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A FEW WORDS

ON THE

CHRISTIANS' CREED

BY C. BRADLAUGH, JUN.

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DEDICATION

TO THE REV. J.G. PACKER, A.M,
INCUMBERER OF ST. PETER'S, HACKNEY ROAD

SIR, — Had the misfortunes which I owe to your officious interference been less than they are, and personal feeling left any place in my mind for deliberation or for inquiry in selecting a proper person to whom to dedicate these few remarks, I should have found myself directed, by many considerations, to the person of the Incumberer of St. Peter's, Hackney Road. A life spent in division from part of your flock, and in crushing those whom you could not answer, may well entitle you to the respect of all true bigots. Hoping that you will be honoured as you deserve,

I am, Reverend Sir,

Yours truly,

C. BRADLAUGH

A FEW WORDS ON THE CHRISTIANS' CREED

THE Creed of the Christian is what I proceed to consider, and I shall take for consideration the one which we have given us in the Communion Service of the Church of England. It begins thus: "I believe in one God, the Father, Almighty." Here is a declaration of belief in the unity of God. How far this declaration is carried out in the latter parts of the creed, is a matter for further investigation; but we will now take the next sentence: "Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible." Here, in the two sentences, we have the declaration of belief in a power that has created the universe. Now, the very term "belief" implies that the thing is not known; for when we have attained knowledge, we are beyond mere belief. As the believers are in doubt about the existence of a creator, I will endeavor to investigate the probability of there being such an existence. If you put any inquiries to a Christian as to the creation, he will tell you that God made matter out of nothing. If you ask him who or what God is, he will tell you that God is quite incomprehensible. Failing to get any other information on this point, you ask him, but how could something be produced from nothing? to which, if he is a pious man, he will reply, that, too, is incomprehensible; and also add, that it is one of those mysteries of religion that we must not attempt to reason upon. Having satisfied ourselves that the Christian can give us no information, beyond that which is contained in a book which he calls a revelation from God, we look to this book to ascertain, if we can, something further relating to this incomprehensibility. We, however, now find ourselves in a worse position than we were before, for we are told in one text that God is all-powerful; in another text (Judges i, 19) we are told that he is not. In one text we are told that God is unchangeable; and in another we are told that God grieves and repeats (Gen. vi, 6). In another that he gets in a passion, and marches through the land in indignation, and thrashes the heathen in his anger (Habakkuk iii, 12). I might fill a volume with these beautiful specimens of the character of the God of the Christian. However, as the Bible quite supports God's character for incomprehensibility, I think we need not doubt that thus far the Christian is right. But, as this is not the sort of evidence that a reasonable man will be satisfied with, and as the burden of proof lies upon the man who declares or makes the assertion, I think all must come to the conclusion that the assertion, not being supported by evidence, must, as a matter of necessity, fall to the ground.

The next passage runs thus: "And in our Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God: begotten of his Father before all the worlds." Here is the declaration of a belief (which, however little it will bear examination, we will take for the present) in a be-

ing whom we should take from the word Son to be a personage inferior to God the Father, especially as in John (xiv, 28), Jesus is represented saying "the Father is greater than I;" but such is not the case, for the next words, "God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God," show that the Christian makes Jesus not only to be equal, but to be superior to God the Father, for he tells us that Jesus is God of Gods, and very God of very God. Now if God the Father is incomprehensible, I can assure you that the God and very God of God the Father appears to me to be doubly so. The belief then proceeds, "begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made." This is a most important declaration, for it clearly proves that the Christian believes in a material and substantial God, or rather material and substantial Gods, for he tells us that God the Father and God the Son are both of the same substance. This belief in a material deity upsets the prior declaration of the creation or production of matter from nothing, for if the Gods or God of the Christians are or is eternal, and as they, or he, are or is clearly material, so matter must be eternal, and could never have been created. The belief next proceeds, "Who for us men and for our salvation came own from heaven." This coming down and ascending up to heaven clearly proves that the Christian considers that the earth is a kind of flat surface with heaven above, and that God lives up in heaven, and that he sometimes has come down to see us and gone up again after the visit. But we are told that he came for our salvation. Now to be a salvation there must be a fall. Of course there must, cries the exulting Christian; look to Genesis and see the account of the fall of Adam. We do look to Genesis, and we find that somebody called Yeue Alehim (whom our translators make Lord God, but for what reason I am at a loss), has placed Adam and Eve in a garden with a command not to eat certain fruit, and that this Lord God, to make his command stronger, backs it with a lie, for he tells Adam and Eve that in the day that they eat of it they shall surely die, which the sequel proves not to be true, as they did not die, but one of them lived 930 years after he had broken the command. While Adam and Eve are in this garden a cunning serpent, whom the Lord God also has made, tempts Eve, and they eat of the fruit of the tree, and their eyes are opened, and they gain a knowledge of good and evil. Now the Lord God seems to be very much like the bigoted parsons of the present day, for when he finds out what Adam and Eve have done he gets in a passion and swears at them, and curses Adam and his wife and the serpent; and not satisfied with this, he curses the land too, just as if the land had had some share in the crime.

