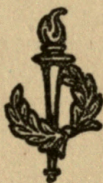


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"Not to Undeceive is to Deceive"

How the Bible Was Invented

A Lecture Delivered
Before the Independent Religious Society
Orchestra Hall
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Tenth Edition

By
M. M. MANGASARIAN

How the Bible Was Invented

Many good people believe that the Bible was given by inspiration of God. The wording of my subject suggests that it is the work of men, and not always of honest men, either. Am I trying to offend people by intimating that the Bible was *invented*? On the contrary, I am exposing myself to criticism by telling these good people the truth about the Bible, which their own preachers, for some reason or other, have withheld from them.

One of the texts in the Bible, attributed to Jesus, says that, It were better for a man to have a millstone tied about his neck, and he were cast into the sea, than that he should offend, that is to say, unsettle the faith of, "one of these little ones." According to this saying of Jesus, a man must keep his questionings and his doubts to himself. He shall not talk where he is liable to upset the faith of some believing soul,—some aged mother, some Sunday-school lad or lassie. The man who will go about disturbing people's religious peace, deserves to be drowned with a millstone about his neck! What is your opinion of such a suggestion?

If you approve of this sentiment, attributed to the founder of Christianity, then the work which we are doing here, every Sunday, is quite wicked; a millstone around our necks is what we deserve, and the bottom of the sea is where we belong.

Psychologists tell us that there is great power in suggestion. With all my love and reverence for whatever is sweet and sane in the Gospels, I must protest against this text, because it is a suggestion to violence and persecution. If Jesus suggests a millstone for the neck of the heretic who upsets people's illusions and makes inquirers out of believers, and intimates further that drowning is too good for them, why not take the hint and act upon it? He expresses a wish, shall

we not fulfill it? Alas, we know, too well, that in less enlightened ages, the suggestion of Jesus was not only carried out, but vastly improved upon—by the Spanish Inquisition, for instance.

Let us be fair. When a man is accused, it is his privilege to defend himself. If Jesus suggests that the investigator who unsettles people's beliefs should be drowned, before the suggestion is acted upon, the disturber should be given a chance to be heard. Would that be asking too much? Let us see, then, just what it means to command a man to suppress whatever might disturb a neighbor's faith: It means that if I am announced to speak on the Bible, I must say nothing to which the weakest or the most credulous among my hearers might object. If I do, I shall deserve to be tied to a millstone and drowned! But let us turn this proposition about to see how it would work: Having discovered a truth, and yearning in my soul to express it, suppose I were to say, that if any man in this audience shall scare me into silence,—shall cheat me out of the joy and duty of imparting that truth to my world, by threatening to be offended, or to be unsettled by it,—he ought to have a millstone tied to his neck and be cast into the sea. How would that do?

Again, an illustration, which I have used before, can with great aptness be repeated here: A woman is given a ring with a stone in it. Not being herself a *connaisseur* of precious stones, she is easily made to believe that her jewel is the most costly in the world. This is told her in order to make her happy, and to fancy herself as the possessor of a gem of great value. Observe, now, how much it costs to keep up this deception. All her friends have to agree to say nothing that may unsettle her faith in her imitation jewel. Indeed, they must pretend not to know the difference between the genuine and the sham stone. To preserve this woman's illusion, they must prevaricate and even openly lie, if pressed to do so, lest the poor woman's eyes should open, or her faith in her jewel be lost. Is it fair to demand so great a sacrifice to prolong the fantasy of a foolish woman?

Apply this illustration now to the Bible. Here are some people who have been told when they were young, that this book, which is placed in their hands, is a personal message

to them from God. This makes the book, certainly, more precious than any jewel. God, the owner and disposer of everything, with his own hand has inscribed an epistle to them, and this is it! What joy! What a treasure! Now these people, not being students themselves, accepted implicitly what they were told by their teachers, just as the woman, not being an expert herself, took her jeweler's word about the value of the stone in her ring. In order not to offend this child-like faith in the Bible, word is sent out to everybody to hush. Hush! not a word! not a whisper!—Hush! hush! is the cry of all. To uphold this conspiracy of silence, arrangements are made to dictate what may and what may not be said in public. A preacher in praying or preaching might give away the secret,—he might inadvertently say something which may prick this pretty bubble of illusion. Hence, in the Catholic and Episcopal Churches, all the prayers are printed, and the preachers pray according to the book. Do you think the Church will let a man close his eyes and open his mouth and say whatever comes into his head? Indeed, not! He must pray by the book. In the protestant denominations there is the creed, to which you swear your allegiance before you can open your mouth in one of their churches, and the moment you are caught talking beyond what the creed allows, your ordination is taken from you and your mouth is shut. Dear me! all this regime is for the purpose of encouraging the conceit that man has been favored with a hand-written, personal message, from the Creator of the universe.

