

THOMSON JAMES, FOOTE
GEORGE WILLIAM

**SATIRES AND
PROFANITIES**

George Foote
James Thomson
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Содержание

PREFACE	4
THE DEVIL IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND	11
RELIGION IN THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS	26
THE STORY OF A FAMOUS OLD JEWISH FIRM	46
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	60

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PREFACE

Believing as I do that James Thomson is, since Shelley, the most brilliant genius who has wielded a pen in the service of Freethought, I take a natural pride and pleasure in rescuing the following articles from burial in the great mausoleum of the periodical press. There will doubtless be a diversity of opinion as to their value. One critic, for instance, has called "The Story of a Famous Old Jewish Firm" a witless squib; but, on the other hand, the late Professor Clifford considered it a piece of exquisite mordant satire worthy of Swift. Such differences are inevitable from the very nature of the subject. Satire, more than any other form of composition, rouses antipathy where it does not command applause; and the greater the satire, the more intense are the feelings it excites.

But which side, it may be inquired, is likely to be the best judge? Surely the friendly one. Sympathy is requisite to insight, as Carlyle says; while hostility blinds us to a thousand virtues and beauties. I am aware that many will take objection to the employment of satire at all, whether good or bad, on religious topics; but this seems to me preposterous, and I should readily

answer it, if Thomson had not done so himself in the most vigorous and triumphant manner.

Nearly all the pieces in this volume appeared originally in the *National Reformer* or the *Secularist*. I have attempted no arrangement of them, not even a chronological one; the compositor has shuffled them at his own sweet will. All I have done, besides collecting them and carefully reading the proofs, is to indicate in each case the year of first publication; and I think the reader will approve this plan as both modest and sensible.

I am much mistaken if this volume does not become a well-prized treasure to many Freethinkers; that it will ever be valued by the general public I dare not hope. Yet the number of its admirers will increase with the growth of a healthy scepticism. It will not fall like a bombshell among ordinary readers, who serenely ignore the most terrible mental explosives, and render them comparatively innocuous by mere force of neglect; but it will startle and stimulate some minds, and in time its influence will extend to many more.

What value Thomson placed on these pieces it is difficult to decide. "Working off the talent," he once remarked when I mentioned them. But the fact remains that he allowed one or two of them to be reprinted as pamphlets before any of his poems were collected in a volume. He naturally cared more for his poems than for his prose. What poet ever did the contrary? But even for these he cared little, except "The City of Dreadful Night" and a few others, which expressed his

profoundest convictions.

There were several articles in his "Essays and Phantasies" that proved Thomson to be a born satirist as well as a born poet; notably "Proposals for the Speedy Extinction of Evil and Misery," a tremendous display of sustained irony, to my mind unsurpassed even by Swift at his greatest, and with a poetic grandeur quite beyond him. The contents of this volume show marks of the same strong hand. There is never, perhaps, so continuous an exertion of power; but there is more versatility, more freedom, and often more abandon. I fancy, too, there is more rapidity and suppleness, and I am sure there is more mirth.

Thomson's satire was always bitterest, or at any rate most trenchant, when it dealt with Religion, which he considered a disease of the mind, engendered by folly and fostered by ignorance and vanity. He saw that spiritual superstition not only diverts men from Truth, but induces a slavish stupidity of mind, and prepares the way for every form of political and social injustice. He was an Atheist first and a Republican afterwards. He derided the idea of making a true Republic of a population besotted with religion, paralysed by creeds cringing to the agents of their servitude, and clinging to the chains that enthrall them.

A few words only as to Thomson's life. Outwardly it was singularly uneventful, although inwardly it was intense and exciting. He was born at Port Glasgow, on the 23rd of November, 1834; and he died in London, on the 1st of June 1882. His father was a merchant captain, and his mother a zealous Irvingite.

Left parentless in his infancy, he was educated at the Caledonian Orphan Asylum. For some years he served as a schoolmaster in the army, during which time he contracted an intimate friendship with Mr. Bradlaugh, with whom he subsequently worked and lived in London. Soon after leaving Mr. Bradlaugh he devoted himself to journalism, to which he brought a well-practised pen; contributing to the *National Reformer*, *the Secularist*, *the Liberal*, *Cope's Tobacco Plant*, and other periodicals. Shortly before his death he gained access to the *Weekly Dispatch* and the *Fortnightly Review*. His poems and essays were mostly written before he tried to live by his pen. Four volumes of these have been published by Reeves and Turner, under the generous editorship of Mr. Bertram Dobell, who has prefixed a memoir to the last, entitled "A Voice from the Nile and Other Poems." Besides the five volumes of Thomson's writings now before the public, there are many essays and articles and a few poems still uncollected, some of them of high value; and many poems in manuscript, unknown to all but a few privileged friends. Mr. Dobell hopes to publish them all in time. Thomson's poetical reputation is, however, already established. The best judges give him the highest praise. My own judgment assigns him the next place to Robert Browning. Of course it is no blasphemy to dispute my estimate; but what prospect is there of reversing the common verdict of George Eliot, George Meredith, Swinburne, and Rossetti?

Mr. Dobell refers to the charm of Thomson's manner in social

intercourse. His personal appearance told in his favor. He was of the medium height, well-built, and active. He possessed that striking characteristic sometimes found in mixed races – black hair and beard, and grey-blue eyes. The eyes were fine and wonderfully expressive. They were full of shifting light, soft grey in some moods and deep blue in others. They contained depth within depth; and when he was moved by strong passion they widened and flashed with magnetic power. When not suffering from depression he was the life of the company. He was the most brilliant talker I ever met, and at home in all societies; a fine companion in a day's walk, and a shining figure at the festive table or in the social drawing-room. But you enjoyed his conversation most when you sat with him alone, taking occasional draughts of our national beverage, and constantly burning "the divine weed."

Thomson's sympathy with radical and revolutionary causes is not much noticed by Mr. Dobell, but it was very strong. He was secretary for some time to the Polish Committee in London, and his glorious lines on "A Polish Insurgent" which I for one can never read without tears, proves that he might have written the noble songs that George Eliot hoped he would compose. He sympathised with all self-sacrifice, all lofty aspiration, and in particular with all suffering. This last emotion was often betrayed by a look rather than expressed in words. I vividly remember being with him once on a popular holiday at the Alexandra Palace. We were seated on the grass, watching the shifting

groups of happy forms, and exchanging appreciative or satirical remarks. Suddenly I observed my companion's gaze fixed on a youth who limped by with a pleasant smile on his face, but too obviously beyond hope of ever sharing in the full enjoyment of life. Thomson's eyes followed him until he passed out of sight, and the next moment our eyes met. I shall never forget the gentle sadness of that look, its beautiful sympathy that transcended speech, and made all words poor.

Thomson's life was a long tragedy. He inherited from his father a fatal curse, and in his youth he lost the beautiful girl to whom he was engaged. She was the object of his passionate adoration, and allusions to her often occur in his poems. Her image mingled with all the sombre panoramas of Love and Death and Grief that passed before the eyes of his imagination. Yet I do not agree with Mr. Dobell in regarding this bereavement as the *cause* of his life-long misery. She was, I hold, merely the peg on which he hung his raiment of sorrow; without her, another object might have served the same purpose. He carried within him his proper curse, constitutional melancholia. From long and careful observation I formed this conclusion, and it explains Thomson's life and philosophy. I would not dogmatise, however; for the profundities and subtleties of the human heart baffle all calculation. Certitude is now impossible. The seal of eternal silence is set on Thomson's lips – "after life's fitful fever he sleeps well." He is buried at Highgate, and his darling lies, I suspect, in an unknown grave. Death has at last united them, but

their love survives in the glory of immortal song.

THE DEVIL IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

(1876.)

The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council has delivered judgment in the case of Jenkins v. Cook. Many of the highest personages in the realm, including the Archbishop of Canterbury and the great law-lords, were present to give weight and solemnity to the decision, which was read by the Lord Chancellor. It was reported at full length in the *Times* of the following day, Feb. 17, 1876, the length being two columns of small print.

