another color (except white), he would have died, the same as her sister's child did. That millions of other children survive who are

not dedicated to the Virgin and who are not dressed in blue or white has no effect on her infantile reasoning powers.

In another place I related the case of an American woman who came from California on a trip to Egypt; one of the beggars there claimed that he could foretell the future, and that cultivated woman gave the man half a dollar to tell her whether oil will be struck on her property in California! When I asked her *how* could an Egyptian beggar, who didn't even know if such a land as California existed and where it was, tell her if there would be oil struck on her property, she answered with the stupid and hackneyed quotation: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy." That was the quality of her brain—not superior to that of the Egyptian beggar who bamboozled her out of half a dollar.

But it isn't women only who have such primitive brains.

## *Chapter Seventeen*

### JUST A FEW QUOTATIONS

IT HAS been my practice during the quarter century of my writing activity to employ quotations very sparingly and to cite but few authorities. I have felt that if I could not present my case convincingly myself, with my own arguments, I should not try to lean on others. If an argument is true it is true in itself, and needs no corroboration; if it is false bolstering it up with quotations from other writers will not make it true.

But all religion is based on authority, and the religious mind bows to authority. And in my discussions with Father L, I found it diverting to offer him now and then some quotations from other writers, and it may not be out of place to reproduce a few of them here. It was particularly when he seemed inclined to deny that religion was cruel, was responsible for cruelties innumerable and unutterable, that I considered it my duty to show him what some excellent writ-

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ers had to say on the subject. What influence, if any, they exerted on Father L, I do not know. I believe none. He never committed himself to any statement, as to any change in his religious ideas.

### THE CHURCH IN THE 18TH CENTURY

A Church which, down to 1766, could still put Protestants to death with revolting cruelty, which is stained with the damning memories of Calas and La Barre, which was almost as corrupt as the nobility, almost as oppressive as the royalty, which added to the barbarism of the *ancien régime* the savage traditions of the Inquisition, which left undone all that it ought to have done, and did all that it ought not to have done—such a Church cumbered the earth. It fell, and loud and great was the crash, and fierce have been the wailings which still fill the air over its ruins. The world has heard enough and too much of Voltaire's curse against *l'infâme*, of Diderot's ferocious distich, how the entrails of the last priest should serve as halter to the last king. No one to-day justifies the fury of their diatribes, except by reminding the nineteenth century what it was that, in the eighteenth century, was called the Church of Christ.—FREDERIC HARRISON, *The Use of History*.

\* \* \*

“The Bible,” says Canon Carmichael, “hardly seems to see any evil in war at all. . . . Nor is the New Tes-

## JUST A FEW QUOTATIONS

tament far behind in this respect. The Lord Jesus never says a word against war. John the Baptist gives advice to soldiers, but never condemns their profession. St. Paul revels in military phrases. The history of the world is full of wars; then must war be congenial to the mind of God in His Evolution of Humanity. What does God care for death? What does God care for pain?"—*The Christian*, January 11, 1900.

\* \* \*

## RELIGION AND CRUELTY

It is frequently argued that we should all be wicked if we did not hold to the Christian religion. It seems to me that the people who have held to it have been for the most part extremely wicked. We find this curious fact, that the more intense the religion of any period and the more profound the dogmatic belief, the greater has been the cruelty and the worse has been the state of affairs. In the so-called ages of faith, when men really did believe the Christian religion in all its completeness, there was the Inquisition with its tortures; there were millions of unfortunate women burnt as witches; and there was every kind of cruelty practised upon all sorts of people in the name of religion.—  
BERTRAND RUSSELL.

\* \* \*

The worst God of all is the God of the older Christian theology: God the Father, the creator of evil, who

## IF I WERE GOD

in his all-power and all-knowledge deliberately plans a cruel universe bristling with traps for his creatures. The older theology thought of God as spending every moment of his eternity in eavesdropping and spying on immoral man, haunting every bedroom, listening to every obscene story, and equally observant of the murderer with his bloody chopper and the child with its fingers in the jam. Absolute Idealism knows nothing of this intolerable God.—MAY SINCLAIR, in the *New Idealism*.

