

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

THE

FABLES OF FAITH:

Their Immorality and Absurdity.

BY

AN EASTERN TRAVELLER.

“Il est affreux sans doute que l’Eglise chrétienne ait toujours été déchirée par *ses querelles* et que le *sang ait coulé* pendant tant de siècles par des mains qui portaient le *Dieu de la paix*.”—“Le Siècle de Louis XIV.,” par Voltaire.

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TO
HIS EMINENCE
CARDINAL MANNING.
ARCHBISHOP OF WESTMINSTER,
THIS ESSAY IS DEDICATED,
AS A TOKEN OF RESPECT
FOR
HIS CHARACTER AND LIFE,
SO HIGH ABOVE THE LEVEL OF HIS
ADOPTED FAITH.

PREFACE.

THE writer of this little essay was born and educated in the Church of England. The prejudices of his education were strong enough (as is usually the case) to bind him to the belief in *a* church, and, on arriving at years of discretion, his reason convinced him that if there *be* a church it must be an infallible one, and thus he "submitted" to the Church of Rome as the only church claiming infallibility. A study "on the spot" of Mahometanism and other Eastern faiths led him to a comparison of *all* faiths, and ultimately to the reluctant conclusion that they are all founded on assumptions more or less inconsistent with truth, and that their doctrines and practices are prejudicial to morals and human happiness. His reasons for coming to this conclusion are sketched in the following pages—pages which must inevitably be painful to the "faithful," and not only to them, but also to him who has felt forced to retire from their ranks, and thus abandon many cherished theories, many beloved friends. The sacrifice he has thus made is a great one, but truth is a sufficient consolation.

THE FABLES OF FAITH.

CHAPTER I.

Faith: its Definition, its Origin, its Evidences and their Value.

(1) It is not to the faithful only, but also to the sceptical, that *faith* is a matter of profound interest, for it is closely woven into the history of every country, in every age, and remains an important factor in many vital questions of the present and of the future. Who, for example, would venture to govern India without taking into account her religions and sects? We may disbelieve and despise these religions, but the "lively faith" reposed in them by 250 millions of our fellow subjects is a *fact* which, however much we may deplore it, we cannot ignore.

(2) What is, then, this "faith," so dear to its votaries, so praised by poets and painters, so pregnant with influence on the destinies of nations and of individuals? St. Paul defines it as the "substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." But this definition, however satisfactory to a Christian believer, falls short of presenting any accurate idea to a mind of another "persuasion," or to that of a mere philosopher. If faith be the "substance of things hoped for" it must be *undiluted happiness*; and yet those who possess it do not appear any happier than those who possess it not. And if it be the "evidence of things not seen," how is it that, as regards such things, the faithful know just as much and just as little as the unbelievers? The revolution of the earth round the sun is, in a sense, a thing not seen; yet the faithful Joshua was ignorant of the fact, and when it was discovered, the Prince of the faithful hurled his anathemas against the unhappy astronomer who had dared to find better evidence of "things not seen" than the combined faith of the college of cardinals was able to accumulate.

(3) Faith would be better defined as the *belief in things unproved by evidence*; and if faith be in itself evidence, as St. Paul advances, it is merely evidence of credulity in its votary. In the ordinary affairs of life we believe little that we hear, and not all we see, and the laws of every country discourage the admission of *hearsay* evidence. But in the concerns of our salvation we are less exacting: an envoy from heaven is never asked for his credentials, and we believe greedily and gratuitously all he alleges with regard to his instructions from his august master. If a tradesman's assistant call to collect his master's account, we take care to have evidence of his authority; but if an ignorant shoemaker or a reformed thief ties a bit of white cambric round his neck and announces his arrival on a mission from the king of kings, we rush in our thousands to hear the glad tidings, without even thinking of demanding a sight of his "full powers."

(4) Man has an innate love of the marvellous, and from his cradle yearns for something higher than his own standard. His imagination is equally great and permeates his thoughts and even his language, which is more or less impregnated with hopes and figures in proportion to the accuracy, or rather the inaccuracy, of his mode of thought. And so possessing both the will and the way, he easily conjures up for himself "troops of spirits," "black spirits and white, red spirits and grey," witches, fairies, hobgoblins, demons, gods, and hosts of other "things not seen." And with the lapse of time these "vain imaginings" *crystalise into faith*—faith by which the cunning often live, and for which the credulous often die. The awe of ignorance, and the zeal of fanaticism have covered the earth's crust with altars of all shapes and sizes, to the "great unknown;" and no mystery, however improbable, or even impossible, can exceed the bounds of the faith of the faithful. Indeed, the very merit of faith is credulity; and so we are told that St. Thomas was rebuked for requiring evidence of what he had heard, haphazard as it were, and which appeared to him too improbable to deserve credence.

