

THE NEW TESTAMENT AS A TEXT-BOOK IN THE SUNDAY-SCHOOL.

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THE purpose of this paper is not to enter upon a technical or scientific analysis of the New Testament and the teachings of Jesus; neither is it to discuss them from an historical or religious point of view: the intention is simply to study the New Testament from a pedagogical standpoint and see whether it is good material for a text-book for the Sunday-school pupil. The present paper follows the same lines with respect to the New Testament along which my paper in the April *Open Court*, 1910, on the Old Testament was planned, attempting to show its influence on the child.

The New, like the Old Testament, contains many noble ethical conceptions, some sublime ideas and precepts. Particularly is this true of Jesus's sayings about children; his own democratic spirit, shown by his readiness to associate with the poor and outcast; and the glorious oration known as the Sermon on the Mount. But when we have mentioned these few particulars, we have also compassed all the commendable ethics of the New Testament. In most other instances, we find the same unethical teachings as in the Old Testament; the same unmerciful laws as those of YHVH; and in addition, a confusion in the sequence of events, a contradictoriness in the events themselves, and an inconsistency in the several characterizations of the exalted subject of the Gospel narratives, which, by blurring the childish conception of Jesus and confusing the childish notion of right and wrong, truth and falsehood, the real and the fictitious, brand the New Testament *as it stands* as unfit material to be put into the hands of young people as a Sunday-school text-book.

When we study the New Testament carefully, we find that the Gospels among themselves are not in accord as to some vital events in the life of Jesus. Thus, Luke recounts that Joseph and Mary,

the parents of Jesus, lived in Nazareth;¹ but because of a tax imposed upon the people, they were forced to go to Bethlehem.² Matthew, on the other hand, says that the parents of Jesus lived first in Bethlehem, but on the advice of an angel, in order to escape the persecution of Herod, went to Egypt, going after Herod's death to Nazareth in Galilee.³ It may here be apropos to note a flagrant contradiction in the genealogy of Joseph, the reputed father of Jesus, as recorded respectively by Matthew and Luke. The former makes Joseph a direct descendant of the kings of Judah, up to Solomon;⁴ while Luke, on the other hand, gives him an entirely different pedigree, tracing his descent from Nathan, the brother of Solomon.⁵

In the testimony of John the Baptist there are likewise curious contradictions. According to Luke's narrative, John the Baptist was not certain whether or not Jesus was the promised Messiah; for when the former was in prison he sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask, "Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?"⁶ But in John, the revelation comes to the Baptist as soon as he sees Jesus. The heavens opened and he, John "saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him (Jesus);"⁷ and John called out, "This is the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world."⁸

Another such conflict exists regarding the discipleship of Peter. The Synoptics relate that Jesus, passing the Jordan, beheld Simon and his brother fishing. He invited them to follow him, and they complied.⁹ But in the Johannine account we read that Peter's brother was a disciple of John the Baptist, and that one day, as Jesus was passing by, the disciple overheard John, his master, murmuring, "This is the Lamb of God." And straightway the brother of Peter followed Jesus. Reporting to his brother, Simon, "We have found the Messiah," he brought Simon also to Jesus, both thenceforth being disciples.¹⁰

Again, the Lazarus fable, which in Luke is told only as a parable,¹¹ is in John narrated as an actual happening.¹²

So too, many of the acts of Jesus are contradictorily reported in the several accounts. For instance, the ceremony of the institu-

¹ Luke i. 26.

² Luke ii. 3-5.

³ Matt. ii. 1-23.

⁴ Matt. i.

⁵ Luke iii. 31.

⁶ Luke vii. 19.

⁷ John i. 23.

⁸ John i. 29.

⁹ Matthew iv. 19-20; Mark i. 20; Luke v. 10-11.

¹⁰ John i. 41.

¹¹ Luke xvi. 19-26.