If this were all, we, ourselves, would not take notice of it. But we, too, are compelled to join this conspiracy of silence and suppression, and to lie in the interests of the delicate believers whose faith cannot stand the least strain. Darwin must beware how he writes about the origin of species, or the descent of man. Some believer, hugging ecstatically his Bible to his bosom, might read his books and lose his blissful conceit. Do not think, do not invent, do not announce your truth, ye philosophers, scientists and reformers! without first consulting the prejudices of the "little ones" in the faith; for if you unsettle the faith of a single believer, it were better that you were weighted down into the sea by a millstone hanging about your necks. And you, whose love and genius give us

our daily victory over disease and error,—whose thought is our daily bread and beauty,—you, too, must hush, you must become sterile, or be content to speak by rote, lest you should disturb the repose of the believer who has laid himself down to sleep. The theological babe must not be awakened. It will bawl and cry if aroused, and better than cause one of these babes to cry, let there be no intellectual life in the world!

Our American author, Thoreau, was right when he said that, "The modern Christian is a man who has consented to say all the prayers in the liturgy, provided you will let him go straight to bed and sleep quietly afterward." That is to say, he does not wish to be disturbed. "All his prayers begin with," says Thoreau, "Now I lay me down to sleep." *Sleep*, seems to be his quest, intellectual as well as physical, "and he is forever looking forward to the time when he shall go to his 'long rest.'" He looks forward to a future of inactivity. All effort, especially intellectual effort, is distasteful to him, and is apt to offend and unsettle him. Hence the intellectual life must not be real; what must be real is the *sleep*.

Those of you who support these lectures, as well as those of you who only hear them, know that our position is the very reverse of what Jesus and the Church recommend. We do not believe in persecution. We do not even suggest that anybody should be drowned; but if our human nature is so depraved that persecution and murder are inevitable, then, in our humble opinion, it will be more economical to drown the people who will not permit a Darwin to give his thought to the world, than to drown a Darwin. The man who is offended at freedom of speech, can be dispensed with more safely than the man who avails himself of this divine privilege. If my freedom of speech offends my neighbor, his fear of freedom is a greater offense to me. Which of us deserves most to be drowned?

But in the next place the suggestion that people who rob their weaker fellows of their illusions should be drowned, even when it does not lead to persecution, is an encouragement to *hypocrisy* and *imposture*, as the story of the composition of the Bible which will now be told, shows.

You have to listen as closely as you can, if you do not wish to do me the injustice of misrepresenting me. I have

traveled extensively in the Orient, and have conversed with and read the works of eminent scholars who have enjoyed a first-hand acquaintance with eastern people, and the unanimous testimony is that one of the besetting sins of Oriental races, is lying. It is not because the Asiatics are wickeder than European nations, for in other respects they are as good, if not better, than ourselves. The average of morality is perhaps about the same in all countries. But the notorious vice of all Asiatic peoples is lying. They lie with a freedom and a fluency,—with such plausibility and so straight a face,—that one can hardly distinguish their lie from their truth. Curious though it may seem, people who are given to lying are often the first to be deceived by their own lies. They

“Keep on till their own lies deceive them,
And oft’ repeating, at length believed ’em.”

Now, then, I am going to look this audience in the face, and then I am going to say just this:

The Bible is an Oriental book.

When, in reading the Bible, I find in it exaggeration, invention, and even unscrupulous misrepresentation, I am not astonished, because I know that it is an Oriental book. But the orthodox believer, in order to excuse or explain away, for instance, these violations of the law of veracity, resorts frequently to sophistry, subterfuge, and even, alas, to lies more unscrupulous than any found in the Bible. This is as sad as it is true. But to defend one lie, or to make it look like the truth, more lying becomes necessary.

There are numerous instances of the Oriental practice of lying in the Bible. Abraham suppressed the truth about his wife, and declared she was his sister. Jacob deceived his father, Isaac, and made him believe he was Esau, and stole his blessing. The same patriarch deceived his father-in-law, and stole his gods. God himself instructs Samuel to tell a falsehood to Saul, to whom he is sent on a mission. “I will send them a lying spirit,” threatens Jehovah, when he is out of temper. And, in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul is Oriental enough, though in many respects a great soul, to resort to “craft and guile,” and to be “all things to all men,” and even to lie for the glory of God. Aside from this being

his own policy, he imagined that it was also the policy of God. "And for this cause," he says in his Epistle to the Thessalonians, "God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe in a lie." Reflect upon that. To send a delusion to people means to trip or trap them,—to catch them in a snare. People tell a falsehood, either to protect themselves, or to hurt others. God needed not to resort to this means to protect himself. Paul tells us he does this to hurt others. "God shall send them strong delusion, that they might believe a lie that *they all might be damned*." How could Paul, an exceptionally intelligent man, be guilty of such blasphemy? How could he so damage the character of the God he loved? My answer is that he was an Asiatic, and he did not look upon lying in the same light that Europeans do. The Asiatic conscience for veracity has never enjoyed a very high reputation. The Apostle Paul even boasts that, "being crafty, I caught you with guile."

