

Did Christ Really Live?

BY CHARLES WATTS.

I propose now to give some reasons for regarding the story of Christ, as recorded in the New Testament, as unhistorical. It is not my intention to dispute that a man by the name of Jesus lived two thousand years ago. Josephus refers to more than one person of the same name who lived about that time. My contention is that there is no historical evidence that the Christ (which really means the anointed) who is professed to be believed in by Christians ever existed. Remembering the period in which he is said to have lived, the many remarkable deeds it is alleged he performed, and the numerous historians who wrote about that time, it is certainly extraordinary, upon the supposition that he existed, that no secular writer of the first century even alludes to the Jesus called Christ. One of the principal Christian contributors to the recently published volume, "The Ancient Faith in Modern Light", in deploring the lack of evidence as to the inception of the Christian faith, thus writes:—

"It is a singular fact that Secular history, which relates the advance of the Christian faith, gives the very scantiest account of its origin—gives indeed, no account at all. It seems as though the men who might have rendered this inestimable service were smitten with mental blindness; the whole Christian movement was to them so small, so weak, so entirely unimportant, that it never occurred to them to trace it to its source. They held it to be a local folly, a provincial fanaticism, which might well be left alone with good natured contempt" (p. 87).

Now it appears incredible that this historical silence should have obtained if such a person as the Christ of the Gospels actually lived. And yet, apart from the New Testament, there is not the slightest trustworthy evidence that he existed. This is the more strange upon the supposition that Jesus was equal with God. For if he were an omnipotent being it is legitimate to conclude that he would have exercised his power, and have given to the world a faithful history of his life.

It has been repeatedly urged that Josephus (A. D. 40) and Tacitus (A. D. 110) mentioned the name of Christ. As regards the former, it is now generally admitted, even by Christian scholars, that the principal passage in Josephus's writings where the name of Christ occurs is a forgery. Its internal evidence goes to prove it to be an interpolation. Dr. Lardner gives up its authenticity, and points out that it was never quoted by Christian writers before Eusebius; that

the name of Christ is nowhere else mentioned in any of Josephus's works; that the language is purely Christian; that the introduction of Christ's name entirely interrupts the narrative; and that, although Chrysostom and Photius both refer to Josephus, they never allude to the disputed passage.

Dean Milman says: "It is interpolated with many additional clauses" (Milman's Gibbon, vol. ii., p. 285). Bishop Warburton calls the passage "a rank forgery" [Divine Legation of Moses, book ii., Sec. 6]. Rev. Dr. Giles also condemns it as a forgery [Hebrew and Christian Records, vol. ii., p. 62]. Dean Farrar says: "The single passage in which he [Josephus] alludes to him [Christ] is interpolated, if not wholly spurious" [Life of Christ, vol. i., p. 46]. Dr. Epersheim says: "The expressions attributed to Josephus must have been altered, and in some parts interpolated, by later writer" [Dictionary of Ecclesiastical History and Biography, article "Josephus"]. Gibbon says that this passage "was inserted into the text of Josephus between the time of Origen and that of Eusebius," and may furnish an example of no vulgar forgery [Chap. xvi., footnote]. And De Quincy, in his essay on the Essenes, emphatically says that "this passage has long been given up as a forgery by all the men not lunatic" (Works, vol. ix.).

The passage in Tacitus in which Christ is mentioned is to be found in the Annals, not in the History. There is no proof that the passage was ever referred to until the fifteenth century. Doane, in his Bible Myths, gives seventeen reasons for believing the passage to be an interpolation. But something even more important than this should be remembered.

In 1878 a valuable work was published in London under the title of "Tacitus and Bracciolini: The Annals Forged in the Fifteenth Century." The object of the writer was to show that the Annals in which the passage referring to Christ appears were not written by Tacitus, but were forged in the fifteenth century by the famous Poggio Bracciolini.

The author says: "I give a detailed history of the forgery, from correspondence that Poggio carried on with a familiar friend who resided in Florence." It thus appears that there is no historical evidence that the earliest Secular writers of the Christian era knew anything of the existence of Jesus, "the anointed one."

Another most important fact which should not be overlooked when dealing with the story of Christ is that the main features of Christianity have almost an exact parallel in the records of previous religions. Take, for instance, the stories of Krishna and Buddha.