¹² John xi. 1-44.

tion of the sacrament, according to John, took place a year before the time specified in the Synoptics.¹³ Furthermore, the time of Jesus's ministry differs in the Johannine version from that assigned by the Synoptics. John intimates that it comprised three years,¹⁴ but the Synoptics give it as only one year.¹⁵ Even as to the day of the crucifixion there is no accord, John giving it as the day before Passover, and the Synoptics placing it as the first day of the festival.¹⁶

The accounts of the trial of Jesus also are mutually contradictory. If we are to believe John, he was brought first before Annas, and then sent by the latter before his son-in-law, Caiaphas.¹⁷ But the Synoptics know no such person as Annas. Nor is there a uniform record of the dying words of Jesus. According to John, he expired saying, "It is finished." In Matthew, he cries out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Luke puts into his mouth the words, "Father into thine hands I commend my spirit;" while Mark merely states that he "cried with a loud voice and gave up the ghost."

Similar conflicting accounts exist of the final command of Jesus, before his ascension. Matthew¹⁸ quotes him as bidding those to whom he revealed himself, "Go, tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me." But according to Luke¹⁹ he bids his disciples: "Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye shall be endued with power from on high."

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The characterization of Jesus, as given in the Synoptics, differs widely from that of John. The former make him a severe inexorable judge, who insists upon faith as the only means of salvation,²⁰ while John surrounds him with a halo of kindness, love, and compassion. According to the Synoptics again, he merely insisted upon faith in God as the condition of salvation, so that when he was called good, he said there was no one good but the one, God who is in heaven;²¹ but John claims that Jesus insisted upon belief in himself as the Son of God, saying, "I and the Father are one."²² So too, on the one hand, the preaching of Jesus, in the Synoptics, is grounded upon the speedy coming of the kingdom of God,²³ whereas

¹³ See John vi. 33; 53-56.

¹⁴ John iii. 24.

¹⁵ Mark i. 14; Matt. iv. 12; Luke iv. 1.

¹⁶ Cf. John xviii. 28; Mark xiv. 12.

¹⁷ John xviii. 13, 24.

¹⁸ Matt. xxviii. 10.

¹⁹ Luke xxiv. 49.

²⁰ Matt. ix. 28; Mark v. 34; ix. 23; Luke viii. 48.

²¹ Matt. xix. 17.

²² John x. 30.

²³ Matt. xxiv. 34; xxvi. 29; Mark xiii. 30; Luke xxi. 32.

in John it is the idea of the glory of the Son of God that is everywhere emphasized.²⁴ In John, again, Jesus is eager to demonstrate his divine powers. He explains to his disciples that the blindness of the man they had met was in order that "the works of God should be made manifest in him,"²⁵ but in the Synoptics, he is always warning the people not to tell of the wonders he had performed.²⁶

As to the personality of Jesus, one would suppose that if any one had been expected to know about his birth and divinity, it would surely have been his mother, for it was to her that the angel appeared announcing the advent and future glory of Jesus.²⁷ Nevertheless, we find later that his own mother knew very little about his divinity. When the shepherds saw the angelic hosts and "came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in the manger; and when they had seen it, they made known abroad the same which was told them concerning this child"; we are told²⁸ that Mary "kept all these things and pondered them in her heart." Also, when the aged Simeon beheld the infant Jesus and pronounced him "to be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of thy people, Israel," "Joseph and his mother marveled at those things which were spoken of him."²⁹ Moreover, when Jesus remained in the Temple, and his parents, after a weary search, found him seated amid the doctors, they are said to have been amazed, "And his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee, sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" Of this obvious answer, we read that "They understood not the saying which he spake unto them."³⁰ Contradictions such as these confuse the mind of the child and blur what should have been a definite conception of a consistent personality.

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The teachings of Jesus in themselves are in some instances contradictory, in others, vague. At one time, he is made to say that "It is not meet to take the bread of the children and give it to the dogs."³¹ And again³² he says, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs; neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." But in Mark³³

²⁴ John vi. 29; iv. 26; xii. 26.

²⁶ Mark, v. 43.

²⁸ Luke ii. 13-19.

³⁰ Luke ii. 42-50.

³³ Matt. vii. 6.

²⁵ John ix. 3.

²⁷ Luke i. 26-38.

²⁹ Luke ii. 32-33.

³¹ Matt. xv. 26.

