

little-known documents

A Glossary for the Bible, Chiefly Designed for Children

ELIZA SHARPLES

INTRODUCTION BY
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Introduction

IN 1829, THE TWENTY-SIX-YEAR-OLD ELIZA SHARPLES PEERED THROUGH A KEYHOLE TO GLIMPSE THE INFAMOUS RABBLE-ROUSER DINING ON THE other side of the door (Sharples 546). Three years later, Sharples was a central figure in London's radical scene, one of the few women to edit a radical weekly—*The Isis*—and a performer billed as the first Englishwoman to speak publicly about politics and religion. Sharples's only book publication, *A Glossary for the Bible, Chiefly Designed for Children* (1832), is a contribution to what Sharples calls her "mental warfare" against the corrupting and obscuring influences of the clergy, her attempt "to wrest the Bible from the hands and false interpretation of the priesthood" and to add a woman's voice to the escalating freethinking, working-class, radical movements of the early nineteenth century (258).

The infamous man on the other side of that keyhole was the notorious publisher and radical lecturer Richard Carlile, who was passing through Lancashire as an "Infidel missionar[y]" (Sharples 546). Sharples was living in what she later referred to as Methodist darkness and ignorance, but after her conversion to radicalism she described herself as a "brand snatched from the fire" and "born again" into free thought (Sharples 7). By 1831 she was by her own account "proud to [be] called an Infidel" and had moved from Bolton to London to live in what she and Carlile referred to as a "moral marriage" despite the fact that he was still legally married to his first wife, Jane (qtd. in Bush and Carlile 114).

Since Carlile was regularly imprisoned for blasphemy and seditious libel for pirating prohibited books like the works of Thomas Paine, Sharples was thrust into both the bustling world of London radicalism and the morass of Carlile's financial and professional schemes. She had barely been in London for two weeks before she was managing the Rotunda on Blackfriars Road, a space that Carlile and Robert Taylor (the self-styled "Devil's Chaplain") had rented in May 1830 to serve as a "nucleus" for London radicals, and by the spring of 1832 she was also managing Carlile's publishing businesses (Parolin 222, 200). Carlile and Taylor lectured often in the Rotunda, but in early 1832 it lacked a headliner because both men were in prison. So Sharples herself

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began appearing as the “Goddess of Reason,” the embodiment of Isis, “waving the magic wand of intellect over the darkness of this land” (Sharples 71). This “Infidel Lady” and self-proclaimed “novelty among women” became a curiosity not unlike the waxworks and wild-beast shows that had formerly been exhibited at the Rotunda (2). She performed twenty-two “discourses,” free-form essays that she also published in *The Isis*, and in them she offers aggressive criticisms of Christianity informed by an amalgam of free thought, Zeteticism, pre-Christian paganism, witchcraft, and a dogged insistence on the centrality of women to radical politics. Her presence on the Rotunda stage not only provided a female voice for the radical movement but also encouraged other women to participate in the nineteenth-century public sphere (Parolin 247).

Unlike many freethinkers at the time who rejected Christianity outright, Sharples argues that while the Bible does offer spiritual truths, priests have turned it into such “a jumble of the most arrant nonsense and contradiction” that it requires allegorical illumination from a “Goddess of Reason” (Sharples 530, 71). In her thirteenth discourse Sharples suggests that she will someday compile a glossary of the Bible, which she did in 1832 (Sharples 194). In 1899 Theophila Carlile Campbell, the daughter of Carlile and Sharples, wrote a book called *The Battle of the Press*, which attempted to recuperate her late mother’s respectability by attributing all of Sharples’s writing to Carlile and Taylor. Despite Campbell’s attempt, few subsequent critics have accepted her depiction of Sharples as a mere mouthpiece for her husband and his partner. Anna Clark, Ruth Frow and Edmund Frow, Helen Rogers, Barbara Taylor, and Gail Turley Houston all agree that while Carlile certainly edited and sometimes contributed to Sharples’s lectures and published works, he was no Svengali, and the critical consensus is that the proto-feminist perspective and rhetoric found throughout the discourses and the *Glossary* are her own.¹

