

WRITINGS OF CHARLES BRADLAUGH

by Charles Bradlaugh

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by Charles Bradlaugh, compiled for study and devotional reading.

2 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. S. What did Jesus Teach?
2. S. Who was Jesus Christ?

S. What did Jesus Teach?

What Did Jesus Teach?

Charles Bradlaugh THE language in which Jesus taught has not been preserved to us. Who recorded his actual words, or if any real record ever existed, is all matter of guess. Who translated the words of Jesus into the Greek no one knows. In the compass of four pamphlets, attributed to four persons, of whose connexion with the Gospels, as we have them, little or nothing whatever can be ascertained, we have what are, by the orthodox, supposed to be the words in which Jesus actually taught.

What did he teach? Manly, self-reliant resistance of wrong, and practise of right? No; the key-stone of his whole teaching may be found in the text: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." [Matthew 5:3.] Is poverty of spirit the chief amongst virtues, that Jesus gives it prime place in his teachings? Is it even a virtue at all? Surely not. Manliness of spirit, honesty of spirit, fullness of rightful purpose, these are virtues; poverty of spirit is a crime. When men are poor in spirit, then the proud and haughty in spirit oppress them. When men are true in spirit and determined (as true men should be) to resist, and as far as possible prevent wrong, then is there greater opportunity for present happiness, and, as even Christians ought to admit, no lesser fitness for the enjoyment of further happiness in some may-be heaven. Are you poor in spirit, and are you smitten; in such case what did Jesus teach? -- "Unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other." [Luke 6:29.] Surely better to teach that "he who courts oppression shares the crime"; and if smitten once to take careful measure to prevent a future smiting. Jesus teaches actual invitation of injury. Shelley breathed higher humanity:

"Stand ye calm and resolute, Like a forest close and mute, With folded arms, and looks which are Weapons of an unvanquished war."

There is a wide distinction between passive resistance to wrong, and courting further injury at the hands of the wrongdoer. In the teaching of Jesus, poverty of spirit is enforced to the fullest conceivable extent: "Him that taketh away thy cloak, forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee, and of him that taketh away thy goods, ask them not again." [Luke 6:29-30.] Poverty of person is the only possible sequence to this extraordinary manifestation of poverty of spirit. Poverty of person is attended with many unpleasantnesses; and Jesus, who knew that poverty would result from his teaching, says, as if he wished to keep the poor content through their lives with Poverty. "Blessed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." [Luke 6:20.] But woe unto you that are rich, for ye have received your consolation." [Luke 6:24.] He pictures one in hell, whose only related vice is that in life he was rich; and another in heaven, whose only related virtue is that in life he was poor. [Luke 16:19-31.] He affirms it is more difficult for a rich man to get into heaven, than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. [Luke 18:25.] The only intent of such teaching could be to induce the poor to remain content in this life with the want and misery of their wretched state in the hope of higher recompense in some future life. Is it good to be content with poverty? Is it not far better to investigate the causes of poverty, with a view to its cure and

prevention? The doctrine is most horrid which declares that the poor shall not cease from the face of the earth. Poor in spirit and poor in pocket, with no courage to work for food, or money to purchase it, we might well expect to find the man with empty stomach also who held these doctrines; and what does Jesus teach? "Blessed are ye that hunger now, for ye shall be filled." [Luke 6:21.] He does not say when the filling shall take place. The date is evidently postponed until men will have no stomachs to replenish. It is not in this life that the hunger is to be sated. "Woe unto you that are full, for ye shall hunger." [Luke 6:25.] It would but little advantage the hungry man to bless him by filling him, if a curse awaited the completion of his repast. Craven in spirit, with an empty purse and hungry mouth -- what next? The man who has not manliness enough to prevent wrong, will probably bemoan his hard fate, and cry bitterly that sore are the misfortunes he endures. And what does Jesus teach? "Blessed are ye that weep now, for ye shall laugh," [Luke 6:21.] Is this true, and, if true, when shall the laughter come? "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." [Matthew 5:4.] Aye, but when? Not while they mourn and weep. Weeping for the past is vain: a deluge of tears will not wash away its history. Weeping for the present is worse than vain -- it obstructs your sight. In each minute of your life the aforesaid future is present born, and you need dry and keen eyes to give it and yourself a safe and happy deliverance. When shall they that mourn be comforted? Are slaves that weep salt teardrops on their chains comforted in their weeping? Each pearly overflowing as it falls rusts mind, as well as fetter. Ye who are slaves and weep, will never be comforted until you dry your eyes, and nerve your arms, and, in the plenitude of manliness:

"Shake your chains to earth, like dew Which in sleep hath fallen on you."