³³ Mark xiii. 10.

he maintains that the Gospel must be published among all nations. Further, in Matthew³⁴ Jesus enjoins upon his disciples, "Go ye not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not," while in John³⁵ we read of Jesus himself going on a missionary journey into Samaria, and Luke on several occasions takes pains to exalt the Samaritans as believers in and friends of Jesus.³⁶ It is Luke also who tells of the *good Samaritan*.³⁷

Matthew³⁸ in one instance quotes Jesus as saying, "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Luke,³⁹ however, quotes Jesus in the words, "And he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one." Later, when the disciples tell Jesus that they have two swords, he is much gratified.⁴⁰

In Mark ii. 17, when speaking of his mission, Jesus says that "They that are whole have no need of the physician: but they that are sick;" adding, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Yet the scribes and Pharisees, whom he always denounced as the worst of sinners, when they asked him for a sign in order that they might believe in him, met with a refusal and were called harsh names by him; he preferred to let them perish rather than convince them of the saving truth he had come to bring to men.⁴¹ But in this respect he seems to have followed the example of John the Baptist, who, when the Pharisees and Sadducees came to him to be baptized, cried out, "O ye generation of vipers, who hath warned ye to flee from the wrath to come?"⁴² Thus, even when they were ready and eager to comply with the condition for salvation, both John and Jesus denied them the chance.

And what his harshness did not accomplish, his vagueness did, in turning away people who would fain have followed him.⁴³ Always in addressing the scribes and Pharisees, he spoke in parables and cryptic utterances, so that often even his disciples failed to understand him. But when asked wherefore he spoke in this vague way, he made answer,⁴⁴ "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." Thus, purposely, he repulsed all overtures of the Pharisees. From these illustrations we see that even the teachings of Jesus are not helpful to the child's religious development at a time when we are

³⁴ Matt. x. 5.

³⁶ Luke xvii. 11.

³⁸ Matt. xxvi. 52.

⁴⁰ Luke xx. 38.

⁴² Matt. iii. 7; Luke iii. 7.

⁴⁴ Matt. xii. 11.

³⁵ John iv. 4-28.

³⁷ Luke x. 33.

³⁹ Luke xxii. 36.

⁴¹ Matt. xii. 39.

⁴³ John vi. 66.

anxious to implant charity, pity, and love for its fellow-men in its soul.

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The promises of Jesus which were never fulfilled are many indeed. Thus in Matthew⁴⁵ he bids the people "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." "For verily, I say unto you," he continues the same promise,⁴⁶ "ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come." This promise is repeated in Mark.⁴⁷ Again, in Matthew,⁴⁸ he says to his disciples, "There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." This could, of course, not have referred to his own death and resurrection, since all his disciples were alive at the times of these events. He therefore must have meant something else which was never fulfilled. Then, after telling of the miracles, earthquake and eclipse of the sun, that were to befall, he concludes⁴⁹ with, "Verily I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation." So too, in Mark,⁵⁰ he declares, "Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass until all these things be done." Further he asserts,⁵¹ "I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God." And in Mark xiv. 62 he tells the high priest Caiaphas, "Ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." It is needless to say that Caiaphas never saw this vision. Then again, according to Luke,^{51a} he promises his disciples that "There shall not an hair of your head perish." Yet many died in defence of his teachings. In John xi. 26, he makes this startling assertion: "And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." In John xii. 32 he says, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me," but there were many that were not drawn unto him. Another singular statement occurs in John v. 25, where he assures the people that "The hour is coming, *and now is*, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live." This he follows in the twenty-eighth verse of the same chapter with, "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice." And in John viii. 51 he says similarly, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death." With all this seeming knowledge of past and future, with

⁴⁵ Matt. iv. 17.

⁴⁷ Mark xi. 1.

⁴⁹ Matt. xxiii. 36.

⁵¹ Mark xiv. 25.

⁴⁶ Matt. x. 23.

⁴⁸ Matt. xvi. 28.

⁵⁰ Mark, xiii. 30.

^{51a} Luke xxi. 18.

all the powers of heaven at his bidding, he cannot know the present : for he is obliged to ask his disciples⁵² what people say about him. Can the child who is given such material be otherwise than bewildered and confused? And later, is there any choice left it but to grow up either in credulous submission and fanaticism, or a mocker and reviler of faith and religion?