In the *Glossary*, Sharples furthers the agendas of her lectures and of *The Isis*: identifying Christianity as both the “fountain head of all political corruption” and the chief silencer of women’s voices (Sharples 513).² The *Glossary* offers scathing analyses

of Christian doctrine in the form of a child’s primer in which Sharples will “reveal the whole mystery, and show [her readers] the kingdom of heaven in all its glory” (258). Contemporary readers might have expected a woman writer, even a radical one, to limit her audience to the domestic sphere of mothers, nurses, and children, but Sharples’s claim that the *Glossary* is “chiefly designed for children” may be both a joke and a rhetorical gambit. The conceit recalls William Godwin’s publishing venture the Juvenile Library as well as Percy Shelley’s *Queen Mab*—a text that Carlile pirated in the 1820s—which was also a radical manifesto disguised as a child’s book.³ Carlile might have hoped that the *Glossary* would make it into the hands of actual young readers, but an adult glossary “designed for children” also fits Sharples’s claim in *The Isis* that all human beings are children relegated to ignorance by the overbearing hand of Christian darkness and the wily, paternalistic priesthood, which in her fourteenth discourse Sharples calls “a class of hateful character, without knowledge, love, or piety” (194).

The *Glossary* was apparently allotted a limited print run, and only two copies of this slim volume have survived. Though most of its entries also appear in the pages of *The Isis*, this work’s contemporary audience was modest (Sharples 337–40). However, as an artifact of radical English free thought in the early decades of the nineteenth century and a direct criticism of Christianity by a high-profile “Infidel Lady,” Sharples’s *Glossary* is a glimpse into a radical version of Christianity for the people, one in which “Eden” is defined as “what the whole earth might be, if it were not for kings, and priests, and lords.”

NOTES

1. Carlile later extended Sharples’s *Glossary* into *A Dictionary of Some of the Names in the Sacred Scriptures Translated into the English Language* (Manchester, 1839). The question of how much Carlile or Taylor contributed to Sharples’s work remains contentious; see Houston for a summary of the authorship question and Schwartz for a dissenting viewpoint.

2. Parolin notes that a Home Office informant identified Sharples's discourses as "a very strong and mixed abuse of all Religions and Governments," and the published versions of the discourses support this assessment (251). For example, in part 3 of "The Editress to Her Sister Maria" (dated 3 Nov. 1832 in *The Isis*), Sharples identifies Christianity as "the greatest political and moral curse that ever befel the human race . . . [which] has caused more political and moral crime, more impoverishment, and a greater debasement of human nature, than all other causes of moral evil brought together" (563).

3. Shelley famously quipped that the aristocrats will not read *Queen Mab*, "but their sons & daughters may" (qtd. in Reiman and Fraistat 494). Sharples was familiar with Shelley's version and compares herself to Queen Mab in her first discourse (Sharples 4). And a letter from "E. R." (probably Elijah Ridings) printed in *The Isis* claims that Shelley's poem "ought to be the poetical companion of the working classes" (qtd. in Sharples 484). For more on Godwin's publications for children, see Barnett and Gustafson.

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A Glossary for the Bible, Chiefly Designed for Children

"Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not"—JESUS.

Introduction

HAVING, LIKE THE WRITER OF THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT LUKE, gained an understanding or perfect knowledge of all things from the beginning, that are most surely believed among us, it seemed good to me, to set forth in a clearer light, the certainty of those things

wherein we have been instructed, so as to leave no difficulty in planting the truths of the Gospel upon the infant mind.

All sacred writings have been handed down to us in allegory, and, in the great lapse of time, the key, to a knowledge of the meaning of the allegory, which was the secret property of those initiated into the mysteries of the priesthood, has been lost, even among that priesthood, so that the doctrines of our present law-established church, or of any dissenting church, known to the statute law of this country, are not the doctrines which the first churches founded on the Gospel received from the apostles.