(5) But the difficulty of believing things without evidence presented itself very early to those who undertook to systematise faith; but they scrambled over it, *sans cérémonie*, by declaring faith to be a *gift*. But if it be a gift, who has

selected the *donees*, and how has it come to pass that each of them has a gift of a different sort? For every religion differs from every other religion, and there are no two members of the same religion whose gifts of faith are exactly alike. Indeed one may go farther and say, that if all the dogmas of all the religions were tabulated, and so arranged as to give a bird's-eye view of their various similarities and differences, we should see at a glance that one half of the faithful anathematizes what the other half looks on as essential portions of the "deposit of faith." And as all these faiths are different they cannot all be true, and so in spite of the old proverb about looking a gift horse in the mouth, the recipients, as well as the non-recipients, of the gift of faith, are at last reduced to the necessity of going more or less into the question of evidence. The faithful enter on the inquiry with excusable reluctance, for they have the case of St. Thomas before their eyes; and in the end they argue the case in a circle and produce as evidence a book¹ bound and lettered, which they claim should be received *without evidence* as the Word of God; or they call into court a witness who proposes to be *Vicarius Dei Generalis in terris*,¹ though he possesses no power of attorney duly "signed, sealed, and delivered" by his supposed august principal. If one accept the book or the "Vicar" as being what they profess to be, we must believe a host of improbabilities, and not a few contradictions and impossibilities—all, it must be admitted, for we wish to be candid, attested by the blood of martyrs, the best possible evidence of *sincerity*, and which would settle the question at once and for ever if it were only one of sincerity. But it is not: it is a question of truth, and on such a question sincerity, if mistaken, has no bearing. If a honest but stupid ignoramus tells me in all sincerity that three times one make one or five, his mere sincerity does not convince me; I prefer demonstration to his stupid but sincere miscalculation. And if he assure me that three Almighty persons make one Almighty God, I

¹ As we are writing in the English language we have here, for the sake of brevity, selected the two "rules of faith" best known to the English-speaking faithful, and which are in fact more than "equal to average" when compared with the rest. Faith has, therefore, the advantage of being judged "in bulk" by flattering "samples."

stop his arithmetic at once by pointing out the impossibility of more than one Almighty person existing at the same time. His sincere belief in this impossibility does not prove it to my mind, even if he die for it.

(6) The value of evidence does not, therefore, depend entirely on the witness's sincerity, but also on *his means of knowledge*, and on his capacity for availing himself of these means. A hundred persons may see a man die, but if the question be one of poisoning it might well be that not one of them would be competent to give material evidence; one would require a *post-mortem* examination by surgeons and physicians, assisted by analysts learned in poisons—in fact, the evidence of persons with good means of knowledge, and competent to avail themselves of those means. And yet, after all this would only be a question of the shortening by a few years of the life of one single individual. How much more careful ought we not to be in receiving evidence on which depends (according to theologians) the length of life of millions upon millions of human beings, and that not for a question of a few short years, but of the countless ages of eternity, when clocks and watches and calendars shall have perished in an universal fire and “time shall be no more.”

CHAPTER II.

The Miracles and Prophecies of the gods of faith.

(7) "THE fool hath said in his heart, there is no God;" but then he was but a fool, though not, it would seem, the greatest of fools, for he does not appear to have been guilty of the supreme folly of attempting to prove openly the negative proposition which formed the subject of his secret sayings, "in his heart." We are not such fools as to say, even in our own heart, there is no God. We cannot help admitting, indeed, we gladly avow that the universality of nature's laws, and the *absolute impossibility* of disobeying them, are quite consistent with the existence of a Supreme Being of absolute power to do all that is possible, and of unchanging will. We say advisedly, all that is *possible*, for there are things absolutely impossible, such as making twice two into five, or making that *not* to have existed which, in point of fact, *has* existed. If God were to persuade all his creatures of any such nonsensical impossibility, he might be said to have wrought a "miracle;" but it would be a mere triumph of falsehood over truth, and the *fact* would remain the same.