A very curious controversy took place some years ago, between Herbert Spencer and a religious Weekly. Quoting the words of Paul to the Romans, where he says, "For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory, etc.," Spencer condemned Paul for this; the religious Weekly objected that Paul was only speaking ironically. And Mr. Spencer generously admitted that such a supposition was quite possible. We are ourselves willing to give Paul every opportunity to exonerate himself, and will not press the charge too vehemently against him. But whatever Paul may have meant in his argument with the Romans, what shall we say about his defense of "guile and craft," in his Epistle to the Thessalonians? And what about his general policy, to be all things to all men,—that is to say, to trim and compromise?

Moreover, the practice of the Church during the early centuries, confirms the criticism of such representative writers as Mosheim, Ellicott, Warburton, Lecky, Gibbon, Jortin, Gieseler, and other equally reliable authorities, that "The pernicious maxim that those who make it their business to deceive with a view of promoting the cause of truth, were deserving rather of commendation than of censure."

"History forces upon us," writes Bishop Ellicott, "the recognition of pious fraud as a principle which was by no

means inoperative in the earliest ages of Christianity." It reflects credit upon this Bishop,—this European,—to admit that the early Christians cultivated the Oriental practice of "lying for the glory of God." Eusebius, the saint who invented Constantine's vision of the cross, boasted that "*he had written what redounded to the glory* and suppressed whatever tended to the disgrace of religion."

"No faith with the heretics," was the cry of the Christian church for centuries.

My object in speaking of this is to show that even as our Oriental-born religion, brought over into Europe the germ of monasticism, religious intolerance, the practise of burning men and women alive,—absolutism in matters of faith, determining by authority of councils what shall and what shall not be the truth,—not one of which institutions previously existed in Europe; it also brought over, the Oriental practice of pious lying, and gave it a vogue which it had never before enjoyed in Europe.

It is universally admitted that beside the four Gospels which the churches believe to be genuine, there were, in the early centuries, hundreds of Gospels which have been rejected as spurious. Pause for a moment, and think of what that means. Why were there so many lying Gospels? The very fact that our four Gospels were chosen from a pile of manuscripts, everyone of which claimed to be genuine, is a sad commentary upon the morality of the early churchmen. I trust you duly appreciate the significance of this. What was it that gave an impetus to the industry of imposture? How explain the vogue which lying for religion enjoyed after the conversion of the Roman Empire? Was it so profitable to manufacture Gospels that everybody tried his hand at it? I cannot get away from the tremendous fact that by the admission of the churches themselves, there were a great number of apocryphal Gospels thrown upon the religious market as soon as Christianity became well established in Europe. What made lying so popular and profitable all at once? If it is true, and it is, that our four Gospels had to be voted upon from among a heap of other manuscripts; and if it is true, as one Church father reports, that a great number of manuscripts were placed under a table, and that prayers were then offered to induce

the genuine Gospels to jump upon the table, and that four of them did so, while the rest, failing to jump upon the table, were disowned; and if it is also true, and we know it is, that some of the Christian fathers claimed that only four Gospels could be genuine because the earth has four corners, and four winds. If all this is true—then, speaking as a student of history, whether it unsettles you or not, I am constrained to say that this Oriental religion, as soon as it set foot in Europe, lifted both superstition and lying to the dignity of a vocation.

But when we come to the four Gospels themselves, pronounced to be canonical, do you know, my hearers, that there are upwards of 150,000 different readings of these same Gospels? That is to say, the same passages read one way in one manuscript, and another, in another, while they may be absent altogether from a third, etc. In view of all these facts, reflect upon the intelligence of the man who, Sunday after Sunday, holds up the Gospels as the infallible word of God. He does so because he is speaking by the creed, to which he has sworn allegiance for the rest of his life. One hundred and fifty thousand various readings of the New Testament! And think of the centuries of bloodshed and controversy over these various readings!

Open, if you please, your New Testaments and read the seventh verse of the fifth chapter of the first epistle of John, then look for the same verse in the Revised Version, and you will not find it there. After being regarded as the word of God for two thousand years, it has been expurgated. Today, according to one Bible (the King James Version), this passage is inspired; according to another Bible (the Revised Version), it is an imposture. Let me quote the text:

"For there are three that bear record in Heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one."

What better proof of the Trinity do we need? On black and white, in the Bible, John, the Apostle, declares by the power of the Holy Ghost, that there are three in heaven, gives their names, and adds that these three are one.

Some lying scribe, some crabbed sectarian, some unconscionable copyist, bribed by his party, must have invented this

text, which, for twenty centuries, has been worshiped as the word of God. Wicked sceptics, two thousand years ago, denounced the clumsy imposture, but they were silenced by the halberd and the sword. It has taken the Christian Church nearly two thousand years to discover that the sceptics were right. It has taken the church two thousand years of evolution in honesty and intelligence to throw out this spurious text. It has taken the church, claiming to be under the guidance of the Spirit of God, twenty hundred years in which to acquire the courage and love of truth of the wicked sceptics who first called attention to this lie hiding behind an apostle's name. Reflect upon this! After using every means, even the most cruel, to force this Trinitarian text upon the world, the Revised Version blushes with shame to retain it any longer.

