

CHARLES BRADLAUGH

A FEW WORDS ABOUT
THE DEVIL, AND OTHER
BIOGRAPHICAL
SKETCHES AND ESSAYS

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AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF
CHARLES BRADLAUGH

A PAGE OF HIS LIFE

At the request of many friends, and by way of farewell address on leaving for America, I, for the first time in my life, pen a partial autobiographical sketch. I do not pretend that the narrative will be a complete picture of my life, I only vouch the accuracy of the facts so far as I state them. I have not the right in some cases to state political occurrences in which others now living are involved, nor have I the courage of Jean Jacques Rousseau, to photograph my inner life. I shall therefore state little the public may not already know. I was born on the 26th September, 1833, in a small house in Bacchus Walk, Hoxton. My father was a

solicitor's clerk with a very poor salary, which he supplemented by law writing. He was an extremely industrious man, and a splendid penman. I never had the opportunity of judging his tastes or thoughts, outside his daily labors, except in one respect, in which I have followed in his footsteps. He was passionately fond of angling. Until 1848 my life needs little relation. My schooling, like that of most poor men's children, was small in quantity, and, except as to the three R's, indifferent in quality. I remember at seven years of age being at a national school in Abbey Street, Bethnel Green; between seven and nine I was at another small private school in the same neighborhood, and my "education" was completed before I was eleven years of age at a boys' school in Coalharbor Street, Hackney Road. When about twelve years of age I was first employed as errand lad in the solicitor's office where my father remained his whole life through. After a little more than two years in this occupation, I became wharf clerk and cashier to a firm of coal merchants in Britannia Fields, City Road. While in their employment the excitement of the Chartist movement was at its height in England, and the authorities, frightened by the then huge continental revolution wave, were preparing for the prosecution of some of the leaders among the Chartists. Meetings used to be held almost continuously all day on Sunday, and every week-night in the open air on Bonner's Fields, near where the Consumption Hospital now stands. These meetings were in knots from fifty to five hundred, sometimes many more, and were occupied chiefly

in discussions on theological, social, and political questions, any bystander taking part. The curiosity of a lad took me occasionally in the week evenings to the Bonner's Fields gatherings. On the Sunday I, as a member of the Church of England, was fully occupied as a Sunday-school teacher. This last-named fashion of passing Sunday was broken suddenly. The Bishop of London was announced to hold a confirmation in Bethnal Green. The incumbent of St. Peter's, Hackney Road, the district in which I resided, was one John Graham Packer, and he, desiring to make a good figure when the Bishop came, pressed me to prepare for confirmation, so as to answer any question the Bishop might put. I studied a little the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, and the four Gospels, and came to the conclusion that they differed. I ventured to write the Rev. Mr. Packer a respectful letter, asking him for aid and explanation. All he did was to denounce my letter to my parents as Atheistical, although at that time I should have shuddered at the very notion of becoming an Atheist, and he suspended me for three months from my office of Sunday-school teacher. This left me my Sundays free, for I did not like to go to church while suspended from my teacher's duty, and I, instead, went to Bonner's Fields, at first to listen, but soon to take part in some of the discussions which were then always pending there.

At the commencement I spoke on the orthodox Christian side, but after a debate with Mr. J. Savage, in the Warner Place Hall, in 1849, on the "Inspiration of the bible," I found that

my views were getting very much tinged with Freethought, and in the winter of that year, at the instigation of Mr. Packer, to whom I had submitted the "Diegesis" of Robert Taylor, I – having become a teetotaler, which in his view brought out my infidel tendencies still more vigorously – had three days given me by my employers, after consultation with my father, to "change my opinions or lose my situation." I am inclined to think now that the threat was never intended to have been enforced, but was used to terrify me into submission. At that time I hardly knew what, if any, opinions I had, but the result was that sooner than make a show of recanting, I left home and situation on the third day, and never returned to either.

I was always a very fluent speaker, and now lectured frequently at the Temperance Hall, Warner Place, Hackney Road, at the small Hall in Philpot Street, and in the open air in Bonner's Fields, where at last on Sunday afternoons scores of hundreds congregated to hear me. My views were then Deistical, but rapidly tending to the more extreme phase in which they ultimately settled. I now took part in all the gatherings held in London on behalf of the Poles and Hungarians, and actually fancied that I could write poetry on Kossuth and Mazzini.

It was at this time I made the acquaintance of my friend and co-worker, Mr. Austin Holyoake, at his printing office in Queen's Head Passage, and I remember him taking me to John Street Institution, where, at one of the pleasant Saturday evening gatherings, I met the late Mrs. Emma Martin. At Mr. Austin

Holyoake's request, Mr. George Jacob Holyoake, to my great delight, presided at one of my lectures in Philpot Street, and I felt special interest in the number of the *Reasoner* which contained a brief reference to myself and that lecture.

I wrote my first pamphlet, "A Few Words on the Christian's Creed," about the middle of 1850, and was honored by Dr. Campbell of the *British Banner* with a leading article vigorously assailing me for the lectures I had then delivered. After leaving home I was chiefly sheltered by Mrs. Sharpies Carlile, with whose children, Hypatia, Theophila, and Julian, I shared such comforts as were at her disposal. Here I studied hard everything which came in my way, picking up a little Hebrew and an imperfect smattering of other tongues. I tried to earn my living as a coal merchant, but at sixteen, and without one farthing in my pocket, the business was not extensive enough to be profitable. I got very poor, and at that time was also very proud. A subscription offered me by a few Freethinkers shocked me, and awakened me to a sense of my poverty; so telling no one where I was going, I went away, and on the 17th of December, 1850, was, after some difficulty, enlisted in the Seventh Dragoon Guards. With this corps I remained until October, 1853, being ultimately appointed orderly-room clerk; the regiment, during the whole of the time I remained in it, being quartered in Ireland. While I was in the regiment I was a teetotaler, and used often to lecture to the men in the barrack-room at night, and I have more than once broken out of Portobello barracks to deliver teetotal speeches in

the small French Street Hall, Dublin. Many times have I spoken there in my scarlet jacket, between James Haughton and the good old father, the Rev. Dr. Spratt, a Roman Catholic priest, then very active in the cause of temperance. While I was in the regiment my father died, and in the summer of 1853 an aunt's death left me a small sum, out of which I purchased my discharge, and returned to England, to aid in the maintenance of my mother and family.

I have now no time for the full story of my army life, which, however, I may tell some day. Before I left the regiment I had won the esteem of most of the privates, and of some of the officers. I quitted the regiment with a "very good character" from the Colonel, but I am bound to add, that the Captain would not have concurred in this character had he had any voice in the matter. The Lieutenant-Colonel, C. P. Ainslie, earned an eternal right to grateful mention at my hands by his gentlemanly and considerate treatment. I can not say the same for my Captain, who did his best to send me to jail, and whom I have not yet quite forgiven.

On returning to civilian life I obtained employment in the daytime with a solicitor named Rogers, and in the evening as clerk to a Building Society; and soon after entering this employ I began again to write and speak, and it was then I, to in some degree avoid the efforts which were afterward made to ruin me, took the name "Iconoclast," under which all my anti-theological work down to 1868 was done. I give Mr. Rogers' name now for he is dead, and malice can not injure him. Many anonymous

letters were sent to him to warn him of my irreligious opinions; he treated them all with contempt, only asking me not to let my propaganda become an injury to his business.

Soon after my discharge from the army I had a curious adventure. While I was away a number of poor men had subscribed their funds together and had erected a Working Man's Hall, in Goldsmith's Row, Hackney Road. Not having any legal advice, it turned out that they had been entrapped into erecting their building on freehold ground without any lease or conveyance from the freeholder, who asserted his legal right to the building. The men consulted me, and finding that under the Statute of Frauds they had no remedy, I recommended them to offer a penalty rent of £20 a year. This being refused, I constituted myself into a law court, and without any riot or breach of the peace, I, with the assistance of a hundred stout men, took every brick of the building bodily away, and divided the materials, so far as was possible, among the proper owners. I think I can see now the disappointed rascal of a freeholder when he only had his bare soil left once more. He did not escape unpunished, for to encourage the others to contribute, he had invested some few pounds in the building. He had been too clever; he had relied on the letter of the law, and I beat him with a version of common-sense justice.

I lectured once or twice a week in the small Philpot Street Hall, very often then in the Hall of Science, City Road, and then in the old John Street Institution, until I won myself a name in

the party throughout the country. In 1855 had my first notable adventure with the authorities in reference to the right of meeting in Hyde Park, and subsequently gave evidence before the Royal Commission ordered by the House of Commons, presided over by the Right Hon. Stuart Wortley. I was very proud that day at Westminster, when, at the conclusion of my testimony against the authorities, the Commissioner publicly thanked me, and the people who crowded the Court of Exchequer cheered me, for the manner in which I denied the right of Sir Richard Mayne, the then Chief Commissioner of Police, to issue the notices forbidding the people to meet in the Park. This was the first step in a course in which I have never flinched or wavered.

In 1855 I undertook, with others, the publication of a series of papers, entitled "Half-Hours with Freethinkers," the late John Watts being one of my co-workers. I also by myself commenced the publication of my "Commentary on the Pentateuch," which has since been entirely re-written and now forms my "Bible: what it is."

During the autumn of 1857 I paid my first lecture visit to Northampton. Early in 1858, when Mr. Edward Truelove was suddenly arrested for publishing the pamphlet, "Is Tyrannicide Justifiable?" I became Honorary Secretary to the Defense, and was at the same time associated with the conduct of the defense of Simon Bernard, who was arrested at the instigation of the French Government for alleged complicity in the Orsini tragedy. It was at this period I gained the friendship of poor Bernard,

which, without diminution, retained until he died; and also the valued friendship of Thomas Allsop, which I still preserve. My associations were from thenceforward such as to encourage in me a strong and bitter feeling against the late Emperor Napoleon. While he was in power I hated him, and never lost an opportunity of working against him until the *decheance* came. I am not sure now that I always judged him fairly; but nothing, I think, could have tempted me to either write or speak of him with friendliness during his life. *Le sang de mes amis etait sur son ame*. Now that the tomb covers his remains, my hatred has ceased; but no other feeling has arisen in its place. Should any of his family seek to resume the Imperial purple, I should remain true to my political declarations of sixteen years since, and should exert myself to the uttermost to prevent France falling under another Empire. I write this with much sadness, as 1870 to 1873 have dispelled some of my illusions held firmly during the fifteen years which preceded. I had believed in such men as Louis Blanc, Lodru Rollin, Victor Hugo, as possible statesmen of France. I was mistaken. They were writers, talkers, and poets; good men to ride on the stream, or to drown in honest protest, but lacking force to swim against, or turn back, the tide by the might of their will. I had believed too in a Republican France, which is yet only in the womb of time, to be born after many pangs and sore travailing.