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The God-idea of the New Testament on the whole is not more sublime than that of the Old. The ministers of the Christian churches are wont to emphasize on every occasion that the God of the Old Testament is a severe judge, meting out justice without mercy, whereas the New Testament God is a clement, merciful one, full of love and kindness; that YHVH is harsh, unbending, inexorable, while Jesus, the New Testament God is tender and full of compassion and gentleness. Yet the ideal of God presented in the Synoptics is on the same level as the God of the Patriarchs. For example, we are told, that on account of the sin of the first, helpless man, God was offended to such a degree that nothing but blood atonement would appease him. Therefore his only begotten Son was sent to earth, to give his blood for the salvation of men, to satisfy the vengeful thirst of God "the Father." But far worse than this is the sequel. To save men, the Son of God assumes humanity and dies for men. But the "Father" can devise no other way but that his Son should die by the instrumentality of the very nation who should have been especially saved; and because this nation, the Jews, cannot evade the divine foreordination, that they should be the executors of Jesus, therefore must they be accursed forevermore! A very questionable ideal of God this, to set before our children. Instead of receiving from this God their ideal of divine love and goodness, they come to regard him as harsh, inexorable, nay, even blood-thirsty and grossly unjust, and pitifully limited in his methods.

In several instances, God is even represented as absolutely unethical. Thus, when for some reason the three wise men, led by his star, come to Jerusalem, and Herod, terrified lest by this newborn, long-foretold King of the Jews he lose his throne and scepter, issues a decree for the massacre of all the children under two years, God the "Father" does not take the trouble to save the little ones. He contents himself with sending a dream to Joseph, ordering him to escape with Mary and his child Jesus to Egypt. It is as though a man should purposely destroy the dam of a river and let the water

⁵² Matt. xvi. 13.

flood the town, anxious only to place his own family in safety, but regardless of all the other inhabitants.

Again, the New Testament goes a step farther down the ladder in comparison with the Old concerning God's anxiety that the wicked should die. In the Old Testament we read⁵³ that God desires not the death of the sinner, but rather wishes him to repent and live. But here in the New Testament we read how God hardened the hearts of the scribes and Pharisees that they might not believe in Jesus, on whom their salvation depended,—just as in the Old Testament he hardened the heart of Pharaoh, to show later his divine power. Indeed, this was even more than blinding them to the truth. First it was ordained in heaven that the Son of God must be born on earth and be sacrificed, in order to save the world from sin. The executioners were appointed. Everything was foreordained. No one could change it. And then the Jews, who believed in God and had waited thousands of years for their promised Messiah, were selected to be the unfortunate murderers of God, and then were to be damned for ever for this terrible but unavoidable act. But the worst of it is, that Jesus was himself a participant in this divine conspiracy against the Jews. For when the latter tried their utmost to be reconciled with Jesus, and, remembering that Isaiah had enjoined on the people to ask a sign from God,⁵⁴ they came to Jesus also asking for a sign, he refused to give it to them,^{54a} because that Isaiah said again, 'Lest their eyes might be opened and their heart purified, and they repent.' More, he even gloats over this plight of the Pharisees, boasting that "If I had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin."⁵⁵

In fact, in numerous instances, Jesus is represented as more harsh and inexorable than YHVH;—as in the statement recorded in Matthew,⁵⁶ "I come not to send peace but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law." In Luke again he says,⁵⁷ "I am come to send fire upon the earth. Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you: Nay, but rather strife." Another strong statement of his is the following:⁵⁸ "If a man come to me and hate not his father, his mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters: nay and his own life also: he cannot be my disciple." His treatment of his

⁵³ Ezek. xviii. 32.

⁵⁴ Is. vii. 11, 14.

^{54a} John xii. 39, 40.

⁵⁶ John xv. 22.

⁵⁶ Matt. x. 34-35.

⁵⁷ Luke xii. 49, 51.

