

THE

ICONOCLASTS.

BY

SALADIN.

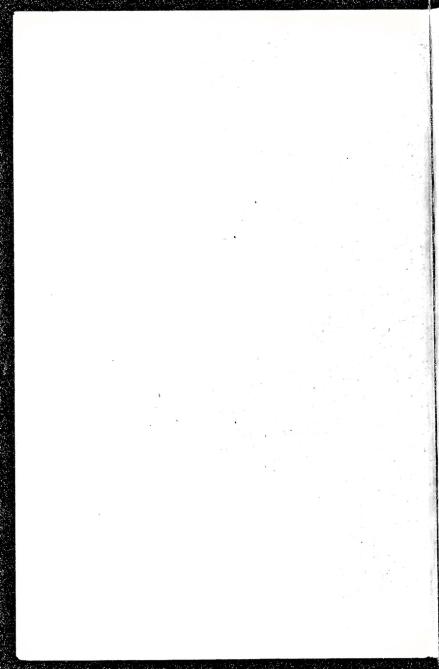
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THE ICONOCLASTS.

CHRISTIANITY was the tender foster-mother of Art. At her benign glance the canvas became vivid with the creations of genius; at her touch the marble breathed and burned into the symmetry of heroes and the lineaments of gods. Indeed! Let us examine the pretensions of this rolling magniloquence, and, if it be found to have no feet to stand on, kick it to Gehenna, its heroes

and gods notwithstanding.

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters under the earth,"* quoth Jehovah; and it is no use asserting that more recent Scriptures abrogated this, for Jehovah's son (of the same age with Jehovah himself) assured all concerned that he came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it. So much for Christianity with its genius glowing on the canvas, and its demi-gods limned in the marble. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image is pretty explicit as far as sculpture is concerned; and in his oracular, "nor any likeness of anything," Jehovah kicks the artist from his campstool, upsets the easel, and knocks Titian headforemost through his canvas. And yet there are Christian apologists who contend that, like the late Joseph Gillott, Jehovah and his son are distinguished patrons of Art.

Now, it only devolves upon me to show that Christians, with some exceptions, were loyal enough and consistent enough to attend rigorously to what Jehovah had said and what his son had not contradicted in regard to the "graven image" (sculpture), and the "likeness of anything" (painting). Our George Second admitted that he "hated boetry and bainting;" and Jehovah First, and

^{*} Exodus xx. 4.

let us hope *last*, endorsed the exalted standard of taste attained to by his royal contemporary in England. Christianity was only a bastard child of Judaism, and we learn from Josephus* that the Jews regarded images, whether painted or sculptured, with bitter aversion. The insignia of the *eagles* on the Roman standards were hated as much as the weapons in the hands of the Roman soldiery were feared. Naturally, as far as painting and sculpture were concerned, it took a few centuries for the dull Christian brat to learn anything essential that its Jewish mother had not taught it. The early fathers, such as Minacius Felix, Origen, and Lactantius, boast that the Christians had no "images," as Christian Bœotianism was pleased to call the creations of the sculptor and the painter.

But the progressive tendency inherent in human nature, in the long run, began to enter its protest against the ignorance, vulgarity, and bestial æsthetics of genuine and primitive Christianity, and painting and sculpture developed in their despite. A net, a fish creel, a kippered haddock, a few shavings, and a carpenter's adz might be the most elegantly artistic objects to the low-bred rabble who first pinned their faith to the Nazarene, and to his apostle, Paul of Tarsus; but gratification had to be found for higher æsthetical aspirations when Christianity became imperial and began to absorb proselytes, ennobled by the culture and taste of decaying heathendom. temples of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva became, under State auspices, Christian Churches, and the only half-Christianised Athenian or Roman refused to break the art treasures of the temples, out of deference to the porcine tastes of Christianity. This compromise between heathen culture and Christian bestiality went on till the eighth century, when it reached a climax. Then the clear issue arose, Was Art to be endured or suppressed? The Christians who were above their Christianity contended that it should be endured—nay, fostered; and those who were only on a level with their Christianity, a fanatical and ferocious mob, agitated that the pictures should be torn to pieces and the images broken with hammers.

^{*} Bell. Jud. i. 33, 2.

conformably with the teachings of Scripture. And thus sprang into being that brutal and shameful rabblement of insurgents known in history as the Iconoclasts.