Jesus teaches that the poor, the hungry, and the wretched shall be blessed. But blessing only comes when they cease to be poor, hungry, and wretched. Contentment under poverty, hunger, and misery is high treason, not to yourself alone, but to your fellows. Slavery spreads quickly wherever humanity is stagnant and content with wrong.

What did Jesus teach? "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." [Matthew 19:19.] But how if thy neighbour will not hear thy doctrine when thou preachest the "glad tidings of great joy" to him? Then forgetting all your love, and with the bitter hatred that a theological disputant alone can manifest, you shall shake off the dust from your feet," and by so doing make it more tolerable in the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah, than for your unfortunate neighbour who has ventured to reject your teaching. [Matthew 10:14-15.] It is mockery to speak as if love could rally result from the dehumanizing and isolating faith required from the disciple of Jesus. Ignatius Loyola in this, at least, was more consistent than his Protestant brethren. "If any man come unto me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" [Luke 14:26.] "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's foes they shall be of his own household." [Matthew 10:34-36.] "Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life." [Matthew 19:29.] The teaching of Jesus is, in fact, save yourself by yourself. The teaching of humanity should be, to save yourself save your fellow. The human family is a vast chain, each man and woman a link. There is no snapping off one link and preserving for it, isolated from the

rest, an entirety of happiness; our joy depends on our brother's also. Jesus teaches that "many are called, but few are chosen"; that the majority will inherit an eternity of misery, while but the minority obtain eternal happiness. And on what is the eternity of bliss to depend? On a truthful course of life? Not so. Jesus puts Father Abraham in Heaven, whose reputation for faith outstrips his character for veracity. The passport through Heaven's portals is faith. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not, shall be damned." [Mark 16:16.] Are you married? You love your wife? Both die. You from first to last had said, "I believe," much as a well-trained parrot might say it. You had never examined your reasons for your faith as a true believer should, you distrusted the efficacy of your carnal reason. You said, "I believe in God and Jesus Christ," because you had been taught to say it, and you would have as glibly said, "I believe in Allah, and in Mahomet his prophet," had your birth-place been a few degrees eastward, and your parents and instructors Turks. You believed in this life, and after death awake in Heaven. Your much-loved wife did not think as you did -- she could not. Her organization, education, and temperament were all different from your own. She disbelieved because she could not believe. She was a good wife, but she disbelieved. A good and affectionate mother, but she disbelieved. A virtuous and kindly woman, but she disbelieved. And you are to be happy for an eternity in Heaven, with the knowledge that she is writhing in agony in Hell. If this be true, Shelley was right in declaring that your Christianity "Peoples earth with demons, hell with men, And heaven with slaves."