(8) But the gods created by "faith" are neither Almighty nor of immutable will; they are supposed to have made a huge universe for the benefit of a few predatory tribes, whose common ancestor, although a miserable savage, was powerful enough to frustrate the will of his maker and make that maker repent of having carried out his original design! It is not against the Supreme Being that we write (God forbid!), but against *tribal gods*, the creation of their own votaries, the offspring of man's imagination and woman's credulity, "crossed" with ignorance and superstition.

(9) The faithful may demand: "If we are wrong, how is it that the great bulk of the human race are with us?"

Because man is a gregarious and imitative animal—independent minds with original thoughts are rarities, the great mass of mankind are followers, they are like sheep at a gap, or the “field” at a fox-hunt, they must be “shown the way”—and the leaders? Are as a rule themselves mere followers though of a higher class; their imitation is not so immediate, they follow, at a more respectful distance, some model, forgotten of the multitude, making the path a little broader here, a little narrower there, but still following it. The fashion of faith changes like the fashion in costume, and the leaders of both fashions are equally arbitrary; to be out of fashion is to be out of favor, and so the faithful and the fashionable are always numerous, though always divided into contradictory sections and sub-sections. All they have in common is the *belief* in things unproved by evidence; that is their fundamental principle, the foundation on which each separate section of the faithful builds its house, in its own style, and repairs in the same style, or in another, in accordance with the prevailing fashion. If all these houses formed a beautiful and united city it would be strong and possibly impregnable. But the city of faith is always divided against itself, always in a state of civil war, and its gutters often flow with the blood of its citizens. Faith has, it is true, a great following, but no one of her followers can say he has the rest with him; he should rather say against him. Ishmael is the patron saint of every faith, if not of every “faithful.”

(10) “But we have our prophets and our miracles, which, attest the truth of our faith.” Every faith has its prophets, “true” and “false,” and its miracles and counter-miracles; but is salvation a mere prize for the guessers of conundrums and the connoisseurs in jugglery? The Egyptian wizards were, perhaps, cleverer than Messrs. Maskelyne and Cooke; they turned sticks into snakes, but Aaron, the idolator, was, according to his brother Moses, a better juggler still; he turned his stick into a snake that eat up the Egyptian snakes. But does this prove that Aaron’s god was a better god than those of the Egyptians? and if so, in what proportion, calculated in decimals? (for we should be accurate in theological matters, and decimals sound more respectful to the gods than mere vulgar fractions.) Let us state the case thus: God A can turn sticks into snakes, God B can

turn sticks into snakes that will eat up other sticks turned into snakes—assuming the value of God A to be unity, or 1, what is the value of God B? On the answer to this absurd sum depends the future of millions! not of sticks or of snakes, as one might think, but of intelligent human beings!

(11) Raising the dead is a favorite miracle with some faiths, but it is an unsavory one, and no one seems to have gone close enough to it to have the testimony of his senses on its genuineness. When the experiment is tried under the noses of experts it invariably fails; there is not one solitary instance of success. And it is an unnecessary miracle which would be much better replaced by the miracle of keeping a good and true witness of the faith *alive for ever*. A respectable venerable-looking old man of two or three thousand years of age, living a regular life without eating or drinking, and enjoying good health and the "possession of all his faculties," and the memory of all the remarkable events of his lifetime, would be a standing witness of the faith, and, at the same time, a useful historian. No one would doubt *his* word, and the faith would be "kept," not only by enthusiasts but by philosophers and men of business; and thus a multitude of silly miracles, such as the liquefaction of some old bloodstains, the periodical appearance of saints to patients suffering from those effects of indigestion which are known as nightmare, would be as unnecessary as they are to most minds ridiculous.

(12) But to come to the prophets: they are divided into two classes, "true" and "false;" but both classes are so much alike that each has nearly the same chance of deceiving the very "elect"—*i.e.*, the persons who have been privately supplied with the only "correct card of the race" for heaven, including the winners' names, or at all events their own. A prophecy, according to the faithful, is not the accurate and definite anticipation of a future event incapable of calculation; on the contrary, it is the use of indefinite language capable of various interpretations, and is generally of the nature of a conundrum or riddle. All definite, or comparatively definite, promises have failed. The greatest of all prophets is reported to have said that the generation in which he lived should not pass away till *all* should be accomplished. Yet his generation has passed away many centuries

ago, and no part of his prophesy has been accomplished, and his followers have nothing left but a miserable play on the word "generation."

