

Findlay's reconstruction of that part of the Corinthian letter to St. Paul some clearer expression contrasting him with the other Apostles.

If Paul chose celibacy, he must have done so while still a Jew, and there can hardly be any doubt that he chose from similar motives to Rabbi Asai. Much of chap. vii. reads like an expansion and wider application of the Rabbi's principle, especially *vv.* 29-34, where the obvious meaning is that marriage prevents the concentration of one's whole powers on "the divine life" and the things of the Lord. St. Paul, like Rabbi Asai, had resolved, even before he became a Christian, to devote himself to the work of God; and his conversion merely changed the direction of his activity and his conception of God's demands, but was not the first cause of his devotion. He believed, while he was persecuting the Christians, that he was as entirely concentrated on God's work as afterwards, when he had become a Christian.

And now, in writing to the Corinthians, he makes in chap. vii. his defence of his original choice. His defence throws a new light on his pre-Christian life, showing him "cleaving to the Law," and renouncing the ordinary life of society for his own conception of the divine life. This is a subject on which much remains to be said, but which is out of place here.

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"UNTO THE GREEKS FOOLISHNESS."

A STUDY IN EARLY APOLOGETIC.

WHEN Christianity made its appearance, it was an age of scepticism and superstition often strangely mingled. Rome was the mistress of the world, and the ancient polytheism remained the official religion of the Empire. It still had its priests and temples, but it was the jest and scorn of reason-

able men. Only the ignorant multitude any longer believed the old mythology, and their credulity staggered at no legend of the gods, however absurd or revolting. Nor did the ancient religion suffice them. Every nation that was conquered by the Roman armies had its own superstitions; and these found their way to the Imperial City and were eagerly caught up by the credulous populace. Side by side with the temples of Jupiter and Venus stood those of the Oriental Cybele and the Egyptian Isis. While the credulity of the multitude thus ran riot, wise men sneered, and the Government looked on with indulgent complacence. "The various modes of worship," says Gibbon, in his epigrammatic way, "which prevailed in the Roman world, were all considered by the people as equally true; by the philosopher, as equally false; and by the magistrate, as equally useful."

By the cultured men of the period, Christianity was regarded as simply one of those multitudinous superstitions—not a problem to be investigated, but an extravagance to be laughed at; and it is both interesting and instructive to hear the opinions of such outsiders. Perhaps the most distinguished of them all was Lucian, the last of the great Greek writers. He was born about 130 A.D. at Samosata, a town on the Euphrates in the north of Mesopotamia. He has been styled "the Voltaire of the second century," but the comparison is singularly unfortunate. He was, indeed, a sceptic, and he plied the ancient polytheism with the artillery of satire and ridicule; but toward Christianity he never behaved himself unseemly. In the few passages where he alludes to it he speaks with a sort of contemptuous compassion, and his references to Jesus are almost reverential. "That great man," he says, "they still revere, who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new mystery into life." "Their first law-giver persuaded them that they are all brethren one of another," when once

they forsake and deny the Greek gods and worship their wise man, him who was crucified, and live according to his laws." Nowhere does Lucian make a jest of Christianity. He was an earnest, truth-loving, and kindly-natured man; and, while Christianity was but a foolish superstition in his eyes, it did not, like the religions of the heathen, offend his moral instincts or rouse his indignation. Indeed his treatment of it is an involuntary tribute to it; and who knows what might have been his attitude toward it had he known it better?

Not the least entertaining of his works is the *True History*. It is a remarkable coincidence that Lucian was on terms of intimate and affectionate friendship with the eclectic philosopher Celsus, the author of a brilliant attack upon Christianity which called forth an equally brilliant defence from Origen; and the title of Celsus's polemic was the *True Word*. It is interesting to think of the two friends comparing notes as they wrote, and sending forth their books under titles thus suggestive the one of the other. Lucian's work is not an attack upon Christianity, yet it contains at least two unmistakable satires on the Holy Scriptures which show what men of his stamp thought about the Bible in those days.