In 1859 I saw Joseph Mazzini for the first time, and remained on terms of communication with the great Italian patriot until the year 1869, from time to time bringing him correspondence from

Italy, where my business sometimes took me. After 1869 we found ourselves holding diverse opinions on the Franco-Prussian question – Mazzini went for Prussia, I for France – and I never saw him again.

In June, 1858, I held my first public formal theological debate with the Rev. Brewin Grant, B.A., at that time a Dissenting Minister at Sheffield. Mr. Grant was then a man of some ability, and if he could have forgotten his aptitudes as a circus jester, would have been a redoubtable antagonist. During this year I was elected President of the London Secular Society, in lieu of Mr. George Jacob Holyoake, who had theretofore led the English Free-thought party, but who has of late years devoted himself more completely to general journalistic work.

In November, 1858, I commenced editorial duties with the *Investigator*, formerly conducted by the late Robert Cooper, which I continued until August, 1859. It had but a small circulation, and was financially a very great failure. For the encouragement of young propagandists, I may here insert a little anecdote of my early lecturing experience. I had lectured in Edinburgh in mid-winter, the audience was small, the profits microscopical. I, after paying my bill at the Temperance Hotel, where I then stayed, had only a few shillings more than my Parliamentary fare to Bolton, where I was next to lecture. I was out of bed at five on a freezing morning, and could have no breakfast, as the people were not up. I carried my luggage (a big tin box, corded round, which then held books and clothes, and a

small black bag), for I could not spare any of my scanty cash for a conveyance or porter. The train from Edinburgh being delayed by a severe snow-storm, the corresponding Parliamentary had left Carlisle long before our arrival. In order to reach Bolton in time for my lecture, I had to book by a quick train, starting in about three-quarters of an hour, but could only book to Preston, as the increased fare took all my money, except 4 1/2d. With this small sum I could get no refreshment in the station, but in a little shop in the street outside I got a mug of tea and a little hot meat pie. From Preston, I got with great difficulty on to Bolton, handing my black bag to the station-master there as security for my fare from Preston, until the morning. I arrived in Bolton about quarter to eight; the lecture commenced at eight, and I, having barely time to run to my lodgings, and wash and change, went onto the platform cold and hungry. I shall never forget that lecture; it was in an old Unitarian Chapel. We had no gas, the building seemed full of a foggy mist, and was imperfectly lit with candles. Everything appeared cold, cheerless, and gloomy. The most amusing feature was that an opponent, endowed with extra piety and forbearance, chose that evening to specially attack me for the money-making and easy life I was leading. Peace to that opponent's memory, I have never seen him since. It was while in Scotland on this journey I made the acquaintance, and ultimately won the friendship, of the late Alexander Campbell, of Glasgow – a generous, kindly-hearted old Socialist Missionary, who, at a time when others were hostile, spoke encouragingly to me,

and who afterward worked with me for a long period on this journal [*The National Reformer*]. Occasionally the lectures were interfered with by the authorities, but this happened oftener in the provinces than in London. In March, 1859, I was to have lectured in Saint Martin's Hall on "Louis Napoleon," but the Government – on a remonstrance by Count Walewski, as to language used at a previous meeting, at which I had presided for Dr. Bernard – interfered; the hall was garrisoned by police, and the lecture prevented. Mr. Hullah, the then proprietor, being indemnified by the authorities, paid damages for his breach of contract, to avoid a suit which I at once commenced against him. Later in the same month I held a debate in Northampton with Mr. John Bowes, a rather heavy, but well-meaning, old gentleman, utterly unfitted for platform controversy. The press now began to deal with me tolerably freely, and I find "boy," "young man," and "juvenile appearance" very frequent in the comments. My want of education was an especial matter for hostile criticism, the more particularly so when the writer had neither heard nor seen me.

Discussions now grew on me so thick and fast that even some of the most important debates may perhaps escape notice in this imperfect chronicling. At Sheffield I debated with a Reverend Dr. Mensor, who styled himself a Jewish Rabbi. He was then in the process of gaining admission to the Church of England, and had been put forward to show my want of scholarship. We both scrawled Hebrew characters for four nights on a black board,

to the delight and mystification of the audience, who gave me credit for erudition, because I chalked the square letter characters with tolerable rapidity and clearness. At Glasgow I debated with a Mr. Court, representing the Glasgow Protestant Association, a glib-tongued missionary, who has since gone to the bad; at Paisley with a Mr. Smart, a very gentlemanly antagonist; and at Halifax with the Rev. T. D. Matthias, a Welsh Baptist Minister, unquestionably very sincere. All these were formal debates, and were reported with tolerable fullness in the various journals. In the early part of 1860 I, aided by my friends at Sheffield, Halifax, and other parts of England, projected the *National Reformer* in small shares. Unfortunately just after the issue of its prospectus, Joseph Barker returned from America, and was associated with me in the editorship. The arrangement was peculiar, Mr. Barker editing the first half of the paper and I the second. It was not precisely a happy union, and the unnatural alliance came to an end in a very brief period. In August.1861, I officially parted company with Joseph Barker as editor. We had been practically divorced for months before: the first part of the paper usually contained abuse of those who wrote in the second half. He came to me originally at Sheffield, pretending to be an Atheist and a Republican, and soon after pretended to be a Christian, and spoke in favor of slavery. I am sometimes doubtful as to how far Mr. Barker deluded himself, as well as others, in his various changes of theological and political opinions. If he had had the slightest thoroughness in his character, he would have been a

great man; as it is, he is only a great turn-coat.

In June, 1860, I debated again with the Reverend Brewin Grant, every Monday for four weeks, at Bradford, and during this debate had a narrow escape of my life. In one of my journeys to London, the great Northern train ran through the station at King's Cross, and many persons were seriously injured. I got off with some trifling bruises and a severe shaking.

Garibaldi having at this time made his famous Marsala effort, I delivered a series of lectures in his aid, and am happy to be able to record that, though at that time very poor, I sent him one hundred guineas as my contribution by my tongue. This money was chiefly sent through W. H. Ashurst, Esq., now Solicitor to the General Post Office, and among the letters I preserve I have one of thanks from "G. Garibaldi," for what I was then doing for Italy.

In this year I debated for four nights with Dr. Brindley, an old antagonist of the Socialists, at Oldham; for two nights with the Rev. Dr. Baylee, the President of St. Aidan's College, at Birkenhead, where a Church of England curate manufactory was for some time carried on; and for two nights with the Rev. Dr. Rutherford, of Newcastle. Dr. Rutherford has since so identified himself with the cause of the Tyneside workers, that I read with regret any harsh words that escaped me in that debate. Although during late years I have managed to keep all my meetings free from violence or disorder, this was not always so. In October, 1860, I paid my first visit to Wigan, and certainly lectured there

under considerable difficulty, and incurred personal clanger, the resident clergy actually inciting the populace to physical violence, and part destruction of the building I lectured in. I, however, supported by one courageous woman and her husband, persevered, and despite bricks and kicks, visited Wigan again and again, until I had, *bon gre malgre* improved the manners and customs of the people, so that now I am a welcome speaker there. I could not improve the morals of the clergy, as the public journals have recently shown, but that was their misfortune not my fault. In the winter of 1860, I held two formal debates in Wigan, all of which were fully reported in the local journals; one with Mr. Hutchings, a respectable Nonconformist layman, and the other with the Rev. Woodville Woodman, a Swedenborgian divine.

Early in 1861 I visited Guernsey in consequence of an attempt made by the Law Courts of the Island to enforce the blasphemy laws against a Mr. Stephen Bendall, who had distributed some of my pamphlets to the Guernseyites, and had been condemned to imprisonment in default of finding sureties not to repeat the offense. Not daring to prosecute me, although challenged in writing, the authorities permitted drink and leave of absence to be given to soldiers in the garrison on condition they would try to prevent the lecture, and the house in which I lectured was broken into by a drunken and pious mob, shouting "Kill the Infidel." My antagonists were fortunately as cowardly as they were intolerant, and I succeeded in quelling the riot, delivering my lecture in spite

of all opposition, although considerable damage was done to the building.

Shortly after this I visited Plymouth, where the Young Men's Christian Association arranged to prosecute me. They were, however, a little too hasty, and had me arrested at an open air meeting when I had scarcely commenced my speech, having only uttered the words: "Friends, I am about to address you on the bible." Having locked me up all night, and refused bail, it was found by their legal adviser that a blunder had been committed, and a charge of "exciting a breach of the peace, and assaulting the constable in the execution of his duty," was manufactured. It was tolerably amusing to see the number of dinners, suppers, and breakfasts, all accompanied with pots or cups of Devonshire cream, sent in to the Devonport Lock-up, where I was confined, by various friends who wanted to show their sympathy. The invented charge, though well sworn to, broke down after two days' hearing, under the severe cross-examination to which I subjected the witnesses. I defended myself, two lawyers appeared against me, and seven magistrates sat on the bench, predetermined to convict me. Finding that the evidence of the whole of the witnesses whom I wished to call was to be objected to, because un-believers in hell were then incompetent as witnesses according to English law, I am pleased to say that several Nonconformists, disgusted with the bigotry and pious perjury of my prosecutors, came forward. The result was a triumphant victory, and a certificate of dismissal,

which I wrung from the reluctant bench of great unpaid. I was not yet satisfied; some of the magistrates had tried to browbeat me, and I announced in court that I would deliver the lecture I had been prevented from delivering to an audience assembled in the borough, and that I should sue at law the Superintendent of Police who had arrested me. The first portion of my defiance was the most difficult to give effect to; not a hall could be hired in Devonport, and nearly all the convenient open land being under military jurisdiction, it was impossible to procure the tenancy of a field for an open-air meeting. I, however, fulfilled my promise, and despite the police and military authorities combined, delivered my lecture to an audience assembled in their very teeth. Devonport, Stonehouse, and Plymouth form one garrisoned and fortified town, divided by the River Tamar. All the water to the sea is under the separate jurisdiction of Saltash, some miles distant. I obtained a large boat on which a temporary platform was built, and this boat was quietly moored in the River Tamar on the Devonport side, about two fathoms from the shore. Placards were issued stating that, acting under legal advice, I should address the meeting and deliver the prevented lecture "near to the Devonport Park Gates." Overwhelming force was prepared by the Devonport authorities, and having already erred by too great haste, this time they determined to let me fairly commence my lecture before they arrested me. To their horror I quietly walked past the Park Gates where the crowd was waiting, and passing down a by-lane to the river side, stepped into a little

boat, was rowed to the large one, and then delivered my lecture, the audience who had followed me standing on an open wharf, all within the jurisdiction of the Borough of Devonport, and I being about 9 feet outside the borough. The face of the Mayor ready to read the riot act, the superintendent with twenty-eight picked policemen to make sure of my arrest, and a military force in readiness to overawe any popular demonstration – all these were sights to remember. I am afraid the Devonport Young Men's Christian Association did not limit themselves to prayers and blessings on that famous Sunday.