(13) But the most celebrated of all prophecies, the one on which millions of the most educated of the faithful rely for the origin of a third of their deity was not so definite, and was therefore not open to immediate refutation. 'Behold,' said the prophet, "a virgin shall conceive." No particular virgin is indicated and no particular time is fixed for her conception, so that no precautions are possible for providing evidence of the conception not being the result of human agency. We wish to speak with all respect for the faith of our fellow-men, but it is necessary to examine this matter somewhat closely, and if it be indelicate, the prophet is to blame and not we. If a married woman conceive a child the world and the law assume, as a matter of *prima facie* evidence, that her husband is the father of it: and that evidence is not likely to be rebutted. But when an *unmarried* woman conceives a child, who does not recognise the difficulty of proving its paternity? Yet every modest matron and every innocent virgin of the Christian faith is bound to examine or rather to believe this matter of a virgin having conceived! Can it be possible that the true God, who alone can be called the god of purity, ever intended to exact from his creatures—men, matrons, or maids—a belief on a question of paternity under penalty of death? And without any evidence? For under what circumstances did the virgin in question—(*i.e.*, begging the question for the sake of argument)—under what circumstance did she conceive? She was living in daily intercourse with her intended husband, in an age when the forms of marriage were not respected so much as they are now; both were young, both were poor, and both probably had the average of human instincts and passions—there is absolutely no evidence that they did not anticipate the formal ceremony of their marriage. Yet in her case we are called upon to assume that she was the virgin alluded to by the prophet, and that his most indefinite prophecy was fulfilled in her person! The prophesy and its fulfilment are equally unsatisfactory, and neither can be accepted by any but the faithful—*i.e.*, by those who can believe without evidence. And even *they* would find a diffi-

culty if, as magistrates, or judges or jurymen, they had to deal with a similar case of our own times, even if it only involved the legitimacy of an insignificant "bit of humanity," the inheritance to a few "dirty" acres, or a miserable pittance of a few shillings per week. Yet in the affairs of "salvation" they greedily swallow an "opening statement" unsupported by a tittle of satisfactory evidence and improbable in the highest degree. Why? It is the foundation of their faith, the rock on which they have built their house, and they do not dare to blast it "in the mere interest of scientific investigation." In time, when the flood of knowledge shall have undermined their little bit of sandstone, or when it shall itself have crumbled gradually away, the house will fall, and the dwellers therein will then be able to see the scientific difference between the sandstone of Faith and the eternal rock of Truth. Meanwhile, they will live in their house and occupy their time in mending their own windows and breaking those of their neighbors.

(14) If a prophet wish to prophesy a birth and be believed, let him select the mother by name, and let him indicate the day and hour of the birth, the sex of the child, the color of its hair and eyes, and any other "distinguishing marks;" it is idle to say *a virgin* shall conceive without naming the person, place, or time, and it does not help the matter to say that the child shall bear a certain name, because names are generally given by parents, and parents naturally select a good one, especially if anything is to be got by it. Or if the prophet know that the "sun is going to stand still" let him name the day and hour, so as to give us an opportunity of consulting our clocks and almanacks, and of thus testing his prophecy. It is playing with us to give the prophecy and its fulfilment as pages from his own history, when he was engaged in carrying fire and sword into the country of his "unbelieving" neighbors. And the matter is not mended when we consider that the movement (if any) of the sun had *absolutely nothing* to do with the matter, and that it was the earth, and not the sun, that he wanted to "stand still," to give him time to slaughter his fellow-men and their women and children. The unblushing ignorance of this prophet and the revolting circumstances of his alleged prophecy (or "com-

mand" as he calls it) are sufficient to stamp him as an imposter; but his prophesy is so old that it has "crystalised" on the deposit of faith and the faithful believe it implicitly. Would the faithful believe a modern "prophet" who should incidentally mention that the world is flat, and that we have only to walk to the end of it and look over the wall to see the sole inhabitant of the moon chopping up the old moons into stars? Yet that would scarcely be more absurd than Joshua's ignorance of the motion of the earth round the sun, for he professed to be on intimate terms with the Supreme, and to be authorised to speak in His name. It is childish to say that when Joshua said the *sun* he meant the *earth*, and that he only used the language of ignorance to ignorant people that they might the better understand him. If he had had miraculous powers he could have used the language of truth and have given his hearers the capacity of understanding it. Or are miracles inconsistent with truth? Let the faithful ponder a little over that question.