The *True History* is a book of travellers' tales after the manner of *Gulliver's Travels*. It is a broad farce, a good-humoured satire on tales of adventure from Homer's *Odyssey* down, especially professed histories which duped their readers with narratives of impossible marvels in distant lands. "Ktesias of Knidas described India and things there which he had neither seen himself nor heard tell of from another; and Iamboulos wrote many marvels about what befell in the Great Sea. The originator and teacher of such trickery was Homer's Odysseus, who told Alkinous and his people about the enthrallment of the winds, one-eyed, savage cannibals, many-headed beasts, the

transformation of his comrades by means of drugs, and such like marvels." It is a pity such romancers should have it all their own way, and Lucian is minded to enter the lists against them and beat them at their own game. His lying is certainly more reasonable than theirs; "for at this one point I shall tell the truth, in saying that I shall lie. I write about things which I have neither seen nor experienced nor learned from others, and which, moreover, have no existence and could not possibly happen."

In this jesting vein he relates how he got a ship, well furnished with provisions, water, and arms, and manned by a crew of fifty; and, passing the Pillars of Herakles—as the Straits of Gibraltar were named by the ancients—steered out upon the Western Ocean with a favouring breeze. Marvellous were the experiences of that gallant company. Lucian's method is to "go one better" than his rivals in the game of romancing, and his adventures are precisely similar to theirs, only tenfold more wonderful. After a succession of amazing experiences, he encountered one more marvellous than all the rest. There is, indeed, a slight reminiscence about it of the Homeric story of Charybdis, but it is obviously a "skit" on the Biblical story of Jonah and the Whale. Let us hear it as Lucian tells it:—

"A change for the better, it seems, proves often the beginning of greater ills. We had sailed only two days in fair weather when, at dawn on the third, we see against the sunrise many monsters and great fishes, especially one fifteen furlongs in length. On it came, open-mouthed and disturbing the sea a long way before it, awash with foam and displaying its gigantic teeth all sharp like stakes and white like ivory. We bade each other good-bye, embraced, and waited. It was now upon us and swallowed us at a gulp, ship and all. It had no time, however, to crunch us with its teeth, and the ship fell clean through the openings into

its inside. When we were within, at first it was dark, and we could see nothing; but presently the fish gaped, and we saw a huge hollow everywhere broad and high, ample for a city of ten thousand men to inhabit. In the midst lay little fish and many other beasts well crushed, and sails and anchors and human bones and cargoes, and at the centre were land and hills composed, methinks, of the mud the monster had swallowed. A wood and all sorts of trees had grown upon it, and herbs had sprung up, and all as though they had been cultivated. The circumference of the land was two hundred and forty furlongs. And one could see also seabirds, gulls, and kingfishers, nesting on the trees."

By-and-by the castaways got somewhat used to their situation, and Lucian set out with seven of his men to reconnoitre. When they had gone five furlongs, they came upon a temple of Poseidon and various evidences of human handiwork. Presently they heard the barking of a dog and spied smoke, and hurrying forward they found an old man and a youth busy at work on a garden-bed. They proved to be a merchant of Cyprus and his son, who, seven and twenty years before, had been driven out to sea by a storm and had been swallowed by the monster, they alone escaping of all their ship's company. There they had lived ever since, sustaining themselves by herbs and nuts and fish, and sorely persecuted by certain fierce neighbours, half fish, half men, who dwelt hard by. Skintharos was the old man's name, and he and Lucian resolved to do battle with the oppressors. They mustered their forces, and, after a grim engagement, during which the inside of the monster rang with cries and the clash of arms, they gained a splendid victory, and, after the fashion of ancient warriors, set up a trophy.