\* \* \*

## FEAR THE BASIS OF RELIGION

Religion is based, I think, primarily and mainly upon fear. It is partly the terror of the unknown, and partly, as I have said, the wish to feel that you have a kind of elder brother who will stand by you in all your troubles and disputes. Fear is the basis of the whole thing—fear of the mysterious, fear of defeat, fear of death. Fear is the parent of cruelty, and therefore it is no wonder if cruelty and religion have gone hand-in-hand. It is because fear is at the basis of those two things.—BERTRAND RUSSELL.

\* \* \*

In Spain, in 1558, *the penalty of death and confiscation of property* was decreed against any bookseller or individual who should keep in his possession condemned books.

\* \* \*

## JUST A FEW QUOTATIONS

You find as you look round the world that every single bit of progress in humane feeling, every improvement in the criminal law, every step towards the diminution of war, every step towards better treatment of the coloured races, every mitigation of slavery, every moral progress that there has been in the world, has been consistently opposed by the organized churches of the world.—BERTRAND RUSSELL.

\* \* \*

This belief in the judgment of God for national sins as a cause of disaster involves the most amazing conception of the divine propensity for senseless and indiscriminate vengeance. Some years ago, when the spire of St. Mary's Shrewsbury, was blown down and the church wrecked in a great gale, the Vicar, Prebendary Poyntz, publicly affirmed that the disaster was a direct visitation of God on the town because the townspeople had allowed a statue of Charles Darwin to be erected in their midst. Father Vaughan, who is always eager to assert God's responsibility, lamented, in 1906, England's "great sin of apostasy" and declared that God had uttered warnings by the eruption of Vesuvius and the San Francisco and Chilian earthquakes. That Italy, San Francisco, and Chili should be stricken because of England's apostasy is an instance of the Justice of God which passeth all understanding.—HYPATIA BRADLAUGH BONNER.

\* \* \*

## IF I WERE GOD

During the first three centuries, when its adherents were few and humble, with a considerable proportion of women among them, besides a number of slaves and paupers, Christianity was no doubt a religion of peace. It could hardly have been otherwise. But all that changed from the moment Constantine took it under his protection in the year 312.

\* \* \*

The belief in immortality has not merely coloured the outlook of the individual upon the world; it has deeply affected the social and political relations of humanity in all ages, for the religious wars and persecutions which distracted and devastated Europe for ages were only the civilized equivalents of the battles and murders which the fear of ghosts has instigated among almost all races of savages of whom we possess a record. Regarded from this point of view, the faith in a life hereafter has been sown like dragon's teeth on the earth, and has brought forth crop after crop of armed men, who have turned their swords against each other.—  
J. G. FRAZER, *Belief in Immortality*.

\* \* \*

It is not too much to say that the Christian ideal of sanctity meant not only self-mortification and sadness but squalor in the individual life. Physical uncleanness became a Christian virtue; and the mark of a city



## JUST A FEW QUOTATIONS

built in the Christian period came to be the absence of baths. Pagan Greece lives for ever in men's thoughts as a dream of grace and beauty and enchanted speech; and though behind the shining vision of art and song there lingers immovably a sombre memory of strife and servitude, the art and the song are a deathless gift to mankind. At every summit of its attainment, our civilization looks back to them with an unquenchable envy, an impotent desire, as of a race disinherited. To regain the morning glory of life is the spontaneous yearning of all who have gazed on the distant light of it.—ROBERTSON.

\* \* \*

When we look back upon the history of Christianity, upon the perpetual and bloody wars of religion, upon the bitter and abominable persecution of heretics, upon the melancholy procession of martyrs, upon the organized suppression of secular knowledge, and upon the Church's desperate opposition to every movement of human emancipation, it seems astounding that sensible men should ever clothe that institution in garments of white and gold. Their hallucination is due, however, to the subtle manner in which from early childhood, they have been led to look away from the truth.—A. G. WHYTE in Preface to *Christianity and Conduct*.

\* \* \*

Dream for dream, the child-like creed of the God-crowded Hellas of Pheidias' day, peopled with statues

## IF I WERE GOD

and crowned with temples of glorious symmetry, is an incomparably fairer thing than the tortured dogma of the Byzantine church, visually expressing itself in wretched icons, barbaric trappings, and infinite numberies of ceremonial. Idolatry for idolatry, the adoration of noble statues by chanting bands of youths and maidens can have wrought less harm to head and heart than the prostration of their posterity before the abominations of Byzantine art. Superstition for superstition, there is nothing in old Hellene religion, with all its survivals of savage myth, to be compared for moral and mental abjection to the practice of the Christian Greeks, with their pilgrimages to Arabia to kiss Job's dung-hill, and their grovelling worship of dead men's bones.—ROBERTSON.

