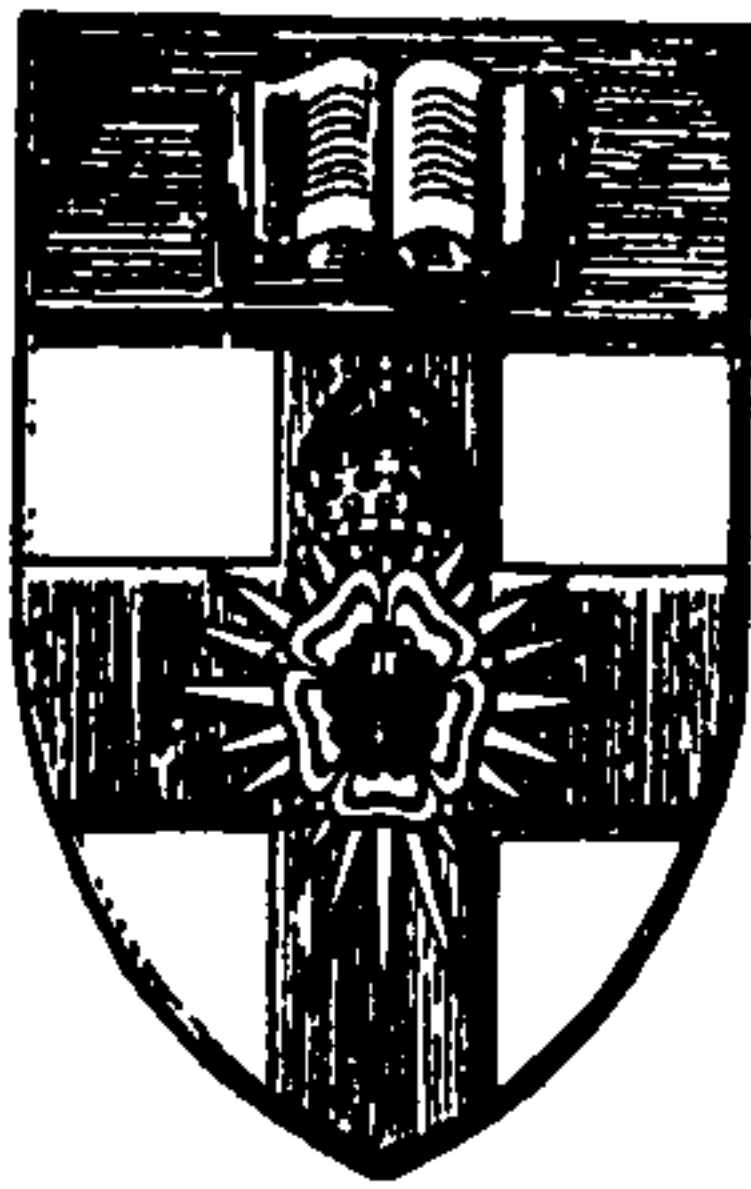


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Religious Faith

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COUNTRY CARPENTER'S
CONFESSION OF FAITH:

WITH

A FEW PLAIN REMARKS

ON THE

AGE OF REASON.

IN A

LETTER

FROM

WILL CHIP, CARPENTER, IN SOMERSETSHIRE,

TO

THOMAS PAIN, STAY-MAKER, IN PARIS.

LONDON:

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COUNTRY CARPENTER'S
 CONFESSION OF FAITH.

MASTER PAIN,

I HOPE you received safe the little dialogue I sent you a year or two ago between my two worthy friends, Jack Anvil the Blacksmith, and Tom Hod the Mason.