To remedy this defect and fruitful source of schism, among those who bear the common name of Christian, I have thought it well to lay bare, to all understandings, the foundation of the Christian religion, and to present it in a lovely and useful shape and character.

Before any one shall attempt to express a disapprobation of my interpretation of any word, I request, that a trial may be made, if that word will bear a better interpretation, or any other that is intelligible. My general principle is, to reduce the poetical personifications of the sacred Scriptures to their true prosaic principles, and to explain the mystery of the allegorical history. In so doing, I expose myself to all the severities of criticism; but criticism is the soul of knowledge, and however severe, however many errors or better interpretations may be shown, I shall revel in the mental warfare and make the gain mine, if the palm of superiority be snatched from me. This it is to fight the good fight, to buckle on the armour of God, having the loins girt about with truth, having on the breast-plate of righteousness, with our feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace, taking the shield of faith to quench the fiery darts of the wicked, to stand against the wiles of the devil, and to wrestle, not with flesh and blood, but against bad principles, and powers, and the rulers of darkness, and against spiritual wickedness in high places, like our glorious predecessor, the author of the Epistle to the Ephesians, seeking no other crown than the crown of glory, to supersede the helmet of salvation, and making the sword of the spirit clear the way for the scepter of human love. How beautiful is this mystery of the Gospel, when rightly understood; and that you, gentle reader, may understand it, as I understand it, I present you the key, which is the workmanship of my experience, with that good-will which is the first-fruit of the Gospel promise.

AARON, the first emblem of a mysterious priesthood: the mouth or voice of God, chosen to denounce kingcraft, and to rescue a people from bondage and tyranny.

ABADDON, *literally, a bad one*, the essence of kingcraft, the king of kings and priests, of all the scorpions and locusts of the earth, and of the bottom-less pit of royal and priestly iniquity.

ABEL, the first righteous martyr of the Sacred Scriptures, according to the Gospel mystery; the first Lamb of the Divine Flock, that bled under the vengeance of tyranny; the first shepherd in Israel; the first victim of tyranny and ignorance; the remote type of Jesus Christ; the first priest to make a sacrifice of animal life and *of the fat thereof* to please the Lord of the priesthood; the first bad example recorded; the first emblematical victim of bad passion, of wrath, and revenge. The character of Abel is mixed.

ABOMINATION, the principle of priestcraft; the viciousness of mystery; witchcraft.

ABRAHAM, the first host of divinity; the first cook; the first baker of cakes; the inventor of melted butter as a savoury sauce to roasted veal; the father of Israel, of the faithful priesthood; the author of tithes; the first contributor to priestcraft.

ADAM, the first scholar that took a lesson from Eve or Divine Wisdom; the first spiritualized or deified man; the first living temple; the first uninquisitive and passive recipient of knowledge; the first parent, under God, of the human mind; the divine father and fountain of human knowledge; the submissive partner, of woman; the first subject of petticoat government; the first dupe; the first ninny; the schoolmaster; the inventor of nouns as a part of speech; the first emblem of a married man; the origin of moral evil. Adam also presents a mixed character. God himself is author of both good and evil.

AGAG, a personal specimen of the danger of falling into the hands of the priesthood of a foreign nation. A priest hath no bowels of mercy, and spareth not; a king may be satiated with blood and sacrifice—a priest never.

ALMIGHTY, the powerful god, the superlative description of knowledge.

ALPHA, the first letter of the Greek Alphabet, *Beta* being the second, whence comes the word *Alphabet*, as a general name for the twenty-four letters; used with *Omega*, the last letter of the Alphabet, as one of the names of God, indicative of the definition that God means a personified perfection of human knowledge, most proper to be sought and adored by mankind.

AMEN, one of the titular names of god.

ANGEL, a messenger of truth; an argument; a reason.

ANTICHRIST, the church of Greece, of Rome, of England, and every church that worships the idolatrous personification of the Deity, whether in unity or in trinity, and neglects the great religious principles of human instruction and improvement.