(15) But, say the faithful: "We do do not pin our faith on Joshua; we have the whole of the Old Testament, we have the New, we have the Koran, and many other good books, and all containing intrinsic evidence of divine inspiration, and all attested by the blood of martyrs." The blood of martyrs is, as we have seen, a mere evidence of perfect sincerity. There is, or was, a patient in a lunatic asylum in Staffordshire whose only trouble was that they would not recognise him as Jesus Christ come a second time. He was *not* Jesus Christ, but he merely believed he was, and was willing to be crucified "again," as he put it, to prove the authenticity of his mission. If he had lived when the inquisition flourished, his blood would have possibly testified to his belief in his identity with the founder of the greatest religion on earth; but it would not have *proved* that identity. Let us therefore leave for the moment the poor martyrs on their crosses, their gridirons, their slow fires, and cast a glance at the intrinsic evidence of the divine inspiration of what are called the "sacred scriptures."

CHAPTER III.

Science—The Inspiration of the Scriptures and their Internal Evidences.

(16) No one who is sincerely convinced of the inspiration of the scriptures can possibly doubt anything they contain, and where they clash with the so-called discoveries of modern science, he is bound to accept the higher evidence of God in preference to the lower evidence of science, however perfect it may seem to be—he must believe with Joshua that the sun goes round the earth, and reject as an optical illusion the “appearances” which have led men of science into the “erroneous” belief that the earth goes round the sun. It is uncandid and illogical to “cut and snip” at inspiration and science in order to make them dove-tail into each other. Let us therefore be candid and just, though the heavens fall, or our cherished notions on astronomy, geology and the other sciences have to be rejected as pretty but fatal fancies into which our weak judgments have seduced us. What, then, are the scriptures? Let us first consider the collection of books known as the Old Testament. They are said to express the will of the creator to his creatures. But we find a difficulty at the outset; they are not signed either in person or by proxy, or duly attested. When a human legislator makes laws he signs them, and publishes them over the whole area of territory to which they are to apply, and it very seldom happens that a question arises as to the making of these laws or their publication. The scriptures of the Old Testament, on the other hand, are unsigned, and were never published to the world until most of them had lost all interest except that of history. This difficulty is, however, surmounted by the assumption that the scriptures in question contain intrinsic evidence of divine inspiration. Let us, then, “search the scriptures” for this evidence, and let

us not forget what we are looking for—viz., an expression of the will of the Supreme to his creatures. What ought we to expect to find? Omnipotence, Justice, Purity, Knowledge. What *do* we find? God ingloriously defeated in his grand design by an anti-god! God inciting to murder and pillage! God relating indecent stories! God ignorant of his own works! God speaking in a language almost unknown! God scolding his people and repenting his creation of them! In one word, we find a tribal god, "the god of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

(17) "But all these charges are false." Let us see, and first as to the defeat of this tribal deity. According to the scriptures, he made man in his own image, intending that man should always be his faithful and obedient servant—that was *his* will. But a strange personage, who seems to have created himself, and who, besides working that miracle, had the habit of miraculously assuming various forms and shapes, turned himself into a serpent, and in that form seduced the brand new man from the service of his maker! Both wanted the servant; the serpent got him, and was not that a defeat for the God? Where was his omnipotence when this miserable, miraculous, self-created serpent took to talking, and talking with success, on the "other side?" And, moreover, the serpent's advice was in favor of *knowledge* whilst the "god" inculcated *ignorance as a virtue*. And, indeed, well he might, for he was himself ignorant of the works he claimed as his own. He made the sun to rule the day (in going round the earth!) and the moon to rule the night (though, as a matter of fact, she often dances attendance on *mid-day*), and we are told parenthetically by the scriptures "he made the stars also," as though that brilliant assemblage of bigger worlds than ours were thrown in as kinds of understrappers to the moon! Then as to the creation itself, the account of it is grotesquely inaccurate, and Noah's ark is only fit to be a plaything for children. What naturalist could believe the absurd story of a *perfect* menagerie being established in one ship long before Great Easterns were thought of. And where was the food for the carnivora kept?—not to mention the hay, straw and chaff for the other animals. The writer of this story must have been a thorough ignoramus, who wrote for a "public" even more ignorant than himself, and the notion of his having

obtained his ideas from God is as absurd as the belief of his story by sane people is strange and wonderful.