It is urged that Jesus is the saviour of the world, who brought redemption without let or stint to the whole human race. But what did Jesus teach? "Go not into any way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not," [Matthew 10:5.] were his injunctions to those whom he first sent out to preach "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel," is his hard answer to the poor Syrophenician woman who entreated succour for her child. Christianity, as first taught by Jesus, was for the Jews alone; it was only when rejected by them that the world at large had the opportunity of salvation afforded it. "He came unto his own and his own received him not." [John 1:11.] Why should the Jews be more God's own than the Gentiles? Is God the creator of all? Did he create the descendant of Abraham with greater right and privilege than all other men? Then, indeed, is grievous injustice. You had no choice whether to be born Jew or Gentile; yet to the accident of such a birth is attached the first offer of a salvation which, if accepted, shuts out all beside. The Kingdom of Heaven is a prominent feature in the teachings of Jesus. Examine the picture drawn by God incarnate of his own special domain. 'Tis likened to a wedding feast, [Matthew 22:2.] to which the invited guests coming not, servants were sent out into the highways to gather all they can find -- both good and bad. The King, examining his motley array of guests, and finding one without a wedding garment, inquired why he came in to the feast without one. The man, whose attendance had been compulsorily enforced, was speechless. And who can wonder? He was a guest from necessity, not choice; he chose neither the fashion of his coming, nor that of his attiring. Then comes the King's decree, the command of the all-merciful and loving King of Heaven. 'Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Commentators urge that it was the custom to provide wedding garments for all guests, and that this man was punished for his non-acceptance of the customary and ready robe. The text does not warrant this explanation, but gives as moral of the parable, that an invitation to the heavenly feast will not ensure partakal of it, for that "many are called, but few are chosen." What more of the Kingdom of Heaven? "Joy shall be in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth,

more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance." [Luke 15:7.] The greater sinner one has been, the better saint he makes, and the more he has sinned, so much the more he loves God. "To whom little is forgiven the same loveth little." [Luke 7:47.] Thus asserting that a life of vice, with its stains washed away by a death-bed repentance, is better than a life of consistent and virtuous conduct. Why should the fatted calf be killed for the prodigal son? [Luke 15:27.] Why should men be taught to make to themselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness? [Luke 16:9.] These ambiguities, these assertions of punishment and forgiveness of crime, instead of directions for its prevention and cure, are serious blots on a system alleged to have been inculcated by one for whom his followers claim divinity. Will you urge the love of Jesus as the redeeming feature of the teaching? Then read the story of the fig tree [Matthew 21:18-22.; Mark 11:12-24.] withered by the hungry Jesus. The fig tree was, if he were all-powerful God, made by him; he limited its growth and regulated its development; he prevented it from bearing figs, expected fruit where he had rendered fruit impossible, and in his infinite love was angry that the tree had not upon it that it could not have. What love is expressed in that remarkable speech which follows one of his parables: "For, I say unto you, that unto every one which hath shall be given, and from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away from him. But those, mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring them hither, and slay them before me." [Luke 19:26-27.] What love is expressed by that Jesus who, if he were God, represents himself as saying to the majority of his unfortunate creatures (for it is the few that are chosen): "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." [Matthew 25:41.] There is no love in this horrid doctrine of eternal torment. And yet the popular preachers of to-day talk first of the love of God and then of "Hell, a red gulf of everlasting fire, Where poisonous and undying worms prolong Eternal misery to those hapless slaves Whose life has been a penance for its crimes." In the sayings attributed to Jesus there is the passage which influenced so extraordinarily the famous Origen. [Matthew 19:12.] If he understood it wrongly, what of the wisdom of teaching which expresses itself so vaguely? The general intent of Christ's teaching seems to be an inculcation of neglect of this life in search for another. "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life." [John 6:27.] take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on ... take no thought saying, what shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed? ... But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." [Matthew 6:25-33.] These texts, if fully observed, would be most disastrous; they would stay all scientific discoveries, prevent all development of man's energies. In the struggle for existence, men are compelled to become acquainted with the conditions which compel happiness or misery. It is only in the practical application of that knowledge that the wants of society are ascertained, and disease, poverty, hunger, and wretchedness prevented, or at any rate lessened.

Jesus substitutes "I believe" for "I think," and puts "watch and pray" instead of "think, then act." Belief is the prominent doctrine which pervades and governs all Christianity. It is represented that, at the judgment, the world will be reproved "Of sin, because they believe not." This teaching is most disastrous; man should be incited to active thought: Christian belief would bind him to the teachings of a stagnant past.

