



Important Examination

OF THE

HOLY SCRIPTURES.

BY

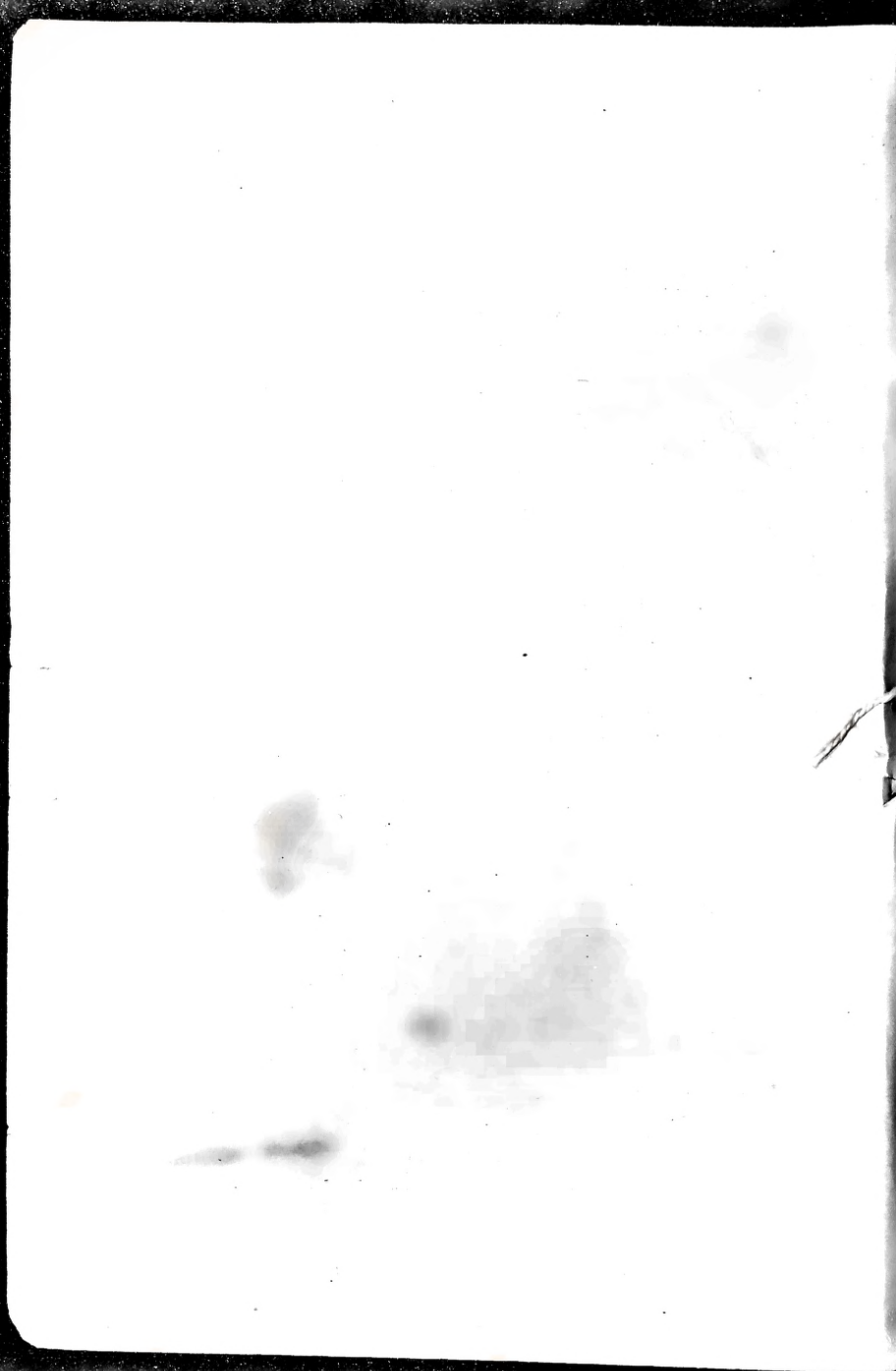
VOLTAIRE.

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NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

