

THE BOOK OF ESTHER :

A SPECIMEN OF WHAT PASSES AS THE INSPIRED
WORD OF GOD.

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THE Book of Esther ! What is there in that worthy of special notice ? It is a part of Holy Writ seldom or never referred to in the controversies of the time, and rarely used to point an argument or adorn a tale in pulpit sermons. Some may say, why drag an obscure, unimportant book into prominence, and attack that which is not of much moment even to Christians ? To this it may be answered, that to a true believer, nothing in the sacred book is trivial—all is inspired, and therefore all is vital truth. If we view it in that light, it will be found to be our strongest argument. The Book of Esther is still retained in all authorised editions of the Bible, and the most orthodox members of the Church maintain that you cannot eliminate a single word or passage without incurring the wrath of Almighty God ; and we see how even a bishop may bring down upon his devoted head the severest ecclesiastical censure, and be maligned, and shunned, and prosecuted by his brethren of the cloth for daring to doubt the accuracy of some accounts of events which never could have taken place as there related. But it is not necessary now to go particularly into the question of inspiration. We will take the book as we find it, and see what passes as the inspired Word of God, and by following the text closely see how much better it is than other writings. It must strike any observant reader that there is nothing whatever on the surface of this part of the Bible that can account for its being placed as a canonical book. It does not relate any of God's doings among his favourite children ; the Lord does not direct the massacres ; Jehovah is not the patron of Mordecai and his amiable niece—in short, neither God, the Lord, nor Jehovah are mentioned at all throughout the whole ten chapters. One might say, if he possessed the confidence of a priest, that this book was never inspired by God. There are thousands who believe this book to be inspired, because they dare not doubt. They have been taught to believe, and they do believe. The human mind, once given to a belief in the supernatural, is open to receive anything as truth, however absurd or contrary to experience it may be. Where are you to stop ? What are to be the bounds of *belief* ? Is not everything possible to a God of infinite power ? And shall petty mortals dare to limit the eternal ? If an occurrence is not easily comprehensible, what a relief it is to one's head to say, "God did it." That is sufficient, with some people, to account for anything.

The Book of Esther, if perused as a narrative, will be found to be a plain, unvarnished tale, possessing but few of the graces of rhetoric, and chronicling the doings of by no means brilliant characters.

In the year 518 before Christ, commenced the reign of Ahasuerus, a very small hero in his way, but through whose influence and by whose sanction many extraordinary deeds were done, and many atrocities committed. He was a king reigning over a vast region, extending from

India to Ethiopia, and including a hundred and twenty-seven provinces. Marian Evans, in her translation of Feuerbach, says something to the effect that Christianity is a religion of gourmands, as throughout the Bible there is a continual record of feasting and jollity. Even the Lord himself was entertained at dinner by Abraham. Accordingly, the Book of Esther opens with an account of a great feast given by the king, in the third year of his reign, to all his princes and his servants; the power of Persia and of Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces being before him. This carouse lasted a hundred and four score days, during which time he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the *honour* of his excellent majesty. Not content with the first feast, at the end of this time he commenced again, and made a feast unto all the people that were in Shushan the palace, both unto great and small, *seven* days, in the court of the garden of the palace. The number *seven* is frequently used in this book, and it is a favourite number with Bible writers, and no doubt accounts for the fact that the whole book is in a state of "sixes and sevens!" A minute account is given of the upholstery of the apartments, and of the metal of which the drinking cups were made. There was royal wine in abundance, and the drinking was according to law—that is, every man was to do according to his pleasure, and no doubt many of them took more than was good for them, for the king himself set the example. Also Vashti, the queen, made a feast for the women in the royal house. Now, Vashti is the only woman in the book who displays any virtues or qualities worthy of admiration; but her virtues, which should have been her glory and protection, are her ruin, and the treatment she received cannot be justified in modern times upon any principle of justice or morality. On the *seventh* day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine (in plain English, when he was intoxicated), he commanded his *seven* chamberlains to bring Vashti, the queen, before him, with the crown royal, to show the people and the princes her beauty, for she was fair to look on. But, like a modest and sedate woman, she refused to present herself to the rude gaze of the king and his court. Therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him. He at once went to law about the matter, by consulting the wise men who understood the law, also the *seven* princes of Persia and Media, among whom was one Memucan. The king asked what should be done with Vashti for disobeying his orders, for he seemed terribly afraid of a disobedient wife. Memucan answered and said, the queen hath not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and to all the people that are in all the provinces, when it should become known, for the wives would despise their husbands if they should learn that the king had allowed the queen to disobey his commands without rebuke. This noble prince ended his address for the prosecution by the following suggestion: "If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, that Vashti come no more before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she. And when the king's decree which he shall make shall be published throughout all his empire (for it is great), all the wives shall give to their husbands honour, both to the great and small." The queen was never called upon to offer an explanation or justification of her conduct, there was no speech for the defence, and the king, who sat as Judge Ordinary, decided on his own case, and immediately pronounced a decree *nisi*, condemning the respondent in all costs. And thus poor