The first serious Iconoclastic outbreak was in 726, when the master Iconoclast was the Emperor Leo the Isaurian. He passed an edict ordering the demolition of statues and the defacing by whitewash of the paintings upon the walls of churches. In the face of this edict of this Christian Emperor (and several succeeding emperors followed in his footsteps), which was popular with and zealously carried into execution by tens of thousands of his subjects, the ordinary Christian apologist is either dishonest enough or ignorant enough to contend that Christianity has been the inspiration and patron of Art!

Over the entrance to a church in a part of Constantinople, known as Chalcopatria, stood a statue of him of By the way, a statue or picture of this personage must, of necessity, bear a very striking likeness to him, seeing that the fact that such a preaching mechanic existed is so firmly established, and seeing that there was a photographer of such distinction in Martha Street. Bethany. Justin Martyr and Tertullian both admit their Lord to have been ugly, "without form or comeliness;" and his saint and servant, Cyril, is complimentary enough to describe him as of shabby appearance, "even beyond the ordinary race of men." But the ugly Saviour of the early fathers blossomed into a sort of Galilean dandy in a spurious epistle pretending to have been written by Lentulus to the Roman Senate. So it is to an epistle, by all scholars admitted to be spurious, that "the Lord" is indebted for his good looks; and it is to four other epistles, or gospels, which have also undoubtedly much of the spurious about them, that he is indebted for all that anybody knows about his existence.

Well, this statue of him of Nazareth (had it a basket of tools slung over its shoulder, a saw under its arm, and a foot-rule obtruding from its pocket?) stood over a church door in the part of Constantinople known as Chalcopatria. Leo sent a party of soldiers to destroy the statue. Behold the historic tableau! On came the soldiers through a crowd, principally made up of exasperated and hissing women. A ladder was placed with

its upper end touching the base of the statue; and, amid cheers, mingled with a storm of hisses and execrations, armed with a heavy axe, he mounts the ladder. The excitement is so intense that it fixes itself into wide-eyed and breathless silence. Would this soldier of the irreverent Leo really smite with his axe the miraculous image of the son of God? This statue had been specially useful to wives that had desired to be mothers, and to maidens who had dreaded lest they should become mothers. They had prayed to this image of a thing compounded of world-maker and carpenter, and it had assisted them in many of the delicate circumstances and junctures peculiar to their sex. Would the Roman soldier be permitted to strike the miraculous image? No, by the thunders of God he should not. They waited with stopped breath and straining eyes to behold him lift his axe and arm, and to see whether they should not be shattered and blasted by a bolt from heaven. Their suspense was soon over. The soldier reached the top of the ladder, swung his impious axe, and dealt a heavy blow upon the face of Almighty God. In the fearful hush of expectancy the sound of the blow reverberated through Chalcopatria, and the faint echoes died away upon the waters of the Golden Horn.

But the calm was only the hush before the crash of thunder. Ere another blow of the axe could be dealt upon the face of Jesus, the street was shaken with a tempest of yells, a hurricane of curses. Men and women rushed frantically to the ladder, tore it away from the wall against which it rested, and brought the impious soldier and his axe crashing to the ground. He rises, he staggers—it is only for a moment; an angry ocean of human beings dash against him and overwhelm him; he is trampled to death, and torn to pieces. His comrades draw their swords and fall upon the mob. A mere handful; they are lost in the armed and infuriated multitude. Women, fierce as tigers, protecting their hands with their shawls, grasp the swords of the soldiery, snap them into flinders, and fling the steel fragments in the faces of their foes. Sounds of the ferocious uproar reach Leo in his palace. He sends a relay of soldiers to quell the mob. At last it is quelled. The street is blocked with corpses and streaming with

blood, and Jesus, with smashed nose and broken jaw,

looks down upon the carnage.

Vigorously as the Iconoclasts had been led on by Leo against the Iconduli, as the defenders of the images were called, their depredations were pushed to even more lamentable excesses by his son and successor, Constantine Copronymus. Some of the finest treasures of Roman and Greek art* were, under the Iconoclastic axe and hammer, irrecoverably lost to the civilisation of the world. Any priest who dared to make use of an image in his sacerdotal function, or was known to conceal an image or picture to save it from destruction, was to be degraded from his office. An aged monk, named Andreas, was scourged to death for vindicating the position of the Iconduli against that of the Iconoclasts. Banishment, imprisonment, scourching, the cutting off of noses, ears, and hands, and the burning out of eyes, were the punishments resorted to against those who had a word to say for the preservation of the treasures of painting and sculpture. One bishop, sound in the Iconoclastic faith, trampled the paten, or golden plate, used for the consecrated bread, under foot, because there was carved upon it the head of Jesus Christ.