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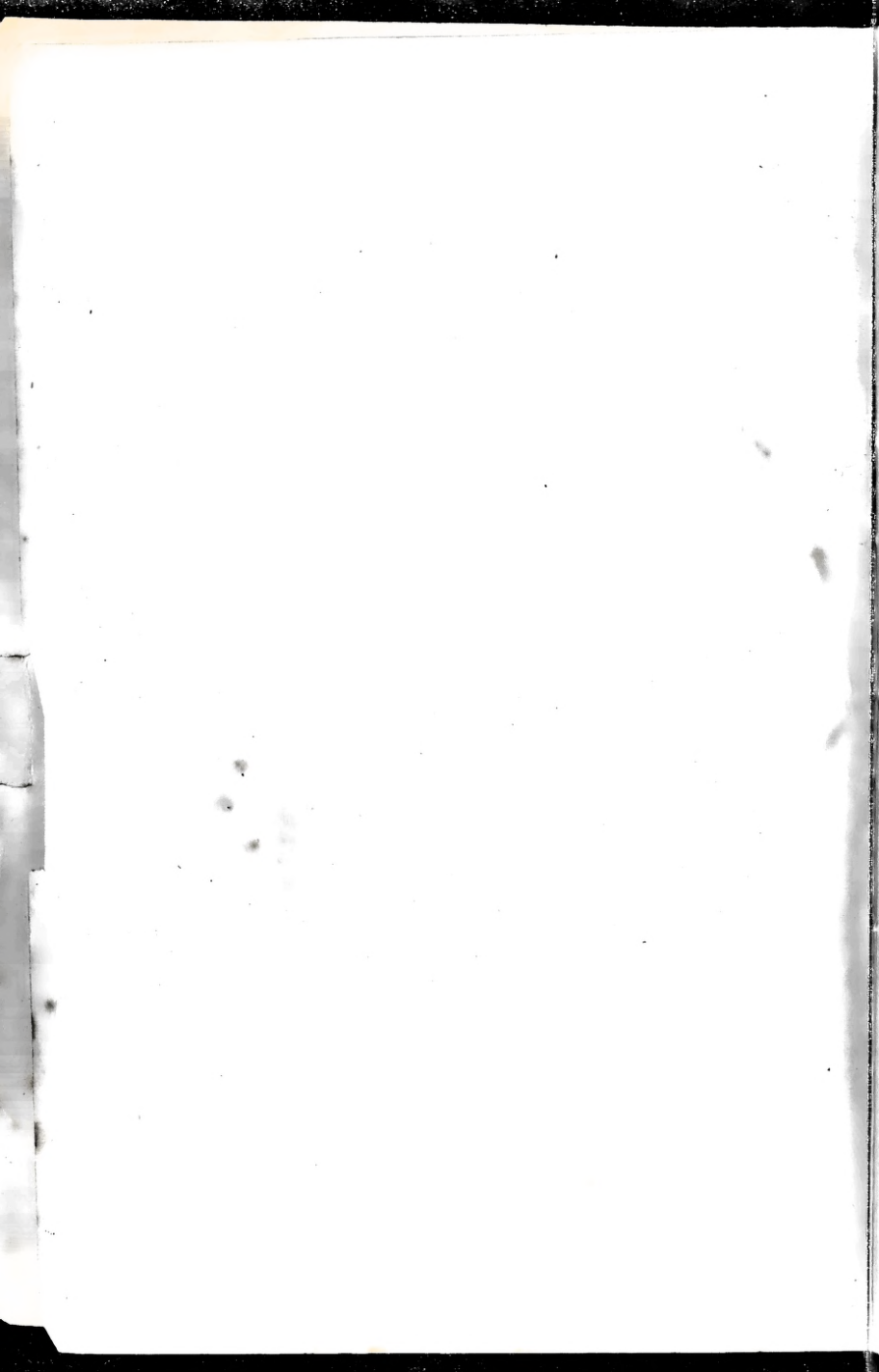
A Critical Inquiry into the Old
and New Testaments.

BY

VOLTAIRE.

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Introduction.

THE ambition of domineering over the mind is one of the strongest passions. A theologian, a missionary, or a partisan of any description is always for conquering like a prince, and there are many more sects than there are sovereigns in the world. To whose guidance shall I submit my mind? Must I be a Christian because I happened to be born in London or in Madrid? Must I be a Mussulman because I was born in Turkey? As it is myself alone that I ought to consult, the choice of a religion is my greatest interest. One man adores God by Mahomet, another by the Grand Lama, and another by the Pope. Weak and foolish men! adore God by your own reason.

The stupid indolence which takes possession of the generality of men, and sets aside this most important of all concerns, seems to intimate to us that they are nothing but stupid machines, endowed with animal functions, whose instinct never occupies itself beyond the present moment. We make use of our understandings in the same way as we use our bodies; both are frequently abandoned to quacks, whose chief concern is to get possession of our money.

The prodigious multitude of Christian sects already forms a great presumption that they are all founded on erroneous systems. The wise man says to himself: "If God had intended us to render him any particular worship, this worship would have been necessary to our species. If this worship were necessary, he himself would have communicated it to each of us, as invariably as he has given us two eyes and one mouth." This worship would likewise have been uniform, since we have not been able to discover anything necessary to the human race that does not possess this uniformity. The universal principles of reason are common to all civilised nations; all acknowledge a Deity; and they may thence infer that this belief is founded in truth. But each nation has a different religion; they ought therefore to conclude that reason tells them to adore a God, but that they have uniformly fallen into errors by wishing to overstep the bounds prescribed them.

The principle, then, in which the whole universe is in agreement, appears to be true; other principles whose consequences are diametrically opposite must appear to be false, and it is natural for us to mistrust them. We have a still greater diffidence when we find that the sole aim of those at the head of each

sect is to domineer and enrich themselves as much as they can; and that from the Dairis of Japan to the Bishop of Rome they are occupied in raising to the pontiff a throne founded on the misery of the people and often cemented with their blood.

Let the Japanese, then, examine how long the Dairis have held them in subjection; let the Tartars make use of their reason in order to judge whether the Grand Lama be immortal; give the Turks permission to judge their Alcoran; and let us, as Christians, examine our Gospels.