\* \* \*

If we talk of moral success, it must still be said that Christianity never gave any section of the Roman Empire a ruler worthy to stand by Marcus and Julian; and that on all the thrones of the world to-day there is no man who can be put above them for moral nobility. If, again, we keep our eyes on the age of Constantine, we cannot but be struck by the fact that Constantius "the pale," the father of Constantine, a monotheist but not a Christian, and Julian, who turned away from Christianity to polytheism, are by far the best men in the series of rulers of that house. Christianity attracted the worse men, Constantine and his sons, and repelled

## JUST A FEW QUOTATIONS

or failed to satisfy the better; and the younger Constantius, who was bred and remained a Christian, is the worst of all. The finer character-values are all associated with Paganism; on the Christian side there is a signal defect of good men.—ROBERTSON, *Short History of Christianity*.

\* \* \*

Paul is the man who has sown the dragons' teeth of discord, hatred, and intolerance; who has poisoned the springs of life and religion; who "persuaded men to worship God contrary to law" (Acts, xviii.13) who substituted for the loving father who is kind "even to the unthankful and the evil" a wrathful God who had to be appeased by a blood sacrifice. *This is the man* who proscribed the gospel of love, peace and justice and substituted for it a cult of intolerance, hatred, and fratricidal wars.

His gospel, thus begotten in anger, founded on deliberate untruth, and established by a curse, has produced fruit of its own kind, "for the tree is known by its fruit."—IGNATIUS SINGER, in *The Rival Philosophies of Jesus and of Paul*.

\* \* \*

The more intense has been the religion of any period and the more profound has been the dogmatic belief, the greater has been the cruelty and the worse has been the state of affairs.—BERTRAND RUSSELL.

\* \* \*

## IF I WERE GOD

Even the beasts are not so cruel to men as the generality of Christians to each other.—JULIAN, the *Apostate*.

\* \* \*

St. Augustine (Fourth Century) taught that baptism was necessary to free the soul from the power which the devil had over it on account of Adam's sin, and that *without baptism all were doomed to hell*. He admitted that the crying of a baby is not sinful, and therefore does not deserve eternal damnation. In the Pelagian controversy, Julian the Pelagian, objected that, if the doctrine of original sin were true, it were a cruel and wicked thing to beget children who would be born in a state of condemnation. To this St. Augustine replied (*contra Julianum*, c.viii) that God is the author of being to all men, many of whom will be eternally condemned, yet God is not to be accused of cruelty for creating them. He suggests that unbaptized infants who have only original sin, and are not loaded with sins of their own, may suffer a gentler condemnation than the personally guilty. Elsewhere (*De Verbis Apostoli*, serm. 14) in the same controversy he takes a less merciful view, saying: "I have explained to you what is the kingdom and what everlasting fire, so that when you confess the infant will not be in "the kingdom," you must acknowledge he will be in "everlasting fire."—WALL's *Infant Baptism*, Part II, C.VI. 5.

\* \* \*

## JUST A FEW QUOTATIONS

St. Fulgentius (Sixth Century), in his treatise *De Fide*, writes: "Be assured, and doubt not, that not only men who have obtained the use of their reason, but also little children who have begun to live in their mother's womb and have there died, or who, having been just born, have passed away from the world without the sacrament of holy baptism administered in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, must be punished by the eternal torture of undying fire; for, although they have committed no sin by their own will, they have nevertheless drawn with them the condemnation of original sin by their carnal conception and nativity."

Pope Gregory (Seventh Century) declared that those taken from their present life and not having the sacrament of salvation for their deliverance from original sin, though they have done nothing of their own here, yet there they undergo eternal torments.