I hope, too, you know the effects that said dialogue produced. That little David, in the shape of a two-penny Pamphlet, brought down your huge Goliath, *The Rights of Man*, to the ground, and laid him fairly on his back, never to rise again. There is not now a copy of your book to be found in any of the book-clubs or circulating libraries in our county.—You must not therefore wonder, Tom, if a poor Carpenter is a little puffed up with such a triumph as this over so doughty a foe; and if his vanity almost inclines him to flatter himself that this epistle will do the same kindness to *The Age of*

Reason.—But, whatever betide me, I am resolved to make this trial, and to tell you a bit of my mind about this last famous book of yours.

We country people, you must know, like very well to be instructed in religion and virtue, and things of that sort; but then we expect that the man who teaches us should be a better scholar and know a little more about the matter than ourselves. This, I hope, you don't think very unreasonable.

Now, Mr. Pain, as far as I can learn from those who seem to be very well acquainted with your history, this does not seem to be the case with you.

Happening the other day to step into the room belonging to our book-club at the Black Bull, I saw a Pamphlet called *The Life of Thomas Pain*, written by one Mr. Oldys, who appears to be a very sensible worthy gentleman, and to know a good deal about you*.

* The Life of Thomas Pain, by Francis Oldys, M. A. is sold by Stockdale in Piccadilly, and has passed through ten editions. It is a curious collection of facts, apparently drawn from good information. Not one of them has been denied or contradicted by Mr. Pain, though he owns that he has seen the book. The spelling of Pain's name, here used, is taken from Mr. Oldys's authority.

He says that you never learnt any thing at school but to read and write and cast accounts—and *there*, Master Pain, I am even with you—for I learnt all this myself, and was reckoned a pretty apt scholar for my age. When my work is over in an evening, I am a great dealer in history-books, and sermons, and the Bible, and am allowed to make as good a figure at our book-club as any man in it, except the school-master, Sir John's steward, and the vicar—yet for all this I never dreamt of getting into the reading desk or the pulpit, and teaching religion to the 'squire and the parson, and all the people in the village. And I should think (begging your pardon) that you are not much better qualified for this than myself.

He says, moreover, that you was bound 'prentice to a stay-maker, and afterwards set up for yourself, and exercised that trade many years.—Now I am ready to allow that a stay-maker is a very useful member of society, and the trade itself a very respectable one.—But what relationship there is between making stays and making creeds, and in what way a knowledge of that ingenious profession leads to the knowledge of divinity, and enables a man to

enlighten the world in matters of Religion, I do not immediately see.

There is another old-fashioned prejudice that we still retain in the country, which is, that whoever sets himself up for a preacher of morality and religion to others, should have a little spice of those qualifications himself. Now if any credit is due to the said Mr. Oldys, you are but very indifferently furnished with those useful articles. He says that you was a cruel husband to the best of wives, and an unnatural son to the best of parents; that you was very little in the habit of speaking truth, of paying your lawful debts, or of refunding money which was entrusted to your care; that you was turned out of the Excise for some unfortunate mistakes you committed in that department, and that your friends, the French, have, for some reason or other, found it necessary to throw you into jail. These circumstances do, I own, create a little doubt in my humble mind whether you are exactly the sort of person that one should chuse for a guide to Truth, to Virtue, and to Religion.

You are pleased, however, to speak of these things, especially the latter, in a very positive and familiar sort of a way, as if you was perfectly

fectly well acquainted with it, and had made it the study of your whole life.

You are, I observe, extremely tifty and out of humour with the Holy Scriptures, and call them by very hard names. But if I may judge from what you say, you certainly can't have looked much into them, because the account you give of them is exactly that which a man would give who had never once cast his eyes upon them. You say, that *more than half of them* is filled with voluptuous debaucheries and *cruel executions*. I should not have thought, master Pain, that you and your friends in France would have objected much to things of this sort. We do indeed now and then meet in the history-part of the Old Testament (as we do in the History of England, and all other histories that have chanced to fall in my way) with bad characters and bad actions. But these, I see, are confined to a very small compass, and are never mentioned (as far as I remember) with commendation, or proposed as examples, but are, in general, very severely condemned, and sometimes very severely punished.