As I had promised, the authorities refusing any apology for the wrongful arrest, I commenced an action against Superintendent Edwards, by whom I had been taken into custody. The borough magistrates indemnified their officer and found funds to resist me. I fought with very little help save from one tried, though anonymous friend, for Joseph Barker, my co-editor, but not co-worker, in our own paper, discouraged any pecuniary support. The cause was made a special jury one, and came on for trial at Exeter Assizes. Unfortunately I was persuaded to brief counsel, and Sir Robert Collier, my leader, commenced his speech with an expression of sorrow for my opinions. This damaged me very much, although I won the case easily after a long trial. The jury, composed of Devonshire landowners, only gave me a farthing damages, and Mr. Baron Channell refused to certify for costs. I was determined not to let the matter rest here, and myself carried it to the Court *in Banco*, where I argued it in person for two whole

days, before Lord Chief Justice Erie and a full bench of Judges. Although I did not succeed in improving my own position, I raised public opinion in favor of free speech, and the enormous costs incurred by the borough authorities, and which they had to bear, have deterred them from ever again interfering either with my lectures or those of any other speaker, and I now have crowded audiences in the finest hall whenever I visit the three towns. These proceedings cost me several hundred pounds, and burdened me with a debt which took long clearing off.

In 1802, I held a four nights' discussion with a Dissenting clergyman, the Rev. W. Barker. My opponent was probably one of the most able and straightforward among my numerous antagonists. About this time a severe attack of acute rheumatism prostrated me, and having soon after to visit Italy, I, at first under medical advice, adopted the habit of drinking the light Continental wines, and although continuing an advocate of sobriety, I naturally ceased to take part in any teetotal gatherings.

In the struggle between the Northern and Southern States of America, my advocacy and sympathies went with what I am glad to say was the feeling of the great mass of the English people – in favor of the North; and my esteemed friend, and then contributor, W. E. Adams, furnished most valuable aid with his pen in the enlightenment of public opinion, at a time when many of our aristocracy were openly exulting in what they conceived to be the probable break-up of the United States Republic. During the Lancashire cotton famine I lectured several times in aid of the

fund.

I began now also to assume a much more prominent position in the various English political movements, and especially to speak on the Irish Church and Irish Land questions. On the Irish questions, I owe much to my late co-worker and contributor, poor Peter Fox Andre, a thoroughly honest and whole-souled man, whose pen was always on the side of struggling nationalities.

One of the disadvantages connected with a public career is, that every vile scoundrel who is too cowardly to face you openly can libel you anonymously. I have had, I think, my full share of this kind of annoyance. Most of the slanders I have treated with utter contempt, and if I had alone consulted my own feelings, should probably never have pursued any other course. Twice, however, I have had recourse to the judgment of the law – once in the case of a clergyman of the Church of England, who indulged in a foul libel affecting my wife and children. This fellow I compelled to retract every word he had uttered, and to pay £100, which, after deducting the costs, was divided among various charitable institutions. The reverend libeler wrote me an abject letter, begging me not to ruin his prospects in the Church by publishing his name; I consented, and he has since repaid my mercy by losing no opportunity of being offensive. He is a prominent contributor to the *Rock*, and a fierce ultra-Protestant. He must have greater confidence in my honor than in his own, or fear of exposure would compel him to greater reticence. The other case arose during the election, and will be dealt with in its

proper order.

It was my fortune to be associated with the Reform League from its earliest moments until its dissolution. It is hardly worth while to repeat the almost stereotyped story of the successful struggle made by the League for Parliamentary Reform. E. Beales, Esq., was the President of the League, and I was one of its Vice-Presidents, and continued nearly the whole time of its existence a member of its executive. The whole of my services and journeys were given to the League without the slightest remuneration, and I repeatedly, and according to my means, contributed to its funds. When I resigned my position on the executive I received from Mr. George Howell, the Secretary, and from Mr. Beales, the President, the most touching and flattering letters as to what Mr. Beales was pleased to describe as the loyalty and utility of my services to the League. Mr. George Howell concluded a long letter as follows: "Be pleased to accept my assurance of sincere regards for your manly courage, consistent and honorable conduct in our cause, and for your kindly consideration for myself as Secretary of this great movement on all occasions." These letters have additional value from the fact that Mr. Beales, whom I sincerely respect, differs widely from me in matters of faith, and Mr. Howell is, fortunately, far from having any friendly feeling toward me. It was while on the Executive of this League that I first became intimately acquainted with Mr. George Odger, and had reason to be pleased with the straightforward course he pursued, and the

honest work he did as one of the Executive Committee. Mr. John Baxter Langley and Mr. R. A. Cooper were also among my most prominent co-workers.

My sympathy with Ireland, and open advocacy of justice for the Irish, nearly brought me into serious trouble. Some who were afterward indicted as the chiefs of the so-called Fenian movement, came to me for advice. So much I see others have written, and the rest of this portion of my autobiography I may write some day. At present there are men not out of danger whom careless words might imperil, and as regards myself I shall not be guilty of the folly of printing language which a government might use against me. My pamphlet on the Irish Question, published in 1866, won a voluntary letter of warm approval from Mr. Gladstone, the only friendly writing I ever received from him in my life.

At Huddersfield, the Philosophical Hall having been duly hired for my lectures, pious influence was brought to bear on the lessee to induce him to break the contract. Fortunately what in law amounted to possession had been given, and on the doors being locked against me, I broke them open, and delivered my lecture to a crowded and most orderly audience. I was arrested, and an attempt was made to prosecute me before the Huddersfield magistrates; but I defended myself with success, and defeated with ease the Conservative solicitor, N. Learoyd, who had been specially retained to insure my committal to jail.

In 1868 I entered into a contest with the Conservative

Government which, having been continued by the Gladstone Government, finished in 1869 with a complete victory for myself. According to the then law every newspaper was required to give sureties to the extent of £800 against blasphemous or seditious libel. I had never offered to give these sureties, as they would have probably been liable to forfeiture about once a month. In March, 1868, the Disraeli Government insisted on my compliance with the law. I refused. The Government then required me to stop my paper. I printed on the next issue, "Printed in Defiance of Her Majesty's Government." I was then served with an Attorney-General's information, containing numerous counts, and seeking to recover enormous penalties. I determined to be my own barrister, and while availing myself in consultation of the best legal advice, I always argued my own case. The interlocutory hearings before the Judges in Chambers were numerous, for I took objection to nearly every step made by the government, and I nearly always succeeded. I also brought the matter before Parliament, being specially backed in this by Mr. Milner Gibson, Mr. John Stuart Mill, and Mr. E. H. J. Crawford. When the information was called on for trial in a crowded court before Mr. Baron Martin, the Government backed out, and declined to make a jury; so the prosecution fell to the ground. Strange to say, it was renewed by the Gladstone Government, who had the coolness to offer me, by the mouth of Attorney-General Collier, that they would not enforce any penalties if I would stop the paper, and admit that I was in the wrong. This I

declined, and the prosecution now came on for trial before Baron Bramwell and a special jury. Against me were the Attorney-General, Sir R. Collier, the Solicitor-General, Sir J. D. Coleridge, and Mr. Crompton Hutton. I found that these legal worthies were blundering in their conduct of the trial, and at *nisi prius* I let them obtain a verdict, which however, I reversed on purely technical grounds, after a long argument, which I sustained before Lord Chief Baron Kelly and a full court sitting in Banco. Having miserably failed to enforce the law against me, the Government repealed the statute, and I can boast that I got rid of the last shackle of the obnoxious English press laws. Mr. J. S. Mill wrote me: "You have gained a very honorable success in obtaining a repeal of the mischievous Act by your persevering resistance." The Government, although beaten, refused to reimburse me any portion of the large outlay incurred in fighting them.

It has always been my ambition to enter Parliament, and at the General Election for 1808 I, for the first time, entered the arena as a candidate. I was beaten; but this is scarcely wonderful. I had all the journals in England except three against me. Every idle or virulent tale which folly could distort or calumny invent was used against me. Despite all, I polled nearly 1,100 votes, and I obtained unasked, but not ungratefully listened to, the public acknowledgments from the Mayor of the borough, also from one of my competitors, Mr. Charles Gilpin, as to the loyal manner in which I had fought the contest through.

During the election struggle libels rained from all sides. One

by the late Mr Capper, M. P., seeking reelection at Sandwich, was the monstrous story, that in the open square at Northampton I had taken out my watch and defied God to show his power by striking me dead in five minutes. Challenged for his authority Mr. Capper pretended to have heard the story from Mr. C. Gilpin, M. P., who indignantly denied being any party to the falsehood. I insisted on an apology from Mr. Capper, which being refused I sued him, but he died soon after the writ was served. The story was not an original invention by Mr. Capper; it had been reported of Abner Kneeland thirty years before, and is still a favorite one with pious missionaries at street corners. A still more outrageous slander was inserted in the *Razor*, a pseudo-comic weekly. I compelled this journal to give a full apology, but not until after two years' litigation, and a new trial had been ordered. When obliged to recant, the Christian proprietor became insolvent, to avoid payment of the costs. Unfortunately born poor, my life had been one continued struggle, and the burden of my indebtedness was sorely swollen in this and similar contests.

Probably the most severe, and to me certainly the most costly, struggle has been on the oath question. Formerly it was a fatal objection against the competency of a witness who did not believe in a Deity and in a future state of rewards and punishments. Several attempts had been made to alter the law, but they had all failed; and indeed Sir J. Trevelyan's measures only provided for affirmation, and did not seek to abolish the

incompetency. In a case in which I was plaintiff in the Court of Common Pleas, my evidence was objected to, and I determined to fight the matter through every possible court, and to get the law changed if possible.

I personally argued the case before Lord Chief Justice Bovill and a full Bench, in the Court of Common Pleas, and with the aid of the present Mr. Justice Denman and the late Lord Chancellor Hatherly, the law was twice altered in Parliament. Before victory was ultimately obtained I had to carry the case into the Court of Error, and I prepared and sent out at my own cost more than two hundred petitions to Parliament. Ultimately the Evidence Amendment Act, 1869, and the Evidence Further Amendment Act, 1870, gave Freethinkers the right to enter the witness box, and I won my suit. The Christian defendant finished by becoming bankrupt, and I lost a terribly large sum in debt and costs. The original debt and interest were over £300, and the costs of the various proceedings were very heavy.

In the winter of 1870 the Mirfield Town Hall, which had been properly taken and paid for for two nights' lectures, was refused by the proprietors, who barricaded the hall, and obtained a great force of police from the neighborhood. In order that the law might be clearly settled on this matter, I brought an action to try the question, and although the late Mr. Justice Willis expressed himself strongly in my favor, it was held by Mr. Justice Mellor at *nisi prius* that nothing, except a deed under seal or an actual demise, would avail. A mere agreement for

a user of a hall was a license revocable at will, even when for a valuable consideration. This convinced me that when hall proprietors break their contracts, I must enforce my rights as I did at Huddersfield, and have done in other places.