It would be unnecessary to multiply illustrations, but let my readers also consult the words in the margin of the last chapter of the Gospel of Mark, in the Revised Bible. Eleven entire verses of this chapter after having been palmed off for two thousand years as the word of God; after being repeatedly quoted as representing God's mind on matters of faith; after causing untold misery, cruel wars, persecutions, diabolical tortures, and more than all these, such mental anguish in millions of sensitive minds as no repentance can atone for,—these verses, among which is the following: "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole Creation. . . . He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, *but he that believeth not shall be damned*,"—has been placed under an interrogation mark. Ah, for how much misery is the above damnable clause responsible! How many lives this leprous falsehood has blasted! How this cruel imposture, like a malignant cancer, ate away the sound parts in human nature, for twenty long centuries!

Among these eleven verses are also Jesus' promise of miraculous power to his disciples, such as casting out devils, juggling with live serpents, drinking deadly poisons, laying hands on the sick,—which has filled our world with charlatans without number. But now comes the Revised Version, and quietly dismisses from the Word of God these eleven Verses, with these words in the margin: "The two oldest Greek manuscripts, and some other authorities, omit from verse 9

to the end (verse 20). Some other authorities have a different ending to the Gospel." Read the above carefully and reflect. The old translators suppressed all this information, and gave us to believe that we were not only reading the word of God, but the only word of God in existence. The revisers say, "Some other authorities have a *different* ending to the Gospel." Is not that edifying? How did they decide which "ending of the Gospel" to print as the Word of God? And why did the translators of the Bible wait two thousand years before they gave out this information? Is it to their increasing honesty that we owe this admission, or is it the increasing power of the non-churchgoing world which has compelled this admission from their lips? Yes, yes, pause and think of how an organization must have become gangrened with imposture to have successfully resisted every claim of truth and honor for two thousand years! This is a question of conscience as well as a question of knowledge. Why did the translators suppress the fact until a few years ago that, "Some other authorities have a different ending to the Gospel"?, and that "the *two oldest* Greek manuscripts and some other authorities omit from verse 9 to the end"? Time forbids me to give other illustrations of the—I regret to say it—manipulations of the Word of God by its custodians. The heart bleeds with mingled pain and indignation at the temerity and effrontery of the pious crew, who, to advance their "ism" or to make converts, did not hesitate to pervert history.

For two thousand years, for anyone to dare breathe a word against this Bible-inventing party, meant hell here and hereafter. Mark Antony invited Rome to weep over the prostrate form of assassinated Cæsar. I wish I could provoke you to a burning blush of indignation over the prostrate majesty of Europe and America at the feet of these unconscionable inventors of inspired texts. Blessed be the day which humbled the pride of the ecclesiastic, and wrested from his hands the power to suppress the truth!

But aside from doctoring their own Gospels, the early Christians did not hesitate to submit the writings of the great pagans,—Seneca, Pliny, Tacitus, Suetonious, Marcus Aurelius and the Jewish historian, Josephus, to the same indignity, by

slipping passages into their works favorable to the Christian religion. Perhaps I am to be blamed for taking this matter so seriously, but how can I help it? I feel the wrong, the shame, and the crime of it, deep in my bones—when I picture to myself an Asiatic scribbler, a sectarian, a clown, a rogue, a cheat, tampering with the works of a dead master,—pushing and squeezing his imposture into the mouth of the mighty dead,—defiling the thought of the philosopher with the foulness of his superstition! It makes my heart rise and knock with vehemence against my ribs until I feel as if they would break. Not only were individual passages invented and slipped into the Pagan writings, but a number of books were written and attributed to the greatest shining lights of the old Roman world. Dr. Gieseler, a prominent Christian historian of modern Germany, who has made, as most German students do, a painstaking study of the early centuries, says that, when the Christians were accused of inventing manuscripts, they “quieted their consciences respecting the forgery with the idea of their good intentions.” “It was an age of literary fraud,” declares Bishop Ellicott.

There is shown at the library in Jena, a letter purported to have been written by Publius Lentulus, the supposed predecessor of Pontius Pilate. The impostor who concocted this epistle and affixed the signature of a Roman governor to it, makes him tell the Roman Senate, “that there had appeared (in Judea) a man endowed with great powers, whose name is Jesus Christ.” The earmarks of fraud are so plain that even the orthodox are ashamed of this clumsy manufacture. Another Gospel is attributed to Pontius Pilate. Nicodemus is made the author of still another. The Emperor Aurelius, is made to recommend the Christians to the Senate for their valor; Tiberius even gives his testimony in their favor; Jesus, himself, is made the author of a treatise in his own behalf; the Virgin Mary writes the story of her wonderful child; Adam, even, testifies to the truth of the Christian religion, though he is supposed to have lived nearly four thousand years before Jesus. There is no end to the list of inventions.

But one of the most daring forgeries is the following passage in Josephus:

"About that time appeared Jesus, a wise man, if indeed it be right to speak of him as a man, for he was a performer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew after him many of the Jews as well as of the Gentiles. *This same was the Christ.* And though Pilate, by the judgment of the chief rulers among us, delivered him up to be crucified . . . he showed himself alive on the third day . . ."