I have learnt that a French vicar, of the name of John Meslier, who died a short time since, prayed on his death-bed that God would forgive him for having taught Christianity. I have seen a vicar in Dorsetshire relinquish a living of £200 a year, and confess to his parishioners that his conscience would not permit him to preach the shocking absurdities of the Christians. But neither the will and testament of John Meslier nor the declaration of this worthy vicar are what I consider decisive proofs. Uriel Acosta, a Jew, publicly renounced the Old Testament in Amsterdam; however, I pay no more attention to the Jew Acosta than to Parson Meslier. I will read the arguments on both sides of the trial with careful attention, not suffering the lawyers to tamper with me; but will weigh before God the reasons of both parties, and decide according to my conscience. I commence by being my own instructor.



NOTE TO NEW EDITION.

THIS pamphlet is reprinted from an edition published over forty years ago by James Watson. It is necessary to explain that in reproducing it I have omitted a few passages which, in my opinion, could be discarded without in the slightest degree affecting the validity of the arguments

G. S.

Examination of the Holy Scriptures.

CHAP. I.

Of the books of Moses.

CHRISTIANITY is founded on Judaism ; let us, then, examine if Judaism be the work of God. The books of Moses are handed to me, and the first point I have to ascertain is, whether or not these books were actually written by Moses.

In the first place—Is it possible that Moses could have graven the Pentateuch, or the books of the law, on stone, and that he found gravers and stone-cutters in a frightful wilderness, where it is said that his people had neither tailors, shoemakers, raiment, nor bread, and where God was compelled to work a continued miracle, for the space of forty years, in order to clothe and feed them ?

Secondly.—The book of Joshua tells us that Deuteronomy was written on an altar of rough stone,¹ covered over with plaster. How could a whole book be written on plaster ? Would not the letters soon be effaced by the blood which continually flowed on this altar ? And how could this altar, this monument of Deuteronomy, subsist so long in a country that had been such a length of time reduced to a state of slavery, which their plunders had so fully justified ?

Thirdly.—The innumerable geographical and chronological errors and contradictions which we find in the Pentateuch have compelled many, both Jews and Christians, to declare that the Pentateuch could not have been written by Moses. The learned Le Clerc, a number

¹ Joshua viii., 31, 32.

of divines, even the great Newton, have embraced this opinion, which appears at least very probable.

I likewise ask any reasonable man if it be at all likely that Moses, when he was in the wilderness, would have given precepts for Jewish kings who did not exist for several centuries after him ; and if it be possible that, when in the same wilderness, he could have allotted forty-eight cities and their suburbs to the tribe of the Levites alone, independent of the tenths which the other tribes ought to pay them ? It is, doubtless, very natural to suppose that the priests would lay hold of everything, but we cannot imagine that they had forty-eight cities given them in a little canton where at that time two villages scarcely existed : as many cities would, at least, have been necessary for the other Jewish tribes, and the whole would have amounted to four hundred and eighty cities with their suburbs. The Jews have not written their history in any other manner. Each trait is a ridiculous hyperbole, a stupid falsehood, or an absurd fable.

CHAP. II.

Of the person of Moses.

Was there ever such a person as Moses ? There is so much of prodigy in him from his cradle to his death that he appears to be an imaginary personage like the magician Merlin. If he had really existed, if he had performed the dreadful miracles attributed to him in Egypt, would it have been possible that no Egyptian author should have spoken of these miracles, and that the Greeks, the lovers of the marvellous, had not recorded a single word respecting him ? Flavius Josephus, who, to extol his despicable nation, seeks after the testimony of the Egyptian authors who have spoken of the Jews, has not the face to quote one that makes mention of the prodigies of Moses. Is not this universal silence a proof that Moses is only a fabulous personage ?

Those who have paid any attention to antiquity know that the ancient Arabs invented many fables which succeeding ages made known to other nations. They had imagined the history of ancient Bacchus, whom they supposed to have lived long anterior to the time when the Jews tell us their Moses made his appearance. This Bacchus, or Back, who was born in Arabia, had written his laws on two tables of stone; he was called Misem, a name which has some resemblance to that of Moses; he was picked up in a box on the waters, and the signification of his name is "saved from the waters"; he had a rod with which he performed miracles, and he could change his rod into a serpent at his own pleasure. This same Misem passed the Red Sea dry-shod at the head of his army; he divided the waters of Orontes and Hydaspus, and suspended them to the right and left, and a fiery column lighted his army during the night. The ancient Orphic verses which were sung in the orgies of Bacchus, celebrated a part of these extravagances. This fable was so ancient that the fathers of the church believed Misem or Bacchus to have been Noah.¹ Is it not highly probable that the Jews adopted this fable, and that it was written as soon as they had obtained some knowledge of literature under their kings? They must have a little of the marvellous as well as other people, but they were not the inventors; never was there a petty nation more stupid; all their falsehoods were plagiarisms, and all their ceremonies were visibly performed in imita-

¹ We must observe that Bacchus was known in Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor, and Greece a long time before any nation had heard the name of Moses, or even of Noah and the whole of his genealogy. Everything that belonged exclusively to the Jewish writings was absolutely unknown to both Eastern and Western nations, from the name of Adam to that of David.