Constantine, to conciliate the Christian dregs of the Roman population for political and military ends, had made the erection of statues punishable by death. So much for the encouragement of sculpture by the first Christian Emperor; and, in this respect, the Christian Emperors, Constantius and Theodosius, followed in his footsteps. The great Christian Emperor, Charlemagne, in this pious detestation of images, followed in the wake of his imperial predecessors. The Roman pontiffs had got thinly painted with the brush of civilisation, and, at the second Council of Nicea, in spite of Jehovah and his aversion to "graven mages," it was enacted that statues be introduced into the churches. But Charlemagne represented the Christianity of the age rather than did the Pope, and against these statues, supported by the Biblical anathema against "graven images," and eagerly

^{*} Many of the Pagan temples had been converted into Christian Churches, and the marble statues of heathen gods came to be worshipped as Christian saints.

seconded by the Christian mob, he sat his face like flint. This omnipotent "Emperor of the West," whose sway extended over France, Spain, Italy, Germany, and Hungary, was too powerful a rival for the Papal power itself to successfully cope with, and so he tore up the painter's canvas and smashed the sculptor's marble without let or hindrance.

A striking representative of popular Christianity was this potent Emperor, who had been anointed with the holy oil. He, in common with every honest man, found in the Bible inexpugnable sanction for slavery, and did his best to make it a lucrative source of income to the State. Here, at least, Charlemagne was at one with the Papacy, for Pope Adrian, for gain, sold his Italian vassals to the Infidel Saracens. Like a good Biblical Christian, this most powerful of the Christian Emperors believed in polygamy, and, when not engaged in the affairs of the camp or the senate, had the opportunity to forget the ills of life amid the blandishments of his nine wives and numerous concubines. Nine wives he considered not sufficient for a good Christian, and he tried hard to make his nine into ten by the addition to his household of the fiendish Empress Irene, who had gouged out the eyes of her own son, and that in the chamber in which she had given him birth. So much for him whom the representative of Christ on earth had adored and anointed with holy oil. I have only to add that this champion of "the living God" was so illiterate that he could not sign his name, and the great majority of God's own monks and priests were in the same predicament. And why not? Ignorance and Illiteracy are the very bed-rock upon which are based Faith and Piety.

Although Charlemagne stood unflinchingly by Iconoclasm as the wisest course for his own personal interests, he was desirous, at the same time, not to come to overstrained relationships with the Pope. Consequently, although he humoured his myrmidons to the top of their bent by permitting them to rush over shattered sculptures to the waning beacon-fires of a former civilisation, he permitted them to attach all the consequence of superstitious awe to shrine-cures, talismans, and relics. The Pope, unwilling to come to a rupture with a potentate

against whom he was likely to find himself overmatched, shut his eyes to Charlemagne's iconoclastic devastations, while there was no hindrance to his driving a flourishing business in relics. As long as the populace could be exercised in wild hyperæsthesia, and behold statues with wounds that could bleed, eyes that could wink, and arms that could brandish swords, his Holiness of the Seven Hills had little reason to complain. The statues of saints, apostles, martyrs, Christ the carpenter, and Polly Davidson, his mamma, might be smashed at will, as long as his Holiness could plenish the pontifical coffers with the profits from the sale of bones and relics, never-ending junks of the true cross, hundreds of bottles of Polly Davidson's inexhaustible milk, hundreds of yards of napkins which had been used by her baby to the Holy Pigeon, and hundreds of legs of the ass upon which her thaumaturgical son Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem. The touching of saints' bones would cure all maladies, from whitlow to rumblegumption in the great toe, or the pains of ladies parturient with an anvil and a grindstone. If the saints, like roaches, had been nearly all bones, and every saint had been as big as a hippopotamus, they would not have had enough of bones to meet the demand of those who, at a moderate price, were willing to buy them. So his Holiness broke into the catacombs, and sent out bones in waggon loads to be sold over the length and breadth of Christendom; and money flowed copiously into the Papal exchequer. The fleshless bones of nobodies and somebodies—the strong femor of the Pagan gladiator and the carious pelvis of the syphilitic sybarite—were sold as the femoral and pelvic ossifications of the apostles of Jesus. because it suits the designs and projects of Charlemagne. let the treasures of painting and sculpture go to eternal smash, the accursed "graven image," and the "likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth"!