Vashti was divorced and disgraced for possessing a virtue which is universally admired among enlightened and refined people.

Now if there is any meaning at all in this disgraceful transaction—and of course there must be a meaning of deep import in every word of the *sacred* book, for do not preachers and commentators weave wonderful discourses out of half lines and incomplete sentences, showing what the inspired penmen *meant* to say, and even what the Deity himself was thinking of, but which unfortunately the text itself in its entirety furnishes no clue to?—now if there is any meaning in this disgraceful divorce of Queen Vashti, it is, that women are to be subject to their husbands in all things, whether their personal liberty be endangered or their moral sense outraged or not. The translators have called it “the decree of men’s sovereignty.” It is a transaction, nevertheless, in which all the honour attaches to the queen who was punished, and the odium to the king who is praised for the deed. It is continually so with Bible morality—the good is put as the bad, and the bad as the good. But, happily for humanity, they are rapidly outgrowing such misleading teaching.

And out of this questionable transaction arise all the subsequent blood and murder recorded in this delectable book. If any good is supposed to have accrued to the world from the doings of Mordecai and Esther, the Lord does indeed work in mysterious ways! After the decree had gone forth, the king cooled down, and when he became sober he thought of Vashti, and how harsh he had been to her; but those who had counselled her banishment, not wishing him to relent, lest their own wives might expect to be forgiven after having been condemned, suggested that all the officers in all the provinces should be commissioned with the very agreeable task of collecting together all the pretty girls they could find and bringing them to Shushan, for the king to choose one from, who should be queen instead of Vashti. This idea pleased him, and he ordered it to be done. Now as the kingdom consisted of 127 provinces, and all the pretty girls were collected together, the bevy of beauties at Shushan must have been the finest ever seen at one exhibition. But notwithstanding all these charms and counter-charms, the king was really able to make a choice. The wonder is that the poor man was not so overpowered, that he resolved to keep the whole of them! However, it took him nearly four years to make up his mind. His choice ultimately fell upon Esther, the lady whose name furnishes the title to the sacred book in which her career is recorded. She had *seven* maidens to wait upon her, and was chosen in the *seventh* year of the reign of the king. We are not told what her age was at this time; but that is not remarkable, as it is generally very difficult to learn what any lady’s age is! Esther was an orphan and a Jewess, but this latter fact was carefully concealed from the king by order of Mordecai, the “nursing father” of Esther, as he is called—as fine a specimen of the cunning Hebrew as is to be found on record. The Jews at this time were in captivity—a state little better than slavery. Mordecai and Esther were first cousins, and Mordecai promptly availed himself of the opportunity of selling his interesting relative to the highest bidder, but with a shrewd eye to his own interests at the same time. During the long while Esther was waiting her turn to be presented to the king, Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women’s house, to know how Esther did, and what should become of her. As soon as Esther was crowned, Mordecai came forward, and “sat in the gate of the king.” It is not clear what this means—it is very much like being

allowed to sit on the door step. Whilst he was thus "hanging about," he overheard two of the door-keepers express some intention of laying hands on the king. This was an opportunity sent by Providence to enable Mordecai to show his loyalty. He at once improved the occasion, and told Esther, who told the king, at the same time making the king understand to whom he was indebted for the information. The two conspirators were hanged, but Mordecai was not rewarded for his zeal.