⁵⁸ Luke xiv. 26.

own mother shows that he lived up to a strange conception of the fifth commandment: When he was told that she was waiting without and wished to come in to see him, he exclaimed oratorically, "Who is my mother?"—thus denying her admission.⁵⁹ And this idea is further emphasized in Matthew viii. 21, where one of Jesus's followers tells him that his father has died, and therefore asks him, "Suffer me first to go and bury my father;" and Jesus cries out, "Let the dead bury the dead. Follow me." Such is the example of filial piety which we hold up to the eyes of our Sunday-school children!

Even of the attribute Christianity bespeaks most insistently for Jesus, he falls woefully short. For Jesus appears unforgiving in the Gospel records. He never forgot a wrong. Because Capernaum did not treat him rightly, he cried out, "Thou Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell."⁶⁰ Even to his disciples he was frequently harsh. When they were unable to cast out an evil spirit, he cried out,⁶¹ "O ye faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you?" Yet later he himself had to admit that there was need of special power against that particular spirit (verse 21). At another time he spoke in this wise to one of his followers:⁶² "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." And again he cries out,⁶³ "He that believeth not, he is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

Nor are his sayings alone calculated to give the child a wrong impression of God. His own rash actions likewise, do not afford very wholesome examples for the young child, as for instance the episode with the fig-tree, as recounted in Mark xi. 13. On his road to Jerusalem, Jesus saw a fig-tree. Coming to it and finding on it nothing but leaves,—it not being the season of the fruit,—he in his anger and disappointment exclaimed, "Let no fruit grow upon thee henceforward forever," and the fig-tree withered. Thus in his fit of anger he destroyed a useful tree. So again when he came to the Temple and beheld the money-changers he cast them all out, overthrowing their tables and the seats of them that sold doves.⁶⁴ Now, these people were there in accordance with certain laws and regulations of the Temple. If Jesus had any objection to them, he should have made complaint in a lawful manner, but should not have acted in this high-handed, impulsive way, which serves as an incitement

⁵⁹ Matt. xii. 48; Mark iii. 33.

⁶⁰ Luke x. 15; also, Matt. xi. 23.

⁶¹ Matt. xvii. 17.

⁶² John iii. 3.

⁶³ John iii. 18.

⁶⁴ Matt. xxi. 12.

to young people reading the story, to applaud the conduct of any demagogue. Indeed, it is a well-known fact that every lynching in the South is justified on this very plea, that Jesus also took the law into his own hands. The child, whose religious training has for one of its motives the making of a good citizen, is led to infer that it is a noble act to trample upon the rights of others and act on the impulse of the moment, regardless of the law of the land.

Some of the methods and devices of Jesus as reported by the Evangelists are not at all in keeping with dignity and sacredness of character. Mark reports, for example, that whenever Jesus cured or healed some afflicted person, he would bid him not to tell it to any one. Yet every man who experienced such a cure is reported to have told every one he met of the wonderful event—the miracle that had happened to him. Now then we must ask ourselves: Did Jesus really think that these people would obey him? If so, he did not know human nature. Just because they were commanded not to divulge the story of their cure, they were sure to talk about it. Besides, they could not help themselves. They were obliged to account in some way to their friends for the wonderful change that had come to them, how their blindness, deafness, lameness, was cured. If, on the other hand, Jesus did know that they would disobey him in the matter and merely ordered them to keep the secret to impress the people with his modesty, then he was employing a cheap device of playing to the gallery.

At another time, he is reported to have overcome the Pharisees and chief priests in debate by a trick. According to Luke xx. 2-7, when the Pharisees and priests asked him in the presence of the people by whose authority he spoke, he evaded a direct answer by an ingenious device. Dramatically he turned on them and asked: "Tell me, by whose authority did John baptize?" And as he foresaw, they were placed in a dilemma, as they could not safely answer this question. For, "they reasoned among themselves, if we shall say, of Heaven, he will say to us: Why then, believed ye him not? But if we say, of men, all the people will stone us, for they be persuaded that John was a prophet." Thus Jesus took an unfair advantage of them relying on the mob, and when his antagonists refused to commit themselves, he said to them, "Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things." This was an excellent lawyer's expedient, but not the direct, illuminating reply one would expect of a brave prophet.