The wretched Jews had their own chronology and fables apart, which bore only a slight resemblance to those of other nations. Their writers, who were very tardy in commencing their labors, ransacked everything they could find among their neighbors, and disguised their thefts very badly; witness the fable of Moses, borrowed from that of Bacchus; their ridiculous Samson, from that of Hercules; Jephthah's daughter, from Iphigenia; Lot's wife, imitated from Eurydice, &c.

tion of those of the Phœnicians, Assyrians and Egyptians.

What they themselves have added appear to be such disgusting stupidities and absurdities that they excite both our indignation and pity. In what ridiculous romance could we bear to hear of a man changing all the waters into blood by a flourish of his rod, in the name of a God unknown, while the magicians can do the same thing in the name of their local deities? The only superiority that Moses obtains over the king's magicians is in creating lice, which they were unable to perform. This made a great prince say that as far as lice were concerned, the Jews could do more than all the magicians in the world.

How did an angel of the Lord come and kill all the cattle in Egypt? How did it happen that the king of Egypt had afterwards an army of cavalry? And how did the cavalry proceed to cross the muddy bottom of the Red Sea? How did the same angel of the Lord slay all the first-born of the Egyptians in a single night? It was then that the pretended Moses ought to have taken possession of this beautiful country, instead of running away like a coward and a vagabond, with two or three millions of men, among whom it is said that there were six hundred and thirty thousand combatants. It was this prodigious multitude that he took with him to wander and die in the wilderness, where they could not even find water to drink. To facilitate this grand expedition his God divides the waters of the sea, which he raises like two mountains to the right and left, in order that his favorite people may perish with hunger and thirst.

All the rest of the history of Moses is equally absurd and barbarous. His quails; his manna; his conversations with God; twenty-three thousand of the people killed by order of the priest; twenty-four thousand massacred at another time; and six hundred and thirty thousand combatants in a wilderness where they could never find two thousand men! Assuredly the whole of this appears to be the height of extravagance; and it has been said that Orlando Furioso and Don Quixote are geometrical books in comparison with those of the Hebrews. If we could find only a few rational and honest actions in the fable of Moses, we might then in reality believe that such a person had existed.

They have the face to tell us that the feast of the Passover among the Jews is a proof of the passage of the Red Sea. At this feast they thanked the Jewish God for his goodness in killing all the first-born of Egypt; and they tell us that nothing could be more true than this holy and divine butchery.

"Can we conceive," says that declaimer and trifling reasoner, Abbadie, "that it was possible for Moses to institute sensible memorials of an event recognized to be false by more than six hundred thousand witnesses?" Poor man! thou shouldst have said by more than two millions of witnesses, for six hundred and thirty thousand combatants, whether they were fugitives or not, assuredly lead us to suppose that there were more than two millions of inhabitants. Thou sayest, then, that Moses read his Pentateuch to two or three millions of Jews. Thou believest, likewise, that these two or three millions would have written against Moses if they had discovered any errors in his Pentateuch, and that they would have had their remarks inserted in the journals of the country. Thou hast forgot nothing, except telling us that these three millions have signed as witnesses and that thou hast seen their signatures.

Thou believest, then, that the temples and rites instituted in honor of Bacchus, Hercules, and Perseus, evidently prove that Perseus, Hercules, and Bacchus were the sons of Jupiter; and that among the Romans, the temple of Castor and Pollux was a demonstration that Castor and Pollux had fought for the Romans. Thus they always beg the question; and in matters of the greatest importance to the human race these controversial traffickers make use of arguments that Lady Blackacre durst not hazard on the stage.

We see that these tales have been written by fools, commented upon by simpletons, taught by knaves, and given to children to be learned by heart; yet the sage is called a blasphemer because he becomes indignant and is irritated at the most abominable fooleries that ever disgraced human nature.

CHAP. III.

Of the inspiration attributed to the Jewish Books.

How can we suppose that God would choose a horde of Arabs to be his favorite people, and that he would arm this horde against all other nations? And why, when fighting at the head of them, did he so frequently suffer his people to be vanquished and to become slaves?

In giving them laws, why did he forget to inculcate among this little troop of thieves the belief of the immortality of the soul, and the rewards and punishments after death,¹ while all the great neighboring nations, such as the Chaldeans, Egyptians, Assyrians and Phœnicians, had so long embraced this salutary belief?

Herodotus tells us that the famous temple of Tyre was built two thousand three hundred years before his time; and they say that Moses conducted his troop in the desert about sixteen hundred years before our era. Herodotus wrote five hundred years before the vulgar era, so that the temple of the Phœnicians subsisted twelve hundred years before Moses, and the Phœnician religion was established long before that time.