I must try to indicate briefly the main facts of the case, before hazarding any comments on it. Mr. Jenkins, of Christ Church, Clifton, brought an action against his vicar, the Rev. Flavel S. Cook, for refusing him the Sacrament of the Holy Communion. Mr. Cook justified the refusal on the ground that Mr. Jenkins did not believe in the Devil, all passages relating to the Devil and evil spirits having been excluded from a bulky volume published by Mr. Jenkins, entitled "Selections from the Old and New Testaments." By the evidence of Mrs. Jenkins, who attempted an amicable arrangement, it appears that Mr. Cook said to her: "Let Mr. Jenkins write me a calm letter, and say he believes in the Devil, and I will give him the Sacrament." Whereupon

Mr. Jenkins wrote on July 20, 1874: "With regard to my book, 'Selections from the Old and New Testaments,' the parts I have omitted, and which has enabled me [meaning, doubtless, and the omission of which has enabled me] to use the book morning and evening in my family are, in their present generally received sense, quite incompatible with region or decency (in my opinion). How such ideas have become connected with a book containing everything that is necessary for a man to know, I really cannot say; I can only sincerely regret it." Mr. Cook replied in effect: "Then you cannot be received at the Lord's table in my church." Mr. Jenkins, a regular communicant, and admittedly a man of exemplary and devout life, answered: "Thinking as you do, I do not see what other course you could consistently have taken. I shall, nevertheless, come to the Lord's table as usual at 'your' church, which is also mine." Accordingly he presented himself, and was repelled, whereupon he brought an action against Mr. Cook.

The case was first tried in the Court of Arches, and the dean dismissed the suit and condemned Mr. Jenkins in costs, saying, "I am of opinion that the avowed and persistent denial of the existence and personality of the Devil did, according to the law of the Church, as expressed in her canons and rubrics, constitute the promoter [Mr. Jenkins] 'an evil liver,' and 'a depraver of the Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments,' in such sense as to warrant the defendant in refusing to administer the Holy Communion to him until he disavowed or withdrew his

avowal of the heretical opinion, and that the same consideration applies to the absolute denial by the promoter of the doctrine of the eternity of punishment, and, of course, still more to the denial of all punishment for sin in a future state, which is the legitimate consequence of his deliberate exclusion of the passages of scripture referring to such punishment.”

So far, so well; the Church of England was assured of the Devil and the eternal punishment it has always held so dear. But Mr. Jenkins appealed to the highest court, and this has reversed the decision of the lower, admonished Mr. Cook for his conduct in the past, monished him to refrain from the like offence in future, and condemned him in the costs of both suits. Do you think, then, that the Church of England is authoritatively deprived of her dear Devil and her beloved eternal punishment? Not at all; the really important problem is evaded with consummate lawyerlike wariness; the points in dispute are most shiftily shifted like slides of a magic lantern; we have a new decision essentially unrelated to that which it cancels; we have a judgment which concerns not the Devil – except that he would chuckle over the too clever unwisdom which fancies it can extinguish “burning questions” with legal wigs.

Their most learned lordships in the first place observe that the learned judge of the Court of Arches appears to have considered that the canon and the rubric severally warrant the repulsion from the Lord’s table of “an evil liver,” and “a depraver of the Book of Common Prayer,” whereas the terms are “an open and

notorious evil liver,” and “common and notorious depravers.” This is a most pregnant distinction, teaching us that an evil liver and a depraver of the said book, as long as he is not notoriously such, is fully entitled to the Holy Communion, fully entitled to the privilege of “eating and drinking damnation to himself?” a privilege from which the notorious evil liver and depraver is righteously debarred.

Now, their most learned lordships find that there is absolutely no evidence that the appellant was an evil liver, much less an open and notorious evil liver. The Question follows, Was he a common and notorious depraver of the Book of Common Prayer? It was contended that the Selections, coupled with the letter of July 20, proved him to be this. But the letter was not written spontaneously. He was invited by the respondent, Mr. Cook, to write it. It was a friendly and private, as well as a solicited, communication. Therefore, whatever be the construction of the letter, and even if there be in it a deprecation of the Book of Common Prayer, still it would be impossible to hold that the writing of such a letter in such circumstances could make the appellant “a common and notorious depraver.” Whence it is clear that a man may deprave the Book of Common Prayer as much as he pleases in private conversation and letters, yet retain the precious privilege of “eating and drinking damnation to himself” in the Holy Communion; he can only forfeit this by common and notorious deprecation of that blessed book – for instance, by a deprecation repeatedly published in a newspaper, or persistently

proclaimed by the town-crier.

So far the law seems most clear, and the judgment quite incontestible. But leaving the strait limits of the law, and looking at the facts in evidence, there is one part of the judgment which to the common lay mind is simply astonishing. Their most learned lordships “*desire to state in the most emphatic manner that there is not before them any evidence that the appellant entertains the doctrines attributed to him by the Dean of Arches;*” wherefore their most learned and subtle lordships “do not mean to decide that those doctrines are otherwise than inconsistent with the formularies of the Church of England.” Nor, of course, do they mean to decide that those doctrines *are* inconsistent with, those formularies. No, “This is not the subject for their lordships’ present consideration.” Indeed, “If they were [had been] called upon to decide that [whether] those opinions, or any of them, could be entertained or expressed by a member of the Church, whether layman or clergyman, consistently with the law and with his remaining in communion with the Church, they would have looked upon this case with much greater anxiety than they now feel in its decision.”

Mr. Jenkins compiles and publishes a book of “Selections from the Bible,” carefully excluding all passages relating to the Devil and evil spirits. The book is bulky; and, in fact, though this is not expressly stated, seems to contain pretty well all the Bible except such passages. He further exhibits in the case a book of selections from the liturgy of the Church of England, apparently

compiled on the same principle of exclusion.. Mr. Cook sends through Mrs. J. a message: "Let Mr. J. write me a calm letter, and say he believes in the Devil, and I will give him the Sacrament." Mr. J. replies, as we have seen, that the parts he has omitted are, in his opinion, quite incompatible with religion or decency, *in their generally received sense*; such generally received sense being evidently (to all of us save their most learned and subtle lordships) that in which the Church of England receives them. Mr. C. replies, "Then I must refuse you the Communion." Mr. J. answers, "Thinking as you do, I do not see what other course you could consistently have taken;" and resolves to test the question of legality. With these facts staring them in the face, their most learned and most subtle lordships can, with the utmost solemnity, and in the most emphatic manner, declare that there is not any evidence before them that Mr. Jenkins does not believe in the Devil in the common Church of England sense! What the eyes of laymen, however purblind, cannot help seeing clearly, their far-sighted lordships, putting on legal spectacles, dim with the dust of many ages, manage not to discern at all.

The question cannot be left thus undecided. As matters stand, the poor Church does not know whether, legally, it has a Devil or not. Its Devil, its dear and precious old Devil, is in a state of suspended animation, neither dead nor alive; a most inefficient and burdensome Devil. He must either be restored to full health and vigor, or buried away decently for ever; decently and solemnly, the Archbishop of Canterbury, in the presence

of all their lordships of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, reading the appropriate Church service over his grave. That would be touching and impressive! – “Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God (with the sanction and authority of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council) of his great mercy to take unto himself the soul of our dear brother here departed, we therefore commit his body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ.” At present it appears that every clergyman and layman in the Church has the legal right to sing as a solo in private, especially if solicited, Beranger’s refrain, “*The Devil is dead! The Devil is dead!*” while it is doubtful whether he is at liberty to chant it publicly and in chorus – a state of things anomalous beyond even the normal anomalism of all things in this our happy England. It is urgent that some one, lay or cleric, should compel the decision which the suit of Mr. Jenkins has failed to obtain.

In considering the question whether disbelief in the Devil would “deprave” the Prayer Book, we must refer to this book itself. It contains three creeds – the Apostles’, the Nicene, and that called of Athanasius. Of these the Nicene (the creed in the Communion Service, by the way) mentions neither the Devil nor Hell; the Apostles’ and the so-called Athanasian mention hell but not the Devil. In No. III. of the Thirty-nine Articles hell is solidly established, but again there is no mention of the Devil. It may be argued that hell implies the Devil, as a fox-hole implies a fox;

but his existence is not authoritatively averred. Strangely enough, the only personage who, according to the creeds and articles, has certainly been in hell, is Jesus Christ himself: "He descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven." What took *him* to hell? The Prayer Book does not inform us. But we learn from the Epistle called 1 Peter, chap. iii., 19, 20, and chap. iv., 6: "By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is eight souls, were saved by water... For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit." Whence it appears that the spirits in prison were not the Devil and his angels, but the spirits of those who were drowned in the Flood for disobedience; and it furthermore appears that these spirits were saved by the preaching of Christ; so that in this famous harrying of hell, he seems to have left it as empty as the mosstroopers in their forays left farmsteads. It is true that No. VI. of the Articles settles the canon of the Old and New Testaments, and that anyone daring to exclude from belief anything in this canon might be convicted of depraving the Prayer Book. But in that case all the best scholars and divines of the Church are guilty of this dreadful sin; and not only guilty, but openly, commonly and notoriously guilty: and therefore all merit repulsion from the Lord's table. Let the truly faithful clergy, those who believe all without question

or distinction, do their duty to the Articles of religion of their Church (the Creeds, as I have pointed out, are neutral), and they will shut out from their Communion nearly all the intelligent piety and learning which lend it whatever dignity it still retains. Granted the canon in its integrity, and the existence of a personal Devil, and the doctrine of eternal punishment cannot be fairly disputed. Without multiplying texts, I may refer to Revelation, chap. xx., as decisive on these points.