Fit companion to blind belief is slave-like prayer. Men pray as though God needed most abject entreaty ere he would grant justice. What does Jesus teach on prayer? "After this manner pray ye -- Our Father which art in heaven." Do you think that God is the Father of all, when you pray that he will enable you to defeat some others of his children, with whom your nation is at war? And why "which art in Heaven"? Where is your Heaven? you look upward, and if you were at the Antipodes, would look upward still. But that upward would be downward to us. Do you localize Heaven? Why say "which art in Heaven"? Is God infinite, then he is also in earth. "Hallowed be thy name." What is God's name? if you know it not how can you hallow it? How can God's name be hallowed even if you know it? "Thy kingdom come." What is God's kingdom, and will your praying bring it quicker? Is it the judgment day? and do you say "Love one another," pray for the more speedy arrival of that day, on which God may say to your fellow "depart ye cursed into everlasting fire"? "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." How is God's will done in heaven? If the Devil be a fallen angel there must have been rebellion even there. "Give us this day our daily bread." Will the prayer get it without work? No. Will work get it without prayer? Yes. Why pray, then, for bread to God, who says, "Blessed be ye that hunger ... woe unto you that are full"? "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." [Matthew 6:12.] What debts have we to God? Sins? Coleridge writes: "A sin is an evil which has its ground or origin in the agent, and not in the compulsion of circumstances. Circumstances are compulsory, from the absence of a power to resist or control them; and if the absence likewise be the effect of circumstances ... the evil derives from the circumstances ... and such evil is not sin." ["Aids to Reflection," 1843, P. 200.] Do you say that you are independent of all circumstances, that you can control them, that you have a free will? Buckle replies that the assertion of a free will "involves two assumptions, of which the first, though possibly true, has never been proved, and the second is unquestionably false. These assumptions are that there is an independent faculty, called consciousness, and that the dictates of that faculty are infallible." ["History of Civilization," vol. 1, p. 14] "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." [Matthew 6:13.] Do you think God may lead you into temptation? If so, you cannot think him all-good; if not all-good, he is not God. If God, the prayer is blasphemy.

Jesus, according to the general declaration of Christian divines, came to die, and what does he teach by his death? The Rev. F.D. Maurice well said, "That he who kills for a faith must be weak, that he who dies for a faith must be strong." How did Jesus die? Giordano Bruno and Julius Caesar Vanini were burned, charged with heresy. They died calm, heroic, defiant of wrong. Jesus, who could not die, courted death, that he, as God, might accept his own atonement, and might pardon man for a sin which the pardoned man had not committed, and in which he had no share. The death Jesus courted came, and when it came he could not face it, but prayed to himself that he might not die. And at last, when on the cross, if two gospels do him no injustice, his last words were a bitter cry of deep despair. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The Rev. Enoch Mellor, writing on the Atonement, says: "I seek not to fathom the profound mystery of these words. To understand their full import would require one to experience the agony of desertion they express." Do the words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" express an agony caused by a consciousness of desertion? If this be not the meaning conveyed by the despairing death-cry, then there is in it no meaning whatever. And if these words do express a "bitter agony of desertion," then they emphatically contradict the teachings of Jesus. "Before Abraham was, I am." "I and my father are one." "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." These were the words of Jesus -- words conveying an impression that divinity was claimed by the one who uttered them.

If Jesus had indeed been God, the words, "My God, my God," would have been a mockery most extreme. God could not have deemed himself forsaken by himself. The dying Jesus, in that despair, confessed himself either the dupe of some other teaching, a self-deluded enthusiast, or an arch-impostor, who in that bitter cry, with the wide-opening of the flood-gates through which life's stream ran out, confessed aloud that he, at least, was no deity, and deemed himself a God-forsaken man. The garden scene of agony is fitting prelude to this most terrible act. Jesus, who is God, prays to himself; in "agony he prayed most earnestly." [Luke 22:44.] He refuses to hear his own prayers, and he, the omnipotent, is forearmed against his coming trial by an angel from heaven, who "strengthened" the great Creator. Was Jesus the Son of God? Praying, he said, Father, the hour is come, glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee." [John 17:1.] And was he glorified? His death and resurrection most strongly disbelieved in the very city where they are alleged to have happened. His doctrines rejected by the only people to whom he preached them. His miracles denied by the only nation amongst whom they are alleged to have been performed; and he himself thus on the cross crying out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Nor is it true that the teachings of Jesus are generally received. Jesus taught: "And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." How many of those who profess to believe in Jesus would be content to be tested by these signs? Any person claiming that each sign was to be found manifested in her or his case would be regarded as mad. Illustrations of faith-healing occasionally arise, but are not always reliable, nor are such cures limited to those who profess faith in Jesus. The gift of speaking with new tongues has been the claim of a very small sect. Serpent-charming is more practised among Hindus than among Christians.