¹ This is the strongest argument against the Jewish law, and one which the great Bolingbroke did not sufficiently insist upon. What! The legislators of the Indians, Egyptians, Babylonians, Greeks, and Romans all taught the immortality of the soul, which we find in twenty places even in Homer, and yet the pretended Moses does not speak of it. Not a single word is said of it, either in the Jewish Decalogue or in the Pentateuch. It became necessary for commentators, who were either very ignorant, or more inclined to knavery than folly, to twist some passages of Job, who was not a Jew, in order to make it believed by men more ignorant than themselves, that Job had spoken of a future life, because he said, "For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job xix. 25). What connection is there, I pray you, between a sick man who is suffering but hopes to be cured, and the immortality of the soul, hell, and paradise? If Warburton had contented himself with proving that the Jewish law did not mention a future life, he would have rendered a very great service. But by the most incomprehensible madness, he wished to have it believed that the stupidity of the Pentateuch was a proof of its divinity, and his excessive pride supported this chimera with the most intolerant insolence.

This religion, as well as that of the Chaldeans and the Egyptians, announced the immortality of the soul, which was never a fundamental dogma with the Jews. We are told that they were a rude people, and that God put himself upon a level with them. With whom? Jewish robbers! God more stupid than his people! Is not this blasphemy?

CHAP. IV.

Who is the author of the Pentateuch ?

I AM asked who is the author of the Pentateuch. I would as soon be asked who wrote "The Four Sons of Aimon," "Robert the Devil," and "The History of Merlin the Magician."

Sir Isaac Newton, who so far degraded himself as to examine this question seriously, pretends that Samuel wrote these reveries, apparently to render the name of king odious to the Jewish horde, whom this detestable priest wished to govern by himself. I am of opinion, myself, that the Jews could neither read nor write until the time of their captivity under the Chaldeans, because their letters were first Chaldaic and afterwards Syriac. We have never had an alphabet purely Hebraic.

I fancy that Esdras forged all these tales of a tub after the captivity. He wrote them in Chaldean characters in the jargon of the country, in the same way as the peasantry of the north of Ireland make use of the English alphabet.

The Cuteans who inhabited Samaria wrote the same Pentateuch in Phœnician characters, which they made use of in that country, and this Pentateuch is still extant.

I believe Jeremiah may have contributed a good deal to the composition of this romance. We know that he had a strong attachment to the Babylonish kings; it is evident from his rhapsodies that he was paid by the Babylonians, and that he betrayed his own country; he wishes everything to yield to the king of Babylon. The Egyptians were at that time enemies of the Babylonians, and it was to make their court to the great king who was master of Hershalaïm Kedusha (called by us Jerusa-

lem) that Jeremiah and Esdras conspired to instil into the Jews such a horror of the Egyptians. They took care to say nothing about the people of the Euphrates. They are slaves that keep upon good terms with their masters. They confess, indeed, that the Jewish horde has almost always been enslaved, but they respect those to whom they were then in subjection.

Whether or not any other Jews have recorded the feats and tricks of their kings is a matter as unimportant to me as the "History of the Knights of the Round Table," or the "Twelve Peers of Charlemagne"; and I fancy the most useless of all researches must be that of finding out the name of the author of a ridiculous book.

Who first wrote the histories of Jupiter, Neptune and Pluto? I do not know; nor do I care about knowing it.

CHAP. V.

That the Jews have borrowed from all other nations.

It has frequently been said that petty enslaved states always endeavor to imitate their masters; that a weak and uncivilized people rudely conform to the customs of great nations. Cornwall apes London; London does not ape Cornwall. Can anything be more natural than the supposition that the Jews have borrowed what they could of the religious worship, laws and customs of their neighbors?

It is now quite certain that their God, whom we call Jehovah, pronounced by them *Yaho*, was the ineffable name of the God of the Phœnicians and the Egyptians, and was known to be so by the ancients.

Clemens Alexandrinus, in the first book of his *Stromates*, relates that those who entered the Egyptian temples were compelled to carry a species of talisman about them, which was composed of this word *Yaho*; and when they had acquired a certain method of pronouncing this word, he who heard it fell down dead, or at least in a swoon. This is what the jugglers of the temple endeavored to persuade the superstitious.

It is well known that the form of the serpent, the cherubim, the ceremony of the red cow, ablutions (since

called baptism), linen robes reserved for the priests, fastings, abstinence from pork and other meats, and circumcision, were all imitations of the Egyptians.

The Jews confess that they were a long time without a temple, and that they had none for more than five hundred years after Moses, according to their own chronology, which is always erroneous. At length they invaded a small city, in which they built a temple in imitation of great nations. What had they before? A box. This was customary among the Nomades, and the Canaanites of the interior, who were very poor. There was an ancient tradition among the Jews that, when they were Nomades (that is to say, wanderers in the deserts of Arabia Petrea), they carried a box containing a rude image of a god named Remphan, or a species of star cut in wood. You will find traces of this worship in some of the prophets, and particularly in the pretended discourse which in the Acts of the Apostles is put into the mouth of Stephen.¹

Even according to the accounts of the Jews themselves the Phœnicians (whom they call Philistines) had the temple of Dagon before the Jewish troop had a house. If this were the case, if all their worship in the wilderness consisted in having a box to the honor of the god Remphan, who was nothing more than a star revered by the Arabs, it is clear that the Jews in their origin were only a band of wandering Arabs, whose pillaging enabled them to establish themselves in Palestine, who afterwards formed a religion to their own taste, and who composed a history containing nothing but fables. They took a part of the fable of the ancient Bacchus, and gave their hero the name of Moses; but that we should revere these fables, that we should have made them the basis of our religion, and that these fables should still be credited in a philosophical age, is what raises the indignation of all wise men. The Christian church sings Jewish prayers, and burns those that adhere to the Jewish law! How pitiful, how contradictory, how horrible!