APOLLYON, *see* ABADDON, the different name of another language for the same thing or quality, like the only difference that is found in all religion: the name of the god of one nation being the name of the devil of another; as we see in this instance, the Glorious Apollo of the Greeks, the name of the CONDEMNED ONE of the Hebrews, and the angel of the bottomless pit of evil!

APOSTLE, A missionary who has knowledge enough to teach something, wherever he may go.

ARMAGEDDON, the field in which the last battle for human liberty is to be fought, by the scholars, against kingcraft, priestcraft, lordcraft, and all other crafts, wiles, subtleties and assaults of the devil.

BAAL, one of the cast-off names of God.

BABEL, confusion; mystery; the towering arrogance of the priesthood; the confusion of language, by the use of mysterious words that have no relation to things, such as a *personified god, soul, spirit, nature, mind*; mysterious poetry.

BABYLON, the universal city of united king-craft and priestcraft; the mother of all the abominations of the earth; to be destroyed by the sons of God, the scholars of the earth.

BALAK, the first and only king who failed in the endeavor to bribe and corrupt a priest, or whose wealth was not so large as the extravagant and unreasonable conscience of the priest.

BALAAM, the first priest, who saw not the Lord in his way, when an ass could see it; who was subjected to a very great temptation, and a wavering conscience, between *the will* and *the fear* to take a royal bribe, to curse and to injure a people.

BAPTISM, (*of infants*), first initiation into the use of letters; a mystical dipping, or use of water, as now misunderstood.

BAPTISM, (*of adults*), the finish of scholastic education; the washing away of the sin of ignorance, in the waters of life, the stream of knowledge, the divine fountain; now sadly polluted and made unholy by the mysteries and abominations of the priesthood, communicating, to those who wash therein, all sorts of mental plagues and disorders.

BELZEBUB, the God or king of flies, locusts, scorpions; a general name for the concentrated essence of kingcraft and priestcraft, and all human evil; the prince of devils.

CAIN, the first murderer; the first tyrant; the first dog that killed a lamb; the first wolf that preyed upon the Lord's fold; the first builder of cities; the first king; the first devil.

CANAAN, any land of the king's enemies, or of the enemies of a priesthood, that floweth with milk and honey, to whet the royal and priestly appetite for war and human blood, for fire and devastation.

CHERUBIM, God, in the figure of a bull, as worshipped in Egypt; in the figure of a cow, as worshipped in India; the Taurus of the zodiac; the emblem of the month of April; Aaron's golden calf.

CHRIST, a learned man; one appointed to teach and save mankind from the sin of ignorance; the synonyme of Jesus; an emblem of the persecution, passion, crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection of the principle of reason among kings and priests.

CHURCH, a congregation of the people; originally a parish-school; but now the den of the priesthood, perverted to the most wicked of all purposes, *the stultification and plunder of mankind*. May it soon be restored to its original purpose.

DAVID, a man after God's own heart, a king of Israel; God himself; the father of Jesus; one of the names of God; one of the divine family; the first Polygamist.

DEATH, extinction or cessation of individual life, the natural means of making room for new individual life, change of state of being, and of sensation, dissolution of organization; state of ignorance.

DEMETRIUS, the principle of gain in trade, where the purpose is no obstacle, and where every obstacle to the purpose is sedition and blasphemy; one of Diana's silversmiths.

DEVIL, the spirit of evil, of darkness, of death, of torment; the adversary of man; the enemy of god or knowledge; the common scape-goat of mankind, bearing all the sins of the world; one created as an apology for human vice.

DISCIPLE, A student, one passing through the college of knowledge, a templar.

DIVINATION, a use of the unlawful names of God; or a use of the lawful names, without the license of the college.

EDEN, a garden, a paradise, what the whole earth might be, if it were not for kings, and priests, and lords.

ELECT (the), the literati of the earth; the truly learned; those who have the name of God written in their high intellectual foreheads; the sons of God.

EVE, the personification of wisdom, of liberty, of resistance to tyranny; the mother of human knowledge; the proper help meet for man.

FAITH, a confirmation in the correctness of a principle, and honest adherence to it.

