

*Imprisoned in the  
narrow vase of Dogmatism*



On the toxicity of Christian Dogmatism and its power to prevent man's moral development. To really appreciate the inner merits of Christian Ethics one must first beat down Christian Theological Exotericism.

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**I**T IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR AN EDITOR to please everybody, and whoever has tried it has been set down as a fool. The attempt has invariably failed, and the discomfiture of the unhappy pacificator has been generally voted to be the righteous punishment of audacity or ignorance. A journal to command the least influence must represent some distinct idea, be the expression of some defined policy. And since no two human beings think exactly alike, it follows that only the wildest dreamer could expect to avoid reproaches and maledictions from dissentient critics if, in a journal devoted to questions of philosophy, science and religion, he should boldly probe to the bottom those puzzling subjects. The theory of our Society is that there is some truth in every religion, but that in some it is so covered up by externals as to be very hard to dissect out. Among those "some" is Christianity which, with a gentle soul, has a body grotesque, hard, cruel — appalling, often. As our lance is couched against all shams in religion, we have pricked the shields of all the dark champions of popular creeds. If the *Front-de-Boeuf*<sup>1</sup> of vulgar Christianity has come in for more than a fair average of our thrusts, it is because in that case error is backed by Power and first needs oversetting. It is not that Christian dogmatism is more hateful to us than any other form of obstructiveness, but because it is enjoying a wider power to prevent man's moral development and crush truth. To really appreciate the inner merits of Christian Ethics one must first beat down Christian theological exotericism. The ancient faiths have had their day of power and are now slumbering upon the ashes of their fanes: Christianity is the official creed of the masculine social energy of the generation. If it could, it would be spread at the sword's point and by the persuasiveness of tyranny and torture as in the good old days. But Progress has brought it to book, and now if it would keep a hold upon the world's thought, it must open its most secret core to the world's inspection. The probe employed for this purpose is sceptical criticism, and that it is being used unsparingly is proven by the wonderful increase of the party of Free-thought, the rapid growth of Infidel Societies and Infidel Literature. The mind of Christendom is deeply imbued with this tendency, which reflects itself equally in the tone of Christian and non-Christian writings. To ignore this, is to thrust out the eyes of one's understanding. But nevertheless there are many professed Theosophists who would have us act upon that principle. We may berate exotericism in any other faith as we choose, but

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<sup>1</sup> [Reginald Front-de-Boeuf (Ox-Face) was a disagreeable character in *Ivanhoe*, a historical novel by Sir Walter Scott, 1820.]



we must not lay our unholy hand upon that gilded altar. We have severally declaimed against exoteric Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and Judaism, — our Christian friends cared not: the galled jade might wince, their withers were un-  
wrung.<sup>2</sup> Those mouldy superstitions were born of the fogs of antiquity, and fit only for wretched blackfellows. But “the line must be drawn somewhere,” and they want us to draw it at the outspoken fearless books of Paine, Voltaire, Ingersoll, Bradlaugh and Bennett. We may open our advertising pages to whatever we like, but not to tracts, treatises or books against “the noblest of faiths.” When Swami Dayānanda was friendly with us we advertised Orthodox works protesting against him; though we were allied with the Orthodox Sanskrit Sabha of Benares, we helped the Swami to get subscribers for his heterodox attacks on it. Colonel Olcott told the Parsis to their faces that they had forgotten the grand spirit of their religion, and were now but carrying around its corpse; what he has said to the Buddhists in some two hundred addresses let them declare. And why, we ask, should we leave only Christianity undissected? Has it so clear and innocent a record as to command the immediate reverence of an outsider? Is there so perfect an agreement between its Catholic and Protestant twins as to convince the Heathen at a glance of its freedom from error and its infallibility? But we “hurt the feelings” of many friends by helping to disseminate the writings of Paine and other Freethinkers. Well, we are sorry, but shall nevertheless do it. There are two sides to Christianity as to every other question, and so far as our voice and influence goes, these Heathen youths, whose unripe minds the Missionaries are doing their best to turn to their foreign creed while teaching them their alphabet and rule-of-three, shall be made to read the best that can be said on *both* sides before taking the most momentous step in life — that of changing their forefathers’ religion. They should bear in mind that there is such a thing as fair play, and “*audi alteram partem*”<sup>3</sup> was a maxim even of the Pagans of old. As we would not have a Christian lad give up the faith of *his* people for Hinduism or Buddhism without thorough study of both, so do we deplore to see the Heathen boy or girl trampling upon his nation’s sacred beliefs before having even read what Christian sceptics have said about Christian errors. We may have offended often through the intensity of this feeling; perhaps we have said many things too harshly or even cruelly; we have more than the average of human infirmities no doubt, and might have been wiser if we had not been so bitter. But this does not touch the main question; it is simply that of the measure of our personal sin or shortcoming. The issue is whether or not we shall help to circulate Freethought literature, or stifle it altogether as some would have us do — out of deference to the nominal religion of the “cultured” nations, and at the same time to allow all other religions to be challenged and even railed at with impunity? Our Christian-born friends and members seem to totally ignore the fact that our Society consists of not only about a dozen of Branches in Europe and America, but of over *seventy* Branches in Asia; and that of the subscribers to our magazine the “heathen” Asiatics are ten times more numerous than those of Europe and America, and that their religious feelings may be also entitled to some consideration. And would it be then either fair or just to sacrifice the vital interests of the majority be-

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<sup>2</sup> [Quoting Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Act III, scene 2; *i.e.*, let the guilty wince, we can watch without being bothered.]

<sup>3</sup> [*i.e.*, hear the other side, too.]

cause they are *non*-Christians and supposed to belong to “the dusky and Heathen majority” — to the squeamish feelings of the “white and Christian minority”? This *we shall never do*. We have come to India for the benefit of the Asiatics, believing that Europeans had already received sufficient share of Fortune’s gifts and did not require our assistance. Therefore our final answer to all such remonstrances in future is the following. To the best of our ability we shall always be ready to discover how much and how little truth there may be in every creed that professes to teach man to thread his way through the mysteries of life, and the more awful mystery of death. And to do this effectively we need and invoke the help of theologians, and bigots, of critics, and philosophers of every faith and every nation. Christianity may be the official religion of the dominant races, its profession the easy road to respectability and fortune; but it has no rewards that we court, and the Theosophical Society is meant to be a platform of true Brotherhood, a bond of amicable tolerance, a fulcrum by which the lever of Progress may move the mass of Ignorance. It has no one religion to propagate, no one creed to endorse: it stands for truth alone, and nothing can make us deviate from this which we consider the path of our Duty and for which we have sacrificed *every thing*. Our motto will stand for ever:

There is no Religion higher than TRUTH !

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[The above article was written by H.P. Blavatsky in answer to letters which she had received from some Manchester and Scotch Theosophists, criticising her for advertising “Freethought” literature in the pages of *The Theosophist*.

Soon after, another letter treating of the same subject was received, this time from the Council of the London Lodge, Theosophical Society. The article in *The Theosophist* being already in print, and Col. Olcott being away on his lecture tour in Southern India, Blavatsky answered the letter from the London Lodge herself. This letter contains some important points of policy. It has been thought advisable to insert it here, as an illustration of Blavatsky’s uncompromising attitude in circumstances where principles were involved.

The letter, text of which follows, is reprinted from *The Theosophist*, August 1931, where it was published under the title of “H.P.B. and Freethought,” from the original held in the Archives of The Theosophical Society, Adyar. (See *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, Vol. V pp. 122-25.) No alterations have been made in Blavatsky’s punctuation which is at times somewhat ambiguous. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]



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