Excepting a very few passages of this kind, every book, both of the Old Testament and the New (but especially the latter) is filled

with the best rules for living well, and with the strongest exhortations to justice, temperance, charity, sobriety, fidelity, sincerity, veracity, benevolence, humanity, compassion, forgiveness of injuries, humility, meekness, gentleness, forbearance, patience, and universal charity towards all mankind.—If the truth was known, master Pain, I believe your *real* quarrel with the Scriptures is for recommending these virtues, not for encouraging debauchery and cruelty.

But what is still more wonderful, you assure your readers, “ that almost the *only* parts of the Bible which convey to us *any idea* of God, are some chapters in Job, and the 19th Psalm; that there is not a *single passage* in *all* the writings ascribed to the Apostles, that convey *any idea what God is*; that the Christian Religion is little else than the *idolatry* of the antient heathens; and that the system of faith it contains is a *system of atheism*. Thou hast been long famous for *dashing*, Tom; but never in thy life didst thou dash so gloriously as this before. May I ask thee a civil question? Lay thy honest hand upon thy honest heart, and then tell me fairly, whether thou thyself dost in thy conscience believe one syllable of what thou hast

here

here affirmed concerning the Scriptures? I am sure thou canst not; and as I am equally sure that no one else will believe it merely because thou hast said it, I will not give one word of answer to it. I will only desire any man living who can read, to open his eyes, and open his Bible, and if in ten minutes he does not see all these assertions to be neither more nor less than a string of most impudent incomprehensible lies from beginning to end, I will burn my Bible at once, and take *The Age of Reason* for my gospel. After these samples of your regard to truth, the world will see what value is to be set on every thing else that you assert. I say *assert*, because I see nothing else in your book but *assertions*. I love an argument, I own, at my heart; and as I said before, there is not a man who fights a stouter battle at the club than I do; and I was in hopes to have had a good tightish bout with *you* in this way. But nothing in the shape of an argument can I find from one end of your pamphlet to the other. You assert, and assert again and again, and very roundly too, but you are very shy of *proving*. Now when we are to take a man's *bare word* for what he says, one must look a little to *character*; and when one looks to *your* character, and

especially to the proofs I have just produced of your veracity, the business is over Tom.

You divert yourself a good deal with the christian doctrines of the Fall of Man, of the Incarnation, the Redemption, Miracles, Prophecies, Mysteries, &c. Now, as I am no scholar, I fairly own that there are many things of this sort in the Bible which I do not understand; but it does not therefore follow, surely, that they are not true. I cannot comprehend how the seed I throw carelessly upon the ground, (for besides my shop I have a little bit of a farm) after lying seemingly dead for some time, strikes root, and shoots up to a great height, and produces me a fine piece of wheat. Nor do I know by what means, and by what contrivances, the victuals I eat are digested in my stomach and turn to nourishment; and yet notwithstanding this ignorance of mine, I have, thank God, very good crops, and a very excellent digestion.—Why then may there not be many things pertaining to Religion, incomprehensible to such a poor man as me, and yet perfectly true?

At the same time, as far as these difficult things *can* be explained, they *have* been explained to me, by our worthy vicar, Mr. Shepherd;

herd; and having made up my mind about them, I shall never puzzle my head any more about matters which are too high for *me*, and and for *you* too, master Pain, however highly you may think of your own capacity. Mr. Shepherd also assures me, that after all the rout you have made about these things, you have not advanced a single syllable that has not been said forty times before, and which has not been confuted over and over again a hundred years ago.