Haman was promoted to be chief over all the princes. All the king's servants, as in duty bound, bowed down and revered Haman; but Mordecai, being annoyed at being passed over, refused to bow down, notwithstanding he was spoken to about it daily. He threw off his reserve now that his cousin was queen, and told them that he belonged to the "stiff-necked" race. This incensed Haman very much, and he resolved to be revenged not alone on Mordecai, but upon his whole tribe. Haman told the king that there was a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the provinces of the kingdom, whose laws were different, and who did not obey the king's laws, therefore it was not for the king's profit to suffer them—mildly suggesting that they should be destroyed, and offering ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those who should have the charge of the slaughter. As in the case of poor Vashti, the king without hesitation acquiesced, and seemed in a hurry to get that bit of business off his hands. Letters were despatched into every province, written in all the languages of the people, and sealed with the king's ring, with orders "to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, *little children and women*, in one day, and to take the spoil of them for a prey." After this, "the king and Haman sat down to drink."

It is the fashion with some people to praise Mordecai for his stubborn will and manly spirit in refusing to bow down to the First Minister of State, as though he had done it from a wholesome contempt of the pomp and pride of court hirelings. But there is nothing in the text to warrant that interpretation. In fact, no word is vouchsafed in explanation of why he refused, except that he was a *Jew*, and that certainly gave him no virtue in the matter, for if he objected to the pride of Haman the Gentile, it was only with the greater pride of Mordecai the Jew. Mordecai belonged to the "chosen people," and we see in our own day how people will strut and plume themselves when clothed in the garments of self-righteousness.

When Mordecai heard of the sanguinary decree, of course he was very much alarmed, and did that silly and dirty trick peculiar to the favourites of the Lord—he tore his clothes and put on sack-cloth and ashes. He went before the palace crying with a loud and bitter cry, but he was too dusty to be allowed to enter into the king's gate. Information of Mordecai's grief was conveyed to Esther, also of the state of his wardrobe, when she immediately sent him fresh raiment, with orders to take away the sack-cloth and ashes; but he preferred his rags and dirt. Then the queen sent her chamberlain to Mordecai to know what troubled him, and how it was. He sent her a copy of the decree, together with all the particulars, with a request that she would go to the king and make supplication for her people. There was some danger attendant upon the carrying out of this request, as a law existed whereby all who came to the king into the inner court without being called, should be put to death, unless the king pardoned them; and as the queen had not seen her loving husband for a month, she was afraid to go to him un-

called. This was conveyed to Mordecai, who replied—"Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews." This determined Esther, who told Mordecai to gather together all the Jews who were in town, and with them to fast three days and three nights, and she and her maidens would do likewise. This species of *praying* for success, is at best but an *empty* supplication. Raine says the Jews never prayed but when they were in trouble, and never for anything but victory, vengeance, and riches. But she said—"I will go to the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish." This was noble—this was daring, and worthy of a heroine. One might expect from this that Esther was full of all noble qualities. On the contrary, she had the smoothness of the leopard with the ferocity of the tiger. Here she resolved, at all hazards to herself, to beg for the lives of the Jews. But listen to the result of her mission.