This is a summary of the account of the Fall contained in the Bible. Because Adam and Eve had been guilty of the horrible crime of eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good

and evil, that is they learnt to think and reason for themselves, God Almighty found it necessary to damn them; and depend upon it, reader, whoever you may be, that when you are guilty of the crime of thinking, speaking, and acting for yourself in religious matters, God's vicegerents on earth, the black-coated, white-neckerchiefed, strait-haired, pious psalm-singing gentry, will do their best to crush you and damn you by every means in their power. They will calumniate you as they have done Thomas Paine and the rest of those brave men who have been courageous enough to strive for civil and religious liberty.

But I fear I am guilty of digression, and therefore I will take you back to the account of the Fall. Adam having been cursed, our pastors pretend that it was necessary that there should be a redemption — for they have such a good opinion of their God, that although they tell us that without God's help we could not live and move, they think God would damn the whole earth because one man [ate] an apple which, according to their own account, he could not have done if God had not permitted him; therefore, to use the words of Richard Carile, they give us the horrible picture of “a merciful God sacrificing a good and pure God to appease the vengeance of a jealous and revengeful God.”

I will now leave this to the consideration of the reader, and take the next passage, which runs thus: “And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man.” I can scarcely imagine that any of the Christians ever give this belief a thought, as, parrot-like, they repeat it after their leader in the pulpit, for if they did think they must be aware that they are uttering the most ridiculous and absurd statements respecting their deity. The doctrine of the incarnation, however, is common to the Hindoos; and as their religion is much older than Christianity, I suppose they will admit that the Hindoos did not derive their doctrine from the Christian, and also that it seems extremely probable that the Christians derived their doctrine of the incarnation from the Hindoos. This would go very far towards identifying Christianity with Paganism; and therefore the devout Christian will shudder at the thought, and again tell you that is a mystery that must not be inquired into. But the absurdities contained in the idea of an omnipotent and infinite God becoming a weak and finite man, must, I think, be apparent to all.

The creed then reads: “And was crucified, also, for us, under Pontius Pilate. He suffered, and was buried.” The idea of a Very God of Very God *suffering* and being buried! “And the third day he rose again according to the scriptures.” Now, unless there were other scriptures besides those which we possess, Jesus did not rise according to the scriptures; for the scriptures say, that as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the

earth. But Jesus was not three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, for he was crucified in the course of Friday, and was out of the grave before dawn on Sunday – being only one clear day and two nights. So much for being according to the scriptures.

It then proceeds: “And ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father.” We have been told that there is only one step from the sublime to the ridiculous, and I think that this fully proves the truth of the observation, for one moment we are told of an infinite God, and the next of two infinite Gods, sitting beside each other in a finite place called heaven. But this is not the whole of the absurdity; for the idea of ascension into heaven proves what I have before noticed with regard to the absurd ideas of heaven and earth contained in this creed.

The creed proceeds: “And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead: whose kingdom shall have no end.” This involves the belief of the existence in a future state, and, as it is impossible to prove a negative to the question, I shall put the following interrogatories for the believer’s consideration. In what state do you expect man to exist with a knowledge of his identity after death? He cannot exist in a material state, for the matter of which he was composed has been dispersed, and now forms other bodies, and thus the organisation is totally destroyed. You cannot tell me that the atoms of which that man was composed will reunite, because that would presuppose the existence of a power possessing the capability of the creation of matter in the same state with the same knowledge of personal identity; besides which, the matter of which Alexander the Great was composed may now be in your body, and thus either you or poor Alexander would have to go on short commons at the day of judgment. And with regard to anything that may be said as to our existence in an immaterial state, I only ask the believer to produce some proof of it, for as yet we have no proof, and therefore have nothing to answer.

The creed proceeds: “And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life: who proceedeth from the Father and Son.” On this declaration I have not much to say, except to point out the absurdity of it; for a dissertation on the term Holy Ghost would be too long for my pages. If God the Father and God the Son are living beings, then God the Holy Ghost is not the Lord and Giver of Life; for he proceeds from them, and they were before him. But if God the Holy Ghost is the Lord and Giver of Life, then, till he came into existence, God Almighty and his Son must have been without life. More than this, Jesus is said to be the son of the *Virgin* Mary by the Holy Ghost; now, if the Holy Ghost proceeds from Jesus first, it seems rather strange that Jesus should have proceeded from the Holy Ghost afterwards. The “Ecce

Homo” suggests that the *aggelos*, or messenger who represented the Holy Ghost, might have been a *young man*.

But to return to our subject. It then proceeds: “Who, with the Father and the Son together, is worshipped and glorified: who spake by the prophets.” Now it happens that there are a number of Lords who spake by the prophets — such as *Yeue* or *Yehovah*, *Alehim*, *El Sheddi*, and others — but not one Holy Ghost: so that the Bible gives the lie to the belief, unless the Holy Ghost was the lying spirit in the case of Ahab, and I am afraid that that would not tell much to the credit of the Holy (or unholy) Ghost.