During the Franco-Prussian struggle I remained neutral until the 4th of September. I was against Bismark and his blood-and-iron theory, but I was also against the Empire and the Emperor; so I took no part with either. I was lecturing at Plymouth the day the *decheance* was proclaimed, and immediately after wrote my first article in favor of Republican France. I now set to work and organized a series of meetings in London and the provinces, some of which were cooperated in by Dr. Congreve, Professor Beesly, and other prominent members of the Positivist party. These meetings exercised some little effect on the public opinion in this country, but unfortunately the collapse on the part of France was so complete, and the resources commanded by Bismark and Moltke so vast, that, except as expressing sympathy, the results were barren. In October, 1870, I, without any previous communication from myself to them, received from the Republican Government at Tours a long and flattering letter, signed by Leon Gambetta, Adolphe Cremieux, Al Glais Bizoin, and Admiral Fourichon, declaring that they, as members of the "Gouvernement de la Defense Nationale, reunis en delegation a Tours," "tiennent a honneur de vous remercier chaleureusement du noble concours que vous apportez a la cause de la France." On the 2d of February, 1871, M. Tissot, the

Charge d'Affaires of France in England, wrote me: "Quant a moi, mon cher ami, le ne puis que constater ici, comme je l'ai deja fait, comme je le ferai en toute occasion, la dette que nous avons contractee envers vous. Vous nous avez donne votre temps, votre activite, votre eloquence, votre ame, la meilleure partie de vous meme, en un mot; la France que vous avez ete seule a defendre ne l'oubliera jamais." This is probably a too flattering estimate of my services to France, but coming from the official representative of the French Republic, I feel entitled to insert it. In September, 1871, Monsieur Emmanuel Arago, member of the Provisional Government of the 4th of September, wrote the following words upon the letter which had been sent me, as above mentioned, in October, 1870, by the Delegate Government of Tours: "En lisant cette lettre, j'eprouve tres vivement le regret de n'avoir pu, en-ferme dans Paris, joindre ma signature a celles de mes collegues de la delegation de Tours. Mr. Bradlaugh est et sera toujours dans la Republique notre concitoyen."

During 1870, 1871, and 1872, I held several debates with the Rev. A. J. Harrison, formerly of Huddersfield. The first at Newcastle, in the splendid Town Hall of that place, was attended by about 5,000 persons. The second debate at Bristol, was notable from being presided over by Professor Newman. The third discussion was at Birmingham, and was an attempt at the Socratic method, and the last platform encounter, was in the New Hall of Science, London. Of the Rev. Mr. Harrison it is enough I should say that, a few weeks since, when rumor put my life in

danger, he was one of the first to write a kindly and unaffected letter of sympathy to Mrs. Bradlaugh.

When the great cry of thanksgiving was raised for the recovery of the Prince of Wales, I could not let it pass without protest. While he lay dangerously ill I had ceased to make any attack on himself or family, but I made no pretense of a grief I did not feel. When the thanksgiving day was fixed, and tickets for St. Paul's were sent by the Lord Chamberlain to working men representatives, I felt it right to hold a meeting of protest, which was attended by a crowded audience in the New Hall of Science.

The "right of meeting" has given me three important occasions of measuring swords with the Government during the last few years, and each time defeat has attended the Government. The first, the Hyde Park meeting, where I acted in accord with Mr. Beales, to whom as chief, let the honor go of this conflict. The second was on the 31st July, 1871, under the following circumstances. A meeting had been held by Mr. G. Odger and some of his friends in Hyde Park, on Sunday the 30th of July, to protest against the grant to Prince Arthur; this meeting was adjourned until the following evening. Late on the Sunday afternoon, the adjourned meeting was forbidden by the Government. Early on Monday morning Mr. Odger applied to me to give the friends the benefit of my legal knowledge and personal influence. I consented, and the Government persevering, I took my share of the responsibility of the gathering, and signed with Mr. Odger a new notice convening

the meeting. The Home Office not only served us also with a written prohibition, but threatened and prepared to use force. I immediately gave Mr. Bruce notice that the force would be illegal, and that it would be resisted. At the last moment, and in fact only some half hour before the meeting commenced, the Government abandoned its prohibition, and an enormous meeting of a most orderly character was held in absolute defiance of the authorities.

The more recent case was in December, 1872, when finding that Mr. Odger, Mr. Bailey, and others, had been prosecuted under some monstrous and ridiculous regulations invented by Mr. Ayrton, I, on my own responsibility, determined to throw down the gauntlet to the Government. I did this most successfully, and soon after the opening of Parliament the obnoxious regulations were annulled.

It is at present too early to speak of the Republican movement in England, which I have sought, and not entirely without success, to organize on a thoroughly legal basis. It is a fair matter for observation that my lectures on "The Impeachment of the House of Brunswick," have been delivered to crowded audiences assembled in some of the finest halls in England and Scotland, notably the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, the Town Hall, Birmingham, the Town Hall, Northampton, and the City Hall, Glasgow. It is, as far as I am aware, the first time any English citizen has, without tumult or disorder and in buildings belonging to various Municipalities, directly challenged the

hereditary right of the reigning family.

In penning the foregoing sketch I had purposely to omit many facts connected with branches of Italian, Irish, and French politics. I have also entirely omitted my own struggles for existence. The political parts are left out because there are secrets which are not my own alone, and which may not bear full telling for many years to come. The second, because I hope that another year or two of hard work may enable me to free myself from the debt load which for some time has hung heavily round me.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE DEVIL

To have written under this head in the reign of James Rex, of pious memory, would have, probably, procured for me, without even the perusal of my pamphlet, the reputation of Dr. Faustus, and a too intimate acquaintance with some of the pleasant plans of torturing to death practiced by the clever witch-finders of that day. I profess, however, no knowledge of the black art, and am entirely unskilled in *diablerie*, and feel quite convinced that the few words I shall say about his Satanic Majesty will not be cause of any unholy compacts in which bodies or souls are signed away in ink suspiciously red.

In many countries, dealing with the Devil has been a perilous experiment. In 1790, an unfortunate named Andre Dubuisson was confined in the Bastile, charged with raising the Devil. To prevent even the slightest apprehension on the part of my reader that I have any desire or intent toward placing him unpleasantly near a black-visaged, sulphureous-constituted individual, horned like an old goat, with satyr-like legs, a tail of unpleasant length, and a disposition to buy a body from any unfortunate wight ready to dispose of it, I have only to assert my intention of treating the subject entirely from a biblical point of view. Doubtless I ought to do this; the Christian Devil is a bible institution. I say, \ advisedly, the Christian Devil, because other religions have boasted their Devil, and it is well to prevent

confusion. But I frankly admit that none of these religions have the honor of a Devil so devilish as our own. Indeed our Devil ought to be the best: it costs the most. No other religion besides our own can boast the array of Popes, Bishops, Conferences, Rectors, Incumbents, and paid preachers of various titles. And all these to preach against the Devil!

It is necessary, before entering upon my subject, that I should confess my little ability to do it justice. I am unable to say, certainly, whether I am writing about a singular Devil or a plurality of Devils. In one text "Devils" are mentioned,¹ recognizing a plurality; in another, "the Devil,"² as if there was but one. We may, however, fairly assume that either there is one Devil, more than one, or less than one; and, having thus cleared our path from mere numerical difficulties, we will proceed to give the Devil his due. Satan appears either to have been a child of God, or, at any rate, a most intimate acquaintance of the family; for we find that on "a day when the children of God came to present themselves before the Lord, that Satan came also among them;"³ and no surprise or disapprobation is manifested at his presence. The conversation narrated in the Book of Job as occurring between God and the Devil has, for us, a value proportioned to the rarity of the scene, and to the high character of the personages concerned.

¹ Leviticus xvii, 7.

² Luke iv, 2.

³ Luke iv, 2.

We are, therefore, despite the infidel criticism of Martin Luther, who condemns the Book of Job as "a sheer *argumentum fabulæ*" determined to examine carefully the whole particulars for ourselves; and, in so doing, we are naturally surprised to find God, the omniscient, putting to Satan the query, Whence comest thou? We cannot suppose God, the all-wise, ignorant upon the subject, and we can not avoid a feeling of astonishment that such an interrogatory should have been made. Satan's reply, assuming its correctness – and this the text leaves us no reason to doubt – increases our surprise and augments our astonishment. The answer given is, "From going to and fro in the earth, and from going up and down it," In remarking on this answer, I do not address myself to those wretched persons who, relying on their reason and common sense, ignore the divine truth. I address myself to the true believer, and I ask, is he not astonished to find, from his bible, that Satan could have gone to and fro in the earth, and walked up and down, and yet not have met God, the omnipresent, occasionally during his journeying? The Lord makes no comment on Satan's reply, but says, "Hast thou not considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil?" It is rather extraordinary that God should wish to have the Devil's opinion on the only good man recorded as then living in the world: the more extraordinary when we know that God is all-wise, and knew Satan's opinion without asking it, and that God is immutable, and, therefore, would not be influenced

by the expression of the Devil's opinion when uttered. Satan's answer is, "Doth Job fear God for naught? Hast thou not made an hedge about him, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blest the work of his hand, and his substance is increased in the land; but put forth thine hand now and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face." What is God's reply to this audacious assertion? Does he express his determination to protect the righteous Job? Does he use his power to rebuke the evil tempter? No. "The Lord said unto Satan, Behold all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put forth not thine hand." And this was Job's reward for being a perfect and upright man, one that feared God and eschewed evil. He was not sent to the Devil, but the Devil was sent to all that he had. And he lost all without repining – sons, daughters, oxen, asses, camels and sheep, all destroyed, and yet Job sinned not. Some divines have urged that we here get a beautiful picture of patience and contentment under wrong and misfortune. But I reply that it is not good to submit patiently to wrong, or to rest contented under misfortune. I urge that it is manlier far to resist wrong, nobler far to wage war against wrong, better far to carefully investigate the causes of wrong and misfortune, with a view to their removal. Contentment under wrong is a crime, voluntary submission under oppression is not the virtue some would have it to be.

"Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord [as if God's children could ever be absent from him], and Satan came also among them to present

himself before the Lord. And the Lord said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the Lord and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth? a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against HIM TO DESTROY HIM WITHOUT CAUSE."

Can God be moved against a man to destroy him without a cause? If so, God is neither immutable nor all-wise. Yet the bible puts into God's mouth the terrible admission that the Devil had moved God against Job to destroy him without cause. If true, it destroys God's goodness; if false, then the bible is no revelation.

But Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life; put forth thine hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face."