On the third day she ventured unbidden into the royal presence, and to her great relief the king was overjoyed to see her, and said: "What wilt thou, Queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom?" The king was a mighty man at a feast, and Esther, knowing his strong point, and also anticipating it would be favourably received, had prepared a banquet, to which she invited him, including Haman in the invitation. Throughout Bible history, it will be found that the pot and the platter formed either the prelude or the sequel to nearly all great undertakings or events. Of course the king accepted the invitation to dine out in his own house, and Haman was only too happy and proud to attend him. After the wine had gone round, the king again repeated his offer, that whatever request Esther made, even to the half of his kingdom, it should be granted. She was still cautious and hesitating, not being sure that the roystering monarch was fed up to the proper pitch for her purpose; so she said that if the king and Haman would come to another feast on the following day, she would then make known her request. This was agreed to. Then went Haman forth that day joyful and with a glad heart. But his exultation was of short duration, for he had not gone far before he nearly fell over that obstinate old Mordecai, who refused to get up or move out of his way. This filled him with indignation, but still he restrained himself till he reached home, when he sent for his friends and for Zeresh, his wife. "And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him," for he was a man of great self-importance, and was quite overpowered if he did not receive a proper amount of deference from his presumed inferiors. After recounting his wonderful position, he said: "Yet all this availeth me nothing so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." His wife and his friends told him to cheer up, and get a gallows made fifty cubits high, and at the morrow's banquet to speak unto the king that Mordecai might be hanged thereon. This humane suggestion pleased Haman much, and, like a modern Governor Eyre, he thereupon issued his order for the erection of that neat piece of architecture—an instrument still used in this country to finish the education which the priest begins.

It so happened, and very fortunately so for Mordecai, that the night before this second banquet the king was not able to sleep, so he thought he would read awhile, and therefore ordered the book of records to be brought, and in this he found chronicled the name and services of Mor-

decai in informing of the two doorkeepers who had got up a little conspiracy against himself. The king asked what honour and dignity had been done to Mordecai for this. He was told nothing. He exclaimed, Who is in the court? He was answered, Haman. Now, Haman, unfortunately for himself, had gone there post haste, not waiting till the morning, to crave the boon of being allowed to elevate poor Mordecai fifty cubits high. It was an ominous moment for him. He was ordered into the king's presence, who, not giving him time to speak, asked: "What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?" Now, Haman thought in his heart, To whom would the king delight to do honour more than to myself? He therefore resolved not to underdo the matter, and modestly proposed that the happy individual should be decked out in the royal apparel, the crown put upon his head, the whole mounted upon the king's horse, and led through the streets of the city by one of the noblest princes, and to be proclaimed before him, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour." But what was Haman's utter astonishment and consternation when he was told to make haste and do all he had said unto Mordecai the Jew, the man whom he hated above all other men. But this was not the last time in which Haman was destined to be caught in his own trap. He hurried home hiding his head, and told his wife and friends of his disappointment. He was a fallen Minister, and they all felt that Mordecai, the Benjamin Disraeli of his time, would lead the Opposition on to the Treasury benches. And while they were talking, the messenger came to summons Haman to the second banquet which Esther had prepared. But he was in no mood for eating. For he had not yet digested the bitter pill of Mordecai's advancement. The king again asked Esther what boon she craved. She said: "Let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish." Though five years had elapsed since their marriage, this appears to have been the first time the king knew that his wife was a Jewess. He asked, "Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?" The king had forgotten all about the decree he had made and signed with his own ring, for the utter destruction of the people who were scattered throughout all his provinces. That was too small a matter to dwell in his memory. Esther answered and said, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman." The king rushed into the garden in great fury, and whilst he was gone Haman became much alarmed for his own safety; and when the king returned he found Haman on his knees beseeching Esther to intercede with the king on his behalf. The king mistook the meaning of the supplication, and became jealous as well as angry. This sealed the fate of poor Haman, who was immediately seized and his face covered. An obliging chamberlain who was standing by, with the usual readiness of court sycophants to help a fallen favourite, told the king that Haman had got a gallows already erected, which was intended for Mordecai, the rising minister. Upon this hint the king spake, and told them to hang Haman thereon. "So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified." Thus Haman was literally the architect of his own fortune, and ultimately graced his own structure. But the king was not blameless in the matter—he was more to blame than Haman himself, for he signed a sanguinary decree at the first time of asking, and without making the slightest inquiry into the justice of what he was about to do. Yet this

is the man into whose hands God had committed the care of a portion of his "chosen people." This justifies the saying that Christianity is much indebted for its preservation to the vilest and silliest characters in all ages and countries.