You know perfectly well, master Pain, that there are many things in this world which we poor people must, in a great measure, take upon trust; many concerns of the highest importance which we cannot manage ourselves, and in which we must almost entirely rely on the advice, the information, the wisdom, the honesty, and the assistance of others.—When we have a law-suit on our hands we can't carry it on ourselves, we must apply to a *lawyer*; when we are dangerously ill, we can't cure ourselves, we must go to a *physician*; what wonder is it, then, if, in forming our opinions on the subject of Religion, we must go to a *divine*? In many difficult points (and of those chiefly I am now speaking) I can no more be my own

divine, than I can be my own attorney or my own physician. But then take this along with you, master Pain, that if I *am* obliged to trust myself to others, I will know who it *is* that I trust. I will not take for my lawyer any miserable petty-fogging attorney that rides down from London on market-days, to frighten us poor tradesmen and farmers out of our money; nor when I am sick will I apply to the quack doctor, who is dealing out his drugs from his stage to the poor people in the village, and promising to cure them of all diseases in a moment. No, I will apply to the ablest lawyer and the most experienced physician I can find in the county; men whom I have known for many years, and whose character is perfectly well established in the neighbourhood. Now I hope you'll forgive me, Tom, (for I am apt to be a little jocular sometimes) but for my life I can't help considering you as a mountebank in religion, coming post-haste from France into this country with your pill and your drop (under the name of Reason and Philosophy) in your hand, with which you undertake to cure us simple folks of diseases which we never heard of before, called Bigotry and Superstition, and to do us more good than

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all the old fashioned prescriptions to be found in the Bible. Some poor ignoramuses you may possibly take in with your fine flourishing speeches; but as to myself, (and I think I can answer for most of my neighbours) I know your tricks too well, of old, to trust myself in your hands, or to run the risk of being poisoned by your drugs and your nostrums.

To speak plainly, if I *must* take my religion from others, it shall not be from *you*, but from those among whom I have been born and bred, whose life and conversation I have known from my childhood, and of whose integrity and good sense I have had repeated proofs. Now all the people of this sort in our village (such as the lord of the manor, the vicar, and all the head farmers) are, to a man, all steady believers in the Bible. Why then shou'd not I too? where can I find better examples and directors than these? not in the jails of Paris, Tom, depend upon it.

But after all, though I might safely follow such guides as these, yet there is no occasion for my following them blind-fold. There are certain proofs of the truth of our religion, of which even a plain unlearned man, like me, can be as good a judge as even the vicar himself.

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I see for instance, in reading the Bible, that (besides many other marks of divinity upon the very face of it, which though I cannot describe properly, I feel very strongly) there is a degree of evidence attending it which cannot be withstood.

As I frequently go to our 'Sizes at Taunton, and have sometimes been upon the petty jury there, I know a little about evidences and witnesses, and have been accustomed to weigh and compare them together, and to determine what degree of credit is due to each; I have observed, that whenever we could get any fact that was before the court, established by two or three *good* witnesses whom we all knew to be men of character in the neighbourhood (especially if uncontradicted by any reputable witnesses on the other side) we all soon made up our minds about the verdict, and the court was always satisfied with it.

Now, I have often thought with myself, that if the truth or falsehood of christianity was to be considered as a *fact* brought into a court of justice, in order to be tried, according to the common rules of evidence, we should then see more clearly and plainly than perhaps in any other way, (at least we common people should) what

what sort of *verdict* we ought to give upon it. Let us look then into the Gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles, and see what *witnesses* we have to produce in this great cause.

Now (besides a multitude of others, both friends and foes, who might safely be cited as good witnesses on this occasion) there are *twelve persons* called *apostles*, plain, honest, unprejudiced, uncorrupted men, tent-makers, fishermen, and such like, whom our Saviour selected as his constant companions, and confidential friends; who were almost always about his person, accompanied him in his travels, heard all his discourses, were witnesses to his miracles, and attended him through all the different scenes of his Life, Death, and Resurrection, till the time of his being taken up into heaven.— These men all unanimously depose, that Christ called himself the Son of God, and affirmed that he was sent from God to teach men true religion, to atone for their sins by his death, and to shew them the sure way of being virtuous here, and happy hereafter. They depose also, that they saw him work many astonishing miracles, such as making the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, the blind to see, and even the dead to rise from the grave. They depose further,

further, that they saw this person crucified and put to death, and that after his body had lain three days in the grave, he rose to life again and lived with them as before, for forty days, and was then taken up into heaven — They depose, that after his resurrection, they not only frequently saw him, but conversed with him, ate and drank with him, touched and handled him, and were perfectly convinced, by every possible kind of proof, that he was the very same person that was put to death by Pontius Pilate.