Catholicism chiselled out the statue with the one hand and broke it with the other. But Protestantism, ignoring tradition and basing her principles upon the infallible Scriptures, and upon them only, was confronted by Exodus xx. 4, whenever she might attempt to rise from the bathos of ascetic doctrine and iron dogma to the sublimer levels of the painter's rapture or the sculptor's ideal. As soon as she had the power, to the extent of that power she exerted it to eradicate Art from the earth. If, in this direction, she had never done a day's work but one, she would have laid claim to the grateful recognition of him who described himself, "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God," and who inspired some one to write Exodus xx. 4. That day's work was performed on the 14th of August, 1566, and it laid the interior of Antwerp Cathedral, the glory of Europe, in ruins.

Antwerp Cathedral! What poetry in stone the words conjure up unbidden, what lyrics in oak, what epics in marble! The heart of even me, the sometimes considered irreverent Freethinker, wanders reverently back through the mists of the years that are no more to the ancient city on the Scheldt and to its hoary Cathedral—

"Where, through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault, The pealing anthem swells the note of praise."

Who claims the triumphs of architecture for Christianity speaks blasphemy—blasphemy against the hills and the stars and the sea, and against the highest visions and loftiest aspirations in the heart and brain of man that ring responsive to the ocean's roar or exult in the hush and silence of the starlight upon the whispering trees. To these subjective and objective impulses, and not to the blood-dyed nails and the crown of thorns, are due the fluted column and the shafted oriel. Who has stood in the cathedral chancel and beheld the vesper sun light up with mellow radiance the scrolls and the blazonry and stream through the glass, burning with tints of gold and deepening into blood-red in the limning of saints and martyrs, and not feel the pulse and glow of a religion of which no Bible or Veda has touched the fringe? Who, as that holy sunlight, catching the stained-glass's tints of purple and amythest, flings them upon the tombs of the rulers and the heroes, fears that all the majesty of Life can be locked up in the sarcophagous of Death? Who, as his heel strikes the flagstone in the aisle and wakens the echoes among the dead below, does not hear in that echo a resurrection anthem and feel that man is too

grand for worms and too mighty for dust? Man cares little for the peddling edicts of mere Science, when, in Religion's chariot of fire, he careers into realms where Science dare not follow, and, in his emotional might,

leaps over the flaming wall of the Eternities.

Christianity originate architecture like that of York Minster or Westminster Abbey, never to speak of the fane of ancient Antwerp! Men shall, indeed, gather grapes off thorns and figs off thistles before Christianity will be aught else than she ever has been, a plagiarist and thief, a jackdaw strutting in the plumes of Pagandom, a Hebrew idiot jabbering the myths of India, vulgarising the hieroglyphs of Egypt, clowning the philosophy of Greece, and burlesquing the Pantheon of Rome. She originate the cathedrals in which she performs her mummeries of worship! They are often the holy ground of Art which she is not worthy to tread upon, even when, like Moses at Horeb, she has cast the shoes from off her feet. Her touch to such edifices is sacrilege. I love them and am religious in them when she is not there mumbling about her debased deity and her crazy carpenter, her tawdry heaven and her revolting hell. When she is there with her conjurer and her dupes, her book, her wine, and her bread, conjuring away like the witches round the hell-pot in "Macbeth," I feel pityingly disgusted, as I would be if I could see Caliban enshrined in the temple of Minerva. The tree of architecture had flourished centuries, if not chiliads, before the tree had been planted out of which was fashioned Christianity's manger-cradle: it was growing while the earliest sept of shepherds kept watch by night on the starlit plains of Shinar; it will continue to branch and blossom when the worship of Jesus has died away from the world as has that of Thoth.