From these considerations it follows that if the Church of England is bound by her own articles she will hold fast to the Devil and hell, and deny the privilege of her Communion to any one who depraves the Prayer-Book by common and notorious disbelief in them. And for my own part, I do not see how the Church could get on at all without a Devil and hell, especially in competition with the other Christian sects, which make unlimited use of both. The Devil is in fact as essential to the Christian schemes as a leader of the opposition to that great political blessing, government by party. If he were to die, or be deposed, it would be necessary to elect another to the vacant dignity. You cannot put the leadership in commission as the unfortunate Liberals were taunted with doing, in their demoralisation after their disasters of the General Election and Mr. Gladstone's sudden retirement. Just as Mr. Disraeli lamented the withdrawal of Mr. Gladstone, complaining of the embarrassment caused to the Government by having no responsible leader opposed to it, so we can imagine dear God

lamenting the absence of a Devil, and declaring that the Christian scheme could not work well without one. His utter loss would make the government of the world retrograde from an admirably balanced constitutional monarchy to a mere Oriental absolute despotism. You must choose some one to lead, if only in name and for the time, as the Whigs chose Lord Hartington. But though Lord Hartington is still tolerated by us English, a Lord Hartington of a Devil, be it said with all respect to both his lordship and his Devil-ship, would scarcely be tolerated by either the celestial or the infernal benches.

In Beranger's authentic record, already alluded to, of "The Death of the Devil" – which, however, relates only to the Church of Rome – we read how, on learning the catastrophe: —

“The conclave shook with mortal fear;
Power and cash-box, adieu! they said;
We have lost our father dear,
The Devil is dead! the Devil is dead!”

But while they they were in this passion of grief and despair, St. Ignatius offered to take the place of the dead Devil; and none could doubt that he with his Jesuits for imps would prove a most efficient substitute. Wherefore the Church threw off its sorrow and welcomed his offer with most holy rapture: —

“Noble fellow! cried all the court,
We bless thee for thy malice and hate.

And at once his Order, Rome's support,
Saw its robe flutter Heaven's gate.
From the angel's tears of pity fell:
Poor man will have cause to rue, they said;
St. Ignatius inherits Hell.
The Devil is dead! the Devil is dead!"

Thus matters continued well for the Church of Rome, and, in fact, became even better than before. But if the Devil should die in the Church of England, whom has she that could efficiently take his place? She has no saints except the disciples and apostles of the New Testament, and these have long since gone to glory. Would Mr. Gladstone undertake the office? or Mr. Beresford Hope, with the *Saturday Review* for his infernal gazette? or the editor of the *Rock*? or he of the *Church Times*? or the man who does religion for the *Daily Telegraph*? Each of these distinguished gentlemen might well eagerly accept the candidature or a post so lofty: but I fear that none of them could be considered equal to its functions. Perhaps Mr. Disraeli has the requisite genius, and probably he would be very glad to exchange the Premiership of little England for that of large hell: but unfortunately he has already committed himself to the side of the angels, meaning by angels the humdrum Tory angels of heaven – for, as Dr. Johnson said, the Devil was the first Whig. On the whole, the Church of England had better keep loyal to its ancient and venerable Devil, being too impoverished in intellect and character to supply a worthy successor.

I have ventured to compare the government of the world in the Christian scheme, by a God and a Devil, with our own felicitous government by party. There is, however, or rather there appears to be, a striking difference between the two. In our government, when the Prime Minister finds himself decidedly in a minority, he goes out of office, and the Leader of the Opposition goes in; in the Government of the World the Leader of the Opposition seems to have always had an immense majority (and his majority in these days is probably larger than ever before, seeing that sceptics and infidels have multiplied exceedingly), yet the other side is supposed to retain permanent possession of office. I say "supposed," because the Bible itself suggests that this popular opinion is a mistake, the Devil (if there be a Devil) being entitled by it the prince of this world, which surely implies his accession to power.

Although the Godhead or governing power of the world, according to the Christian scheme, is usually spoken and written of as a trinity, it is, in fact, quarterary or fourfold for Protestants, and quinary or fivefold for Roman Catholics. The former have God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, and God the Devil; the latter supplement these with Goddess the Virgin Mary. Both formally acknowledge the first three as collectively and severally almighty, but Protestants implicitly acknowledge the fourth, and Roman Catholics the fifth, as more almighty still (these solecisms of dogma cannot be expressed without solecisms of language). With the Roman Catholics I

am not concerned here. With regard to the Protestants, and those especially professing the Protestantism of the Church of England, I may safely affirm that the Devil is not less essential to their theology than is any person of the Trinity, or, in fact, than are the three persons together. Indeed, the Father and the Holy Ghost have been practically dispensed with, leaving Christ and Satan to fight the battle out between themselves.

As this is a gloriously scientific age, nobly enamored of the exact sciences, I will endeavor to expound this sublime subject of the divinity of the Church of England mathematically, even after the manner of the divine Plato in Book VIII. of "The Republic," treating of divine and human generation; and in the "Timæus," treating of the creation of the universal soul. His demonstrations, indeed, are so divinely obscure as to confound all the scholiasts; my demonstration, however, shall be so translucent that even the most learned and subtle lords of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, with their legal spectacles on, shall not be able to help seeing through it. And whereas the figures, which are shapes, are more intelligible to most people than the figures which are numbers, let the exposition be geometrical. We will say, then, that the Church of old conceived the divinity in the form of an equilateral triangle, whereof the base was Christ as the whole system was founded on belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Father and the Holy Ghost were the two sides, leaning each on the other; and the Devil was the apex, as opposed to, and farthest from, our blessed Savior. But in course of time the

theologians (perhaps merely wanting some occupation for their vigorous talents, perhaps deeming it undignified to have two persons of the godhead supporting each other obliquely like a couple of tipsy men, perhaps simply in order to make matters square) set to work, and pushed up the two sides, so that each might stand firm and perpendicular by itself. This process had two unforeseen results; it expanded the apex, which was a very elastic point, so that it became the crowning side of the square, and it so unhinged the sides that after a brief upright existence they lost their balance, and were carried to Limbo by the first wind of strange doctrine which blew that way; and the Devil and Christ, or Christ and the Devil (arrange the precedence as you please), were left alone confronting each other. These two are of course equal and parallel, the main distinction between them being that Christ is below, and the Devil above, or, in other words, that the Devil is superior and Christ inferior (the Devil seems entitled to the precedence). Thus matters have continued even to the present time, the divinity showing itself, as we may say, without form and void; and we are free to speculate on the momentous questions: Will the crown (which is the Devil) fall into the base (which is Christ)? Will the base float up into the crown? Will the two coalesce half way? Will they both, unknit from their sides, be carried away to Limbo by some blast of strange doctrine? One thing is certain, they cannot long remain as they are. Rare Ben Jonson chanted the Trinity, or Equilateral Triangle; rare Walt Whitman has chanted the Square Deific

(with Satan for the fourth side); no poet can care to chant the two straight lines which, in the language of Euclid, and in the region of intelligence, cannot enclose a space, but are as a magnified symbol of equal – to nothing.

P. S. – It may be appropriately added that the books of Euclid are really symbolic and prophetic expositions of most sublime and sacrosanct mysteries, though in these days few persons seem aware of the fact. Thus the very first definition, “A point is position without magnitude,” exactly defines every point of difference between the theologians. So a line, which is as the prolongation of a point, or length without breadth, represents in one sense (for each symbol has manifold meanings) the history of any theological system. An acute angle is, say, Professor Clifford; an obtuse angle, Mr. Whalley; a right angle, the present writer: *non angeli sed Angli*. The first proposition, “To erect an equilateral triangle upon a given finite straight line,” indicates the problem solved by Christianity, when it erected the Trinity on the basis of the man we call Jesus. This pregnant subject should be worked out in detail through the whole eight books.