What now can be said against these *witnesses*, whose characters were irreproachable, and on whom their bitterest enemies never pretended to throw the slightest stain*?—You will say perhaps, these men were not upon oath, as our witnesses are in a court of justice. It is very true; but they gave a much stronger proof of their veracity and sincerity than all the oaths in the world.—*They staked their own lives* on the truth of what they said. For affirming these

* It is a very remarkable circumstance, and well worth an Englishman's attention, that the number of these witnesses (namely twelve) is exactly the same with that at our *juries*; to whom we trust the most important causes, even those of life and death.

facts they were persecuted, afflicted, tormented. They were exposed to every insult, and every act of cruelty, that human malice could invent, and at length put to the most horrible deaths. All which they might have avoided, if they would only have said that Christ was *not* the Son of God, and that he did *not* rise from the dead? Is not this giving a pretty good proof, Mr. Pain, that they were *sincere*, and believed what they affirmed to be true? Must they not have been absolutely mad, to have incurred voluntarily so much misery, and such certain destruction, for affirming things to be true, which they knew to be false, and more especially when their own religion taught them that they would be punished most severely in another world, as well as in this, for so wicked a fraud? Is it usual for men thus to sport with their own happiness, and their very lives, to bring upon themselves, with their eyes open, such dreadful evils, without any reason in the world, and without the least possible benefit, advantage, credit, or pleasure resulting from it? Where have you ever heard of any instance of this sort? Would any twelve men you ever knew in your life, take it into their heads to swear that they saw a man that was dead, rise

to life again, who never *did* rise to life again; and that they would all with one consent quietly suffer themselves to be hanged, rather than confess that they had told a lie?—The thing is absolutely impossible, and you must know it to be so.

If, then, this evidence was brought into a court of justice, to prove this fact, *that the Christian Religion is true, and came from God,* and no contrary evidence of the least moment was produced against it, I appeal to any farmer, tradesman, or manufacturer in this kingdom, that has ever served upon a jury at the 'Sizes, whether he could *in his conscience, and upon his oath,* give any other verdict than this, *that the Christian Religion is true, and came from God.*—Here, then, master Pain, I finish my pleadings, and close my evidence; and I challenge you, or any man living; to overthrow it if you can. *

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* There is another very short and convincing proof of the divine authority of our religion, which Mr. Pain must; if he is consistent, *necessarily* admit. He allows that Christ was a virtuous and amiable man*. If so, he could not be a cheat and impostor, that is, a very *wicked* man. But this
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* Age of Reason, p. 5.

All further *proof* then is needless. But even if I had no proof at all that the Christian Religion came from God, I should consider very seriously what I was about before I gave up this religion in order to take yours; I should consider (as we hard working people are a little apt to do) what I should *get* by the bargain.

At present, I feel myself as comfortable as a man can well be; I have my hands full of business, and a little morsel of land besides, well tilled. I have brought up a large family by the labour of my hands decently and reputably. They are all thriving and getting forwards in the world; my sons are settled in good farms, and my daughters are married to respectable tradesmen. All the other inhabitants of the village, are nearly as happy as myself. The farmers are most of them in a prosperous way. The labourers, in general, have constant employment and good wages. They have neat little tight cottages to live in, a garden, an

he *must* have been, unless he *really* was what he affirmed himself to be, *the Son of God*; and unless he *really* rose from the dead, and worked *real* miracles, both which he pretended to do.