\* \* \*

Jonathan Edwards (1629-1712), a gentle Christian soul, wrote as follows:

"The world will be converted into a great lake or liquid globe of fire, a vast ocean of fire, in which the wicked shall be overwhelmed, which will always be in tempest, in which they shall be tossed to and fro, having no rest day or night, vast waves or billows of fire continually rolling over their heads, of which they shall for ever be full of a quick sense within and without; their heads, their eyes, their tongues, their hands,

## IF I WERE GOD

their feet, their loins, and their vitals shall forever be full of a flowing, melting fire, fierce enough to melt the very rocks and elements; and, also, they shall eternally be full of the most quick and lively sense to feel the torments: not for one minute, nor for a hundred ages, nor for ten thousands of millions of ages, one after another, but for ever, without any end at all, and never, never be delivered."

\* \* \*

God holds sinners in his hands over the mouth of hell as so many spiders; and he is dreadfully provoked, and he not only hates them, but holds them in the utmost contempt, and he will trample them beneath his feet with inexpressible fierceness, he will crush their blood out, and will make it fly so that it will sprinkle his garments and stain all his raiments.—JONATHAN EDWARDS (*Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*).

Beautiful, loving sentiments!

*Religion and Conduct.* A recent analysis of the character of the inmates of our prisons dismisses several smug theories as utterly falacious. The contention that the foreign element is responsible for a vast proportion of the crimes committed is revealed as erroneous, the analysis showing that native Americans comprise the preponderant majority in our prisons. But perhaps the most interesting disclosure is that contained in the figures showing that, in an institution harboring several thousand criminals, *only nine are atheists or non-believers*. That is perhaps the most distressing comment on the moral and ethical significance of modern religion as a directing force in the life of the mod-

## JUST A FEW QUOTATIONS

ern individual. Perhaps the most frequent and insistent question directed against any attempt to discredit belief in the existence of God is the unfailing question, "What influence would keep men good if they did not fear God?" It is perfectly evident that the question, generally regarded as final and unanswerable, is an impotent and pointless one. The prison statistics reveal that a belief in and fear of God is no guarantee whatever of good conduct, and conversely, that a disbelief in God in no way releases man from a sense of moral responsibility. It has in fact always been a notable circumstance that disbelievers and atheists were generally extremely law-abiding and well conducted.—Editorial in *American Medicine*.

## Chapter Eighteen

### CONCLUSION

IT SHOULD not be necessary to write this chapter. But things that *should not* be necessary are sometimes most necessary. For, unfortunately, some people are obtuse, some are malicious, and in writing on controversial subjects, I generally find it necessary to cross my t's and dot my i's and emphasize or reemphasize points which should be clear from my entire attitude on the subject.

And so in this chapter I wish to reemphasize a few points. I do not wish to be classed with the professional, pugnacious atheists who are sometimes as narrow and intolerant as the most reactionary of fundamentalists. And I never *sneer* at or ridicule a person's religious beliefs. No, not even the savage's wooden idol. I know how ideas inculcated in the child's brain may retain a permanent foothold there and how a person may hold the most bizarre ideas on certain subjects



## CONCLUSION

without it affecting his general intelligence or curtailing his social usefulness. Probably no man has been of greater value to mankind, has done more to discover the causes of disease and to combat them than Pasteur; and yet he was childishly infantile in his religious beliefs; he was not merely religious, he was as superstitious as an old peasant woman. I was deeply religious once and I do not think that during my religious phase I was particularly stupid or vicious. I imbibed knowledge then just as eagerly as I do now, and my pity for every suffering creature, human or animal, my pro-social humanitarian tendencies were as strong then as they are now. And as I am not a unicum, what is true of myself is, of course, true of millions of others.

And I can be very friendly with the most orthodoxly religious person—Catholic, Protestant, Jew, Mohammedan, or Buddhist. I could not be friends, would not shake hands and would have nothing to do with a fascist, a ku-kluxer, a *camelot du roi*, a *Stahlhelmer*, a *Heimwehr* member, a believer in or glorifier of war. That is another matter, for here a man's entire outlook on life is involved which influences his *activity* and his *rela-*

## IF I WERE GOD

tion towards his fellow-beings; in short the categories of men enumerated above are *anti-social*, generally cruel, dishonest and believers in the "end justifies the means," and with such people I could have nothing to do, would not and *could* not associate. But this is not true of religious people. Some of the finest, gentlest and most humane men and women are found among the sincere believers in God, among religious people of all denominations—as well as among atheists. I once had to share a room with a thoroughly orthodox Catholic physician (of rather heavy build). Every evening before going to bed he would plump down on his knees and say his prayers in a fervent voice. To me it seemed very silly, very childish. And though I did not tell him so, I think he knew what I thought of his nightly performance. But that did not prevent us from being friends and from discussing various medical questions and social problems in the daytime.