Does the Lord now drive the Devil from his presence? Is there any expression of wrath or indignation against his tempter? Not so. "The Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand, but save his life." And Job, being better than everybody else, finds himself smitten in consequence with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. The ways of the Lord are not as our ways, or this would seem the reverse of an encouragement to virtue.

We turn over the pages of our bible for further information on this diabolic theme.

After reading the account of the numbering by David attentively, one is puzzled by the apparent contradiction, that in one place "God" and in another "Satan" occurs.⁴

But it may be that there is more harmony between God and the Devil than ordinary men are aware. Unfortunately, we have not the advantage of great scholarship, but one erudite commentator on the bible tells us, in speaking of the Hebrew word Azazel: "This terrible and venerable name of God, through the pens of biblical glossers, has been *a Devil, a mountain, a wilderness, and a he-goat.*"⁵ Well may incomprehensibility be an attribute of Deity, when, even to holy and reverend fathers, God has been sometimes undistinguishable from a he-goat or a Devil. Goats and Devils are alike represented with horns and tails. We trust that profanity will not enlarge on this sad confusion of ideas. Not possessing great lingual acquirements, we adhere to the English bible, believing that religion can never be improved by mere common sense, or human effort. We admire, without understanding, the skill of the Missionary, who makes the word "Mooigniazimoongo" an equivalent for God in the Sooahelee dialect, and who represents "original sin" to the Ottomi Indian by the word "Teacatzintiliztlatlacolli," and who recommends the Delaware to repentance as "Schiwelendamowitchewagan."

We do not wonder that in these translating thaumaturgic exploits God and Devil get mistaken for each other.

⁴ 1 Chron. xxi, 1; 2 Sam. xxiv, 1.

⁵ G. R. Gliddon's extract from "Land's Sagra Scritura," chap. iii, sec. 1.

God is a spirit. Jesus was led up of the Spirit to be tempted of the Devil; and it is also true that spirits are very likely to lead men to the Devil. Too intimate acquaintance with whisky toddy overnight is often followed by the *delirium tremens* and blue-devils on the morrow. We advise our readers to eschew alike spirituous and spiritual mixtures. They interfere sadly with sober thinking, and play the Devil with your brains.

The history of the temptation of Jesus by the Devil has been dealt with in another essay.⁶ Yet it may be well to add the opinion of a Church of England divine in this place: "That the Devil should appear personally *to* the Son of God *is certainly not more wonderful* than that he should, in a more remote age, have appeared *among* the sons of God, in the presence of God himself, to tempt and torment the righteous Job."

But that Satan should carry Jesus, bodily and literally, through the air – first to the top of a high mountain, and then to the topmost pinnacle of the temple – is wholly inadmissible, it is an insult to our understanding.⁷ It is pleasant to be able to find so many clergymen, in these days, zealously repudiating their own creeds. I am not prepared to speak strongly as to the color of the Devil; white men paint him black, black men white; but, allowing for the prejudices of dark-colored and fair-skinned believers, an invisible green would not be an unreasonable tint. We presume that he is not colorless, as otherwise the Evangelists

⁶ "Who was Jesus Christ?" p. 8.

⁷ *"Christian Records," by the Rev. Dr. Giles, p. 144.

or the persons present would have labored under considerable difficulties in witnessing the casting out of the Devil from the man in the synagogue.⁸ This Devil is described as an unclean Devil, and it is, therefore, a fair inference that there are some clean Devils as well as dirty Devils. Printer's Devils are mostly unclean Devils, but then they are only little Devils, and we must not make too much of them. Nearly all the Devils seem to talk, and it has therefore been conjectured by some bachelor metaphysicians that they are of the feminine gender, but I see no reason to agree in this, and my wife is of a contrary opinion. The Devils are probably good Christians – one text tells us that they believe and tremble. It is a fact with some poor Devils that the more they believe the more they tremble. We are told in another text that the Devil goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. He will have extremely bad taste, however, if he eat up the lean and bony working-classes, while so many fat bishops and stout archdeacons remain unconsumed.

Devils should be a sort of eternal salamander, for we are told there is everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels,⁹ and that there is a lake of brimstone and fire, into which the Devil was cast.¹⁰ Perhaps instead of being salamander they will, while in the fire, be rather of the 'otter tribe; but this is a question which Mr. C. H. Spurgeon, who is a far better judge of brimstone

⁸ Luke iv, 35, 36.

⁹ Matt, xxv, 41.

¹⁰ Jude, 9.

than myself, would be more competent to settle. The Devil has, at least upon one occasion, figured as a controversialist. He disputed with the archangel Michael, contending about the body of Moses;¹¹ and in these degenerate days of personality in debate it is pleasant to know that the religious champion, unlike the Grants, Coopers, and Brindleys of the present period, was very civil toward his Satanic opponent. The Devil was once imprisoned for 1,000 years in a bottomless pit.¹² If a pit has no bottom, it seems but little confinement to shut the top; but with faith and prayer, even a good foundation may be obtained for a bottomless pit.

It is urged by some that the Devil was the serpent of Genesis – that is, that it was really Satan who, in this guise, tempted Eve. There is this difficulty in the matter: the Devil is a liar, but in the interview with Eve the serpent seems to have confined himself to the strict truth.¹³ There is, in fact, no point of resemblance – no horns, no hoof, nothing except the tail – which can be in any way identified.

The Old Testament speaks a little of the Devils, sometimes of Satan, but never of "The Devil," and it seems almost too much, in Matthew, to usher him in, in the temptation scene, without introduction, and as if he were an old acquaintance. I do not remember reading, in the Old Testament, anything about the lake

¹¹ Jude, 9.

¹² Rev. xxi, 10.

¹³ Genesis iii, 4, 5, 22.

of brimstone and fire; this feature of faith was reserved for the warmth of Christian love to inspire; the Pentateuch makes no reference to it. Zechariah, in a vision, saw "Joshua, the High-Priest, standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him."¹⁴ Why the Devil wanted to resist Joshua is not clear; but as Joshua's garments were in a very filthy state, it may be that he was preaching to the Priest the virtues of cleanliness. It is often said that cleanliness is next to godliness; I honestly confess that I should prefer a clean sinner to a dirty saint. Jesus said that one of the twelve disciples was a Devil,¹⁵ but I am not prepared to say whether he meant the unfaithful and cowardly Peter, to whom he intrusted the keys of Heaven, or Judas who sold him for money, just as would nearly any bishop of the present day. The bishops preach that it is as difficult for a rich man to get into Heaven as for a camel to go through the eye of a needle; yet they enrich themselves, and their families, as greedily and carelessly as if they, at any rate, never expected to smell brimstone as a consequence. You are told to resist the Devil, and he will flee from you;¹⁶ if this be true, he is a cowardly Devil, and thus does not agree quite with Milton's picture of his grand, defiant, almost heroism. But then Milton was a poet, and true religion has but little poetry in it.

Jeroboam, one of the Jewish monarchs, ordained priests for

¹⁴ Zechariah iii, 1.

¹⁵ John vi, 70.

¹⁶ John vi, 70.

the Devils,¹⁷ and this may be the reason why, at the present day, all the orthodox clergy are gentlemen in black. In the time of Jesus, Satan must, when not in the body of some mad, deaf, dumb, blind, or paralytic person, have been in Heaven; for Jesus, on one occasion, told his disciples that he saw Satan, as lightning, fall from Heaven.¹⁸ Of course, this would betoken a rapid descent, but although a light affair, it is no laughing matter, and we reverently leave it to the clergy to explain the text. Jesus told Simon Peter that Satan desired to have him, that he might sift him as wheat;¹⁹ in this text it may be urged that Jesus was chaffing his disciple. Paul, the apostle, seems to have looked on the Devil much as the magistrates of Guernsey, Devonport, and Yarmouth look on the police, for Paul delivered Hymeneus and Alexander unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.²⁰

Revivalists are much indebted for their evanescent successes to Hell and the Devil, if the following extract from the experience of a Christian preacher be reliable:

"Thomas English was one of those very noisy and active preachers who do so much in promoting revivals." he would tell his hearers of "dwelling with devouring fire, bearing everlasting burning, roasting on the Devil's spit, broiling on his gridiron, being pitched about with his fork, drinking the liquid fire,

¹⁷ 2 Chron: xi, 15.

¹⁸ Luke x, 18.

¹⁹ Luke xxii, 31.

²⁰ 1 Tim. i, 20.

breathing the brimstone fumes, drowning in a red-hot sea, lying on fiery beds," etc.

In the present year the vulgar tirades of Reginald Radcliffe, Richard Weaver, and C. H. Spurgeon (some of them delivered in Exeter Hall) will serve to evidence that the above quotation is not the exaggeration which some might think. In London, before crowded audiences, Mr. Weaver, without originality, and with only the merit of copied coarseness, has called upon the Lord to "shake the ungodly for five minutes over the mouth of Hell." Mr. Spurgeon has drawn pictures of Hell which, if true and revealed to him by God, are most disgustingly frightful, and which being, as we believe, false, and but the creation of his own vulgar, morbid fancies, induce, on our part, a feeling of contempt as well as disgust.

The Wesleyans, some years since, made the Devil a prominent feature in the famous "Fly-Sheet" controversy, so much so that a Wesleyan, speaking and writing on the subject, suggested that the authors of the "Fly-Sheets" were Devils, and another once-Wesleyan writer says: "The first thing which made me inquire about the Devil was that I thought him abused. I thought him bad enough, but could not help fearing that people told lies about him. R. S – , a very zealous prayer-leader, stole some oats, and imputed the blame to the Devil. T. C – got drunk, and complained in the love-feast that the Devil had been very busy with him for some time, and then took him in an unguarded moment. B. S – was detected in lying, and complained that Satan

had gained the advantage over him. Old George White burned his fingers in lighting his pipe, and declared that it was the Devil that caused him to do it; and Farmer Duffy horsewhipped his wife, and said that he did it to beat the Devil out of her. This made me desirous to know what influence the Devil really had, and I was stimulated to this inquiry by my friend, Mr. Trelevan, who assured me that the Devil was as necessary as the Almighty to the orthodox faith."²¹ The fashionable preachers in the neighborhood of Belgravia mostly eschew the Devil, and avoid the taint of brimstone; treacle is the commodity they dispense.

For myself, the only Devil I know is that black Devil ignorance, fostered by knavery and tyranny; a Devil personified by the credulous many, and kept up in the past by the learned but treacherous few, who preferred to rule the masses by their fears, rather than to guide them through their love. This devil has, indeed, not been a roaring lion, but a cowardly and treacherous boa constrictor; it has enveloped in its massive folds glorious truths, and in the fierceness of its brute power has crushed them in its writhings. But oh! a glorious day is coming: amid the heretofore gloom of night the bright rays of the rising sun are piercing, the light of truth dispels the mists of ignorance. Bright facts drive out dark delusions; mighty truths triumph over pious frauds, and no longer need men be affrighted by the notion of an omnipotent fiend, wandering through the earth, ever seeking their damnation.