¹ Acts vii. 43.

CHAP. VI.

Of Genesis.

ALL the nations by whom the Jews were encompassed had a Genesis, a Theogony, a Cosmogony long before the Jews existed. Is it not evident that the Genesis of the Jews was taken from the ancient fables of their neighbors?

Yaho, the ancient god of the Phœnicians, unravelled the chaos, the Khautereb; he arranged matter, Muth; he formed man with his breath, Calpi; he gave a garden for his habitation, Aden or Eden; he forbade him to meddle with the great serpent Ophioneus, as we are told in the ancient fragment of Pherecidus. What a conformity with the Genesis of the Jews! Is it not natural to suppose that a petty, ignorant people would, in the course of time, borrow the fables of the great people who invented the arts?

It was likewise a received opinion in Asia that God had formed the world in six periods of time, which the Chaldeans, who were so long anterior to the Jews, called six *gahambars*. This was also an opinion of the ancient Indians. The Jews, then, who wrote Genesis, are merely imitators; they mixed their own absurdities with these fables, and we must confess that it is difficult for us to abstain from laughter when we hear of a serpent talking familiarly with Eve; of God speaking to the serpent; of God's promenade in the garden of Eden at noonday; of God making small-clothes for Adam, and an apron for his wife Eve. All the rest appears equally senseless. Many Jews themselves are ashamed of these tales, and they have been considered by them as allegorical fables. How can we interpret literally what the Jews have regarded as allegories?

Neither the histories of Judges, Kings, nor any of the Prophets quote a single passage of Genesis. None of them speaks of Adam's rib being taken from his side to make a woman of; nor of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; nor of the serpent that tempted Eve; nor, in short, of any of these imaginations. Once more: have we any rational motives for believing them?

Their rhapsodies demonstrate that they have pilfered all their notions from the Phœnicians, Chaldeans, and Egyptians, in the same way as they pilfered their goods, when they had it in their power. Even the name of Israel was borrowed from the Chaldeans, as Philo confesses in the first page of the narrative of his deputation to Caligula. These are his words : " The Chaldeans give to the righteous the name of Israel, *seeing God.*" Yet we are such simpletons in the West as to fancy that everything which these Eastern barbarians had stolen belonged exclusively to themselves.

CHAP. VII.

Of the manners of the Jews.

If we pass from Jewish fables to Jewish manners, do we not find them as abominable as their tales are absurd? According to their own confession, they are a troop of brigands, who carry into the wilderness all that they stole from the Egyptians. Joshua, their chief, passes the Jordan by a miracle similar to that of the Red Sea ; and for what purpose? To put to fire and the sword a city to which he was an entire stranger, and the walls of which God caused to fall by the sound of trumpets.

The fables of the Greeks had more of humanity in them. Amphion built cities by the sound of his flute ; Joshua destroys them, and gives up to fire and sword old men, women, children, and cattle. Was there ever a more senseless brutality? He pardons only a prostitute who had betrayed her country. What occasion had he for the perfidy of this miserable woman, since the walls fell at the sound of his trumpet, which may be compared to the trumpet of Astolphus, that made everybody run away from him. We may remark, by the bye, that this woman called Rahab, the prostitute, was an ancestor of the Jew whom we have since transformed into a God, who likewise reckons himself a descendant of the incestuous Tamar, the impudent Ruth, and the adulterous Bathsheba.

We are then told that this same Joshua smote thirty-one kings of the country, that is to say, thirty-one village chiefs, who had defended their firesides against this troop of assassins. If the author of this history had formed a design of rendering the Jews execrable among other nations, could he have adopted a surer method? To add blasphemy to robbery and barbarity, the author dares to say that all these abominations were committed in the name and by the express command of God, to whom they were offered up as so many human sacrifices.

These are God's people! Certainly the Hurons, Canadians, and Iroquois were philosophers of humanity compared to the children of Israel; and yet it was to favor these monsters that the sun and moon stood still at noon-day! And why? To give them time to pursue and slay the miserable Ammorites, who were already crushed to death by a shower of great stones, covering a space of five leagues, which God had thrown upon them from the sky. Is this the history of Gargantua? Is this the history of God's people? And which do we find the more insupportable, the excess of horror or the excess of foolery contained therein? Is it not increasing this stupidity, to amuse ourselves by combatting this detestable collection of fables, which are equally disgraceful to common sense, to virtue, to nature, and to the Deity? If a single adventure related of this people had unfortunately been true, all nations would have united to exterminate them; and if they be false it is not possible to tell lies in a more stupid manner.