RELIGION IN THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

Top of Pike's Peak, March 4th, 1873.

Honored with your special commission, I at once hurried across to Denver, and thence still westward until I found myself among the big vertebrae of this longish backbone of America. I have wandered to and fro among the new cities, the advanced camps of civilisation, always carefully reticent as to my mission, always carefully inquiring into the state of religion both in doctrine and practice. You were so hopeful that high Freethought would be found revelling triumphant in these high free regions, that I fear you will be acutely pained by this my true report. Churches and chapels of all kinds abound – Episcopalian, Methodist Episcopal (for the Methodists here have bishops), Presbyterian, Baptist, Congregational, Roman Catholic, etc. Zeal inflaming my courage, three and even four times have I ventured into a church, each time enduring the whole service; and if I have not ventured oftener, certainly I had more than sufficient cause to abstain. For as I suffered in my few visits to churches in your England, so I suffered here; and such sufferings are too dreadful to be frequently encountered, even by the bravest of the brave. Whether my sensations in church are similar to those of others, or are peculiar to myself, I cannot be sure; but I am quite

sure that they are excruciating. On first entering I may feel calm, wakeful, sane, and not uncomfortable, except that here I rather regret being shut in from the pure air and splendid sky, and in England rather regret having come out through the raw, damp murk, and in both regret that civilisation has not yet established smoking-pews; but the Church is always behind the age. It is pleasant for awhile to note the well-dressed people seated or entering; the men with unctuous hair and somewhat wooden decorum; the women floating more at ease, suavely conscious of their fine inward and outward adornments. It is pleasant to keep a hopeful look-out for some one of more than common beauty or grace, and to watch such a one if discovered. As the service begins, and the old, old words and phrases come floating around me, I am lulled into quaint dream-memories of childhood; the long unthought-of school-mates, the surreptitious sweetstuff, the manifold tricks and smothered laughter, by whose aid (together with total inattention to the service, except to mark and learn the text) one managed to survive the ordeal. The singing also is pleasant, and lulls me into vaguer dreams. Gradually, as the service proceeds, I become more drowsy; my small faculties are drugged into quiet slumber, they feel themselves off duty, there is nothing for which they need keep awake. But, with the commencement of the sermon, new and alarming symptoms arise within me, growing ever worse and worse until the close. Pleasure departs with tranquility, the irritation of revolt and passive helplessness is acute. I cannot find relief in toffy, or in

fun with my neighbors, as when I was a happy child. The old stereotyped phrases, the immemorial platitudes, the often-killed sophistries that never die, come buzzing and droning about me like a sluggish swarm of wasps, whose slow deliberate stinging is more hard to bear than the quick keen stinging of anger. Then the wasps, penetrating through my ears, swarm inside me; there is a horrid buzzing in my brain, a portentous humming in my breast; my small faculties are speedily routed, and disperse in blind anguish, the implacable wasps droning out and away after them, and I am left void, void; with hollow skull, empty heart, and a mortal sinking of stomach; my whole being is but a thin shell charged with vacuity and desperate craving; I expect every instant to collapse or explode. It is but too certain that if anyone should then come to lead me off to an asylum for idiots, or a Young Men's Christian Association, or any similar institution, I could not utter a single rational word to save myself. And though all my faculties have left me, I cannot attempt to leave the church; decorum, rigid and frigid, freezes me to my seat; I stare stonily in unimaginable torture, feebly wondering whether the sermon will outlast my sanity, or my sanity outlast the sermon. When at length released, I am so utterly demoralised that I can but smoke furiously, pour much beer and cram much dinner into my hollowness, and so with swinish dozing hope to feel better by tea-time. Now, though in order to fulfil the great duties you entrust to me, I have cheerfully dared the Atlantic, and spent long days and perilous nights in railroad cars, and would of course (were

it indeed necessary) face unappalled mere physical death and destruction, I really could not go on risking, with the certainty of ere long losing, my whole small stock of brains; especially as the loss of these would probably rather hinder than further the performance of the said duties. For suppose me reduced to permanent idiocy by church-going, become a mere brazen hollowness with a riotous tongue like Cowper's church-going bell; is it not most likely that I would then turn true believer, renouncing and denouncing your noble commission, even as you would renounce and denounce your imbecile commissioner?

Finding that I could not pursue my inquiries in the churches and chapels, I was much grieved and perplexed, until one of those thoughts occurred to me which are always welcome and persuasive, because in exact agreement with our own desires or necessities. I thought of what I had remarked when visiting your England: how the churches and chapels and lecture-halls, each sect thundering more or less terribly against all the others, made one guess that the people were more disputatious than pious; how one became convinced, in spite of his infidel reluctance, that the people were indeed, as a rule, thoroughly and genuinely religious, by mingling freely with them in their common daily and nightly life. I asked myself, What really proved to me the pervading Christianity of England? the sermons, the tracts, the clerical lectures, the missionary meetings? the cathedrals and other theatres and music-halls crowded with worshippers on Sunday, while the museums and other public-houses were empty

and shut? No, scarcely these things; but the grand princeliness of the princes, the true nobleness of the nobles, the lowliness of the bishops, the sanctity of the clergy, the honesty of the merchants, the veracity of the shopkeepers, the sobriety and thrift of the artisans, the independence and intelligence of the rustics; the general faith and hope and love which brightened the sunless days, the general temperance and chastity which made beautiful the sombre nights; the almost universal abhorrence of the world, the flesh, and the Devil; the almost universal devotion to heaven, the spirit, and God.

I thereupon determined to study the religion out here, even as I had studied it in England, in the ordinary public and private life of the people; and you will doubtless be sorely afflicted to learn that I have found everywhere much the same signs of genuine, practical Christianity as are so common and patent in the old country. The ranchmen have sown the good seed, and shall reap the harvest of heavenly felicity; the stockmen will surely be corraled with the sheep, and not among the goats, at the last day; not to gain the whole world would the storekeepers lose their own souls; the pioneers have found the narrow way which leadeth unto life; the fishermen are true disciples, the trappers catch Satan in his own snares, the hunters are mighty before the Lord; bright are the celestial prospects of the prospectors, and the miners are all stopping-out that hidden treasure which is richer than silver and much fine gold. As compared with the English, these Western men are perchance inferior in two

important points of Christian sentiment: they probably do not fear God, being little given to fear anyone; they certainly do not honor the king, perhaps because they unfortunately have none to honor. On the other hand, as I have been assured by many persons from the States and the old country, they are even superior to the English in one important point of Christian conduct. Christ has promised that in discharging the damned to hell at the day of judgment, he will fling at them this among other reproaches, "I was a stranger, and ye took me not in," and this particular rebuke seems to have wrought a peculiarly deep impression in these men, perhaps because they have much more to do with strangers than have people in old settled countries, so much, indeed, that the word "stranger" is continually in their mouths. The result is (as the said persons from England and the States have often solemnly assured me) that any and every stranger arriving in these regions is most thoroughly, most beautifully, most religiously taken in. So that should any of these fine fellows by evil hap be among the accursed multitude whom Christ thus addresses, they will undoubtedly retort in their frank fashion of speech: "Wall, boss, it may be right to give us hell on other counts, but you say you was a stranger and we didn't take you in. What we want to know is, Did you ever come to our parts to trade in mines or stock or sich? If you *didn't*, how the Devil *could* we take you in? if you *did*, it's a darned lie, and an insult to our understanding to say we *didn't*."