²¹ "Pilgrim's Progress from Methodism to Christianity."

Yes – to partially adopt the phraseology of a writer in "Macmillan's Magazine" – I do refuse to see in God a being omniscient as omnipotent, who puts us into this world without our volition, leaves us to struggle through it as we can, unequally pitted against an almost omnipotent and supersubtile Devil, and then, if we fail, finally drops us out of this world into Hell-fire, where a legion of inferior Devils find constant and never-ending employment in inventing fresh tortures for us; our crime being that we have not succeeded where success was rendered impossible. No high, no manly, no humane thinkings are developed in the doctrine of Devils and damnation. If a potent faith, it degrades alike the teacher and the taught, by its abhorrent mercilessness; and if a form, instead of a faith, then is the Devil doctrine a misleading sham, which frightens weak minds and never developes strong men.

NEW LIFE OF DAVID

In compiling a biographical account of any ancient personage, impediments mostly arise from the uncertainty of the various traditions out of which we gather our biography, and from the party bias and coloring which often pervade and detract from their value. In the present case no such obstacle is met with, no such bias can be imagined, for, in giving the life of David, we extract it from an all-wise God's perfect and infallible revelation to man, and thus are enabled to present it to our readers free from any doubt, uncertainty, or difficulty. The father of David was Jesse, an Ephrathite of Bethlehem-judah. Jesse had either eight sons (1 Samuel xvi, 10, 11, and xvii, 12) or only seven (1 Chron. ii, 13 to 15), and David was either the eighth son or the seventh. Some may think this a difficulty to commence with, but such persons will only be those who rely on their own intellectual faculties, or who have been misled by Colenso's arithmetic. If you, my dear reader, are in any doubt, at once consult some qualified divine, and he will explain to you that there is really no difference between eight and seven when rightly understood with prayer and faith, by the help of the spirit. Arithmetic is an utterly infidel acquirement, and one which all true believers should eschew. In proof of this, I may observe that the proposition three times one are one is a fundamental article of the Christian faith. David's great grandmother was the holy harlot Rahab, and his

grandmother was a lady who when unmarried went in the night and lay at the feet of Boaz, and left in the morning before it was light enough for any one to recognize her like her grandson she was "prudent in matters." When young, David tended his father's sheep, and apparently while so doing he obtained the reputation for being cunning in playing, a mighty valiant man, and a man of war and prudent in matters. He obtained his reputation as a soldier early and wonderfully, for he was "but a youth," and God's most holy word asserts that when going to fight with Goliath he tried to walk in armor, and could not, for he was not accustomed to it (1 Samuel xvii, 39, Douay version). Samuel shortly prior to this anointed David, and the spirit of the Lord came upon him from that day forward. If a man takes to spirits his life will probably be one of vice, misery, and misfortune, and if spirits take to him the result in the end is nearly the same. Saul being King of Israel, an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him. The devil has no ear for music, and Saul was recommended to have David to play on a harp in order that harmony might drive this evil spirit back to the Lord who sent it. The Jews' harp was played successfully, and Saul was often relieved from the evil spirit by the aid of David's ministrations. There is nothing miraculous in this; at the people's concerts many a working man has been released from the "blue devils" by a stirring chorus, a merry song, or patriotic anthem. David was appointed armor-bearer to the king, but curiously enough this office does not appear to have interfered with his duties as a shepherd; indeed the care of his

father's sheep took precedence over the care of the king's armor, and in the time of war he "went and returned to feed his father's sheep." Perhaps his "prudence in matters" induced him thus to take care of himself.

A Philistine, one Goliath of Gath (whose height was six cubits and a span, or about nine feet six inches, at a low computation) had defied the armies of Israel. This Goliath was (to use the vocabulary of the reverend sporting correspondent of a certain religious newspaper) a veritable champion of the heavy weights. He carried in all two cwt. of armor, offensive and defensive, upon his person, and his challenge had great weight. None dared accept it among the soldiers of Saul until the arrival of David with some food for his brethren. David volunteered to fight the giant, but Saul objecting that he was not competent to take part in a conflict so dangerous, David related how he pursued a *lion and a bear*, how he caught *him* by his beard and slew *him*. David's offer was accepted, he was permitted to fight the giant. In one verse David slew the Philistine with a stone, in another verse he slew him with the giant's own sword, while in 2 Samuel, c. xxi, v. 19, we are told that Goliath the Gittite was slain by Elhanan. Our translators, who have great regard for our faiths and more for their pulpits, have kindly inserted the words "the brother of" before Goliath. This saves the true believer from the difficulty of understanding how Goliath of Gath could have been killed by different men at different times. David was previously well known to Saul, and was much loved and favored by that

monarch. He was also seen by the king before he went forth to do battle with the gigantic Philistine. Yet Saul had forgotten his own armor-bearer and much-loved harpist, and was obliged to ask Abner who David was. Abner, captain of the king's host, familiar with the person of the armor-bearer to the king, of course knew David well; he therefore answered, "As thy soul liveth, O king, I can not tell." One day the evil spirit from the Lord came upon Saul and he prophesied. Men who are spiritually inclined often talk great nonsense under the influence of spirits, which they sometimes regret when sober. It is, however, an interesting fact in ancient spiritualism to know that Saul prophesied with a devil in him. Under the joint influence of the devil and prophecy, he tried to kill David, and when this was repeated, even after David had married the king's daughter (for whose wedding trousseau he had procured an interesting and delicate offering by the slaughter of two hundred men), then to save his own life David fled to Naioth, and Saul sent there messengers to arrest him, but the king's messengers having all become prophets, in the end Saul went himself, and this time the spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he stripped off his clothes and prophesied as hard as the rest. What he prophesied about we do not know. In fact, the priests have made so great deduction from the profits during the plenitude of their power, that there has been little which is profitable in connection with religion left for the people.

David lived in exile for some time, having collected around him every one that was in distress, and every one that was in

debt, and every one that was discontented. Saul made several fruitless attempts to effect his capture, with no better result than that he twice placed himself in the power of David, who twice showed the mercy to a cruel king which he never conceded to an unoffending people. David having obtruded himself upon Achish, King of Gath, and doubtful of his safety, feigned madness to cover his retreat. He then lived a precarious life, sometimes levying a species of blackmail upon defenseless farmers. Having applied to one farmer to make him some compensation for permitting the farm to go unrobbed, and his demand not having been complied with, David, who is a man after the heart of the God of mercy, immediately determined to murder the farmer and all his household for their wicked reluctance in submitting to his extortions. The wife of farmer Nabal compromised the matter. David "accepted her person" and ten days afterward Nabal was found dead in his bed. David afterward went with six hundred men and lived under the protection of Achish, king of Gath; and while thus residing (being the anointed one of a God who says "Thou shalt not steal,") he robbed the inhabitants of the surrounding places; being also obedient to the statute "Thou shalt do no murder," he slaughtered, and left neither man nor woman alive to report his robberies to King Achish; and as he "always walked in the ways" of a God to whom "lying lips are an abomination," he made false reports to Achish in relation to his actions. Of course this was all for the glory of God, whose ways are not as our ways.

Soon the Philistines were engaged in another of the constantly recurring conflicts with the Israelites. Who offered them the help of himself and band? Who offered to make war on his own countrymen? David, the man after God's own heart, who obeyed his statutes and who walked in his ways to do only that which was right in the sight of God. The Philistines rejected the traitor's aid, and saved David from the consummation of this baseness. While David was making this unpatriotic proffer of his services to the Philistines, his own city of Ziklag was captured by the Amalekites, who were doubtless endeavoring to avenge some of the most unjustifiable robberies and murders perpetrated by David and his followers in their country. David's own friends evidently thought that this misfortune was a retribution for David's crimes, for they spoke of stoning him. The Amalekites had captured and carried off every thing, but they do not seem to have maltreated or killed any of their enemies. David was less merciful. He pursued them, recaptured the spoil, and spared not a man of them, save 400 who escaped on camels. In consequence of the death of Saul, David soon after was elevated to the throne of Judah, while Ishbosheth, son of Saul, was made King of Israel. But Ishbosheth, having been assassinated, David slew the assassins, when they, hoping for reward, brought him the news, and he reigned ultimately over Israel also.

As my religious readers are doubtless aware, the Lord God of Israel, after the time of Moses, usually dwelt on the top of an ark or box, between two figures of gold, and on one occasion

David made a journey with his followers to Baal, to bring thence the ark of God. They placed it on a new cart drawn by oxen. On their journey the oxen stumbled and consequently shook the cart, and one of the drivers, whose name was Uzzah, fearing that God might be tumbled to the ground, took hold of the ark, apparently in order to steady it, and prevent it from overturning. God, who is a God of love, was much displeased that any one should presume to do any such act of kindness, and killed Uzzah on the spot as a punishment for his error. This shows that if a man sees the Church of God tumbling down, he should never try to prop it up; if it be not strong enough to save itself the sooner it falls the better for human kind – that is, if they keep away from it while it is falling. David was much displeased that the Lord had killed Uzzah; in fact, David seems to have wished for a monopoly of slaughter, and always manifested displeasure when killing was done unauthorized by himself. Being displeased, David would not take the ark to Jerusalem; he left it in the house of Obed Edom, but as the Lord proved more kind to Obed Edom than he had done to Uzzah, David determined to bring it away, and he did so, and David danced before the ark in a state of semi-nudity, for which he was reproached by Michal. The story is one which, by itself, would be as entertaining to a depraved mind as any Holywell-Street pamphlet, if Lord Campbell's act did not prevent the publication of indecencies. The pages of God's most holy word, we believe, do not come within the scope of the act, and lovers of obscene language may therefore have legal gratification

so long as the bible shall exist. The God of Israel, who had been leading a wandering life for many years, and who had "walked in a tent and in a tabernacle," and "from tent to tent," and "from one tabernacle to another," and who "had not dwelt in any house" since the time that he brought the Israelites out of Egypt, was offered "an house for him to dwell in," but he declined to accept it during the lifetime of David, although he promised to permit the son of David to erect him such an abode. David being now a powerful monarch, and having many wives and concubines, saw one day the beautiful wife of one of his soldiers. To see, with this licentious monarch, was to crave for the gratification of his lust. The husband, Uriah, was fighting for the king, yet David was base enough to steal his wife's virtue during Uriah's absence in the field of battle. "Thou shalt not commit adultery," was one of the commandments, yet we are told by God of this David, "who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart to do only that which was right in mine eyes" (1 Kings, c. xiv, v. 8). David having seduced the wife, sent for her husband, wishing to make him condone his wife's dishonor, as many a man has done in other lands, when a king or prince has been the seducer. Some hold that virtue in rags is less worth than vice when coroneted. Uriah would not be thus tricked, and David, the pious David, coolly planned, and without mercy caused to be executed, the treacherous murder of Uriah. God is all just; and David having committed adultery and murder, God punished and killed an innocent child, which had no part or share in David's crime, and

never chose that it should be born from the womb of Bathsheba. After this the king David was even more cruel and merciless than before. Previously he had systematically slaughtered the inhabitants of Moab, now he sawed people with saws, cut them with harrows and axes, and made them pass through brick-kilns. Yet of this man God said he "did that which was right in mine eyes." So bad a king, so treacherous a man, a lover so inconstant, a husband so adulterous, of course was a bad father, having bad children. We are little surprised, therefore, to read that his son Ammon robbed his sister, David's daughter Tamar, of her virtue; and that Ammon was afterward slain by his own brother, David's son Absalom, and are scarcely astonished that Absalom himself, on the house-top, in the sight of all Israel, should complete his father's shame by an act worthy a child of God's selected people. Yet these are God's chosen race, and this is the family of the man "who walked in God's ways all the days of his life."