A further instance of the unfair advantages Jesus took of his audience, if we are to trust his chroniclers, was the parable of the

good Samaritan. We all know the story, but only a few of us are familiar with the conditions in Judea at that time. In order to appreciate thoroughly this parable of the good Samaritan, we must bear in mind the following data: First, there were three castes in Israel, the priests, the Levites, and the laymen (called Israelites). Second, the same division of castes prevailed in Samaria also. Third, the priests and Levites were by the law forbidden to touch dead and dying persons.⁶⁵ Now, having these facts in mind, we will see at once that Jesus himself could never have employed that parable as we have it, for it is manifestly unfair and unjust. Suppose one were to make a comparison between the Americans and the French, asserting that the latter were better mathematicians than the former; because, having propounded a problem to an illiterate American and found him incapable of solving it, he had later given it to a French professor of mathematics, who, of course, found its solution immediately. The very same unfair comparison is made in the parable in discussion. Jesus takes hold of a priest and a Levite of Israel, who are forbidden to touch a dying body, and hence would of course not have transgressed the law of God; while the Samaritan whom he next introduces, being a merchant, and hence a layman, had no such scruple to consider and could therefore easily aid the dying man. We see therefore that the Evangelists were not always careful how they reported the acts and sayings of Jesus,—unless we assume that Jesus did actually originate this unfair comparison.

It was, perhaps, the influence of this example of subterfuge which prompted Matthew to act similarly on his own account.^{65a} In his genealogy of Jesus, he attempts to prove that every fourteenth generation in Jewish history chronicles an epoch-making event (fourteen being a multiple of the old sacred number, seven). In order to make Jesus such an epoch-making person, he says,⁶⁶ "So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations. And from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations: and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations." But in order to make the number of generations between David and the carrying into captivity the requisite number of generations, he drops out three generations between Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, and Ozias, the son of Amaziah. By this omission of three kings, Matthew leaps a period of seventy-seven years,—and this simply to prove by an old theory the great-

⁶⁵ See Lev. xxi. 1.

^{65a} See J. Horton's *Tekel: or, The Wonderland of the Bible*, pp. 420-422.

⁶⁶ Matt. i. 17.

ness of Jesus. One may here well pause again, to ask if this is fit material to give the child for its spiritual elevation and growth!

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Other confusing ideas in the New Testament are the following:

a. The relation between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. It is all very easy to say that three are one and one is three. Yet even grown persons can hardly settle it in their minds. If you ask a minister of the Christian church how these three can act harmoniously together, he will answer that the three persons are really one, as Christianity is a monotheistic religion. But when you confront him with the New Testament teaching,—that God the Father was so severe with the world that he craved for a vicarious atonement, and that his only begotten Son offered himself as a voluntary sacrifice,—he will be at a loss to tell you how one and the same God can wish for a sacrifice and give himself as that sacrifice.

b. The same vagueness confronts the student in regard to the dual nature of Jesus,—the human and the divine. How could a Son of God, we may ask, feel physical pain, and his agony cause him to sweat blood? How could he await death with terror (“The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”)? How could he, the Son of God, be tempted by Satan and informed if he bowed down before and worshiped the tempter, all the kingdoms of earth should be his? Here we are seriously informed that Jesus was human. But when we ask how a human being could assert, “I and the Father are one”? “I am the way, the truth, the life,” “Jesus was divine,” we are given for reply.

c. Nor has the status of Mary been clearly explained. To leave all theological discussion out of the question,—it was ordained for one reason or another that she should become the mother of God’s son. If she was the only one considered by the heavenly hosts as worthy of this honor, she should have been worthy of being informed of the honor in time, so that she might not have become engaged to Joseph until after Jesus was born. That would have saved her from suspicion and Joseph from jealousy.

It was all this vagueness that forced the Catholic church, and in a measure the Protestant also, to oppose all scientific study of the Bible. It was feared that the student might discover that the church ranged itself against reason and knowledge. The myth of the Garden of Eden was artfully utilized to impress on the faithful that God himself favored humanity’s remaining in ignorance and darkness. Knowledge is the special property of God. Yet man, made in God’s image and bidden to strive to become as nearly like God

as he can,—man is forbidden to seek knowledge. Urged to ascend to the regions of light, his soul is fettered to the prison of ignorance by the pseudo-divine command.