The king, as is the wont of monarchs, bestowed the dead man's property upon his favourite, and Esther became enriched by Haman's death. Mordecai also experienced rapid promotion, as he was for the first time introduced to the king as Esther's relative. And the king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mordecai; and Esther set Mordecai over the House of Haman. The Jews' star was now in the ascendant. The queen then besought the king to revoke his edict against the Jews, which had been issued at the instigation of Haman. Being a most yielding man, and having the amiable weakness of granting everything to everybody at the moment of asking, whether it was the slaughter of a whole race, or the hanging of an individual even on his own new gallows, he consented without a murmur to reverse what he had done a short time before, and commanded Mordecai, saying—"Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring; for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse." Mordecai's patience and perseverance were at length rewarded, and his day of triumph had arrived. Having *carte blanche* from the king, he availed himself of it to the fullest extent. He sent proclamations into all the provinces, in which he said "the king had granted the Jews in every city to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them, *both little ones and women*, and to take the spoil of them for a prey." Not content with telling the Jews they might destroy, slay, and cause to perish all who assaulted them, he ordered them all to be in readiness on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month to *avenge* themselves on their enemies. Mordecai then strutted out like a peacock to show his fine feathers. He went out "in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen and purple: and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad. The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honour. And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day. And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them."

Accordingly, on the fatal thirteenth of the twelfth month, the day on which the Jews were to have been killed, the order of things was reversed, for the Jews gathered themselves together in all the cities to lay hands on such as sought their hurt; and no man could withstand them; for the fear of them fell upon all people. All the king's officials, throughout the kingdom, like true time-servers and worshippers of power, because the Prime Minister was a Jew, joined with the Jews against their own countrymen; and thus as bloody a *coup d'état* was perpetrated in Asia in the year 509 before Christ, as that which took place in France on the 2nd of December, 1851 years after this precious Gospel came to bless mankind! "Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them. And in Shushan the palace, the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men." The ten sons of Haman slew them, thus carrying out the barbarous doctrine

taught in this holy book, of visiting the sins of the father upon the children. "On that day the number of those that were slain in Shushan were brought before the king. And the king said unto Esther the queen—The Jews have slain and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the palace, and the ten sons of Haman; what have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? now what is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: or what is thy request further? And it shall be done." Mark the fiendish answer of this tigress, sent of course by God to be an instrument in the preservation of his favourite people. "Then said Esther—If it please the king, let it be granted to the Jews which are in Shushan to do to-morrow also according unto this day's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows! And the king commanded it so to be done; and the decree was given at Shushan; and they hanged Haman's ten sons." This was diabolical ferocity, prompted by the direst spirit of revenge. Esther could not have forgotten that a few minutes before the king had told her that the ten sons of Haman had been *slain*, and therefore to hang them on the gallows was not with the idea of killing them a second time, but merely for the gratification of gloating over the ghastly corpses of ten men who had never injured her, but who had the misfortune to be the sons of her enemy. This is Bible morality, of which there are innumerable instances in this sacred word of God. And so the slaughter went on, and the Jews gathered themselves together on the fourteenth day, and in Shushan butchered three hundred more men, and those in the provinces made up the total number of victims *seventy-five thousand*. After this the Jews fell to feasting and rejoicing, and called it a day of *gladness*, and resolved, at the suggestion of Mordecai, to celebrate both the thirteenth and fourteenth of the twelfth month as a festival every year. "Then Esther the queen, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority to confirm this, and sent letters unto all the Jews in the 127 provinces, with words of peace and truth." "For Mordecai the Jew was next unto King Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed."

And thus ends this eventful history.