(18) All this is only grotesque. The incitement to murder and rapine is more serious, and places at once the "god of Abraham" on the same level with the "one god" who has Mahomet for "his prophet." Both gods are equally bloodthirsty, equally narrow-minded, equally partial to their robber bands; in a word, both are tribal gods in the strictest sense of the term, and neither evinces the slightest trace of the character of the *God of the Universe*, who made heaven and earth.

(19) As to the indecent stories, it is a difficult matter even to allude to them without shocking that sense of decency which God has implanted in the nature of man, and which even the most abandoned (with the exception of tribal gods) cannot thoroughly eradicate. We will only mention the stories told of Lot, referring our readers to the Bible for the details, which are too foul for our pages. An edifying composition of drink, debauchery, and incest for the delectation of the children of faith! And the story is told without a single word of condemnation of its disgusting depravity! This gutter literature never flowed from the pen of the God of purity, and it is mere blasphemy to impute it to *Him*. Yet this is part of the intrinsic evidence of the inspiration of the Scriptures!

(20) As to the language in which each book of the Scriptures is written, the fact that it is not a universal language proves that the writings themselves were not intended for universal circulation. God is almighty, and if he wants to speak to his creatures, he does not require interpreters; and the story of his having confounded the tongues of men when they were building the Tower of Babel, lest they should "climb up to heaven," is no apology for the non-universality of the language; it is merely a proof that the writer of that story was utterly ignorant of the necessity of oxygen for the existence of animal life, and knew nothing of the law of gravity or of the distance of "heaven" from earth. This story of the confusion of tongues may be interesting to the admirers of the "Thousand and One Nights," but the crass ignorance of its writer proves conclusively that the Supreme took no part in concocting it. The simple circumstance that the god spoken of was *jealous* of men

and afraid they would "climb up to heaven" is sufficient to stamp that god as a mere tribal god, the creation of ignorant superstition.

(21) "But the New Testament is of a higher standard of morality, and evinces nobler ideas of God. Surely the New Testament is true?" The New Testament is but a supplement to the Old, as is proved by the first chapter of its first book, where we find the pedigree of JESUS CHRIST from Abraham to *Joseph*, and the statement that Joseph was NOT his father, but that the Holy Ghost was, and that his birth was a miraculous fulfilment of the prophecy we have considered (§ 13), "Behold, a virgin shall conceive." The New Testament is, therefore, founded entirely on the Old; and if the foundation be rotten, the superstructure must perish with it. The Old Testament was the "rule of faith" of the Jews: Jesus Christ was a Jew and a great Jewish reformer, but he founded all his reforms on the prophets of the Old Testament. It is true that Jesus Christ's morality is of a much higher standard than that of the Old Testament; but what does that prove? That the god of his father Abraham was a changeable god, willing one thing at one time and something very different at another—was, in fact, a mere tribal god.

(22) "Then, was Jesus Christ an impostor?" We do not say so: he gave the best proof of his sincerity, his life; but the enthusiasts of other religions have done the same, and, as we have seen, martyrdom proves nothing beyond the martyr's individual sincerity. "But his miracles?" Were not recorded by himself, but by his followers, chiefly ignorant and all superstitious, and ready to believe anything and everything wonderful with regard to their great and good leader. They *idolised* him during his life, and in their writings after his death they *deified* him, and magnified his "miracles," which are unproved by any title of independent and impartial evidence. If Jesus Christ had had a mission from the Supreme to his creatures, he would have been provided with credentials sufficient to satisfy those creatures of the reality of his mission; but, as a matter of fact, Jesus Christ spent the best part of his life working at a humble, though honorable, trade, and the rest of it in vainly attempting to persuade his people, in a remote corner of the world, that he had received a divine mission. The great

mass of mankind was absolutely ignorant of his existence, and the few who were not, only knew him as an itinerant street preacher, who was endeavoring to form a schism in the religion in which he had been born. And his judicial murder was only regarded by those who knew of it as an execution for heresy, or as a result of that religious intolerance which has in all ages spilt the blood of religious enthusiasts. And if the "King of Kings" really sent Jesus Christ on a mission, why did he not protect his ambassador, or demand immediate satisfaction for his murder?