GABRIEL, the strong man of God, a pair of wings of knowledge, the messenger from

Knowledge to the Virgin Wisdom, and proxy for the Divine Union.

GHOST, spirit, not a person, not visible, other than as a principle or quality.

GOD, the Idol of human nature's imaginary perfection.

GOD, (the Father) life; love; the principle of light and goodness; knowledge; the spirit of truth and intelligence; to be worshipped in spirit and in truth; but not in any idea of a person, which is idolatrous and damnable.

GOD, (the Son) O Logos! The word; reason; the first fruit of knowledge; the mediator between knowledge and ignorance; the saviour of mankind from sin, darkness, and the torment of all the crafts of the world, the flesh, and the devil; the winnower and burner up of chaff and error; the baptizer with fire; the finishing schoolmaster.

GOD (*the Holy Ghost*,) proceeding from the Father and the Son; the Holy Spirit; the Spirit of Education; knowledge communicated through the principle of reason, by teaching or discussion; the comforter; the Spirit of Truth received; the principle of human perfection; the spirit of liberty; the angel of knowledge.

GOSPEL, the secret of God; the allegory and personification of the birth, life, passion, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of the principle of knowledge among mankind; the spirit of the Bible.

HEBREW, the name or distinction of one of the degrees in the ancient Pagan mysteries.

HELL, darkness; ignorance; sin; neglect to cultivate the mind; torment; error; the place or seat of evil; bad passion.

HERESY, person-worship, as distinct from a veneration of the principles of truth and knowledge.

HEROD, monarchy; kingcraft; tyranny; ignorance, the personification of the power of hell.

HOLY, one of the names of God, such as Al, Allah, El, Eli, Elohim, Holloa.

HOLY GHOST. *See God, the Holy Ghost.*

HOLY KISS, A Divine kiss; the kiss of mutual knowledge; the embrace, salutation, or fraternization, of two accomplished scholars.

ISRAELITE, an ancient masonic degree in the secret mysteries.

JEHOVAH, a name of God, similar to Jove, and of various physical meaning.

JESUS, Saviour. *See God, the Son.*

JEW, a name of God, similar to Jehovah, Jove, and Yahouh; a name taken formerly by the adepts and finished students in the ancient Pagan mysteries, and not the name of a people of any particular nation, as now supposed and perverted.

JOHN, (the Baptist), the schoolmaster for children; the teacher of the alphabet and first lessons in reading; the waterer of the tender shoots of the plants of knowledge; the fore-runner to prepare the way for Jesus, as the finishing schoolmaster; the first baptizer of infants in the stream of learning, a teacher sent from God; a prophet; a voice in the desert or wilderness of mind to call the children of men to the kingdom of heaven; a messenger to mankind with a warning not to remain longer in ignorance; the first publisher of the Age of Reason; the first terror of kings and priests.

JOB, one of the names of God, as Jove and Jehovah; but more particularly known in the Gospel Allegory, as one of the heroes of virtue struggling with adversity, but strong in integrity and invincibly righteous; a sight and trial pleasing to God.

KING, a generally useless and mischievous public officer.

KINGDOM OF HEAVEN, a reasonable state of human society; the school of reason; the government of knowledge and honesty.

LAMB OF GOD, the scholars of the earth, always under persecution by kings and priests.

LAMECH, the first bigamist and self-condemned criminal.

LIFE, (*physical*), an electric concatenation of animal or vegetable fibre.

LIFE, (*moral*), to be born again; to gain knowledge; to live to useful purpose; addition of spirit, or soul, or mind, to physical life.

LIFE, (*eternal*), an eminent degree of useful knowledge; well applied to the general instruction of mankind; a promise given to those who press forward to the high mark of making their calling and election sure.

LORD, (The), one of the names of God, as also

LORD GOD, (The), is one of the distinctions of God.

MARK, of the Beast; a low unintellectual forehead, resembling in the human being the general foreheads of other animals; the absence of brain from the forehead.

MARK, of the followers of the Lamb, or sons of God; a high intellectual forehead; the brain in the right place.