God, who is all-wise and all-just, and who is not a man that he should repent, had repented that he, had made Saul king because Saul spared one man. In the reign of David the same good God sent a famine for three years on the descendants of Abraham, and upon being asked his reason for thus starving his chosen ones, the reply of the Deity was that he sent the famine on the subjects of David because Saul slew the Gibeonites. Satisfactory reason! – because Oliver Cromwell slew the Royalists, God will punish the subjects of Charles the Second. One reason is to profane eyes equivalent to the other, but a bishop or even a rural

dean would show how remarkably God's justice was manifested. David was not behindhand in justice. He had sworn to Saul that he would not cut off his seed – i.e. that he would not destroy Saul's family. He therefore took two of Saul's sons, and five of Saul's grandsons, and gave them up to the Gibeonites, who hung them. Strangely wonderful are the ways of the Lord! Saul slew the Gibeonites, therefore years afterward God starves Judah. The Gibeonites hang men who had nothing to do with the crime of Saul, except that they are his decendants, and then we are told "the Lord was intreated for the land." Perhaps David wanted to get rid of the royal family of Saul. The anger of the Lord being kindled against Israel, and he wanting some excuse for punishing the decendants of Jacob, moved David to number his people. The Chronicles say that it was Satan, and pious people may thus learn that there is little difference between God and the Devil when rightly understood. Both are personifications founded in the ignorance of the masses, and their continuance will cease with their credulousness. David caused a census to be taken of the tribes of Israel and Judah. There is a trivial disagreement to the extent of about 270,000 soldiers between Samuel and Chronicles, but the readers must not allow so slight an inaccuracy as this to stand between them and heaven. What are 270,000 men when looked at prayerfully? The idea that any doubt should arise is to a devout mind at the same time profane and preposterous. Infidels suggest that 1,570,000 soldiers form a larger army than the Jews are likely to have possessed. I can

only add that as God is omnipotent, there is no reason to limit his power of increasing or decreasing miraculously the armament of the Jewish nation. David, it seems, did wrong in numbering his people, although we are never told that he did wrong in robbing or murdering their neighbors, or in pillaging peaceful agriculturists. David said, "I have sinned." The king having done wrong, an all-merciful God brought a pestilence on the people, and murdered 70,000 Israelites for an offense which their ruler had committed. The angel who was engaged in this terrible slaughter stood somewhere between heaven and earth, and stretched forth his hand with a drawn sword in it to destroy Jerusalem itself, but even the blood-thirsty Deity of the bible "repented him of the evil," and said to the angel, "It is enough." Many volumes might be written to answer the inquiries – Where did the angel stand, and on what? Of what metal was the sword, and where was it made? As it was a drawn one, where was the scabbard? and did the angel wear a sword belt? Examined in a pious frame of mind, much holy instruction may be derived from the attempt at solution of these problems.

David now grows old and weak, and at last, notwithstanding that he has the advantage of a pretty maiden to cherish him, he wears out, and his death hour comes. Oh! for the dying words of the Psalmist! What pious instruction shall we derive from the deathbed scene of the man after God's own heart! Listen to the last words of Judah's expiring monarch. You who have been content with the pious frauds and forgeries perpetrated with

reference to the deathbeds and dying words of the great, the generous, the witty Voltaire, the manly, the self-denying, the incorruptible Thomas Paine, the humane, simple, child-like man, yet mighty poet, Shelley – you who have turned away from these with horror, unfounded if real, come with me to the death couch of the special favorite of God. Bathsheba's child stands by his side. Does any thought of the murdered Uriah rack old David's brain, or has a tardy repentance effaced the bloody stain from the pages of his memory? What does the dying David say? Does he talk of cherubs, angels, and heavenly choirs? Nay, none of these things pass his lips. Does he make a confession of his crime-stained life, and beg his son to be a better king, a truer man, a more honest citizen, a wiser father? Nay, not so – no word or sigh of regret, no expression of remorse or repentance escaped his lips. What does the dying David say? This foul adulterer, whom God has made king; this red-handed robber, whose life has been guarded by "our Father which art in Heaven;" this perjured king, whose lying lips have found favor in the sight of God, and who when he dies is safe for Heaven. Does David repent? Nay – like the ravenous tiger or wolf, which once tasting blood is made more eager for the prey, he yearns for blood; he dies, and with his dying breath begs his son to bring the grey hairs of two old men down to the grave with blood. Yet this is the life of God's anointed king, the chief one of God's chosen people.

David is alleged to have written several Psalms. In one of these he addresses God in the phraseology of a member of the P. R.

praising Deity that he had smitten all of his enemies on the cheek bone and broken the teeth of the ungodly. In these days, when "muscular Christianity" is not without advocates, the metaphor which presents God as a sort of magnificent Benicia Boy may find many admirers. In the eighteenth Psalm, David describes God as with "smoke coming out of his nostrils and fire out of his mouth," by which "coals were kindled." He represents God as coming down from heaven, and says "he rode upon a cherub." The learned Parkhurst gives a likeness of a one-legged, four-winged, four-faced animal, part lion, part bull, part eagle, part man, and if a cloven foot be any criterion, part devil also. This description, if correct, will give some idea to the faithful of the wonderful character of the equestrian feats of Deity.

In the twenty-sixth Psalm, the writer, if David, exposes his own hypocrisy in addition to his other vices. He has the impudence to tell God that he has been a man of integrity and truth; that he has avoided evildoers, although if we are to believe the thirty-eighth Psalm, the vile hypocrite must have already been subject to a loathsome disease – a penalty consequent on his licentiousness and criminality. In another Psalm, David the liar tells God that "he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight." To understand his malevolent nature we can not do better than quote his prayer to God against an enemy (Psalm cix, 6-14):

"6. Set thou a wicked man over him: and let Satan stand at his right hand.

"7. When he shall be judged, let him be condemned: and let

his prayer become sin.

"8. Let his days be few: and let another take his office.

"9. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow.

"10. Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg: let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places.

"11. Let the extortioner catch all that he hath: and let the strangers spoil his labor.

"12. Let there be none to extend mercy unto him: neither let there be any to favor his fatherless children.

"13. Let his posterity be cut off: and in the generation following let their name be blotted out.

"14. Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the Lord: and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out."

A full consideration of the life of David must give great help to each orthodox reader in promoting and sustaining his faith. While he is spoken of by Deity as obeying all the statutes and keeping all the commandments, we are astonished to find that murder, theft, lying, adultery, licentiousness, and treachery are among the crimes which may be laid to his charge. David was a liar, God is a God of truth; David was merciless, God is merciful, and of long suffering; David was a thief, God says "Thou shalt not steal;" David was a murderer, God says "Thou shalt do no murder;" David took the wife of Uriah, and "accepted" the wife of Nabal, God says "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife;" Yet, notwithstanding all these things, David was a man after God's own heart.

Had this Jewish monarch any redeeming traits in his character? Was he a good citizen? If so, the bible has carefully concealed every action which would entitle him to such an appellation, and in lieu has given us the record of his attempted extortion in the case of Nabal, and furnished us with a notice of his horde of followers – outlawed, discontented, and in debt. Was he a kind and constant husband? Was he grateful to those who aided him in his hour of need? Nay; like the wounded serpent which, half frozen by the wayside, is warmed into new life in the traveler's breast, and then treacherously stabs him with his poisoned fangs, so David robbed and murdered the friends and allies of the King of Gath, who had afforded him refuge against the pursuit of Saul. Does his patriotism outshine his many vices? Does his love of country efface his many misdoings? Not even this. David was a heartless traitor who volunteered to serve against his own countrymen, and would have done so had not the Philistines rejected his treacherous help. Was he a good king? So say the priesthood now; but where is the evidence of his virtue? His crimes brought a plague and pestilence on his subjects, and his reign is a continued succession of wars, revolts, and assassinations, plottings and counterplots.

The life of David is a dark blot on the page of human history, and our best hope is that if a spirit from God inspired the writer, then that it was a lying spirit, and that he has given us fiction instead of truth.

NEW LIFE OF JACOB

It is pleasant work to present to the reader sketches of God's chosen people. More especially is it an agreeable task to recapitulate the interesting events occurring during the life of a man whom God has loved. Jacob was the son of Isaac; the grandson of Abraham. These three men were so free from fault, their lives so unobjectionable, that the God of the bible delighted to be called the "God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." It is true, Abraham owned slaves, was not exact as to the truth, and, on one occasion, turned his wife and child out to the mercies of a sandy desert. That Isaac in some sort followed his father's example and disingenuous practices, and that Jacob was without manly feeling, a sordid, selfish, unfraternal cozener, a cowardly trickster, a cunning knave, but they must nevertheless have been good men, for God was "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." The name Jacob is not inappropriate. Kalisch says: "This appellation, if taken in its obvious etymological meaning, implies a deep ignominy; for the root from which it is derived signifies *to deceive, to defraud*, and in such a despicable meaning the same form of the word is indeed used elsewhere (Jeremiah ix, 3). Jacob would, therefore, be nothing else but the crafty *impostor*; in this sense Esau, in the heat of his animosity, in fact clearly explains the word, justly is his name called Jacob (cheat) because he has cheated me

twice" (Genesis xxvii, 30). According to the ordinary orthodox bible chronology, Jacob was born about 1836 or 1837 B. C, that is, about 2,168 years from "in the beginning," his father Isaac being then sixty years of age. There is a difficulty connected with Holy Scripture chronology which would be insuperable were it not that we have the advantage of spiritual aids in elucidation of the text. This difficulty arises from the fact that the chronology of the bible, in this respect, like the major portion of bible history, is utterly unreliable. But we do not look to the Old or New Testament for mere commonplace, everyday facts; or if we do, severe will be the disappointment of the truthseeker; we look there for mysteries, miracles, paradoxes, and perplexities, and have no difficulties in finding the objects of our search. Jacob was born, together with his twin brother, Esau, in consequence of special entreaty addressed by Isaac to the Lord on behalf of Rebekah, to whom he had been married about nineteen years, and who was yet childless. Infidel physiologists (and it is a strange, though not unaccountable, fact that all who are physiologists are also in so far infidel) assert that prayer would do little to repair the consequence of such disease, or such abnormal organic structure, as would compel sterility. But our able clergy are agreed that the bible was not intended to teach us science; or, at any rate, we have learned that its attempts in that direction are most miserable failures. Its mission is to teach the unteachable; to enable us to comprehend the incomprehensible. Before Jacob was born God decreed that he and his descendants should obtain

the mastery over Esau and his descendants – "the elder shall serve the younger."²² The God of the bible is a just God, but it is hard for weak flesh to discover the justice of this proemial decree, which so sentenced to servitude the children of Esau before their father's birth.