That this famous passage in Josephus is an interpolation, is now generally admitted. Breaking suddenly in the midst of a paragraph, the great Jewish historian pauses to announce that Jesus was the Christ, and that he really rose from the dead, etc., etc. This, if true, makes Josephus a Christian, which he was not. The early fathers, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen, never referred to this famous passage, which they certainly would have done, had such a passage existed. What better evidence could they desire in their controversy with the Jews than to point to this wonderful confession of their principal author and historian, that the Jesus whom they crucified was the Christ, and that he rose from the dead! But in the Josephus with which they were acquainted there was no such text. Origen, the Christian Father, admits in his writings that Josephus was not a believer in Christ. How, then, did this passage creep into the works of the Jewish historian? The man who discovered this passage in Josephus was the same man who invented Constantine's vision, and the fable of the Seventy, who, he says, shut up in seventy separate cells, produced the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, a translation, which, he adds, was surely the work of the Holy Ghost, because when the Seventy separate translations were compared, they were found to be in every detail alike, without even the difference of a punctuation mark in them all. To further prove this story, Eusebius tells us that he himself saw the seventy cells which the translators had occupied four hundred years before. This is the kind of churchman who first discovered the Josephus passage. After quoting the interpolated passage, Eusebius wonders how any Jew can have the impudence not to believe that Jesus was the Christ. In one of his essays, De Quincy says that only lunatics now believe in the genuineness of this passage, while a bishop

of the Anglican Church,—Warburton—calls it “a stupid forgery.”

But the early Christians made even the pagan gods to testify for Jesus. They composed verses in praise of the Christian religion and attributed them to the pagan Sibyls. The oracles of Rome were made to prophesy the coming of Christ,—his passion, and resurrection, and to admit their inferiority to him. For many hundred years these Sibylline verses were quoted as genuine, until the advancement of education laughed the disgraceful fabrication out of existence.

Again, pious ecclesiastics in their zeal for their “ism,” invented also an *Apostles’ Creed*, which the apostles never saw, and an *Apostolic Constitution*, containing directions how a Christian Church or State should be governed. They invented also the *Decretal Epistles*, by which Constantine transfers all his property to the Bishop of Rome,—his sword, his diadem, his throne,—and makes a prince of the pope, and an empire of his church. Here is the passage which was forged into Constantine’s mouth by the Spanish priest Isidore:

“We ascribe to the See of St. Peter all dignity, all glory, all imperial power. . . . Besides, we give to Sylvester (bishop of Rome) and his successor, our palace of the Lateran which is beyond question the most beautiful place on earth. We give him our crown, our mitre, our diadem, and all our imperial vestments; we remit to him the imperial dignity. We give as a pure gift, to the holy pontiff, the city of Rome and all the Western cities of Italy, as well as the Western cities of other countries. In order to give place to him, we yield our dominion over all these provinces by removing the seat of our empire to Byzantium, considering it not right that a terrestrial emperor should preserve the least power where God had established the head of religion.”

How lovely! No wonder that Cardinal Newman regarded Constantine as a pattern for all future monarchs.

But enough! Let us draw the curtain upon that early Christian age of invention and imposture. Why was it, we ask again, that Europe became a market for forgeries, immediately after its conversion to the Asiatic cult?

Yet we must not forget that hand in hand with this dishonest work of invention, went the shameful destruction of what-

ever was deemed unfavorable to the new religion. Many of the masterpieces of pagan literature were destroyed when they could not be tampered with. The rare volumes of history, philosophy and poetry were reduced to ashes, that they might not live to bear witness to the greatness of the pre-Christian world. Even as they destroyed the monuments and temples of Athens and Rome, they destroyed also the precious manuscripts of Greek and Roman authors. From the following confession of St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, we may gauge the temper of the early Christian Church: "I myself would willingly assume the guilt (of destroying pagan buildings) and say that 'I have set them in flames that there may be not a place left in which Christ is denied.'"

Let us now briefly, tell the story of the invention of the Old Testament: When Moses finished writing the book of the law, he called the elders of the people before him and commanded them to "*take the book of the law* and put it into the side" or the inside "of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness." The ark was a chest or box constructed after specific directions from God, and was placed in the holy place in the temple, under or behind a veil, which also covered the mercy seat upon the ark. As you must know, even Aaron the high priest was cautioned against approaching this place too often, for it was very holy. According to this account, God gives a book to his people, but he locks it up in a box, and places the box behind a veil, then fixes a seat upon the box which He Himself, occupies. How could the people, under these circumstances, get at the book? But it was not meant that they should. Ah, we have here a fine illustration of what we may call the craft of the priest, or priestcraft. They announce a revelation from God, but they will not permit anyone to take it home and read it. It is locked up in a box, and God himself is made to sit on the box.