MELCHISEDEC, the first union of royalty with the priesthood, and the institution of tithes as the consequence.

MICHAEL, a divine warrior, such as is now much wanted.

MOSES, the first array of priestcraft against royal power; the leader of a rebellious people; the saviour of a people; a lawgiver; the founder of a commonwealth in opposition to and in supercession of royalty.

MYSTERY, Babylon; an abuse of the human mind, and consequently of human society.

PHARAOH, a personification of royal obstinacy refusing to yield to circumstances.

PHARISEE, a superstitious sect, that vainly imagined the immortality of individual human life; a heresy now introduced into the church falsely called Christian.

PRAYER, a wrestling with the spirit; a mental exertion to acquire knowledge; an asking of knowledge from one competent to give it; study; contemplation; converse with the spirits.

PRIEST, the officiating minister in the mysteries of the temple.

PROPHET, a scholar, a reasoner, a learned man; a calculator of consequences; a reasoner from cause to effect; a philosopher; a politician; a seer; a poet.

PROPHETESS, a female prophet.

PSALM, an ejaculatory effusion, while contemplating the power and goodness of God. It is a great mistake to suppose that David was a Psalmist. David was the Deity addressed.

RESURRECTION, springing forth of knowledge after apparent death; growth of knowledge; return to the study of science; renewal.

REVELATION, secrecy secreted, confusion confused, or mystery mystified, as it now stands in the Sacred Scriptures; but really found in its original meaning, in this glossary or divine lexicon.

SADDUCEE, the more reasonable of the ancients, who credited human life only for value proved and received.

SAINTS, the learned men among the ancient Pagans.

SAMSON, the strength of God; the Hercules of Knowledge; the slayer of the lion.

SATAN, of various character in the various Gospel Allegories; in the garden scene of Eden, an intelligent serpent; in the book of Job, the most distinguished visitor in the Divine Levee; in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, an experimentalist upon the nature of divinity; in the latter books of the New Testament, an enemy of mankind. As the etymology of religious personifications brings the whole to one divine root, it was not an absence of wisdom in the woman, who held a light to a painting of Satan, under the influence of the uncertainty of the future.

SAUL, the condemned king of Israel.

SEER, a bishop; a prophet, &c.

SELAH, *stir the fire*, a holy ejaculation in the mysteries of fire or sun worship, corresponding with the *amen* in modern churches.

SERAPHIM, man burning with the fire of intellect.

SIN, ignorance; a condemned state of life.

SIN, (original), primitive state of human nature without knowledge.

SOLOMON, a royal personification of the wisdom of being wealthy.

SON, (*of man*), an unschooled or unintellectual man.

SON, (*of God*), a schooled and intellectual man.

SORCERY, the same as witchcraft and divination.

SOUL, life; spirit; knowledge; ghost.

SPIRIT, life; temper; qualification; state of knowledge; angel; messenger; ghost. See *ghost*.

SWORD (of the spirit), the power of knowledge; strength of argument; keenness of wit; force of reason; biting quality of satire and irony; pungency of ridicule and jest; the dart or shaft of malice, when the spirit is evil; a two edged sword.

TEMPLE, a place or house in which the ancients recorded time and worshipped God; a place of learning; emphatically, a church or place of popular gathering to behold divine emblems, now improperly used to receive the dead as well as the living.

VIRGIN MARY, the Lamb's mother and wife; the mother of the church; the personification of wisdom; the second birth of Eve; the mystical generation of human knowledge; in physics, the sea, and the Virgo of the Zodiac.

WITCH, WITCHCRAFT, a pretence to, or an allegation of, an incantation, not in accordance with that of the established and prevailing religion.

WORD (The), Logos; Reason; the essence of Deity; one of the names of God.

WORD OF GOD, good sense; reason; sound and critical knowledge.

N.B. For further instruction in this proper interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures, see the Isis, a weekly, philosophical publication.

EDITOR'S NOTE

This transcription was made from the copy in the Huntington Library; the library of the London School of Economics holds the only other known copy.