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From what we have seen, we may at once conclude that the character of Jesus as presented in the New Testament is really weak and insignificant. Yet in our ordinary conception of him, he appeared colossal and awe-inspiring. We are therefore at a loss to explain how from these narratives we could have derived our wonderful, exalted ideal of him. The reason, to my thinking, is the fact that the narrators employed a dramatic device. In order to strengthen the personality of the hero of the New Testament, the writers introduced a villain as a foil to the hero. This villain was the Jewish people. By contrasting Jesus with the Jewish people, the former grew to wonderful proportions—on the principle that the blacker the villain, the whiter the hero. The custom up to the present time has been to lead Christian young people to a love of Jesus through the medium of hatred toward the Jews. This, of course, is at once an admission that Jesus by himself really appeared weak to the teachers. But this device of resorting to hatred as a means for implanting love is certainly a questionable one.

This device is clearly discernible in the stories of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. The account given by all the writers places the whole burden of the death of Jesus on the shoulders of the Jews. It was the Jews, they tell us, who captured Jesus; who tried him by night; who delivered him over to Pilate; insisted upon his condemnation; and when Pilate inquired if he should release Jesus, it was the Jews who cried out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

The account of Pilate's wife is rather a questionable story to bring into the Sunday-school. Claudia, the lawful wife of Pilate, was at Rome at the time of Jesus's death, basking in the sunshine of the Emperor's favor;⁶⁷ to whom, then, does the chronicler refer, when he tells us that the Governor's wife interceded for Jesus?

Again, aside from the fact that crucifixion was not a Jewish mode of execution, it was even considered a disgrace to all the people, that one of their number should be put to death in this way. For even the Romans inflicted this form of death only on thieves and slaves. And by using it in the case of a Jew, they would have

⁶⁷ The unprintable story of the lineage and career of Claudia and her marriage to Pilate, which might have served as the prototype for the career of Mme. Du Barry, is succinctly set forth by Giovanni Rosadi in his *Il processo di Gesù* (*The Trial of Jesus*, tr. by Dr. Emil Reich), ch. 16; also by Petrucci Della Gattina, *Memorie di Giuda*, vol. I. ch. 2.

stigmatized the whole Jewish nation as slaves of Rome. But for the Jews themselves to have asked this form of death for one of themselves, would have been like inviting a blow in the face. This version, therefore, is hard to believe, even for a child, for the following reasons: (a) We know that Jesus had many friends among the people. We know, for instance, that the chief priests and Pharisees were afraid to attack him in the Temple for fear of the multitude. Matthew states the matter plainly:⁶⁸ "When they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet." And Mark also testifies to the fact that the scribes and Pharisees feared to offend him because of the people.⁶⁹ Even after he was condemned to death and led to the place of execution, Luke tells us,⁷⁰ "There followed him a great company of people, and women, which also bewailed and lamented him." Yet when the crucial moment came, when Pilate asked whether they wished him to free Jesus, there was not a man, according to the story of the New Testament, to speak a word in his defense. Furthermore, any child would be struck by the incongruity of Pilate's position. Pilate asked Jesus during the trial, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" And Jesus answered and said, "Thou sayest it." Then Pilate, the representative of Cæsar and the one delegated to watch over the interests of Cæsar, the only rightful King of the Jews, turned around and said, "I see no fault in him."⁷¹

And the same method of shifting the ground and endeavoring to divert the attention of the student, is found in the story of the resurrection. Here was a chance for Jesus to assert himself and convince the people, especially the scribes and Pharisees, that they had made a mistake,—by appearing after the resurrection, openly and boldly in the Temple. The miracles,—the earthquake, the eclipse of the sun, and the opening of the graves of the saints, who entered the city, as told by Matthew—if witnessed by only a few others, would have afforded convincing proof that Jesus was the real Son of God. It seems, however, that no other record of these wonderful things chronicled by Matthew is to be found; hence doubt of their having occurred at all is justified. The story that a large sum of money was given to the guard in order that they should give out that the disciples had stolen the body while they were asleep, is rather amusing, to say the least,—because, first it would be almost an impossibility to buy a man who had witnessed such a wonderful event as the resurrection of a dead person; this sign

⁶⁸ Matt. xxi. 46.