But though the practical life out here is so veritably Christian,

you still hope that at any rate the creeds and doctrines are considerably heterodox. I am sincerely sorry to be obliged to destroy this hope. In the ordinary talk of the men continually recur the same or almost the same expressions and implications of orthodox belief, as are so common in your England, and throughout Christendom. Why such formulas are generally used by men only, I have often been puzzled to explain: it may be that the women, who in all lands attend divine service much more than do the men, find ample expression of their faith in the set times and places of public worship and private prayer; while the men, less methodical, and demanding liberal scope, give it robust utterance whenever and wherever they choose. These formulas, as you must have often remarked, are most weighty and energetic; they avouch and avow the supreme personages and mysteries and dogmas of their religion; they are usually but brief ejaculations, in strong contrast to those long prayers of the Pharisees which Jesus laughed to scorn; and they are often so superfluous as regards the mere worldly meaning of the sentences in which they appear, that it is evident they have been interjected simply to satisfy the pious ardor of the speaker, burning to proclaim in season and out of season the cardinal principles of his faith. I say speaker, and not writer, because writing, being comparatively cold and deliberate, seldom flames out in these sharp swift flashes, that leap from living lips touched with coals of fire from the altar.¹

¹ Is it not time that we wrote such words as this damn at full length, as did Emily

I am aware that these fervid ejaculations are apt to be regarded by the light-minded as trivial, by the cold-hearted as indecorous, by the sanctimonious as even profane; but to the true philosopher, whether he be religious or not, they are pregnant with grave significance. For do not these irrepressible utterances burst forth from the very depths of the profound heart of the people? Are they not just as spontaneous and universal as is the belief in God itself? Are they not among the most genuine and impassioned words of mankind? Have they not a primordial vigor and vitality? Are they not supremely of that voice of the people which has been well called the voice of God? Thus when your Englishman instead of “Strange!” says “The Devil!” instead of “Wonderful!” cries “Good Heavens!” instead of “How startling!” exclaims “O Christ!” he does more than merely express his emotions, his surprise, his wonder, his amaze; he hallows it to the assertion of his belief in Satan, in the good kingdom of God, in Jesus; and, moreover, by the emotional gradation ranks with perfect accuracy the Devil lowest in the scale, the heavens higher, Christ the loftiest. When another shouts “God damn you!”(1) he not only condemns the evil of the person addressed; he also takes occasion to avow his own strong faith in God and God’s judgment of sinners. Similarly “God bless you!” implies that there is a God, and that from him all blessings flow. How vividly does

Brontë, the Titaness, whom Charlotte justly indicates in this as in other respects; instead of putting only initial and final letters, with a hypocritical fig-leaf dash in the middle, drawing particular attention to what it affects to conceal? These words are in all men’s mouths, and many of them are emphatically the leading words of the Bible.

the vulgar hyperbole "Infernally hot," prove the general belief in hell-fire! And the phrase "God knows!" not merely declares that the subject is beyond human knowledge, but also that an all-wise God exists. Here in the West, as before stated, such brief expressions of faith, which are so much more sincere than long formularies repeated by rote in church, are quite as common as in your England. When one has sharply rebuked or punished another, he says "I gave him hell." And that this belief in future punishment pervades all classes is proved by the fact that even a profane editor speaks of it as a matter of course. For the thermometer having been stolen from his sanctum, the said worthy editor announced that the mean cuss who took it might as well bring or send it back (no questions asked) for it could not be of any use to him in the place he was going to, as it only registered up to 212 degrees. The old notion that hell or Hades is located in the middle of the earth (which may have a scientific solution in the Plutonic theory that we dwell on the crust of a baked dumpling full of fusion and confusion) is obviously tallied by the miner's assertion that his vein was true-fissure, reaching from the grass-roots down to hell. The frequent phrase "A God-damned liar," "A God-damned thief," recognise God as the punisher of the wicked. I have heard a man complain of an ungodly headache, implying first, the existence of God, and secondly, the fact that the Godhead does not ache, or in other words is perfect. Countless other phrases of this kind might be alleged, a few of them astonishingly vigorous

and racy, for new countries breed lusty new forms of speech; but the few already given suffice for my present purpose. One remarkable comparison, however, I cannot pass over without a word: it is common to say of a man who has too much self-esteem, He thinks himself a little tin Jesus on wheels. It is clear that some profound suggestion, some sacrosanct mystery, must underlie this bold locution; but what I have been hitherto unable to find out. The connexion between Jesus and tin may seem obvious to such as know anything of bishops and pluralists, pious bankers and traders. But what about the wheels? Have they any relation to the opening chapter of Ezekiel? It is much to be wished that Max Müller, and all other such great scholars, who (as I am informed, for it's not I that would presume to study them myself) manage to extract whatever noble mythological meanings they want, from unintelligible Oriental metaphors and broken phrases many thousand years old, would give a few years of their superfluous time to the interpretation of this holy riddle. Do not, gentleman, do not by all that is mysterious, leave it to the scholars of millenniums to come; proceed to probe and analyse and turn it inside out at once, while it is still young and flourishing, while the genius who invented it is still probably alive, if he deceased not in his boots, as decease so many gallant pioneers.

And here, before afflicting you further, O much-enduring editor, let me soothe you a little by stating that some particles of heresy, some few heretics, are to be found even here. I have

learned that into a very good and respectable bookstore in a city of these regions, certain copies of Taylor's "Diegesis" have penetrated, who can say how? and that some of these have been sold. A living judge has been heard to declare that he couldn't believe at all in the Holy Ghost outfit. It has also been told me of a man who must have held strange opinions as to the offspring of God the Father, though certainly this man was not a representative pioneer, being but a German miner, fresh from the States. This Dutchman (all Germans here are Dutch, doubtless from *Deutsche*, the special claims of the Hollanders being ignored) was asked solemnly by a clergyman, "Who died to save sinners?" and answered "Gott." "What," said the pained and pious pastor, "don't you know that it was Jesus the *Son* of God?" "Ah," returned placidly the Dutchman, "it vass one of te boys, vass it? I always dought it vass te olt man himselben." This good German may have been misled by the mention of the sons of God early in Genesis, yet it is strange that he knew not that Jesus is the only son of God, and our savior. A story is moreover told of two persons, of whom the one boasted rather too often that he was a self-made man, and the other at length quietly remarked that he was quite glad to hear it, as it cleared God from the responsibility of a darned mean bit of work. Whence some have inferred the heresy that God is the creator of only a part of the universe; but I frankly confess that in my own opinion the reply was merely a playful sarcasm.

The most decided heresy which has come under my own

observation was developed in the course of a chat between two miners in a lager-beer saloon and billiard-hall; into the which, it need scarcely be remarked, I was myself solely driven by the fierce determination to carry out my inquiries thoroughly. Bill was smoking, Dick was chewing; and they stood up together, at rather rapidly decreasing intervals, for drinks of such "fine old Bourbon" rye whiskey as bears the honorable popular title of rot-gut. The frequency with which the drinking of alcoholic liquors leads to impassioned and elevated discussion of great problems in politics, history, dog-breeding, horse-racing, moral philosophy, religion, and kindred important subjects, seems to furnish a strong and hitherto neglected argument against teetotalism. There are countless men who can only be stimulated to a lively and outspoken interest in intellectual questions by a series of convivial glasses and meditative whiffs. If such men really take any interest in such questions at other times, it remains deplorably latent, not exercising its legitimate influence on the public opinion of the world. Our two boys were discussing theology; and having had many drinks, grappled with the doctrine of the triune God. "Wall," said Bill, "I can't make out that trinity consam, that three's one and one's three outfit." Whereto Dick: "Is that so? Then you wam't rigged out for a philosopher, Bill. Look here," pulling forth his revolver, an action which caused a slight stir in the saloon, till the other boys saw that he didn't mean business; "look here, I'll soon fix it up for you. Here's six chambers, but it's only one pistol, with one heft and one barrel; the heft for us to

catch hold of, the barrel to kill our enemy. Wall, God a'mighty's jest made hisself a three-shooter, while he remains one God; but the Devil, he's only a single-shot deringer: so God can have three fires at the Devil for one the Devil can have at him. Now can't you figure it out?" "Wall," said Bill, evidently staggered by the revolver, and feeling, if possible, increased respect for that instrument on finding it could be brought to bear toward settlement of even such a difficulty as the present; "Wall, that pans out better than I thought it could: but to come down to the bedrock, either God's a poor mean shot or his piece carries darned light; for I reckon the Devil makes better play with his one chamber than God with his three." "Maybe," replied Dick, with calm candor, strangely indifferent to the appalling prospects this theory held out for our universe; "some of them pesky little things jest shoot peas that rile the other fellow without much hurting him, and then, by thunder, he lets daylight through you with one good ball. Besides, it's likely enough the Devil's the best shot, for he's been consarned in a devilish heap of shooting more than God has; at any rate" – perchance vaguely remembering to have heard of such things as "religious wars" – "of late years, between here and 'Frisco. Wall, I guess I don't run the creation. Let's liquor;" manifestly deriving much comfort from the consciousness that he had no hand in conducting this world. Bill acquiesced with a brief "Ja," and they stood up for another drink. I am bound to attest that, in spite or because of the drinks, they had argued throughout with the utmost deliberation and gravity, with a

dignified demeanour which Bishops and D.Ds. might envy, and ought to emulate.