“And I believe in one catholic and apostolic church.” Setting aside the word apostolic, this is the only good part in the belief; for depend upon it readers, that till there is an universality of mind and action throughout the world in one direction, we never shall have true happiness. Therefore I praise the belief in a catholic or universal church or community; but the objectionable word apostolic pulls me down from the Utopia to which I had begun to soar, for that word spoils all. With the word apostle are strangely mingled together some ideas of Peter, the Pope, the Inquisition, thumbscrews, racks, stakes, and other adjuncts to an apostolic church.

“I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins.” Only think, readers, the church set at loggerheads, and nearly £100,000 spent on the last nine words. A bishop, with all the courage imaginable, speaking what the *Times* tells him may cost him his mitre, and then excommunicating the whole who disagree with him, the *Times* of course included, on account of these words! I think after this we had better read the passage again. What is baptism? Answer: Saying long prayers over a baby in long clothes, till you wake it, and then sprinkling water on it till you make it cry! What is remission of sins? Answer: Don’t know. Now I believe the grand question in dispute is whether the grace comes before the baptism or at it, or after it, or whether it comes at all; and to settle this question they have employed themselves in worrying one another with threats, protests, and prohibitions, to the benefit of the lawyers and us poor inquirers. I say our benefit, too, for we are told that when rogues fall out honest men get their own. What absurdity is contained in the idea that the baptising of a child with water saved it from being damned for sins that it never committed! or, how still more absurd is the idea that the child would be damned if it were not baptised at all; yet this doctrine is taught and inculcated by the Creed of the Church of England. The creed proceeds: “I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.” Together with this resurrection are associated the ideas that we shall be brought before the bar of God and give an account of our deeds, and that the bad shall be sent to hell and the good to heaven. Now we are told that hell is a lake of brim-

stone and fire; if that is the case, I deny that there can be eternal punishment, for science proves that there is not enough brimstone in any finite space to burn one man for ever, let alone several millions: and with regard to heaven, if I am to go there I hope it will not be near the planet Uranus, for I should feel too cold; or near the sun, for then I should feel too hot, and should not be very happy. However, take it at the worst, we freethinkers should be better off than the believer, for bad as the believer makes his God, he surely could never be unjust enough to send me to hell for speaking what I believed to be the truth.

Taking the Creed as a whole, it is one of the most ridiculous declarations of faith imaginable, for the believer declares a belief in Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. And how are these pictured in Scripture? “The Father is somewhere in heaven, the Son sits at his right hand, and the Holy Ghost flies about in a bodily shape like a dove.” What a curious picture to present to any reasonable man — a Father begets a Son from nothing, and a dove proceeds from the two of them. I shall say no more on this disgusting part of Christianity — disgusting because so many believe all that is told them by a man who possesses the same powers of comprehension as themselves, and who has a position to maintain in the world — I mean the priest. My blood runs cold to think of the mischief that has been done by those men called priests; they are the bane of society, for they rule the mass of society *vi et armis* and they rule it wrongfully; they do not give it a chance of obtaining a mouthful of intellectual food without steeping it in the poison of their superstitious dogmas, and till we take the antidote of free discussion we shall never be free. But alas for reform! there are strong bulwarks of faith and prejudice to be attacked and pulled down before that antidote can fully counteract the debasing effects of superstition on the mind and action of man.

However, Christian, before concluding, I will give you a summary of your most absurd Creed. You believe in God the Father who is eternal, and in God the Son who is eternal too. You believe that the Holy Ghost is the father of Jesus, and that Jesus is the son of God the Father. You believe that the Holy Ghost is a *material spirit*, and that he has made himself manifest in two forms, namely, a dove or pigeon, and a cloven tongue of fire (the latter would be no bad emblem, were he the identical lying spirit). You believe that a finite woman, who was a virgin, gave birth to an infinite God, and yet that that God was a man. You believe that Jesus went down into hell and stopped on his visit three days; but, Christian, if it were true, do you think that the devil would have been unwise enough to let his bitterest enemy out after he had got him so nicely in his power? You believe that the Holy Ghost spoke by the prophets. To do that he must have had foreknowledge, and we must have been predestined to do certain acts;

and yet you believe that we are free, and shall be punished or rewarded according to our actions and faith. You believe that God, Jesus, and the Holy Ghost, are three separate persons, and yet that they are one.

You who are Papists believe that there are three Gods in one and one in three, and that yours is the true Church, and that the Pope is the head of the church, and the representative of God on earth. You who are Churchmen hold the same trinity, but make Victoria, by the grace of God, queen defender of the faith, nominal Pope of your church, and the Archbishops of Canterbury and York the actual popes. You who are Wesleyan elect John Wesley to the papal dignity, and so on with the rest.

I hope that all who profess the creed will look around and see the present theological panic. The Wesleyans are divided by the "Fly Sheets" into two parties, and are attacking one another most vigorously. The Church of England is divided by Goreham, and the bishops are excommunicating one another. And lastly, the Pope is at a discount in the very seat of his empire, and Free-thought is slowly but steadily increasing.

To those readers who approve of this, I beg leave to ask their assistance in the work of progress by their acting as well as talking among their fellow-men. To those who disapprove, I say, "Answer it."