We close this blood-stained Book of Esther with feelings of loathing and disgust. There is not one principle of morality inculcated throughout the entire narrative; there is but one estimable or worthy character depicted therein, and she is a victim; the incidents recorded are incidents of drunkenness, domestic tyranny, lust, ambition, vacillation, revenge, and wholesale and brutal murder of innocent men, women, and children. There is no inspiration, no instruction, no moral elevation in it. It is one dull, dead level of brutality and animal indulgence. The first chapter commences with a gross outrage upon the delicacy of a sensitive woman, and ends by her being divorced and disgraced, that "man's sovereignty" may be upheld and proclaimed. This can be quoted as an argument in favour of the oppression of one half the human race, for does it not tally with that other passage in the Bible, which says that woman shall be subject to the man? Chapter ii. enters into particulars of the utterly immoral way in which the king chose a wife in succession to Vashti, and the calculating manner in which Mordecai brought his foster daughter and relative to the market, and sold her to the highest bidder. Chapter iii. is an account of an ambitious minister, who, on being irritated and annoyed by a man belonging to a despised race, who presumed upon his relationship to

the queen, seeks to have his enemy and his enemy's race destroyed ; and where a king, who should be the guardian of his people, condemns to death a large number of his subjects at the mere request of one man. Chapter iv. depicts the real cause of all this mischief and commotion in a state of the most abject fear. There is no reason why Mordecai should have hated and annoyed Haman, unless it was from a feeling of envy at his elevation and good fortune. Chapter v. shows a man so engrossed with a feeling of hatred, that he builds a gallows of his own on which to hang his enemy. Chapter vi. pretends to relate how a king can honour a subject who has served him ; but the story is so overdone that it becomes outrageously improbable. Chapter vii. is an attempt to portray an instance of retributive justice, but it is a failure, for the wicked Haman, who dies on his own gallows, is not hanged for seeking the lives of the Jews, but because the king in his mad fury mistook the meaning of his subject's supplication. Chapter viii. shows a vacillating and sanguinary tyrant playing with the lives of his subjects at the merest caprice, sparing neither women nor little innocent children. Chapter ix. contains an account of deeds worthy only of fiends, the bare recital of which makes one shudder, but over which God's chosen cannibals rejoice and make merry, and call it a good day, which they will celebrate with feasting and rejoicing through all coming time. And Esther, the heroine of the book, God's appointed agent to save his peculiar people, when told of the glorious slaughter which her brethren had had the first day, begged the boon of one more day of the hellish work, that the agony might be prolonged, that more wives might be made widows, that there should be more children made orphans, that the desolation might be more widespread, and that the wail of despair might again resound through the affrighted city. And chapter x. closes the book with the pompous parade of Mordecai's greatness in the eyes of the multitude, and of his "seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed." Oh, bitter mockery ! the peace he had won was the peace of the grave and the silence of death.

And this is the inspired word of God ; and these are the people for whom the Lord had an especial liking. What could have been the object of the concoctors of the Bible in including this book among the canonical gospels ? It could not have been intended as a compliment to the Deity, because his name is never mentioned in it under any one title by which he is known. It does not point the way to mansions in the skies ; for though death, in all its ghastliness, is constantly present, any supposed immortality is never alluded to. Even the most besotted bigot could scarcely maintain that it was intended to convey a moral lesson in any one chapter or verse. Nothing could be more ferocious and imbecile than this king, who grants everything that is asked of him by every favourite of the hour, and who not even by accident performs a good action. The queen too, who to graces of person should have added beauties of heart and mind, on the only occasion on which she possessed the power of doing anything great or good, manifested a disposition which would disgrace a North American savage when on the war trail. Then what is the object of this book ? It can only be intended to show the "providential" preservation of the Jews from a great peril, and, being the children of God, it was necessary that they should be spared to carry out God's plans upon earth. Was anything ever more monstrous than this ? If what is recorded of the Jews in the Bible be true, they are as vile a race as ever trod the earth.