Peace and love are alleged to be the special characteristics of Christianity. Yet the whole history of Christian nations has been blurred by war and hate. Now and for the past thirty years the most civilized amongst Christian nations have been devoting enormous sums and huge masses of men to the preparation for war. Torpedoes and explosive shells, one hundred ton guns and melinite, are by Christian rulers accounted better aids than faith in Jesus.

S. Who was Jesus Christ?

Who Was Jesus Christ?

Charles Bradlaugh

MANY persons will consider the question one to which the Gospels give a sufficient answer and that no further inquiry is necessary. But while the general Christian body affirm that Jesus was God incarnate on earth, the Unitarian Christians, less in numerical strength but numbering a large proportion of the more intelligent and humane, absolutely deny his divinity; the Jews, of whom he is alleged to have been one, do not believe in him at all; and the enormous majority of the inhabitants of the earth have never accepted the Gospels. Even in the earliest ages of the Christian Church heretics were found, amongst Christians themselves, who denied that Jesus had ever existed in the flesh. Under these circumstances the most pious should concede that it is well to prosecute the inquiry to the uttermost, that their faith may rest on sure foundations. The history of Jesus Christ is contained in four books or gospels; outside these it cannot be pretended that there is any reliable narrative of his life. We know not with any certainty, and have now no means of knowing, when, where, or by whom these Gospels were written. The name at the head of each Gospel affords no clue to the real writer. Before A.D. 160 no author mentions any Gospels by Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, and there is no sufficient evidence to identify the Gospels we have with even the writings to which Irenaeus refers towards the close of the second century. The Church has provided us with an author for each Gospel, and some early Fathers have argued that there ought to be four Gospels, because there are four seasons, four principal points to the compass, and four corners to the earth. Bolder speculators affirm twelve apostles because there are twelve signs of the Zodiac. With regard to the Gospel first in order, divines disagree as to the language written. Some allege that the original was in Hebrew, others deny that our Greek version has any of the characters of a translation.

We neither know the hour, nor day, nor month, nor year of Jesus's birth; divines generally agree that he was not born on Christmas Day, and yet on that day the anniversary of his birth is observed. The Oxford Chronology places the matter in no clearer light, and more than thirty learned authorities give a period of over seven years' difference in their reckoning. The place of his birth is also uncertain. The Jews, in the presence of Jesus, reproached him that he ought to have been born at Bethlehem, and he never replied "I was born there ", (John 7:41-42, John 7:52).

Jesus was the son of David, the son of Abraham (Matthew 1:2-16), from whom his descent is traced through Isaac -- born of Sarai (whom the writer of the epistle to Galatians [Galatians 4:24] says was a covenant and not a woman) -- and ultimately through Joseph, who was not only not his father, but is not shown to have had any kind of relationship to him, and through whom therefore the genealogy should not be traced. There are two genealogies in the Gospels which contradict each other, and these in part may be collated with the Old Testament genealogy, which differs from both. The genealogy of Matthew is self-contradictory, counts thirteen names as fourteen, and omits the names of three kings. Matthew says Abiud was the son of Zorobabel (Matthew 1:13).

Luke says Zorobabel's son was Rhesa (Luke 3:27). The Old Testament contradicts both, and gives Meshullam and Hananiah, and Shelomith, their sister (1 Chronicles 3:19), as the names of Zorobabel's children. The reputed father of Jesus, Joseph, had two fathers, one named Jacob, the other Heli. The divines suggest that Heli was the father of Mary, by reading the word "Mary" in Luke 3:23, in lieu of "Joseph," and the word "daughter" in lieu of "son," thus correcting the evident blunder made by inspiration. The birth of Jesus was miraculously announced to Mary and to Joseph by visits of an angel, but they so little regarded the miraculous annunciation that they marvelled soon after at much less wonderful things spoken by Simeon.