⁶⁹ Mark xi. 18.

⁷⁰ Luke xxiii. 27.

⁷¹ Mark xv. 2.

would have converted the most hardened sinner. Second, by admitting that they had slept at their post, the guard would have put themselves in danger, inasmuch as the penalty for sleeping at the post was death. It would scarcely have been possible that they would put their lives in jeopardy for the sake of money, especially when there were so many opportunities for safer bribes. Here again, many extraneous matters were introduced, to divert the attention of the reader from a dangerous conjecture. Some one might suspect that Jesus was saved from death by Pilate and Joseph of Arimathea, after he had been crucified. The mind of the young reader would revert to the trial, where the Governor is represented as the friend of Jesus, anxious to save him, but afraid of the Jews. It was upon the Roman soldiers that the task devolved of crucifying Jesus. It being a holiday, the Jews durst not contaminate themselves by attending the execution of a criminal; or, if they witnessed it at all, would have stood at a great distance. It was therefore easy for Pilate to give orders to the soldiers that Jesus should not be killed by crucifixion, and that his legs should not be broken, as were those of the thieves. In agreement with Joseph the Arimathean, who was in the plot for saving the life of Jesus, the ostensible corpse was delivered into Joseph's hands, and laid away in the new sepulcher until it was dark, when by connivance of the guard, Jesus was allowed to escape. It was for this reason that he was able to show Thomas the nail marks in his hands, because he was still alive. So might the child reason. In order therefore to divert attention from this possibility, the distracting details were inserted into the story and the reader's feelings are played upon by inciting his hatred toward the Jews.

Hence the final impression after perusing the New Testament is not so much love for Jesus as hatred for the Jews. It is perhaps due to this influence of the New Testament that the Christian church is the most intolerant in the world. The Buddhists of Japan and the Confucianists of China are proverbial for their tolerance. If now and then they cry out against Christian missionaries, it is simply due to their previous experience, according to which the missionaries were too often merely the vanguard of the invading army. Even the Mohammedan church is more tolerant than the Christian, as recent events in Turkey prove. It was the Mosque that stood in the front ranks of the Young-Turkish reform, whereas in Christian countries the church always abets the tyrant, standing for reaction and persecution. France obtained liberty, equality and fraternity in spite of the church and the pope. And the great clause

in the American Constitution, "That all men are created free and equal," was derived, not from the pronouncements of the clergy, but from the influence of Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*. Even to-day, if the Jews may be the criterion for Christian tolerance, we find the Christian church their most relentless foe, the most enthusiastic exponent of Anti-Semitism and its concomitant horrors. All the Anti-Semitic organizations of Austria, France and Germany are supported by the clericals. And even in our enlightened country, one has but to take up a denominational paper to learn who are in the vanguard of Jew-hatred.

Podbenotzoff, the former Procurator of the Holy Russian Synod, was one day upbraided by an English clergyman for not stopping the massacres and oppression of the Jews in Russia. "As a good Christian you should have acted in the true Christian spirit," the Englishman asserted. "We, the *pravoslavna* (the followers of the true word) are the only ones who have preserved the true Christian spirit," retorted Podbenotzoff. "The true spirit of Christianity is, to exterminate all infidels and unbelievers. Wherever the church had the power to destroy all God-forsaking people, she did it with full vigor. Look at the history of the church from its inception, and you will see that we, the Russians, are the only ones who preserved the traditional spirit of Christianity. It is the radicals and the half-Christians among the nations who have allowed the Satan of tolerance to control their conduct."

Such is the lesson the nations derive from the New Testament. Time and again the sword which Christ is vaunted to have brought into the world has been put into requisition in inquisitions and massacres,—to say nothing of the persecutions within the church, when Christian brother turned against Christian brother. Shall we infer then that the individual child will draw a better spiritual nurture from this book; or that it will not utilize the many existing contradictions in the same to justify any action it feels moved to?