And this book is read in Sunday-schools, and these are the lessons implanted in the young and tender minds of children. From the earliest moment they are taught to reverence this volume as the sacred word of God, and not to doubt or call in question, on pain of eternal, never-ending torments, a single line or word therein? What does Theodore Parker say on this point?—

“To the Bible the minister prostitutes his mind and conscience, heart and soul; on the authority of an anonymous Hebrew book, he will justify the slaughter of innocent men, women, and children, by the thousand; and, on that of an anonymous Greek book, he will believe, or at least command others to believe, that man is born totally depraved, and God will perpetually slaughter men in hell by the million, though they had committed no fault, except that of not believing an absurd doctrine they had never heard of. Ministers take the Bible in the lump as divine; all between the lids of the book is equally the ‘Word of God,’ infallible and miraculous: he that believeth it shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned; no amount of piety and morality can make up for not believing this. No doctor is ever so subordinate to his drug, no lawyer lies so prone before statute and custom, as the mass of ministers before the Bible, the great fetish of Protestant Christendom. The Ephesians did not so worship their great goddess Diana and the meteoric stone which fell down from Jupiter. ‘We can believe anything,’ say they, ‘which has a “Thus saith the Lord” before or after it.’ The Bible is not only master of the soul, it is also a talisman to keep men from harm; bodily contact with it, through hand or eye, is a part of religion; so it lies in railroad stations, in the parlours and sleeping chambers of taverns, and the cabins of ships, only to be seen and touched, not read. The pious mother puts it in the trunk of her prodigal son about to travel, and while she knows he is wasting her substance in riotous living, she contents herself with the thought that ‘he has got his Bible with him, and promised to read a chapter every day!’ So the Catholic mother uses an image of the ‘Virgin Mother of God,’ and the Rocky Mountain savage a bundle of grass: *it is a fetish.*”

Now, a God of mercy, and justice, and lovingkindness can never approve of this. This delusion is perpetuated, and this evil is kept up by some from interested motives; by others from ignorance of the real nature of the book they were taught in their infancy to prostrate their reason before, and by most from a feeling of fanaticism and superstition. Thomas Paine, who speaks as a Deist, says:—

“It has been the practice of all Christian commentators on the Bible, and of all Christian priests and preachers, to impose the Bible on the world as a mass of truth, and as the word of God; they have disputed and wrangled, and have anathematised each other about the supposable meaning of particular parts and passages therein—one has said and insisted that such a passage meant such a thing; another that it meant directly the contrary; and a third, that it neither meant one nor the other, but something different from both—and this they call *understanding* the Bible. There are matters in that book, said to be done by the express command of God, that are as shocking to humanity, and to every idea we have of moral justice, as anything done by Robespierre, by Carrier, by Joseph le Bon, in France; by the English Government in the East Indies; or by any other assassin in modern times. When we read in the books ascribed to Moses, Joshua, &c., that the Israelites came by stealth upon whole nations of people, who, as the history it-

self shows, had given them no offence—that they put all those nations to the sword; that they spared neither age nor infancy; that they utterly destroyed men, women, and children; that they left not a soul to breathe; expressions that are repeated over and over again in those books, and that too with exulting ferocity; are we sure these things are facts? Are we sure that the Creator of man commissioned these things to be done? Are we sure that the books which tell us so were written by his authority? To charge the commission of acts upon the Almighty, which in their nature, and by every rule of moral justice, are crimes—as all assassination is, and more especially the assassination of infants—is matter of serious concern. The Bible tells us that these assassinations were done *by the express command of God*. To believe therefore the Bible to be true, we must *unbelieve* all our belief in the moral justice of God: for wherein could crying or smiling infants offend? And to read the Bible without horror, we must undo everything that is tender, sympathising, and benevolent in the heart of man. Speaking for myself, if I had no other evidence that the Bible is fabulous, than the sacrifice I must make to believe it to be true, that alone would be sufficient to determine my choice.”

What can be done to sweep this delusion from the minds of men, which for nearly eighteen hundred years has been preached to them by the aid of church and cannon, sword and surplice? For ages the pioneer of truth was always its martyr, till despair almost entered the heart of those who sought the service of humanity. But there still remained a heroic few who nobly passed the banner of truth from generation to generation, till it has reached our time, and now waves more freely in the breezes of awakened intelligence, which ere long will swell into a whirlwind of enlightenment, which shall sweep before it every vestige of the dark clouds of ignorance and superstition which have overshadowed the fair face of nature, and been the prolific parents of all those calamities which have befallen poor humanity groping its way through the darkness of ignorance, and stumbling at every step over those things which might be turned into stepping-stones to assist their onward march, if they had but more mental light with which to illumine their path through life.