The grass dies without air and light. The birds pine away in a cage. Even the worms which creep in damp holes, come out for a glimpse of the light, now and then; but the word of God hides in the darkness of the ark, and fears the searching gaze of man! Was it born to be buried in a wooden tomb,—

born to be locked up in a shittim-wood chest,—born to blink at the light! Ah, the precious priests! The sun may be seen by everybody, the stars shine in the open, but the Word of God, like a bashful maid, shrinks from observation, and sneaks into a closet. To this day, the Catholics have to go to a closet—that is to say they have to secure permission, before they can read the Word of God.¹

To show that we have Bible authority for the statements made above, we will quote from the Book of Deuteronomy, chapter xxxi, verse 24, etc.:

“And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished. That Moses commanded the Levites which bare the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, saying: Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee.”

The directions are specific. And the people's reverence for the ark or the chest containing the inspired words of God increased a thousandfold.

Let us continue: The book of the law is now in the box, with the lid closed, and the deity sitting on the lid. Surely, it will be impossible for the book ever to get lost. But it did get lost. We will tell its story presently. But first let us speak of the jealousy with which the priests watched the ark. In times of war when the Jews were compelled to move the ark from one place to another, everybody was strictly forbidden from touching it, or looking into it. On one occasion, while they had the chest containing the two tables of stone and the Book of the Law, on an ox-cart, moving it to a place of safety, the cart jostled and the ark tipped. One of the drivers, Uzzah, instinctively, put forth his hand to steady the sacred chest. He was instantly killed. He touched the ark, and that was a crime. One must not even touch the box to save it from falling, much less read and investigate the book hidden therein. Every precaution was taken to protect the Bible from being investigated. God did not guard the tree of

¹See Saladin's *God and His Book*.

knowledge more zealously than did the priests the book of the law.

There were some people, however, who were curious enough to peep into the ark, in spite of the threats of the rabbis. To scare these people, the awful words,—sacrilege, impiety, profanity,—*blasphemy*,—were invented. When these failed, murder was resorted to. Listen to this story: The people of Beth-Shemesh, being of an inquiring mind, one day, they approached the ark and peeped into it, or tried to. Well; riot and massacre followed! The Lord “smote the men of Beth-Shemesh because they had looked into the ark of the Lord, even he smote of the people fifty thousand and three score and ten men,”—fifty thousand and seventy. The rabbis charged this wholesale massacre to the deity. All successful murderers do the same. But we must admit the priests took excellent care of the ark and its contents. Unfortunately, however, it is now nearly three thousand years since the ark was last heard of. Where is it now?

But to return to our story:

Many years after the time we are now speaking of, when King Solomon finished his magnificent temple, in Jerusalem, he ordered the ark to be opened. How he dared to disobey the priests, I cannot tell, but kings enjoy special privileges, and perhaps, he had never heard that there was a prohibition against even touching the ark. When the ark was opened, lo! and behold! the Book of the Law which Moses had commanded to be put inside the ark was not there.

It was not there!

In 2nd Kings, eighth chapter, ninth verse, we read that when they opened the ark:

“There was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone.”

In other words, the book which we read about in the former quotation from the Bible, and which contained most valuable divine instructions to the people, had disappeared. The ark contained only two stones, which too, in due time, went the way of the book, and no one knows where they are at the present time. Ark and stones and book, as they are

nowhere to be found, there is a bare possibility that they have returned to heaven whence they came.

But let us follow the story: The book was not in the ark.

What fate had befallen it? Was it never put there? When Uzzah, and the five thousand and seventy men were killed for touching the ark, was it empty? Solomon had the lid of the chest removed, and he found therein no "Book of the Law," which was ordered to be placed there "as a witness."

Then followed a stretch of centuries in which the Book of the Law is not heard of. Oblivion now began to spread its dusty wings upon the memory of it. Yet, suggests Saladin, the old world jogged along as usual; the sun rose and set; the moon, as ever before shed its romantic light upon sea and shore. Lovers paired, and children, like a flock of swallows, visited our earth. They toiled, grew old and died—without any Book of the Law.

There is a third chapter in the biography of the Bible. Three hundred and fifty years after Solomon had fallen asleep with his fathers, one morning,—I cannot tell whether it was on a fair or on a foul day, Hilkiah,—remember that name,—Hilkiah! the high priest, knocked on the door of Shaphan, King Josiah's private secretary, and begged for a private interview,—a *tete-a-tete*, as the French would say. Leaning over, he whispered in the ears of the King's minister, slowly and solemnly, as one who is burdened with some compelling news,—that—he—had—just—found—"The Book of the Law" which had been lost for three hundred and fifty years!

The two men paused and looked at each other for a moment. Yes, Hilkiah, the high priest, had found the book which had been lost for three hundred and fifty years! And where? In the Temple! Had the king's minister been in an inquiring mood, he might have asked some questions: Was the book lying there all these years and not a man stumbled upon it? Or was it just put there for Hilkiah to find it? If it had been lost for three hundred years or more, how could Hilkiah tell that the book he found was the same that Moses wrote and ordered kept in the shittim-wood chest? If Hil-kiah made any changes in the book, how is the world to know which is Hilkiah's and which is Moses' contribution to the Bible? But the questions were not asked. Besides, faith

can shut its small eye to even greater difficulties than are involved in Hilkiah's discovery.