Incidents and wonders are associated with the legends of their lives similar to those ascribed to the career of Christ. There is a striking allusion in Justin's Apology bearing on the similarity of Christian and Pagan beliefs. Justin, writing in the middle of the second century, says:—

"When we say that the Logos, who is the first birth of God, was produced without sexual union, and that Jesus Christ our teacher, was crucified and died, and rose again, and ascended into heaven, we propound nothing different from what you (the Pagans) believe regarding those whom you esteem as sons of Jupiter."

If this be true, there can be no doubt as to the unhistorical character of the story of Christ. When we read in the New Testament of a virgin birth—that is, a child being born without a human father; of the devil taking Jesus up to a high mountain and showing him all the kingdoms of the world; of his having a meal of fish and honeycomb, and then being carried up into heaven; of his being "born of a woman," and yet, like Melchisedec, "without mother"; of people being possessed of devils; of the dead being restored to life after the body had become decomposed—I say, when we read stories like these, we know that we are in the region of fable and romance, and not upon the solid ground of historical facts. True, Jesus is represented as being of real flesh and blood; but the idea of his rising from the grave, after being deprived of all natural power, and appearing in a room while the doors were shut, is utterly opposed to all ideas of reality.

The perpetual repetition of the Gospel stories in modern times shows that the mythical still rules the Christian mind. This is specially manifest in the present revival of the old tradition about the fall of Jerusalem being the signal for the Messiah descending from heaven and the final triumph of the Jews.

The latest form which this story has taken is that we are upon the eve of the reign of Christ and the triumph of his saints. The growth of the Christian faith, built on ancient myths, affords a striking illustration of orthodox inconsistency and credulity. At first, poor fishermen, weavers and tanners, we are told, met for worship in private houses; but now their successors assemble in costly structures, while they repeat the same old stories that deluded their superstitious predecessors. Fortunately, however, there is a rapidly increasing section of the community who will not be misled by the fables of the past. Many of the greatest thinkers of today recognize that the Christianity of the New Testament has no historical foundation, and that its teachings are only val-

uable in sustaining the creeds and dogmas of an expiring faith.—[Freethinker.]

Darwin on Morals.

Darwin gave morality a purely natural basis. He found that morality was a part of man's life, not an ornament brought down from heaven. Four things, according to Darwin, make the foundation of morals:

1. Man is a sociable animal. He loves society; he feels sympathy.
2. Man has power of memory, which makes him reflect on his actions and their consequences; he can look upon himself as a separate self; he can judge himself.
3. He has a capacity for language. Ideas fly from brain to brain by means of words. Men learn to know each other, to warn, to praise, to preach.
4. Man has the ability to form his habits. Habit is a guarantee of character. Habit is the secret of right conduct. Right conduct is not goodness in a momentary rush, a spasm, a jerk, but it is a steady habit of mind which gives a man a moral purpose and makes him upright and true to the line of duty.—[Agnostic Journal.]

Detestable Nonsense.

The great English writer and scholar, Ruskin, was once appealed to for a contribution to pay off a debt contracted in the building of a new chapel. And here is what he said in reply:

"Sir: I am scornfully amused at your appeal to me, of all the people in the world the precisely least likely to give you a farthing. My first word to all men and boys who wish to hear me is, 'Don't get in debt. Starve and go to heaven—but don't borrow. Try first begging. I don't mind if it is really needful, stealing. But don't buy things you can't pay for.' And of all manner of debtors, pious people building churches they can't pay for are the most detestable nonsense to me. Can't you preach and pray behind the hedges—or in a sand pit—or a coal hole—first?"

The specific rules of morality are not pronounced to be permanent and unalterable. How could society advance if they were? The community undergoes a silent revolution in its moral ideas as new tastes are generated, new passions raised, and new modes of existence and of thought are laid open; but alterations such as these, slow and scarce perceptible, cannot endanger the steady authority of morals. The sea and the dry land may be changing places, but, nevertheless the sea and dry land are very distinguishable; the change is not inconsistent with the habitable nature of our globe, and each generation of mortals walks upon the shore neither deterred nor perplexed with sense of insecurity.—[Sel.]