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orchard, a pig, and sometimes a cow. In bad times, or in sickness, they are kindly treated and assisted by Sir John, the vicar, and all the farmers. Their clothes are whole and warm for working days, and they have a tidy suit to go to church in on sundays. There is a *friendly club* among them, and the two neighbouring villages, from which they receive seven shillings a week when they are ill, or old, or out of work, besides what the parish and their kind neighbours allow them.

And now what is all this comfort and happiness principally owing to? most evidently to two things; to the mild and free government under which we all live; and to the merciful temper and blessed influence of that heavenly religion, in which we have been all well instructed from our childhood; which has in most of us produced habits of industry, sobriety, temperance, frugality, seriousness, piety, and devotion; and these virtues, by their natural effects, as well as by drawing down the blessing of heaven upon us, have made our village a little paradise upon earth.

And for what are we to exchange this divine religion, and the happiness which flows from it
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in the present life, as well as the infinite rewards it promises to us in the next? we are to exchange it for *your* religion, master Pain, that it is for the religion of France; and if we take its religion, we must take its government too; for they are so closely linked together, that it is impossible to separate them from each other. Republicanism and infidelity (our vicar tells me) are sworn friends, both here and in France, and what they can do when they set their shoulders together to their work, we can form a shrewd guess, from what has been passing in France, for the last four or five years. From thence we learn, that whenever these things make their way into this Island, our trade and commerce will be ruined, our money turned into paper, our credit destroyed, our lands sold, our corn, hay, and cattle seized for the use of the army, our churches shut up, our clergy, nobility, and gentry banished, or murdered, and ourselves and our sons torn from our wives and families, and compelled to take arms, or to perish by the guillotine.

And now to sum up the whole (as the judge does at the 'Sizes) be so good, master Pain, to
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give yourself no further trouble, in order to make me an infidel; I feel no inclination in the world to become so. I have been brought up in a religion, which I find, by experience, makes me virtuous, contented, and happy; and which holds out to me the most joyful expectations in another world; why then should I part with it? This religion (I am credibly informed) has been received as a divine revelation in every age, for upwards of seventeen hundred years, and all those in my neighbourhood, of whose learning and judgment, veracity and honesty, I have the highest opinion, and whom I have known from boys, assure me, that after the most impartial and diligent enquiry into its truth, they are convinced it comes from God. *You* say the contrary. But as I have nothing but *your* word for this, and as those gentlemen bear a very good character, and you a very bad one, I shall believe them, and not you. On men such as these, I could safely rely, both for my religion, and for every thing else. But it is not necessary. There are some things, and those very material things, of which I can judge for myself. When I look into the Bible and see that twelve plain

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honest men of unblemished character, all concurred in bearing testimony to the truth and divine origin of our religion, and laid down their lives in confirmation of that testimony, even *my* poor understanding tells me, that this is such evidence as ought to satisfy any reasonable mind. On evidence far less than this, I have myself (as a juryman) frequently given verdicts, on which depended the lives and fortunes of my countrymen, and on *this*, therefore, I will rest my religion too. On this firm ground I will set my foot; and neither your hard words, nor your jests and your jibes, shall ever force me from it. I will live and die in the religion of my country, and of my forefathers, which, as far as I am able to judge, is much better than any you have to offer me. Your own religion (which I think you call deism) has been tried in France, and the effects it has produced there, do not greatly tempt one to receive it here. It may possibly suit *your* temper and disposition—but it does not perfectly square with mine. And you must excuse a plain man, if he does not chuse to try hazardous experiments; if he does not chuse to exchange the peace, the plenty, the cheerfulness,

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the security, and prosperity he now enjoys under the influence of a mild government, and a charitable religion, for the plunder, rapine, exile, murder, ruin, and desolation, which have been produced by *The Rights of Man*, and *The Age of Reason*, with the sight of which you are now feasting your eyes from your prison windows at Paris.

FINIS.