But the Cathedral of Antwerp, the cynosure of cathedrals, what of it? "There was no Church in all Northern Europe.......which could equal the Nôtre Dame of the commercial capital of Brabant, whether in the imposing grandeur of its exterior or in the variety and richness of its internal decorations. The magnificence of its statuary, the beauty of its paintings, its mouldings in bronze and carvings in wood, and its vessels of silver and gold,

made it the pride of the citizens, and the delight and wonder of strangers from foreign lands. Its spire shot up to a height of 500 feet; its nave and aisles stretched out longitudinally the same length. Under its lofty roof, borne up by columns of gigantic stature, hung round with escutcheons and banners, slept mailed warriors in their tombs of marble, while the boom of organ, the chant of priest, and the whispered prayers of numberless worshippers kept eddying continually round their beds of still and deep and never-ending repose."*

It was in the middle of Autumn, on the fête-day of the Assumption of the Virgin, 1566, when the Protestant zealots, mad with "the fear of God," and horrible with hammers, burst into Antwerp Cathedral. statue of the Virgin was dashed to pieces. Ropes were thrown over the necks of statues that stood high up on the walls, and the yelling zealots of pious rabbledom tugged at the ropes and brought down with a crash upon the flagstones the marble effigies of gods and heroes each marble effigy worth a hundred of the carrion brutes that destroyed it. For, mark me, the child that proceeds from the head of the man of genius is of more value to elevate and redeem the world than is the rabble issue from the loins of John Smith during a thousand years. The tapers were lifted from the altar and carried round with axe, hammer, and crowbar to light up the gloom of that night of devilry. The pictures were torn down from the walls, the frames broken, and the canvas torn to shreds. The stained glass of the noble windows was dashed to splinters. The Protestant bigots filled the chalices with the sacramental wine, and roared their drunken ditties in discord with the clank of their A deafening hubbub of clash and crash, hammers. and clang and shout, pealed thunderously under the groined arches during the live-long night; and, before the morning threw its first ray upon the Scheldt, the madly-swung candles which had been taken from the altar revealed, in ghostly hideousness, such a scene of devastation as, peradventure, the world had never known before, and which, let us hope, it will never know again.

^{*} Wylie's "History of Protestantism," vol. iii., p. 53.

The candles, in the hands of the Iconoclasts, drunk with sacramental wine, through that mighty temple flung vivid and fitful glares of light, which rendered more awful the impenetrable gloom that lay beyond the line of their illumination. How fearful the ever-shifting area where the illumination fell! There, under the feet of the Protestant mob, lay the débris that proclaimed to the world of Art a loss irreparable. There, in mad commingling, lay battered martyr and shattered saint, oaken carving dashed to matchwood, and pictures torn to ribbons; patens, pyxes, plate, chalices, and mass vestments lay mixed with broken crucifixes and splintered glass; the Cathedral's seventy altars were levelled wit the floor, and the Protestants danced upon them the jig of destruction.

This at Antwerp. I could go on to recount the same deeds of Vandalism at Breda, Bergen-op-Zoom, Lier, Tournay, Hague, Delft, Brill, Leyden, Dort, Rotterdam, Haarlem, and scores of other towns; but *ex pede Herculem*, and the task is one which no poet or artist could execute without a feeling of anger and shame.

"Ah, but," say you, "Protestantism gave her learning to the people, and Rome kept it to herself." And what learning, pray thee, did Protestantism give to the people? The only learning she gave, and which Catholicism refused, was that which can be culled from "an open Bible." And this is, of course, learning to be proud of-inexpugnable cosmogony, incontrovertible astronomy, and geology that cannot be questioned; and abundant sanctions for stealing, lying, murdering, slavery, polygamy, harlotry, and, perhaps, every crime of which human turpitude has ever been capable. This is the learning (save the mark) which Protestantism gave and which Catholicism wisely withheld. An "open Bible" is an open Pandora's box. Learning proper neither Church has ever encouraged; and, at this hour, Catholicism is not more hostile than Protestantism to the fearless researches of science and the unbiassed generalisations of philosophy. Catholicism and Protestantism-which of the two weird sisters is at present most amiably disposed to Charles Darwin's Evolution or to Herbert Spencer's Agnosticism?