(23) One final word as to the New Testament. Although it is the second dispensation of the "God of Abraham," it is by no means the last. That wonderful dreamer, St. John the Divine, in his "revelations," tells us, amongst other things, that Satan was, or is to be (when, as is usual in such matters, left doubtful), bound for a thousand years, during which his privilege to "deceive the nations" is to be suspended, though it is afterwards to be revived for "a little season!" Now this Satan has played a grand part under the two dispensations of the two testaments, and, as we have seen, succeeded in defeating the original design of the God of Abraham, and, moreover, was powerful enough to seize that God's son and place him on a pinnacle of the temple; in fact, Satan has played the important rôle of god's rival, and *successful* rival. But St. John tells us that he is to be shut up for a thousand years: and it is reasonable to suppose that during that period God will have it all his own way. This will, indeed, be a new dispensation—an Almighty without a rival has the appearance of a real Almighty. But, unfortunately, it is only another temporary arrangement, and after a thousand years the rival is to play his part again for a "little season," as St. John, the stage manager, indefinitely phrases it.

(24) It is difficult to write seriously of the "prophecy" of St. John, especially as he told us nearly two thousand years ago that the time of its fulfilment was "at hand," and it remains unfulfilled to the present day. It is a mixture of grotesque romance and unintelligible conundrum, all very well for a midsummer night's dream or nightmare, but totally unworthy of a Supreme Being of infinite power and unchangeable will. And yet it is the foundation of a new dispensation of the will of the God of Abraham!

(25) The Koran and other sacred scriptures of "faith," although containing here and there moral precepts of universal application are, like the Bible, all strongly impregnated with the principles of tribal theology: they all picture a god of limited power and wisdom, of vacillating will, of strong passions, of absurd partiality for his own particular tribe—on which he lavishes all his gifts and all his little power, to the neglect of the greater part of this tiny world, and in complete oblivion of those bigger and brighter worlds, whose light reaches us through millions of miles of space.

The scriptures tell us nothing that is new and much that is not true; and it is only by an "act" of blind "faith" that we can find in them any internal evidence of having been written under the inspiration of the God and Maker of the universe.

CHAPTER IV.

The Substitute for Faith—Truth—Future Rewards and Punishments—A Glance at "Heaven" and "Hell."

(26) "BUT if we abandon the 'faith of our fathers' what can you give us in its stead?" Truth! demonstrated truth, who claims no sacrifice of her votaries' reason. Truth, who, conscious of her own power and ultimate victory, has no persecution for her ignorant enemies. If faithful enthusiasts believe that the Alps were once in the ocean, and were removed to their present site by an "act of faith" on the part of some pious prince in want of a "scientific frontier," truth does not burn them alive to extinguish their foolish faith; she pities them and patiently watches for an opportunity to convince them of the folly and absurdity of their unfounded faith. Truth does not preach ignorance as a virtue, she does not coquet with drunkenness and impurity; she is the foundation of all morality, and the great antagonist of all crime. A thief is a liar ("Show me a liar, I will show you a thief"). A seducer is a liar, for truth cannot seduce. An adulterer is a liar, for he breaks his marriage vow. A murderer is a liar, for he always denies his crime (those who plead guilty to murder are invariably insane or consider their homicide justifiable). In short, there is no offence against morality that is not at the same time an offence against truth. Do the "faiths" inculcate a higher morality than Truth? The Bible sanctions murder and rapine of neighbors, including women and children. The Bible and the Koran sanction plurality of wives, which is an untruth to the first. Then holy books wink at slavery, which is opposed to the now recognised truth of the freedom of man. The Bible visits the sins of the fathers on the children. The Bible winks at lying, for Abraham, who "walked with his god," said his wife was his sister. The Bible inculcates religious persecution, the "casting out of the heathen."

(27) "But the Christian religion is more moral." Possibly ; but what explanation is there of the murders and tortures of the Inquisition, of the *autos da fé*, of the fires of Smithfield, of the *dragonnades*, and of the horrors that followed the revocation of the Edict of Nantes? The blood shed by Faith in all ages has stained almost every page of the history of every country ; "religious" war is *par excellence* the war of inhumanity and of extermination ; and it borders on a miracle that Faith has not depopulated the world. If the wretched gipsies under Moses had fully carried out their god's commands where should we Gentiles be now? And a similar question may be asked with regard to almost every "faith."