When the King heard this extraordinary news, he must have doubted the word of the high priest, for he appointed a committee, whose names are given in the Bible, to present a report on this newly-found book. What did the committee do? Did it study the book? Did it invite native and foreign scholars to pronounce upon it? Did it encourage the noblest, bravest, most truthful men and women in the world to express their free opinion about it, or to cross-examine the high priest? Indeed not! The committee took the book and went to a medium. They believed that the prophetess Huldah, the medium, or the witch, was the sole person capable of passing upon the genuineness of inspired documents. No thinker, no conscientious student, patiently collecting facts, and fearlessly exposing error, could compare with the witch Huldah in inspiration. She was to the Jewish nation, at this time, what Plato and Aristotle were to the heathen Greeks. Huldah, the medium, represented the highest culture of the country and its people. She was the one light in Jerusalem. The confidence of Minot, Savage, Heber, Newton and publisher Funk, in Mrs. Piper, is not a circumstance to the faith of King Josiah's committee in prophetess Huldah. And she did not require time to study the book, or to make investigations. What kind of a prophetess would she have been if she could not answer any questions offhand?

Of course, Huldah's opinion was the Lord's opinion, because she began her decision with the words, "Thus saith the Lord." And although, like all mediums, she is very careful not to commit herself, she seems to have satisfied the delegation from the King that the priest, Hilkiah, had found the lost book of the law. For some reason which we are unable to divine the book was not put back into the Ark. Perhaps they had found a safer place.

How do Christian scholars explain this Hilkiah episode? Let us quote from the *Encyclopedia Biblica*, one of the best known commentaries on the Bible:—"What led Hilkiah to say that he had found the Book of the Law is not recorded." Perhaps it was not convenient to do so: "He may merely have meant," adds the commentator, feeling fearfully the strain of

his orthodoxy, "Here is the best and fullest law-book, about which thou hast been asking." Is not this ingenious? "I have found the Book of the Law," may only have meant, according to this clergyman's interpretation, "Here is the best and fullest law-book about which thou hast been asking." But why should Hilkiah have meant one thing and said another? And what about the fact that Solomon failed to find the Book of the Law in the Ark, and that for three hundred and fifty years there is silence about this same book? And why did they go to medium Huldah, if everybody knew what the book was? But the explanations of the orthodox scholars which I have quoted prove what I said about the believer being compelled to twist and cramp his conscience even worse than the reputed authors of the Scriptures have done, in order to smooth over the offenses against truth and honor in the Bible.

The authors of the *Encyclopedia Biblica* are among the most scholarly and progressive of the Christian clergy, and their answer to questions about the High Priest Hilkiah is as good as can be expected, under the circumstances. But we know of a safer answer than that—*silence*.

There is a concluding chapter in the history of the Bible. It appears that when Jerusalem fell into the hands of the Persians, the city was pillaged, the temple destroyed, and the Book of the Law which Hilkiah had discovered, was burned. Once more, Israel is without a book. Driven into captivity, the Jews lived among the heathen without a temple and without a bible. Then Cyrus, the King of Persia, is represented in the book of Ezra, as issuing a proclamation to the Jews to return to their country and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. At this time, Cyrus, graciously delivered to the Jews "the vessels of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods." Among the articles restored to the Temple, no mention is made of the Book of the Law. But Ezra, who is called "a scribe of the words of the commandment of the Lord," appears to have not only rebuilt the temple, but also to have restored the burned Book of the Law. In forty days, by the help of forty associates, everything that was ever reported to have been done of the Lord was put to writing and read aloud to the congregation which kept standing as Ezra

read to them. Such is the story in the Book of *Esdras*.

That Ezra was the restorer of the destroyed law seems to have been the opinion of almost all the early church Fathers. "Whether you choose to call Moses the author of the Pentateuch, or Ezra the restorer of the same book, I make no objection," wrote St. Jerome. Clement, of Alexandria, another church Father, writes, that, "The writings having been destroyed, Ezra, the Levite, having become inspired, prophesied, restoring again all the old writings." Eusebius and Irenaeus seem to be of the same opinion, and the famous Tertullian, a pillar of the church, gives his testimony that, "Jerusalem having been destroyed by the Babylonian siege, it appears that every instrument of Jewish literature was restored by Esdras."

If Esdras, indeed, restored the burned book, which Hilkiah had found in the Temple after it had been lost for three hundred and fifty years, then, the question whether Moses was inspired or not,—a question which has vexed the world so much—loses all its importance. Was Ezra inspired? That is the crucial question? If he was not, how can Moses' inspiration help us since his writings were burned by the Persians, even if they were not stolen from the ark and revised by Hilkiah? The inventor of the Old Testament was Ezra, "a scribe of the words of the commandment of the Lord," that is to say, the clerk or amanuensis of God, a title which aptly describes not the interpreter, but the author of the Book of the Law. What kind of a man was this compiler or inventor of the Book of the Law? What does Christian Scholarship think of his character? Let us hear the doctors of divinity on Ezra.