Having thus comforted you with what little of heresy and infidelity I have been able to gather, it is now my painful duty to advance another class of proofs of the general religiousness here; a class of which you have very few current specimens in England, unless it be among the Roman Catholics. All comparative mythologists – indeed, all students of history – are said to agree that the popular legends and myths of any race at any time are of the utmost value, as showing what the race then believed, and thus determining its moral and intellectual condition at that period; this value being quite irrespective of the truth or untruth to fact of the said legends. Hence in modern times collections of old traditions and fairy tales have been excellently well received, whether from the infantile literature of ancient peoples, as the Oriental and Norse, or from the senile and anile lips of secluded members of tribes whose nationality is fast dying out, as the Gaelic and Welsh. And truly such collections commend themselves alike to the grave and the frivolous for the scientific scholar finds in them rich materials for serious study, and the mere novel-reader can flatter himself that he is studying while simply enjoying strange stories become new by extreme old age. All primitive peoples, who read and write little, have their most popular beliefs fluidly embodied in oral legends and myths; and in this respect the settlers of a new region, though they may come from the oldest countries, resemble the primitive

peoples. They are too busy with the tough work of subduing the earth to give much time to writing or reading anything beyond their local newspapers; they love to chat together when not working, and chat, much more than writing, runs into stories. Thus religious legends in great numbers circulate out here, all charged and surcharged with faith in the mythology of the Bible. Of these it has been my sad privilege to listen to not a few. As this letter is already too long for your paper, though very brief for the importance of its theme, I will subjoin but a couple of them, which I doubt not will be quite enough to indicate what measureless superstition prevails in these youngest territories of the free and enlightened Republic.

It is told – on what authority no one asks, the legend being universally accepted on its intrinsic merits, as Protestants would have us accept the Bible, and Papists their copious hagiology – that St. Joseph, the putative father of our Lord, fell into bad habits, slipping almost daily out of Heaven into evil society, coming home very late at night and always more or less intoxicated. It is suggested that he may have been driven into these courses by unhappiness in his connubial and parental relations, his wife and her child being ranked so much above himself by the Christian world, and the latter being quite openly attributed to another father. Peter, though very irascible, put up with his misconduct for a long time, not liking to be harsh to one of the Royal Family; and it is believed that God the Father sympathised with this poor old Joseph, and protected him, being

himself jealous of the vastly superior popularity of Mary and Jesus. But at length, after catching a violent cold through getting out of bed at a preposterous hour to let the staggering Joseph in, Peter told him roundly that if he didn't come home sober and in good time, he must just stay out all night. Joseph, feeling sick and having lost his pile, promised amendment, and for a time kept his word. Then he relapsed; the heavenly life proved too slow for him, the continual howling of "all the menagerie of the Apocalypse" shattered his nerves, he was disgusted at his own insignificance, the memory of the *liaison* between his betrothed and the Holy Ghost filled him with gall and wormwood, and perhaps he suspected that it was still kept up. So, late one night or early one morning Peter was roused from sleep by an irregular knocking and fumbling at the gate, as if some stupid dumb animal were seeking admittance. "Who's there?" growled Peter. "It's me – Joseph," hiccupped the unfortunate. "You're drunk," said Peter, savagely.

"You're on the tear again; you're having another bender." "Yes," answered Joseph, meekly. "Wall," said Peter, "you jest go back to where you come from, and spend the night there; get." "I can't," said Joseph. "They're all shut up; they've turned me out." "Then sleep outside in the open air; it's wholesome, and will bring you round," said Peter. After much vain coaxing and supplicating, old Joe got quite mad, and roared out, "If you don't get up and let me in at once, by God I'll take my son out of the outfit and bust up the whole consarn!" Peter, terrified by this

threat, which, if carried out, would ruin his prospects in eternal life by abolishing his office of celestial porter, caved in, getting up and admitting Joseph, who ever since has had a latch-key that he may go and come when he pleases. It is to be hoped that he will never when tight let this latch-key be stolen by one of the little devils who are always lurking about the haunts of dissipation he frequents; for in that case the consequences might be awful, as can be readily imagined.

Again it is told that a certain miner, a tough cuss, who could whip his weight in wild cats and give points to a grizzle, seemed uncommonly moody and low-spirited one morning, and on being questioned by his chum, at length confessed that he was bothered by a very queer dream. "I dreamt that I was dead," he explained; "and a smart spry pretty little angel took me up to heaven." "Dreams go by contraries," suggested the chum, by way of comfort. "Let that slide," answered the dreamer; "the point isn't there. Wall, St. Peter wasn't at the gate, and the angel critter led me on to pay my respects to the boss, and after travelling considerable we found him as thus. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost and Peter, all as large as life, were playing a high-toned game of poker, and there was four heavy piles on the table – gold, not shinplasters, you bet. I was kinder glad to see that they played poker up in heaven, so as to make life there not on-bearable; for it would be but poor fun singing psalms all day; I was never much of a hand at singing, more particularly when the songs is psalms. Wall, we waited, not liking to disturb their

game, and I watched the play. I soon found that Jesus Christ was going through the rest, cheating worse than the heathen Chinees at euchre; but of course I didn't say nothing, not being in the game. After a while Peter showed that he began to guess it too, if he wasn't quite sure; or p'r'aps he was skeared at up and telling Christ to his face. At last, however, what does Christ do, after a bully bluff which ran Pete almost to his bottom dollar, but up and show five aces to Pete's call; and 'What's that for high?' says he, quite cool. 'Now look you, Christ,' shouts Pete, jumping up as mad as thunder, and not caring a cent or a continental what he said to anybody; 'look you, Christ, that's too thin; we don't want any of your darned miracles here!' and with that he grabbed up his pile and all his stakes, and went off in a mighty huff. Christ looked pretty mean, I tell you, and the game was up. Now you see," said the dreamer, sadly and thoughtfully, "it's a hard rock to drill and darned poor pay at that, if when you have a quiet hand at poker up there, the bosses are allowed to cheat and a man can't use his deringer or put a head on 'em; I don't know but I'd rather go to the other place on those terms." Not yet to be read in books, as I have intimated, but circulating orally, and in versions that vary with the various rhapsodists, such are the legends you may hear when a ring is formed round the hotel-office stove at night, in shanties and shebangs of ranchmen and miners, in the shingled offices of judge and doctor, in railroad cars and steamboats, or when bumming around the stores; whenever and wherever, in short, men are gathered with nothing particular to do. The very *naïveté*

of such stories surely testifies to the child-like sincerity of the faith they express and nourish. It is the simple unbounded faith of the Middle Ages, such as we find in the old European legends and poems and mysteries, such as your poetess Mrs. Browning well marks in Chaucer.

Many of the so-called liberal clergy complain of the gulf which yawns in this age of materialistic science between religion and every-day life, in this world and the things are treated as mere thin abstractions, they say; and only the lower things are recognised as real. These pious pioneers, in the freshness and wonderfulness of their new life, overleap this gulf without an effort, realising heaven as thoroughly as earth. How could the communion and the human nature of saints be better exhibited than in St. Joseph falling into dissipation and St. Peter playing poker? How could the manhood as well as the Godhead of Jesus Christ be more familiarly brought home to us than by his taking a hand at this game and then miraculously cheating. When generations have passed away, if not earlier, such next, heaven

“the infantine Familiar clasp of things divine.”

The higher legends as these will assuredly be gathered by earnest and reverent students as quite invaluable historical relics. They must fill the Christian soul with delight; they must harrow the heart of him who hath said in his heart, There is no God.

In conclusion, I must again express my deep regret at being forced by the spirit of truth to give you so favorable an account of the state of religion out here, both in creed and practice. I trust

that you will lose no time and spare no exertion in attacking and, if possible, routing out the Christianity now entrenched in these great natural fortresses. Be your war-cry that of the first pioneers, "Pike's Peak or bust"; and be not like unto him found teamless half-way across the plains, with the confession on his waggon-tilt, "Busted, by thunder." For you can come right out here by railroad now. As for myself, I climbed wearily and with mortal pantings unto the top of this great mountain, thinking it one of the best coigns of vantage whence to command a comprehensive view of the sphere of my inquiries, and also a spot where one might write without being interrupted or overlooked by loafers. Unfortunately I have not been able to discover any special religious or irreligious phænomena; for, though the prospect is indeed ample where not intercepted by clouds or mist, very few of the people and still fewer of their characteristics can be made out distinctly even with a good glass. How I am to get down and post this letter puzzles me. The descent will be difficult, dangerous, perhaps deadly. Would that I had not come up. After all there is some truth in the Gospel narrative of the Temptation: for by studying the general course of ecclesiastical promotion and the characters of the most eminent churchmen, I was long since led to recognise that it is indeed Satan who sets people on pinnacles of the temple; and I am now moreover thoroughly convinced that it is the Devil and the Devil only that takes any one to the top of an exceeding high mountain.