This "open Bible" would, ere now, have done irreparable mischief but that it might almost as well have never been "open;" hardly anybody reads it. The ordinary Protestant knows as much about its contents as does the ordinary Catholic. Not one Protestant in a thousand knows anything about it beyond a few hackneyed texts. Miss Nancy Smith walks mincingly home from chapel with it in her muff, in sublime ignorance of what it contains. If you were to introduce yourself to her, and narrate to her certain stories to be found in the "sacred volume," she would blush and scream and call you a vile, bad man, and a liar; and, if her papa, Mr. John Smith, were to come up, he would swear that no such filth was to be found in "God's Holy Word;" that you were a scoundrel attempting to corrupt a young girl's morals, and try to drag you into the police court. So much for the Protestant knowledge of the "open Bible." The Bible is nice to go to church with, and, if big enough and gilt enough, it is pretty to lie on the window-sill; but nobody really reads it. I am glad Miss Nancy Smith does not, as I prefer her ignorant innocence to her guilty knowledge. The people who have really read the Bible are to be found in the ranks of the Infidel, and there the careful reading of the Bible sent them. It is a tedious and nasty pathway to the repudiation of the Christian myth; but a careful reading of the Bible is that pathway. I should say that, during the last seven years, the Bible has made a thousand Infidels where the Secular Review has made one. So much for Protestantism's learning for the people in the shape of "an open Bible."

I have said that literature and learning suffered under the illiterate malice of Protestantism. The verification of the statement must be present to the mind of every student of history. Up to the period of the so-called Reformation, about which Mr. John Smith and his Nonconformist Beetle speak so endearingly, the whole of the literature and learning of Europe was concentrated in the monasteries. The 5,000 MSS. to form the nucleus of the Vatican Library were collected as early as the time of Pope Nicolas V.; and, soon after, all over Christendom, every monastery had its library and its scrip-

torium where the patient and laborious monks, with richly-coloured inks, illuminated and copied on vellum the works that had come down through the storm and gloom of the bygone centuries of the world. literary treasures of the ages were sold for waste-paper, because the charms of Anne Boleyn (said, by the way, to be his own illegitimate daughter) made Henry VIII. a Protestant. As a Protestant he suppressed the monasteries and abbeys, edifices of whose grandeur we can form some estimate from their magnificence, even in The splendour of these institutions may be inferred from an account of one of the abbeys, Glastonbury, left us by the commissioners who visited it in 1538. was, we are told, "a house meet for the king's majesty. and no man else, great, goodly, and so princely as we have not seen the like. There are four parks adjoining, the furtherest of them but four miles from the house; a great mere, five miles round, and a mile and a half from the house, well stocked with great pikes, bream, perch, and roach; four manor-houses belonging to the abbot, the furthermost only three miles distant." This magnificent "House of God," along with hundreds of others, was dismantled and gutted, its noble architecture pleading in vain against the hand of Protestant Vandalism, its precious vessels and art treasures in vain opposing their sanctity to the greedy yearnings of Protestant avarice. What Protestant Christianity had done for Art at Antwerp and Dort she now enacted at Glastonbury and Colchester, and in hundreds of other abbeys and monasteries, whose broken arches and ivy-mantled towers cast a melancholy glory over many an expanse of English and Scottish landscape.

And carefully mark Protestantism's reverence for books and learning. She sold the libraries, just as she sold the lead on the roofs, for whatever sum they would bring. And, since all the learned institutions were being suppressed and an educated priesthood being disinherited, the libraries sold for next to nothing. The Protestants were too full of heavenly wisdom to care anything for secular MSS. and learning, the former of which, in its ignorant disdain, it regarded as "monkish trash." The library of Glastonbury was disposed of as waste yellum. Some of

the libraries, says Bale,* they sold "to grocers and soapsellers, and some they sent over the sea to the bookbinders, not in small number, but, at times, whole ships' full. Yea, the universities of this realm [when they became Protestant] are not at all clear of this detestable fact. I know a merchantman that bought the contents of two noble libraries for forty shillings. This stuff he has used instead of grey paper for more than ten years,

and he has enough for ten years to come."

I have now submitted a few out of many historic facts for the honest consideration of those who, either in dishonesty or in ignorance, venture to maintain that Christianity has been the friend of Art and Learning, instead of recognising that they breathe an air in which she cannot live. Now we have some Art and Learning; but, in consequence, we have a tame parody of Christianity, a poor Protean parasite that will abrogate any previous dogma, and wriggle itself into any shape, to escape eviction and enable it to hold on with its bicuspids to the obolus of Mammon.

* Declaration upon Leland's Journal, 1549.

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