(28) "Good, but the truth you speak of has no system of future rewards and punishments, such as faith has, and without these inducements and deterrents it is impossible to rule mankind." No one has, as yet, made any serious attempt to rule *without* them, and all the attempts to rule *with* them have failed, and failed miserably. The heaven and the hell invented by faith are too clumsily made for the purposes for which they were intended, and the conditions of admission are simply absurd. Heaven, according to the Christian, is a huge concert-room, in which 144,000 Jews and a "multitude which no man could number" of other persuasions sing without ceasing a monotonous bit of flattery to their tribal god: terms of admission, simple credulity! The Mohametan is not so musical ; he furnishes *his* heaven with beautiful women ; it is a sort of "gay" house without the drunkenness: price of admission, simple credulity. Then look at hell—its temperature is kept up at a ridiculously high degree, and the fuel, though always burning, is never burnt ; its aboriginal inhabitants enjoy an immortality which they appear to have created for themselves, and their chief takes a change of air as often as he pleases, and plays an occasional game at cards with the chief of the "other place," in which he sometimes loses, but more frequently wins ; for, according to theologians, hell is more frequented than heaven: terms of admission quite as easy, incredulity. "He that believeth not shall be damned."

(29) There are "faiths," rewards, and punishments: how do they work in practice? Do they lead men to lead good lives? Not at all: they lead men to slaughter the "un-

believers," and steal their goods or burn them—to commit, in a word, all the atrocities of a "holy war." Good lives? It is good *deaths* that the faithful prize. A life spent in bloodshed and plunder is atoned for by a death-bed repentance—the giving of a share of the plunder to "holy church," and falling asleep in her bosom. The brigand, whose profession is a combination of habitual robbery with occasional murder, goes regularly to his "Easter duties;" he fulfils the condition of admission to heaven; he believes, and he is safe. But let us take another and a better-known son of the Faith—Louis XIV. of France—the sovereign of his century. Louis was a "patriot," a "pattern king," and a powerful "defender of the faith," and lived his life under the eyes of his resident confessor. What kind of life? He carried fire and sword amongst his weaker neighbors, he revoked the edict of Nantes, he broke "unbelievers" on the wheel, and, whilst his dragoons were protecting the faith against thousands of harmless unarmed citizens, he was lying in the lap of debauched luxury, surrounded by his mistresses and his illegitimate children, and attended by his faithful confessor, ever ready to give him absolution when he felt in the humor to receive it. Did the hope of heaven, or the fear of hell, influence *his* life for good? Or take another king of the same kidney—David. He was also a defender of the faith. Did he scruple to seduce Uriah's wife and murder her husband out of fear of future punishment? (And, by the way, this guilty pair are said by St. Matthew to be direct ancestors of Jesus Christ!) Or, to come to our own times. Some of the Glasgow Bank directors were shining lights of faith: they even built churches. Did the fear of hell induce them to look on other people's money as sacred?

(30) As a matter of fact the heaven of faith is too indefinite, her hell is too absurd and too easily evaded, to form any real inducement to a good life or deterrent from a bad one. They are mere "bogies," whose real influence has never done the world any good, though the faith they are supposed to enforce has done the world incalculable mischief.

(31) Having supped full of the horrors of Faith, having seen "in a vision," the nightmare of the ghosts of her millions of victims, let us awake to the beauty of Truth. Her hands are not stained with innocent blood, she is not guilty of any amorous embrace of Ignorance, she puts no

prohibition on the tree of knowledge, she has no slaves, she is not capricious, she is the same to all men, in all ages, she has no worthless favorites. She is eternal and, conscious of her own strength, and of her ultimate triumph, she has no hatred to cherish, no enemies to *punish*; she would convert them all into friends, her triumphs are the triumphs of peace. The pursuit of truth and of peace are the only noble pursuits, and they alone contribute to the happiness of the human race. War and Faith,¹ despite their sham glory, bring but misery and ruin alike to their devotees and their victims.

(32) We do not know *all* the laws of the Supreme, but such as we do know are certain and unchangeable: let us search diligently after the others, reserving our judgment on them until they be demonstrated, and respecting, at the same time, the judgments of others. Let us be charitable, and endeavor to shame Faith out of her intolerance, her ignorance, her superstition, her immorality; and we shall certainly ultimately be successful, if we only live that good moral life which Truth, and the experience of enlightened minds, demonstrate to be most consistent with the real happiness of the human race.

Truth is the blessing, *par excellence*; and it is this blessing which the author of this humble vindication of her wishes his readers, both friends and foes.

¹ The faithful have always admitted the likeness Faith bears to War: we recognise the likeness as perfect.