THE STORY OF A FAMOUS OLD JEWISH FIRM

(1866.)

Many thousand years ago, when the Jews first started in business, the chief of their merchants was a venerable and irascible old gentleman named Jah. The Jews have always been excellent traders, keen to scent wealth, subtle to track it, unwearied to pursue it, strong to seize it, tenacious to hold it; and the most keen, subtle, untiring, strong, tenacious of them all, was this Jah. The patriarchs of his people paid him full measure of the homage which Jews have always eagerly paid to wealth and power, and all their most important transactions were carried out through him. In those antique times people lived to a very great age, and Jah is supposed to have lived so many thousands of years that one may as well not try to count them. Perhaps it was not one Jah that existed all this while, but the house of Jah: the family, both for pride and profit, preserving through successive generations the name of its founder. Certain books have been treasured by the Jews as containing exact records of the dealings of this lordly merchant (or house) both with the Jews themselves and with strangers. Many people in our times, however, have ventured to doubt the accuracy of these records, arguing that some of the transactions therein recorded it would have been impossible

to transact, that others must have totally ruined the richest of merchants, that the accounts often contradict each other, and that the system of book-keeping generally is quite unworthy of a dealer so truthful and clear-headed as Jah is affirmed to have been. The records are so ancient in themselves, and they treat of matters so much more ancient still, that it is not easy to find other records of any sort with which to check their accounts. Strangely enough the most recent researches have impugned the accuracy of the most ancient of these records; certain leaves of a volume called the "Great Stone Book," having been brought forward to contradict the very first folio of the ledger in which the dealings of Jah have been posted up according to the Jews. It may be that the first few folios, like the early pages of most annals, are somewhat mythical; and the present humble compiler (who is not deep in the affairs of the primaeval world, and who, like the late lamented Captain Cuttle with his large volume, is utterly knocked up at any time by four or five lines of the "Great Stone Book") will prudently not begin at the beginning, but skip it with great comfort and pleasure, especially as many and learned men are now earnest students of this beginning. We will, therefore, if you please, take for granted the facts that at some time, in some manner, Jah created his wonderful business, and that early in his career he met with a great misfortune, being compelled, by the villainy of all those with whom he had dealings to resort to a wholesale liquidation, which left him so poor, that for some time he had not a house in the world, and his establishment was

reduced to four male and as many female servants.

He must have pretty well recovered from this severe shock when he entered into the famous covenant or contract with Abraham and his heirs, by which he bound himself to deliver over to them at a certain, then distant, period, the whole of the valuable landed property called Canaan, on condition that they should appoint him the sole agent for the management of their affairs. In pursuance of this contract, he conducted that little business of the flocks and herds for Jacob against one Laban; and afterwards, when the children of Abraham were grown very numerous, he managed for them that other little affair, by which they spoiled the Egyptians of jewels of silver and jewels of gold; and it is even asserted that he fed and clothed the family for no less than forty years in a country where the commissariat was a service of extreme difficulty.

At length the time came when he was to make over to them the Land of Canaan, for this purpose evicting the several families then in possession thereof. The whole of the covenanted estate he never did make over to them, but the Jews freely admit that this was through their own fault. They held this land as mortgaged to him, he pledging himself not to foreclose while they dealt with him faithfully and fulfilled all the conditions of the covenant. They were to pay him ten per cent, per annum interest, with sundry other charges, to put all their affairs into his hands, to have no dealings whatsoever with any rival merchants, etc., etc. Under this covenant the Jews continued in possession of the

fine little property of Canaan for several hundred years, and they assert that this same Jah lived and conducted his business throughout the whole period. But, as I have ventured to suggest, the long existence of the house of Jah may have been the sum total of the lives of a series of individual Jahs. The Jews could not have distinguished the one from the other; for it is a strange fact that Jah himself, they admit, was never seen. Perhaps he did not affect close contact with Jews. Perhaps he calculated that his power over them would be increased by mystery; this is certain, that he kept himself wholly apart from them in his private office, so that no one was admitted even on business. It is indeed related that one Moses (the witness to the execution of the covenant) caught a glimpse of him from behind, but this glimpse could scarcely have sufficed for identification; and it is said, also, that at certain periods the chief of the priesthood was admitted to consultation with him; but although his voice was then heard, he did not appear in person – only the shadow of him was seen, and everyone will allow that a shadow is not the best means of identification. And in further support of my humble suggestion it may be noted that in many and important respects the later proceedings attributed to Jah differ extremely in character from the earlier; and this difference cannot be explained as the common difference between the youth and maturity and senility of one and the same man, for we are expressly assured that Jah was without change – by which we are not to understand that either through thoughtlessness or

parsimony he never had small cash in his pocket for the minor occasions of life; but that he was stubborn in his will, unalterable in his ideas, persistent in his projects and plans.

The records of his dealings at home with the Jews, and abroad with the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Philistines, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Edomites, and other nations, as kept by the Jews themselves, are among the strangest accounts of a large general business which have ever been put down in black on white. And in nothing are they more strange than in the unsullied candor with which the Jews always admit and proclaim that it was their fault, and by no means the fault of Jah, whenever the joint business went badly, and narrate against themselves the most astonishing series of frauds and falsehoods, showing how they broke the covenant, and attempted to cheat the other party in every imaginable way, and, in order to ruin his credit, conspired with foreign adventurers of the worst character – such as MM. Baal, Ashtaroth, and Moloch. Jah, who gave many proofs of a violent and jealous temper, and who was wont to sell up other debtors in the most heartless way, appears to have been very patient and lenient with these flagitious Jews. Yet with all his kindness and long-suffering he was again and again forced to put executions into their houses, and throw themselves into prison; and at length, before our year One, having, as it would seem, given up all hope of making them deal honestly with him, he had put certain strict Romans in possession of the property to enforce his mortgage and other rights.

And now comes a sudden and wonderful change in the history of this mysterious Jah. Whether it was the original Jah, who felt himself too old to conduct the immense business alone, or whether it was some successor of his, who had not the same self-reliance and imperious will, one cannot venture to decide, but we all know that it was publicly announced, and soon came to be extensively believed, that Jah had taken unto himself two partners, and that the business was thenceforth to be carried on by a firm, under the style of Father, Son, and Co. It is commonly thought that history has more of certainty as it becomes more recent; but unfortunately in the life of Jah, uncertainty grows ten times more uncertain when we attain the period of this alleged partnership, for the Jews deny it altogether; and of those who believe in it not one is able to define its character, or even to state its possibility in intelligible language. The Jews assert roundly that the alleged partners are a couple of vile impostors, that Jah still conducts his world-wide business alone, that he has good reasons (known only to himself) for delaying the exposure of these pretenders; and that, however sternly he has been dealing with the Jews for a long time past, and however little they may seem to have improved so as to deserve better treatment, he will yet be reconciled to them, and restore them to possession of their old land, and exalt them above all their rivals and enemies, and of his own free will and absolute pleasure burn and destroy every bond of their indebtedness now in his hands. And in support of these modest expectations they can produce a bundle

of documents which they assert to be his promissory notes, undoubtedly for very large amounts; but which, being carefully examined, turn out to be all framed on this model: "I, the above-mentioned A. B." (an obscure or utterly unknown Jew, supposed to have lived about three thousand years ago), "hereby promise in the name of Jah, that the said Jah shall in some future year unknown, pay unto the house of Israel the following amount, that is to say, etc." If we ask, Where is the power of attorney authorising this dubious A. B. to promise this amount in the name of Jah? the Jews retort: "If you believe in the partnership, you must believe in such power, for you have accepted all the obligations of the old house, and have never refused to discount its paper: if you believe neither in Jah nor in the partnership, you are a wretch utterly without faith, a commercial outlaw." In addition, however, to these remarkable promissory notes, the Jews rely upon the fact that Jah, in the midst of his terrible anger, has still preserved some kindness for them. He threatened many pains and penalties upon them for breach of the covenant, and many of these threats he has carried out; but the most cruel and horrific of all he has not had the heart to fulfil: they have been oppressed and crushed, strangers have come into their landed property, they have been scattered among all peoples, a proverb and a by-word of scorn among the nations, their religion has been accursed, their holy places are defiled, but the crowning woe has been spared them (Deut. xxviii., 44); never yet has it come to pass that the stranger should lend to them, and they should

not lend to the stranger. There is yet balm in Gilead, a rose of beauty in Sharon, and a cedar of majesty on Lebanon; the Jew still lends to the stranger, and does not borrow from him, except as he “borrowed” from the Egyptian – and the interest on money lent is still capable, with judicious treatment, of surpassing the noble standard of “shent per shent.”