The authors of the *Encyclopedia Biblica* whom we have already quoted, admit that the man who bears the name of Ezra manipulated, if he did not invent, the narrative which he tells in the Bible:—"He partly mutilates it by removing a portion, partly makes it almost unintelligible by placing it in a connection to which it does not belong, and by making interpolations, etc." Could we ask for a stronger proof that the Bible is the work of men—and not of honest men, at that? But is it fair to include the whole Bible in this accusation? I wish I could feel that some portions of the Bible are free from suspicion, but I cannot. Alas! it is impossible to point to a single

book in the Bible of the authorship of which we may speak with assurance. The marks of political and theological imposture in the Bible are like leopard's spots, they cannot be removed.

Well! It must not be thought that we have now disarmed the bibliolaters. They have still a powerful weapon left with which to defend the Bible: Suppose Ezra did compose or compile the Book! Is it not, nevertheless, true that the Bible teaches righteousness? The argument is something like this: The Bible may not be true, but it is very moral. In our opinion, however, it is even less moral than it is true. A book which commands murder, plunder, persecution for opinion sake, slavery and credulity of the most abject kind, can not very well be recommended as a moral text-book. Of course, there are in the Bible, as also in the Vedas or the Koran, splendid passages of truth and beauty, but by selecting only one set of passages and ignoring the rest any book could be made pure.

Matthew Arnold professes to have discovered in the Old Bible "the Eternal, not ourselves, making for Righteousness," one of his proofs being Ps. 50:23: "To him that ordereth his conversation *right* shall be shown the salvation of God." But the Revised Version has robbed the Oxford professor of his text by completely changing its meaning: "Whoso offereth the sacrifice of thanksgiving glorifieth me, and prepareth a way that I may show him the salvation of God" (See margin of Revised Version). There is nothing in the original about "ordering one's conduct or conversation right," it was put there by the translators whose moral culture was far superior to the authors they were rendering into English.

Moreover, Matthew Arnold, fully conceding the conclusions of the "higher critics," e. g., that the events narrated in the Bible are in most cases pure fabrications; that they are the work of myth-mongers who sought to pass as genuine and divine, documents which they had themselves forged for partisan purposes—who plagiarized from Assyrian liturgies, and wilfully misrepresented as well as interpolated the history of their nation—asks us, nevertheless, to look upon these political schemers and *poseurs*, as having but one all-consuming passion—*righteousness!*

In conclusion: The inspiration of the Bible is not a ques-

tion of belief, it is a question of evidence. If believing a book inspired could make it so, then, the books of Mohammed and Buddha, of Confucius and Zoroaster, must be inspired too. In fact, any book could be made infallible, if believing it to be so, were all that was required. But does the evidence which I have offered prove that the Bible was invented? I sincerely believe it does, but still, I may be mistaken, and am therefore open to any evidence which may be furnished that the four gospels, for instance, were not invented by religious partisans, who, while suppressing their own names, paraded those of the apostles as their real authors, notwithstanding that the apostles had been dead long ago. I shall consider, conscientiously, any evidence which might be furnished that Ezra was not the real reproducer, if not the original author of the Jewish code, after his return from Babylonia. And, I promise to retract and apologize for the position I have maintained in this lecture, if the theologians, who are at home on this subject, will prove that there were no spurious gospels, no impostures, no lying manuscripts thrown upon the religious market as soon as the pagan state embraced Christianity, I will also listen to any arguments which may be produced to show that *the Apostles' Creed* was written by the apostles; that Constantine abdicated in favor of the pope; that the Pagan Sibyls prophesied of Christ, and that Josephus acknowledged Jesus to have been the Messiah.

I sincerely trust some learned divine into whose hands this lecture might fall, will present the other side, if he thinks there is another side, of the story I have presented. By the word invented it is not meant that the names, events, etc., were all manufactured, but that stories borrowed largely from mythical sources were edited and altered to serve partisan and political purposes.

And why have I told this story?

Do you know of any good reason, reader, why every other subject may be independently discussed or investigated, except religion? And do you know why, if Shakespeare can stand criticism, the Bible should shrink from it?

If it is possible to disagree with, or to advance beyond, Plato, Socrates, Spencer, Darwin, Goethe, Emerson,—please! why is it a heresy to differ from Moses, Solomon, Jonah or

Jesus? Why is it proper to disagree with a Greek or a Roman, but blasphemy to disagree with a Jew?

The Bible has for centuries blocked the way of progress. As an infallible book it has enslaved conscience, and encouraged intolerance. To defend its many puerilities, and even immoral tales, men have resorted to casuistry and dissimulation. I believe that men will be more honest, more tolerant, more progressive, more independent and more manly, if they could be delivered from the bondage of the Bible. To overthrow its tyranny and to prove that a book can not be the master of living and growing men, to make man free, to raise him from his knees, to bring back the color to his cheeks white with fear, and to give to his arrested mind movement—is my aim and my joy!

Those who wish to read further on this subject should consult the author's *The Truth About Jesus—Is He a Myth?*

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