What shall we say of Jephthah, who immolates his own daughter to his imaginary God; of the left-handed Ehud, who assassinates Eglon his king in the name of the Lord; of the divine Jael, who assassinates General Sisera by driving a nail into his head; and of the drunken Samson whom God favors with so many miracles?

This last is a gross imitation of the fable of Hercules.

The eleven tribes arm four hundred thousand soldiers, against the tribe of Benjamin. Four hundred thousand soldiers, good God! in a territory which did not measure fifteen leagues in length by five or six in breadth! The Grand Seigneur never had half such an army. These Israelites exterminate the tribe of Benjamin, both old

and young, women and girls, according to their laudable custom. Six hundred boys escape. It would not be proper to let one tribe perish, therefore six hundred girls at least must be given to these six hundred boys.

What do the Israelites do? There was in the neighborhood a small city named Jabez; they take it by surprise, kill all, massacre every thing, even the cattle, reserving only four hundred girls for four hundred Benjamites!

Two hundred boys remain to be provided for, and it is agreed that they shall ravish two hundred of the daughters of Shiloh, when they go to dance at the gates of the city!¹

Come on, Tillotson, Sherlock, Clarke, and the rest of your tribe; say something to justify these cannibal fables; prove to us that these are all types and figures announcing Jesus Christ!

CHAP. VIII.

Of the Jewish manners under their Kings and Pontiffs, to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

THE Jews obtain a king in spite of the priest Samuel, who does all he can to preserve his usurped authority, and he has the hardihood to say that "to choose a king is to reject God."²

At length a herdsman, who sought his father's asses, is elected king by lot. The Jews were then under the yoke of the Canaanites; they had never had a temple; their sanctuary was an ark that could be put into a cart.³

The Canaanites had taken their ark from them, at which God was much displeased; yet he, nevertheless, suffered them to take it, but to be revenged he gave the piles to the conquerors and sent mice into their fields. The victors appeased God by returning him his ark, accompanied with five golden mice.⁴

¹ Judges xxi., 21.

³ 1 Sam. vi. 11.

² 1 Sam. viii. 7.

⁴ 1 Sam. vi. 4.

No vengeance or sacrifice could be more worthy of the Jewish God. He pardons the Canaanites, but kills fifty thousand and seventy of his own people for having looked into the ark.¹

It is under these propitious circumstances that Saul is elected king of the Jews. In their miserable country there was neither sword nor spear; the Canaanites or Philistines did not permit their Jewish slaves even to sharpen their plough-shares and axes; they were forced to apply to the Philistine laborers for this assistance;² and yet we are told that king Saul had, at first, an army of three hundred thousand men with whom he won a great battle.³ Gulliver has similar fables, but not such contradictions.

In another battle Saul comes to terms with the pretended king Agag. The prophet Samuel arrives, and asks, in the name of the Lord, "Wherefore didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord, to slay both man and infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass?"⁴ and he takes a hatchet and hews king Agag in pieces.⁵ If such an action were true, what kind of people and priests were the Jews?

Saul, who was reproved by the Lord because he had not himself slain king Agag his prisoner, goes at length to fight against the Philistines, after the death of the meek prophet Samuel. He consults a witch respecting the success of the battle. It is known that witches can raise ghosts. This witch brings out of the ground the ghost of Samuel; but this merely regards the fine philosophy of the Jews. Now for their morality.

A player of the harp, for whom the Deity had caught a tender affection, causes himself to be anointed king during Samuel's life-time: he revolts against his sovereign, and, as the Scripture tells us, collects four hundred wretches. "Every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him."⁶

This was a man after God's own heart; so the first thing he does is to assassinate a farmer, named Nabal,

¹ 1 Sam. vi. 19.

² 1 Sam. xiii. 19, 20.

³ 1 Sam. xi. 8.

⁴ 1 Sam. xv. 8.

⁵ 1 Sam. xv. 33.

⁶ 1 Sam. xxii. 2.

because he refused to pay contributions. He marries Nabal's widow, and eighteen other women, without reckoning concubines. He goes to an enemy of his own country, king Achish, who receives him well; and as a recompense for this kind reception, he sacks the villages of the allies of Achish, whom he persuades that he has not meddled with any towns except such as belonged to the Hebrews. We must confess, that highwaymen are less culpable in the eyes of men; but the ways of the Jewish God are not as our ways.

The good king David robs Saul's son, Ishbosheth, of his crown. He causes Mephibosheth, son of his protector, Jonathan, to be assassinated. He delivers up to the Gibeonites two sons of Saul, and five of his grandsons to be put to death. He assassinates Uriah, to screen his adultery with Bathsheba; and yet this abominable Bathsheba was the mother of Solomon, who was an ancestor of Jesus Christ.

The remainder of the Jewish history is nothing but a tissue of consecrated crimes. Solomon begins by killing his brother Adonijah.

If God granted to this Solomon the gift of wisdom, he appears to have refused him the gifts of humanity, justice, continence, and honor. He has seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. The song imputed to him is written in the style of those indecent books which are calculated to put modesty to the blush.

Such were the manners of the wisest man among the Jews, or, at least, the manners imputed to him out of respect by miserable rabbins and Christian divines, whose notions are still more absurd.