Nor can I work up the antagonism and hatred towards the priesthood of various religions that we often find in the professional atheist. On the contrary, I have some very good friends among priests, rabbis, pastors, and preachers of many

## CONCLUSION

denominations and various shades of orthodoxy. And strange as it may seem, we have even Catholic priests on the subscription list of *The Critic and Guide*. And I confess that the droll stories and ribald pictures of priests carousing and indulging in sexual adventures utterly fail to amuse me. They are pabulum for infantile minds. Because the priests of the middle ages were corrupt, ignorant and lecherous, it does not follow that the priests of to-day are of the same type. Because Alexander (Borgia) VI and John XXII were incarnations of all the vices and crimes on the human calendar, it does not follow that the popes of to-day are tainted with vice and crime. I am quite convinced that the priests of all religions, as a whole (there will always be individual exceptions), live a decent, clean and chaste life, and are beginning to be sincerely interested in social problems. They could not now retain their hold on the people if they lived the way the priests and monks of the middle ages did. Perhaps I might make an exception of the priesthood of Spain and Brittany; they still live in the middle ages. And the Greek orthodox priesthood under the Czar was a vile aggregation of ignorant,

savagely superstitious and corrupt henchmen who always did the government's bidding.

As to the *value* of religion, I would be the last person to deny it. I mentioned it before and I must refer to it again. No institution would have lasted so long and have maintained its hold on such a large percentage of the population if it didn't give something of real value, if it did not furnish support and encouragement, if it did not prove of real help in the great crises of life. Within my own brief lifetime and relatively limited experience, I have come across many instances where religion has proved a healing, a life saving balm; many are the men and women who would go to pieces, who would perhaps commit suicide if they didn't have the supporting belief in an all-wise and beneficent God, who knows what he is doing and why he is doing it, to carry them through the crisis, to help them through until the pain is somewhat dulled and the wounds cicatrized.

And I will confess, publicly and frankly,—a strange confession from the lips of a freethinker, and it requires some courage to make it—that many a time I ardently and fervently wished

## CONCLUSION

that I *could* believe in a beneficent deity. But I have never been given to “thobbing” or wishful thinking, and because we may wish, with every fiber of our soul, a thing to be true, does not make it true. Wishing a thing to exist does not make it exist.

And because I am not given to wishful thinking, I do not agree with the militant freethinkers and atheists who try to make us believe that religion is dead, that it has lost its hold on the people, that it plays practically no rôle in their lives and that soon it will be a dead issue, gone from the face of the earth. No! Religion, I mean even orthodox, dogmatic, superstitious religion, is not dead yet, and what is more, strange as this statement may sound, Catholicism is much stronger now than it was half a century ago. It has less open, direct temporal power, but its moral influence and its indirect power are much greater than they were a century or half a century ago. Take off your blinders, and look at the enormous power that Catholicism has in America. And even in anti-clerical France, the power of the Catholic Church is much greater than it was fifty years ago. No government would dare now

## IF I WERE GOD

to act toward the Catholic congregations and the Jesuits the way the Waldeck-Rousseau and the Combes ministries did, and the priests and militant lay Catholics are assuming a much bolder tone, and making bolder demands; and they do so because they know they have the people behind them. And the Jesuits and the congregations driven out of France are coming back. I know that to some of our freethinking friends this will be unpleasant reading, but I am not indulging in wishful thinking and I am telling the truth as I see it.

And I wish to repeat and to reëmphasize, so that there may be no doubt of my position, that I am convinced that at the present time there are *millions* of people to whom religion affords support, comfort and consolation which *nothing else* could. Of course, this has nothing to do with the truth of religion. I am merely asserting its pragmatic value. An *illusion* may be deeply comforting, and even life saving. Are we quite ready to be divested of all our illusions? *We* may be. But is all the rest of the world? I doubt it. But we must tell the Truth as we see it. For Truth is the only goddess at whose feet we, rationalists, can still worship.

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