Jesus was the son of God, or God manifest in the flesh, and his birth was first discovered by some wise men or astrologers, a class described in the Bible as an abomination in God's sight. These men saw his star in the East, but it did not tell them much, for they were apparently obliged to ask information from Herod the King. Herod in turn inquired of the chief priests and scribes; and it is evident Jeremiah was right if he said, "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means," for these chief priests either misread the prophets or misquoted the Scripture, which is claimed to be a revelation from God, and invented a false prophecy (Matthew 2:5-6; cf. Micah 5:2) by omitting a few words from, and adding a few words to, a text until it suited their purpose. The star -- after the wise men knew where to go, and no longer required its aid -- led and went before them, until it came and stood over where the young child was. This story will be better understood if the reader will walk out some clear night, notice a star, and then try to fix the one house it will be exactly over. The writer of the Third Gospel, silent on the star story, speaks of an angel who tells some shepherds of the miraculous; but this does not appear to have happened in the reign of Herod.

After the wise men had left Jesus an angel warned Joseph to flee with Jesus and Mary into Egypt; and Joseph did fly, and remained there with the young child and his mother until the death of Herod; and this it is alleged was done to fulfil a prophecy. The words (Hosea 6:1) are not prophetic and have no reference whatever to Jesus. The Jesus of the Third Gospel never went into Egypt at all in his childhood. When Jesus began to be about thirty years of age he was baptized by John in the River Jordan. John, who knew him, according to the First Gospel, forbade him directly he saw him; but, according to the Fourth Gospel, he knew him not, and had, therefore, no occasion to forbid him. God is an "invisible spirit," whom no man hath seen (John 1:18) or can see (Exodus 33:20); but the man John saw the spirit of God descending like a dove. God is everywhere, but at that time was in heaven, from whence he said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Although John heard this from God's own mouth, he did not always act as if he believed it, but some time after sent two of his disciples to Jesus to inquire if he were really the Christ (Matthew 11:2-3).

Immediately after the baptism Jesus was led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil. Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights, and in those days he did eat nothing. Moses twice fasted that period. Such fasts are nearly miraculous. The modern fasting men, and the Hindoo fasters, only show that under very abnormal conditions long abstinence from food is possible. Absolutely miraculous events are events which never happened in the past, do not take place in the present, and never will occur in the future. Jesus, it is said, was God, and by his power as God fasted. On the hypothesis of his divinity it is difficult to understand how he became hungry. When hungry the Devil tempted Jesus by offering him stones, and asking him to make them

bread. Stones offered to a hungry man for bread-making hardly afford a probable temptation. Which temptation came next is a matter of doubt. Matthew and Luke relate the story in different order. According to one, the Devil next taketh Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and tempts him to throw himself to the bottom, by quoting Scripture that angels should bear him in their arms. Jesus either disbelieved this Scripture or remembered that the Devil, like other pillars of the Church, grossly misquoted to suit his purpose, and the temptation failed. The Devil then took Jesus to an exceeding high mountain, from whence he showeth him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory thereof, in a moment of time. It is urged that this did not include a view of the Antipodes, but only referred to the kingdoms then known; even then it must have been a long look from Judea to China. The mountain must have been very high -- much higher than the diameter of the earth, Origen, a learned and pious holy father, suggests that no man in his senses will believe this to have really happened. If Origen had to defend his language before a modern judge of the type of Mr. Justice North, the Christian Father would have sore risk of Holloway jail. The Devil offered Jesus -- who it is declared was one with God and therefore omnipotent -- all the kingdoms of the world if he, Jesus, the omnipotent God, would fall down and worship his own creature, the Devil. Some object that if God is the creator and omnipotent ruler of the world, then the Devil would have no control over the kingdoms of the world, and that the offer could be no temptation as it was made to Jesus, who was God omnipotent and all-wise. Such objectors rely on natural reason.