Ere long they grew sick-tired of their situation, and cast about for some way of escape. First they essayed to dig through the side of the monster; but, after digging about

five furlongs, they saw it was no use, and gave it up in despair. Their next plan was to set the wood on fire and thus kill the creature. They did so; and for seven days and as many nights it seemed to suffer no inconvenience, but on the eighth and ninth it was obviously sick. It gaped sluggishly, and, when it gaped, soon closed its mouth again. On the tenth and eleventh days it was completely mortified and stank. The prisoners saw that, if it died with its jaws closed, they were lost; and so they watched their opportunity, and when next it gaped, they shored up its jaws with props, so that it could not close them. Presently the creature died, and they dragged the ship along its gullet, launched out, and sailed away.

Beyond a doubt, it is the Book of Jonah that Lucian was making a jest of when he wrote this tale of wonder, and it plainly reveals his attitude toward the Christian religion. He does not for one moment entertain the idea that the Scriptures contain a Divine revelation. He puts them in the same category with Homer's *Odyssey*; and as for the miracles they record, he dismisses them with a wave of his hand and a good-natured smile. "I know," he says, "that your Bible is full of marvels; but so are other books. And really it would not be difficult to improve upon them and invent still more wonderful romances." This he sets himself to do in a spirit of playful banter. We have seen his treatment of the story of Jonah; and he goes on presently to give us another taste of his caustic wit. It is the Apocalyptic description of the New Jerusalem that he now assails, and he laughs it out of court in precisely the same fashion. He paints a still more wonderful picture, and, though he does not draw the inference, he plainly suggests: "See how I have improved upon your fable! What of your New Jerusalem now?"

Here is the passage, and it is not necessary to arrange it and the familiar verses in the twenty-first chapter of

Revelation in parallel columns in order to perceive their resemblance. After their escape from the belly of the great fish, those venturous mariners voyaged on till they came to that Island of the Blest of which the ancient poets sing, and were conducted to the radiant city where Rhadamantos had his throne and the mighty dead feasted in perpetual peace. "Now," says Lucian, "this city is all golden, and the wall that encircles it is of emerald; and there are seven gates, all of cinnamon wood of one piece. The foundation of the city and the ground within the wall are of ivory. And there are temples of all gods builded of beryl stone, and vast altars therein of solid amethyst, whereon they offer the hecatombs. And round the city runs a river of the fairest myrrh, an hundred royal cubits broad and fifty deep, so that it flows gently. And there are baths therein, great houses of glass heated with cinnamon; and instead of water in the basins is warm dew. And no one waxes old, but remains at the age whereat he comes. Yea, neither is there night among them, nor very bright day; for, as the radiance of dawn ere the sun has risen, such is the light that overspreads the land. Moreover they know but one season of the year; for with them it is always spring, and with them one wind blows—the west."

These two books appeared about the same time—the *True History* of Lucian and the *True Word* of Celsus. In them we see the two weapons wherewith chiefly Christianity has been assailed—satire and argument; and of these the former, if it be skilfully handled, is the more injurious. An argument may be refuted, but a sneer is like a poisoned arrow; and there is no surer way of crushing an opponent than covering him with ridicule and making him a public laughing-stock. It is interesting to observe how these two contemporaneous assaults were received by the Christian theologians of the day. The

True Word was answered, and that right effectively, by Origen, who was equally great as a thinker, a scholar, and a Christian. The *True History*, on the contrary, evoked no response. The keen shafts may have pierced deep, but they were endured in silence.

And for this silence there are, perhaps, two reasons. One is that *silence is really the most effective reply to calumnies*. There is a striking passage in Origen's introduction to his great apology. "Our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ," he says, "when false witness was borne against Him, 'held His peace'; when He was accused, He 'answered nothing'; being persuaded that His whole life and His doings among the Jews were stronger than a voice refuting the false witness and than speeches making defence against the accusation. . . . It was matter for surprise that, when He could have made defence and established His innocence and recounted the praises of His own life and of His miracles as they had been wrought of God, that He might give His judge a way of pronouncing a gentler sentence upon Him, He should not have done this, but should have despised it and regarded the accusation with proud disdain. . . . Now Jesus," Origen continues, "is always having false witness borne against Him, and there is never a time when, malice being in men, He is not being accused; and He Himself now also holds His peace at these things and answers not by voice, but makes His defence in the life of His own true disciples, which cries out His excellences and is stronger than all false witness. Thus He refutes and overturns false witness-bearings and accusations."