And even among the Gentiles there are some who believe that Jah is still the sole head of the house, and that the pair who are commonly accounted junior partners are in fact only superior servants, the one a sort of manager, the other general superintendent and agent, though Jah may allow them a liberal commission on the profits, as well as a fixed salary.

– But the commercial world of Europe, in general, professes to believe that there is a *bona fide* partnership, and that the three partners have exactly equal authority and interest in the concern; that, in fact, there is such thorough identity in every respect that the three may, and ought to be, for all purposes of business, considered as one. The second partner, they say, is really the son of Jah; though Jah, with that eccentricity which has ever abundantly characterised his proceedings, had this son brought up as a poor Jewish youth, apparently the child of a carpenter called Joseph, and his wife Mary. Joseph has little or no influence with the firm, and we scarcely hear of a transaction done through him, but Mary has made the most profitable use of her old *liaison* with Jah, and the majority of those who do business with the firm seek her good offices, and pay her very liberal commissions.

Those who do not think so highly of her influence, deal with the house chiefly through the son, and thus it has come to pass that poor Jah is virtually ousted from his own business. He and the third partner are little more than sleeping partners, while his mistress and her son manage every affair of importance.

This state of things seems somewhat unfair to Jah; yet one must own that there are good reasons for it. Jah was a most haughty and humorous gentleman, extremely difficult to deal with, liable to sudden fits of rage, wherein he maltreated friends and foes alike, implacable when once offended, a desperately sharp shaver in the bargain, a terrible fellow for going to law. The son was a much more kindly personage, very affable and pleasant in conversation, willing and eager to do a favor to any one, liberal in promises even beyond his powers of performance, fond of strangers, and good to the poor; and his mother, with or without reason, is credited with a similar character. Moreover, Jah always kept himself invisible, while the son and mother were possibly seen, during some years, by a large number of persons; and among those who have never seen them their portraits are almost as popular as photographs of the Prince and Princess of Wales.

With the real or pretended establishment of the Firm, a great change took place in the business of Jah. This business had been chiefly with the Jews, and even when it extended to foreign transactions, these were all subordinate to the Jewish trade. But the Firm lost no time in proclaiming that it would

deal with the whole world on equal terms: no wonder the Jews abhor the alleged partners! And the nature of the contracts, the principal articles of trade, the mode of keeping the accounts, the commission and interest charged and allowed, the salaries of the agents and clerks, the advantages offered to clients, were all changed too. The head establishment was removed from Jerusalem to Rome, and branch establishments were gradually opened in nearly all the towns and villages of Europe, besides many in Asia and Africa, and afterwards in America and Australia. It is worth noting that in Asia and Africa (although the firm arose in the former) the business has never been carried on very successfully; Messrs. Brahma, Vishnu, Seeva, and Co., the great houses of Buddha and Mumbo Jumbo, various Parsee firms, and other opposition houses, having among them almost monopolised the trade.

The novel, distinctive, and most useful article which the Firm engaged to supply was a bread called *par excellence* the Bread of Life. The Prospectus (which was first drafted, apparently in perfect good faith, by the Son; but which has since been so altered and expanded by successive agents that we cannot learn what the original, no longer extant, exactly stated) sets forth that the House of Jah, Son and Co. has sole possession of the districts yielding the corn whereof this bread is made, the sole patents of the mills for grinding and ovens for baking, and that it alone has the secret of the proper process for kneading. The Firm admits that many other houses have pretended to supply this invaluable bread, but

accuses them all of imposture or poisonous adulteration. For itself, it commands the genuine supply in such quantities that it can under take to feed the whole world, and at so cheap a rate that the poorest will be able to purchase as much as he needs; and, moreover, as the firm differs essentially from all other firms in having no object in view save the benefit of its customers, the partners being already so rich that no profits could add to their wealth, it will supply the bread for mere love to those who have not money!

This fair and beautiful prospectus, you will easily believe, brought vast multitudes eager to deal with the firm, and especially large multitudes of the poor, ravished with the announcement that love should be henceforth current coin of the realm; and the business spread amazingly. But at the very outset a sad mischance occurred. The Son, by far the best of the partners, was suddenly seized and murdered and buried by certain agents of the old Jewish business (furious at the prospect of losing all their rich trade), with the connivance of the Roman installed as inspector. At least, these wretches thought they had murdered the poor man, and it is admitted on every side that they buried him: but the dependants of the Firm have a strange story that he was not really killed, but arose out of his tomb after lying there for three days, and slipped away to keep company with his father, the invisible Jah, in his exceedingly private office; and they assert that he is still alive along with Jah, mollifying the old man when he gets into one of his furious passions, pleading for

insolvent debtors, and in all things by act and counsel doing good for all the clients of the house. They, moreover, assert that the third partner, who as the consoling substitute for the absent Son is commonly called the Comforter, and who is very energetic, though mysteriously invisible in his operations, superintends all the details of the business in every one of the establishments. But this third partner is so difficult to catch, that, as stated before, the majority of the customers deal with the venerable mother, as the most accessible and humane personage belonging to the house.

Despite the death or disappearance of the Son, the firm prospered for a considerable time. After severe competition, in which neither side showed itself very scrupulous, the great firm of Jupiter and Co., the old Greek house, which had been strengthened by the amalgamation of the wealthiest Roman firms, was utterly beaten from the field, sold up and extinguished. In the sale of the effects many of the properties in most demand were bought in by the new firm, which also took many of the clerks and agents into its employment, and it is even said adopted in several important respects the mode of carrying on business and the system of book-keeping. But while the firm was thus conquering its most formidable competitor, innumerable dissensions were arising between its own branch establishments; every one accusing every other of dealing on principles quite hostile to the regulations instituted by the head of the house, of falsifying the accounts, and of selling an article which was anything but the genuine unadulterated bread. There

were also interminable quarrels among them as to relative rank and importance.

And whether the wheat, as delivered to the various establishments, was or was not the genuine article which the firm had contracted to supply, it was soon discovered that it issued from the licensed shops adulterated in the most audacious manner. And, although the prospectus had stated most positively that the bread should be delivered to the poor customers of the firm without money and without price (and such seems really to have been the good Son's intention), it was found, in fact, that the loaves, when they reached the consumer, were at least as costly as ever loaves of any kind of bread had been. It mattered little that the wheat was not reckoned in the price, when agents', commissioners', messengers' fees, bakers' charges, and a hundred items, made the price total so enormous. When, at length, the business was flourishing all over Europe, it was the most bewildering confusion of contradictions that, perhaps, was ever known in the commercial world. For in all the establishments the agents professed and very solemnly swore that they dealt on principles opposed and infinitely superior to the old principles of trade; yet their proceedings (save that they christened old things with new names) were identical with those which had brought to shameful ruin the most villainous old firms. The sub-managers, who were specially ordered to remain poor while in the business, and for obedience were promised the most splendid pensions when superannuated, all became rich

as princes by their exactions from the clients of the house; the agents, who were especially commanded to keep the peace, were ever stirring up quarrels and fighting ferociously, not only with opposition agents but with one another. The accounts, which were to be regulated by the most honest and simple rules, were complicated in a lawless system, which no man could understand, and falsified to incredible amounts, to the loss of the customers, without being to the gain of the firm. In brief, each establishment was like one of those Chinese shops where the most beautiful and noble maxims of justice and generosity are painted in gilt letters outside, while the most unblushing fraud and extortion are practised inside. When poor customers complained of these things, they were told that the system was perfect, that the evils were all from the evil men who conducted the business! but the good people did not further explain how the perfection of the system could ever be realised, since it must always be worked by imperfect men. Complainants thus mildly and vaguely answered were very fortunate; others, in places where the firm was very powerful, were answered by imprisonment or false accusations, or by being pelted and even murdered by mobs. Many who thought the bread badly baked were themselves thrust into the fire.

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