After the temptation Jesus worked many miracles, casting out devils and otherwise doing marvels amongst the inhabitants of Judea, who seem as a body to have been very unbelieving. If a second Jesus of Nazareth were in this heretical age to boast that he possessed the power of casting out devils, he would stand a fair chance of expiating his offence by a three months' imprisonment with hard labour. It is true that the 72nd Canon of the Church of England recognizes that ministers can cast out devils, but forbids them to do this unless licensed by the Bishop, "under pain of the imputation of imposture or cozenage." Now, if sick men have a little wisdom the physician is resorted to that he may cure the disease. If men have much wisdom they study physiology while they have health, in order to prevent sickness. In the time of the early Christians prayer and faith (James 5:14-15) occupied the position since usurped by medicine and experience. Men who had lost their senses in the time of Christ were regarded as attacked not by disease but by the Devil. In the days of Jesus one spirit would make a man blind, or deaf, or dumb; occasionally a number of devils would get into a man and drive him mad. On one occasion Jesus met either one man (Mark 5:2) or two men (Matthew 8:28) possessed with devils. The devils knew Jesus and addressed him by name. Jesus, not so familiar with the imp or imps, inquired the name of the particular devil he was addressing. The answer, given in Latin, would induce a belief, possibly corroborated by the writings of the monks, that devils communicated in that tongue. Jesus wanted to cast out the devils from the man; this they did not contest, but they expressed a decided objection to being cast out of the country. A compromise was agreed to, and at their own request the devils were transferred to a herd of swine. The swine ran into the sea and were drowned. There is no record of any compensation to the owner.

Jesus fed large multitudes of people under circumstances of a most ultra-thaumaturgic character. To the first book of Euclid is prefixed an axiom "that the whole is greater than its part." John Wesley was wise if it be true that he eschewed mathematics lest it should lead him to infidelity. If

any man be irreligious enough to accept Euclid's axiom he will be compelled to reject the miraculous feeding of 5,000 people with five loaves and two small fishes. The original difficulty of the miracle, though not increased, is made hard to the common mind by the assertion that after the multitude had been fed twelve baskets full of fragments remained.

Jesus is related to have walked on the sea when it was very stormy, and when "the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew." Walking on the water is a great feat even if the sea be calm, but when the waves run high it is still more wonderful. The miracle of turning water into wine at Cana, in Galilee, is worthy of attention when considering the question, Who was Jesus Christ? Jesus and his disciples had been called to a marriage feast, and when there the company fell short of wine. The mother of Jesus, to whom the Catholics offer worship, and to whom they pay great adoration, informed Jesus of the deficiency and was answered, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come." His mother seemed to have expected a miracle, yet in the Fourth Gospel the Cana wonder was the beginning of miracle-working by Jesus; the apocryphal gospels assert that Jesus practised miracle-working as a child. Jesus having obtained six water-pots full of water, turned them into wine. Teetotalers who cannot believe God would specially provide means of drunkenness urge that this wine was not of intoxicating quality, though there is nothing in the text to justify their hypothesis. The curious connexion between the phrase "well drunk" and the time at which the miracle was performed would rather warrant the supposition that the guests were already in such a state as to render it difficult for them to critically appreciate the new vintage. The moral effects of this miracle are not easily appreciable.

Shortly after this Jesus went to the temple with a scourge of small cords, and drove thereout the cattle-dealers and money-changers who had assembled there in the ordinary course of their business. The writer of the Fourth Gospel places this event very early in the public life of Jesus. The writer of the Third Gospel fixes the occurrence much later.

Jesus being hungry went to a fig-tree to gather figs, though the season of figs was not yet come. Of course there were no figs upon the tree, and Jesus then caused the tree to wither away. This is specially interesting as a problem for a true orthodox trinitarian who will believe, first, that Jesus was God, who made the tree, and prevented it from bearing figs; second, that God the all-wise, who is not subject to human passions, being hungry, went to the fig-tree, on which he knew there could be no figs, expecting to find some there; third, that God, the all-just, then punished the tree because it did not bear figs in opposition to God's eternal ordination.