It was only the insistence of his friend Ambrose that induced Origen to enter the lists against Celsus. Had he followed his own judgment, he would have imitated Jesus and "held his peace." Not that he had no defence to offer, but that he reckoned a Christian life the best evidence

of Christianity. And shall we not recognise a like explanation of the silence with which Lucian's mockery was endured?

Another explanation of it is that the early Christians would be somewhat puzzled by Lucian's raillery and would hardly know what to make of it. They were mostly either Jews or men imbued with the Jewish spirit; and the Jewish spirit was an utter stranger to the sense of humour, herein differing widely from the Greek spirit. It is instructive to observe how the word *laugh* is used in the Old Testament. It denotes the laughter of *incredulity*, as when Sarah laughed at the promise which she judged impossible; the laughter of *folly*, which is "as the crackling of thorns under a pot"; the laughter of *exultation* at an enemy's discomfiture; the laughter of *contemptuous scorn*. Never once does it mean the laughter of mirthful gaiety. Of sarcasm, indeed, caustic and biting satire, there is no lack in the holy Scriptures. How scathing the Prophets could be! And St. Paul is almost as richly endowed with this perilous gift as Elijah or Isaiah. But where, at any rate in the Old Testament, is there a single ray of playful humour? The laughter of the Hebrews is never the merriment of a genial and kindly soul, but always harsh, scornful, vindictive mockery that grates on the ear and corrodes the heart.

The truth is that the Hebrew mind was too serious to be humorous; and, while such a temper has its advantages, it has its disadvantages also. The sense of humour sweetens a man's heart and delivers him from a thousand extravagances. A little touch of it would have saved George Fox from his manifold absurdities. Had he been blessed with the feeblest perception of comicality, would he have condemned the friendly greetings *Good morning* and *Good evening* as rank blasphemies, inasmuch as God made every morning and every evening, and therefore no morning or evening can be other than good? Would he have insisted

that a Christian must rather lay down his life than uncover his head, even in the presence of the most exalted of mankind, supporting his contention on one occasion by the example of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who, though in the king's presence, still had their hats on when they were cast into the burning fiery furnace? Humour has been called a "saving grace," and Thoreau has styled it the "indispensable pledge of sanity." And is it not so? Surely it deserves to be called a "saving grace" when it delivers a man from playing the fool; surely it is justly termed the "indispensable pledge of sanity" when it balances a man's judgment and helps him to lead a sensible, cheery life, in peace and goodwill with his fellow-creatures.

Yet the advantage is not all on one side. It is a striking fact that the world's great causes have found their doughtiest champions in men of the grave Hebrew temper. There is, indeed, one remarkable exception—Martin Luther. A score of times he came within an ace of martyrdom, yet none was ever more blithe than he, always singing, and meeting every man with a cheery smile and a pleasant jest. It would seem, however, to be the rule that fanaticism and enthusiasm go hand in hand. It was because they took life so earnestly, and so intensely realized the power and presence of the Unseen, that St. Paul, Athanasius, Calvin, and Knox were what they were and did what they did. His subtle wit and balanced judgment delivered Erasmus from fanaticism, but they quenched the ardour of his soul and chilled the enthusiasm which would have made him the chief among the Reformers. The course of history would have been different had the early champions of Christianity resembled Erasmus. They were men of the grave Hebrew temper, and they would regard Lucian's raillery as mere foolish trifling. His shafts were keen and poisonous, but they struck against a panoply of grim insensibility, and glanced off harmless.

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