Jacob came into the world holding by his brother's heel, like some cowardly knave in the battle of life, who, not daring to break a gap in the hedge of conventional prejudice, which bars his path, is yet ready enough to follow some bolder warrior, and to gather the fruits of his courage. "And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field: and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents." One day Esau returned from his hunting faint and wearied to the very point of death. He was hungry, and came to Jacob, his twin and only brother, saying, "Feed me, I pray thee,"²³ "for I am exceedingly faint."²⁴ In a like case would not any man so entreated immediately offer to the other the best at his command, the more especially when that other is his only brother, born at the same time, from the same womb, suckled at the same breast, fed under the same roof? But Jacob was not a man and a brother, he was one of God's chosen people, and one who had been honored by God's prenatal selection. "If a man come unto me and hate not his brother, he can not be my disciple." So taught Jesus the Jew, in after time, but

²² Gen. xxv, 23.

²³ Gen. xxv, 30.

²⁴ Douay version.

in this earlier age Jacob the Jew, in practice, anticipated the later doctrine. It is one of the misfortunes of theology, if not its crime, that profession of love to God is often accompanied with bitter and active hate of man. Jacob was one of the founders of the Jewish race, and even in this their pre-historic age, the instinct for driving a hard bargain seems strongly developed. "Jacob said" to Esau, "Sell me this day thy birthright." The famished man vainly expostulated, and the birthright was sold for a mess of pottage.

If to-day one man should so meanly and cruelly take advantage of his brother's necessities to rob him of his birthright, all good and honest men would shun him as an unbrotherly scoundrel and most contemptible knave; yet, less than 4,000 years ago, a very different standard of morality must have prevailed. Indeed, if God is unchangeable, divine notions of honor and honesty must to-day be widely different from those of our highest men. God approved and endorsed Jacob's conduct. His approval is shown by his love afterward expressed for Jacob, his endorsement by his subsequent attention to Jacob's welfare. We may learn from this tale, so pregnant with instruction, that any deed which to the worldly and sensible man appears like knavery while understood literally, becomes to the devout and prayerful man an act of piety when understood spiritually. Much faith is required to thoroughly understand this; *for example*, it looks like swindling to collect poor children's halfpence and farthings in the Sunday schools for missionary purposes abroad, and to spend thereout two or three hundred pounds in an annual jubilatory dinner for well-fed

pauper parsons at home; and so thought the noble lord who wrote to the *Times* under the initials S. G. O. If he had possessed more faith and less sense, he would have seen the piety and completely overlooked the knavery of the transaction. Pious preachers and clever commentators declare that Esau despised his birthright. I do not deny that they might back their declaration by scripture quotations, but I do deny that the narrative ought to convey any such impression. Esau's words were, "Behold I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright be to me?"

Isaac growing old, and fearing from his physical infirmities the near approach of death, was anxious to bless Esau before he died, and directed him to take quiver and bow and go out in the field to hunt some venison for a savory meat, such as old Isaac loved. Esau departed, but when he had left his father's presence in order to fulfill his request, Jacob appeared on the scene. Instigated by his mother, he, by an abject stratagem, passed himself off as Esau. With a savory meat prepared by Rebekah, he came into his father's presence, and Isaac said, "Who art thou, my son?" Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord. The Lord loved Jacob, yet Jacob lied to his old blind father, saying, "I am Esau, thy first-born." Isaac had some doubts: these are manifested by his inquiring how it was that the game was killed so quickly. Jacob, whom God loved, in a spirit of shameless blasphemy replied, "Because the Lord thy God brought it to me." Isaac still hesitated, fancying that he recognized the voice to be the voice of Jacob, and again questioned him, saying, "Art thou my very son

Esau?" God is the God of truth and loved Jacob, yet Jacob said, "I am." Then Isaac blessed Jacob, believing that he was blessing Esau: and God permitted the fraud to be successful, and himself also blessed Jacob. In that extraordinary composition known as the Epistle to the Hebrews, we are told that by faith Isaac blessed Jacob. But what faith had Isaac? Faith that Jacob was Esau? His belief was produced by deceptive appearances. His faith resulted from false representations. And there are very many men in the world who have no better foundation for their religious faith than had Isaac when he blessed Jacob, believing him to be Esau. In the Douay bible I find the following note on this remarkable narrative: "St. Augustine (X. contra mendacium c. 10), treating at large upon this place, excuseth Jacob from a lie, because thi's whole passage was mysterious, as relating to the preference which was afterward to be given to the Gentiles before the carnal Jews, which Jacob, by prophetic light, might understand. So far it is certain that the first birthright, both by divine election and by Esau's free cession, belonged to Jacob; so that if there were any lie in the case, it would be no more than an officious and venial one." How glorious to be a patriarch, and to have a real saint laboring years after your death to twist your lies into truth by aid of prophetic light. Lying is at all times most disreputable, but at the deathbed the crime is rendered more heinous. The death hour would have awed many men into speaking the truth, but it had little effect on Jacob. Although Isaac was about to die, this greedy knave cared not, so that he got from the dying man

the sought-for prize. God is said to love righteousness and hate iniquity, yet he loved the iniquitous Jacob, and hated the honest Esau. All knaves are tinged more or less with cowardice. Jacob was no exception to the rule. His brother enraged at the deception practiced upon Isaac, threatened to kill Jacob. Jacob was warned by his mother and fled. Induced by Rebekah, Isaac charged Jacob to marry one of Laban's daughters. On the way to Haran, where Laban dwell, Jacob rested and slept. While sleeping he dreamed; ordinarily dreams have little significance, but in the bible they are more important. Some of the most weighty and vital facts (?) of the bible are communicated in dreams, and rightly so; if the men had been wide awake, they would have probably rejected the revelation as absurd. So much does that prince of darkness, the devil, influence mankind against the bible in the daytime, that it is when all is dark, and our eyes are closed, and the senses dormant, that God's mysteries are most clearly seen and understood. Jacob "saw in his sleep a ladder standing upon the earth, and the top thereof touching heaven; the angels of God ascending and descending by it, and *the Lord leaning upon the ladder.*" In the ancient temples of India, and in the mysteries of Mithra, the seven-stepped ladder by which the spirits ascended to heaven is a prominent feature, and one of probably far higher antiquity than the age of Jacob. Did paganism furnish the groundwork for the patriarch's dream? "No man hath seen God at any time." God is "invisible." Yet Jacob saw the invisible God, whom no man hath seen or can see, either standing

above a ladder or leaning upon it. True, it was all a dream. Yet God spoke to Jacob; but perhaps that was a delusion too. We find by scripture that God threatens to send to some "strong delusions, that they might believe a lie and be damned." Poor Jacob was much frightened, as any one might be, to dream of God leaning on so long a ladder. What if it had broken and the dreamer underneath it? Jacob's fears were not so powerful but that his shrewdness and avarice had full scope in a sort of half-vow, half-contract, made in the morning. Jacob said, "If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I shall come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God." The inference deducible from this conditional statement is, that if God failed to complete the items enumerated by Jacob, then the latter would have nothing to do with him. Jacob was a shrewd Jew, who would have laughed to scorn the preaching, "Take no thought, saying, what shall we eat? or, what shall we drink? or, wherewithal shall we be clothed?"

After this contract, Jacob went on his journey, and reached the house of his mother's brother, Laban, into whose service he entered. "Diamond cut diamond" would be an appropriate heading to the tale which gives the transactions between Jacob the Jew and Laban the son of Nahor. Laban had two daughters. Rachel, the youngest, was "beautiful and well-favored;" Leah, the elder, was "blear-eyed." Jacob served for the pretty one; but on the wedding-day Laban made a feast, and gave Jacob the

ugly Leah instead of the pretty Rachel. Jacob being (according to Josephs) both in drink and in the dark, it was morning ere he discovered his error. After this Jacob served for Rachel also, and then the remainder of the chapter of Jacob's servitude to Laban is but the recital of a series of frauds and trickeries. Jacob embezzled Laban's property, and Laban misappropriated and changed Jacob's wages. In fact, if Jacob had not possessed the advantage of divine aid, he would probably have failed in the endeavor to cheat his master; but God, who says "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, nor anything that is thy neighbor's," encouraged Jacob in his career of criminality. At last, Jacob, having amassed a large quantity of property, determined to abscond from his employment, and taking advantage of his uncle's absence at sheepshearing, "he stole away unawares," taking with him his wives, his children, flocks, herds, and goods. To crown the whole, Rachel, worthy wife of a husband so fraudulent, stole her father's gods. In the present day the next phase would be the employment of Mr. Sergeant Vericute, of the special detective department, and the issue of bills as follows:

"ONE HUNDRED SHEKELS REWARD,

Absconded, with a large amount of property,

JACOB, THE JEW

**Information to be given to Laban,
the Syrian, at Haran, in the**

East, or to Mr. Serjeant Vericute, Scotland Yard."

But in those days God's ways were not as our ways. God came to Laban in a dream and compounded the felony, saying, "Take heed thou speak not anything harshly against Jacob."²⁵ This would probably prevent Laban giving evidence in a police court against Jacob, and thus save him from transportation or penal servitude. After a reconciliation and treaty had been effected between Jacob and Laban, the former went on his way "and the

²⁵ Genesis xxxi, 24, Douay version.

angel of God met him." Angels are not included in the circle with which I have at present made acquaintance, and I hesitate, therefore, to comment on the meeting between Jacob and the angels. Balaam's ass, at a later period, shared the good fortune which was the lot of Jacob, for that animal also had a meeting with an angel. Jacob was the grandson of the faithful Abraham to whom angels also appeared. Perhaps angelic apparitions are limited to asses and the faithful. On this point I do not venture to assert, and but timidly suggest. It is somewhat extraordinary that Jacob should have manifested no surprise at meeting a host of angels. Still more worthy of note is it that our good translators elevate the same words into "angels" in verse 1, which they degrade into "messengers" in verse 3. John Bellamy, in his translation, says the "angels were not immortal angels," and it is very probable John Bellamy was right.

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