Jesus had a disciple named Peter, who, having much Christian faith, was a great coward, and denied his leader in his hour of need. Jesus, though previously aware that Peter would be a traitor, yet gave him the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, and told him that whatsoever he bound on earth should be bound in Heaven. Peter was to have denied Jesus three times before the cock should crow (Matthew 26:34). The cock crowed before Peter's second denial (Mark 14:68). Commentators urge that the words used do not refer to the crowing of any particular cock, but to a special hour of the morning called "cock-crow" But if the Gospel be true the explanation is false. Peter's denial becomes the more extraordinary when we remember that he had seen Moses, Jesus, and Elias talking together, and had heard a voice from a cloud say, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." As Peter could thus deny Jesus after having heard God vouch his divinity, and Peter not only escapes punishment but gets the office of gate-keeper to Heaven,

how much more should those escape punishment and obtain reward who only deny because they cannot help it, and who have been left without any corroborative evidence of sight or hearing! The Jesus of the First Gospel promised that, as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so he (Jesus) would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Yet he was buried on Friday evening and was out of the grave before Saturday night was over. Some say that the Jews reckoned part of a day as a whole one. The translators have made Jesus perform a curious equestrian feat on his entry into Jerusalem. The text (Matthew 21:7) says they "brought the ass and the colt and put on them their clothes and set him thereon." This does not mean that he rode on both at one time; it only says so. On the Cross the Jesus of the Four Gospels, who was God, cried out " My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" God cannot forsake himself, Jesus was God himself. Yet God forsook Jesus, and the latter cried out to know why he was forsaken. Any able divine will explain that of course he knew, and that he was not forsaken. The explanation renders it difficult to believe the dying cry, and the passage becomes one of the mysteries of the holy Christian religion, which, unless a man rightly believe, "without doubt he shall perish everlastingly." At the crucifixion of Jesus wonderful miracles took place. "The graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept arose and came out of the grave after his resurrection and appeared unto many." Which saints were these? They "appeared unto many," but there is not the slightest evidence outside the Bible that anyone ever saw them. Their "bodies came out of the graves. Do not the bodies of the saints decompose like those of ordinary human beings?

Jesus must have much changed in the grave, for his disciples did not know him when he stood on the shore (John 21:4), and Mary, most attached to him, knew him not, but supposed that he was the gardener. According to the First Gospel, Jesus appeared to two women after his resurrection, and afterwards met eleven of his disciples by appointment on a mountain in Galilee. When was this appointment made? The text on which divines rely is Matthew 26:32; this makes no such appointment. According to the Second Gospel he appeared first to one woman, and when she told the disciples they did not believe it. Yet, on pain of indictment now and damnation hereafter, we are bound to unhesitatingly accept that which the disciples of Jesus rejected. By the Second Gospel we learn that instead of the eleven going to Galilee after Jesus he came to them as they sat at meat. In the Third Gospel he first appeared to two of his disciples at Emmaus, and they did not know him until they had been a long time in his company -- it was evening before they recognized him. Unfortunately, directly they knew him they did not see him, for as soon as they knew him he vanished out of their sight. He immediately afterwards appeared to the eleven at Jerusalem, and not at Galilee, as stated in the First Gospel. Jesus asked for some meat, and the disciples gave him a portion of a broiled fish and of a honeycomb, and he did eat. Jesus was afterwards taken up into Heaven, a cloud received him, and he was missed. God is everywhere, and Heaven no more above than below, but it is necessary we should believe that Jesus has ascended into Heaven to sit on the right hand of God, who is infinite and has no right hand. Was Jesus Christ a man? If limited for our answer to the mere Gospel Jesus -- surely not. His whole career is, on any literal reading, simply a series of improbabilities or contradictions. Who was Christ? born of a virgin, and of divine parentage? So too were many of the mythic Sungods and so was Krishna, whose story, similar in many respects with that of Jesus, was current long prior to the Christian era. Was Jesus Christ man or myth? His story being fable, is the hero a reality? That a man named Jesus really lived and performed some special actions attracting popular attention,

and thus became the centre for a hundred myths, may well be true; but beyond this what is there of solid fact?

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
 - 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net