If I were a believer in a Special Providence answering the supplications of men, I would kneel at the “throne of grace,” and importune the Deity to end this war, and strife, and hatred among his children. Not with a scoffing tongue do I now say it, but in all seriousness, as becomes the solemnity of such a task, and I would offer up this

PRAYER.

O God, who art omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent; all-powerful, all-wise, and all-just; who existed before time was, and who made all-things; who searchest the hearts of all, and knowest our most secret thoughts—vouchsafe but one word that shall stop at once and for ever all the horrors that are committed in thy name; utter it in the thunder that all may hear to the remotest corners of the earth, or write it across the heavens in characters that all, of every nation and every tongue, may read and understand. Thou knowest, in thy infinite wisdom, that men, groping their way by the dim light of ages past, fail to see the truth they fain would reach. Some by accident find the precious treasure; others clutch error, and, clinging to it with the tenacity of despair, make war upon all around them. O thou beneficent Deity, one word from thee would open the eyes of all, making

the blind to see and the dull to understand. This Bible, for which men lie, and cheat, and persecute—which inculcates doctrines the most contradictory, immoral, and revolting—which records deeds done in thy name at which humanity shudders aghast—can it be thy message of mercy to mankind? Didst thou, in thy boundless benevolence, inspire its pages, and in thy immutable justice send it as a guide for the human race? Is it serving thee for the professors of Bible religion to rend one another? In one country, Catholic Christians imprison and torture their Protestant brethren; in another, the Protestants tax, persecute, and oppress their Catholic fellow-subjects, and all in thy name. Eighteen hundred years ago a Jew who preached a new doctrine was cruelly put to death. An effigy of his mangled and bleeding body, nailed to a cross, is the emblem of Christians, under which they have made war, and slaughtered tens and hundreds of thousands of their fellow creatures. This murdered man is called thy Son, and all are commanded to worship him, on pain of death in some countries, and of social persecution and hatred in others. Are we justified, O God, in thy sight in regarding this symbol of blood and suffering as a sign of thy love for the family of man? In England (this small speck in thy immense universe), there are thousands of thy creatures steeped in the deepest poverty and crime; thousands lolling in the lap of luxury, extravagance, and wealth; thousands of priests paid millions a year, wrung from the hard earnings of industry, to preach what is called thy “holy word,” which in one part declares “the poor will not cease from out the land.” Is this, O Lord, the most perfect state of society to which men can attain? Every despot in Europe, who oppresses his subjects, and slaughters them if they complain, is styled “Most Christian Majesty,” and he declares that he rules by right divine derived direct from thee. The Pope of Rome, the head of an ecclesiastical despotism, which keeps men ignorant and rules them as slaves, is called thy Vicegerent upon earth. All claim Bible sanction for what they do. My sense of right revolts at all this, and I beseech thee, O thou God of justice and righteousness, to direct me in the right path, if I am erring in my judgment of thy goodness and truth. Rather would I say, the vast majority of the populations of the world are tortured and enslaved by the dominant few who rule in thy name, because the masses are ignorant and therefore helpless. In anguish I cry unto thee—

“When wilt thou save the *people*,
O God of mercy, when?
Not crowns and thrones, but *nations*;
Not kings and lords, but *men*?”

One word from thy everlasting lips would bind all hearts in one; would reconcile man to man the world over; would inaugurate the reign of love and peace, and banish hate and all uncharitableness. Speak this word, O Lord, I implore thee, that man may go on his way rejoicing, giving and receiving pleasure; shed thy radiance on mankind, that they may feel thy kingdom *has* come; establish thy Paradise upon earth; and thine be the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever.

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