At length, to unite an excess of ridicule with this excess of immodesty, the priests have decided that the rhapsodies of Solomon's Song are an emblem and a type of the marriage of Jesus Christ with his church.

Of all the kings of Judah and of Samaria, there were very few of them who were not either assassins or assassinated, until this den of robbers, who massacred one another in the public places and the temple during the time that Titus besieged them, fell under the iron chains of the Romans with the rest of this miserable people of God, of whom five-sixths had long been dispersed over

Asia, and sold in the markets of the Roman cities, each Jew being valued at the price of a pig, an animal which was certainly less impure than this nation, if it were such as its historians and prophets represent it.

No one can deny that the Jews have written these abominations; and when we thus assemble them before our eyes, our hearts revolt at them. These, then, are the heralds of Providence, the forerunners of the reign of Jesus. Sayest thou, O Abbadie, that all the Jewish history is a prediction of the Church; that all the prophets have foretold Jesus? Let us, then, examine the prophets.

CHAP. IX.

Of the Prophets.

PROPHET, Nabim, Roheim—speaking, seeing, guessing, is all the same thing. All ancient authors agree that the Egyptians, the Chaldeans, and all the Asiatic nations had their prophets and conjurers. These nations were long anterior to the little people called the Jews, which, when it formed a horde in a corner of land, had no language but that of its neighbors, and which, as we have before shown, borrowed from the Phœnicians even the names of its God, Eloha, Jehovah, Adonai, Sadai; which, in short, took all its rites and ceremonies from its surrounding neighbors, though it continually declaimed against them.

It was said by some writer, that the first seer, or prophet, was the first knave who met with a simpleton; thus is prophecy established from the most remote antiquity. But to fraud, let us add fanaticism; these two monsters dwell together very peaceably in human skulls. We have witnessed the arrival in London of hordes from the heart of Languedoc and Vivarais, who were as much prophets as those of the Jews, and joined the most horrible enthusiasm to the most disgusting falsehoods. We have witnessed Jurieu prophesying in Holland. There were always such impostors, and not only wretches who predicted, but other wretches who imagined prophecies spoken by ancient personages.

The world has been filled with Sybils and Nostradamuses. The Alcoran reckons two hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets. Bishop Epiphanius, in his notes on the pretended Canon of the Apostles, reckons seventy-three Jewish prophets and ten prophetesses. The trade of prophet among the Jews was neither a dignity nor a degree, nor a profession in the state; they were not admitted prophets as doctors are admitted at Oxford and Cambridge. Let those prophesy that would; it was sufficient to have, or to believe they had, or to feign they had, the calling of the spirit of God. Futurity was announced by dancing and playing on the psaltery. Saul, although he was rebuked, took it into his head to be a prophet. During civil wars each party had its prophet, as we have our Grub Street writers. The parties treated each other reciprocally as fools, visionaries, liars and knaves, and in this alone they spoke truth. "The prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad," says Hosea, chap. ix. ver. 7.

The prophets of Jerusalem are fanciful and deceitful men, said Saphoniah, a Jerusalem prophet. They are all something like our apothecary, Moore, who inserts in the newspapers, "Take my pills and beware of counterfeits."

When the prophet Micaiah is predicting misfortunes to the kings of Samaria and Judah, the prophet Zedekiah gives him a box on the cheek, saying, "Which way went the spirit of the Lord from me to speak unto thee?"¹

Jeremiah, who prophesied in favor of Nebuchadnezzar, a Jewish tyrant, put cords round his neck, and a yoke on his back, which was a type, and he was to send this type to the neighboring petty kings, to invite them to submission to Nebuchadnezzar. The prophet Ananias, who looked upon Jeremiah as a traitor, took his cords from him, and threw his yoke on the ground.

Prophecies are seldom read; it is difficult to go through these lengthy and enormous rhapsodies. Fashionable men who have read Gulliver and Atlantis, know neither Hosea nor Ezekiel.

When we point out to sensible people, these execrable passages, buried in the rubbish of prophecy, they cannot recover from their astonishment.

¹ 2 Chron. xviii. 23.

They cannot conceive, that an Isaiah¹ should walk stark naked in the middle of Jerusalem; that an Ezekiel should cut his beard into three portions; that a Jonah should be three days in a whale's belly, &c. Were they to read these shameless indecencies in a profane book, they would throw it away in disgust. It is the Bible; they remain confounded; they hesitate; they condemn the abominations, and dare not condemn the book that contains them. It requires time, before they dare to make use of common sense, but, in the end, they detest what knaves and simpletons have taught them to adore.

When were these irrational and immodest books written? Nobody knows. The most probable opinion is that the greater part of the books attributed to Solomon, Daniel, and others, were written in Alexandria; but what matters it as to time and place? Is it not sufficient to witness in them the most outrageous folly, and the most infamous debauchery?

How is it, then, that the Jews have held them in veneration? Because they were Jews. We must likewise consider, that all these extravagant monuments were preserved only by priests and scribes. We know how scarce books were in all countries, where the art of printing (which the Chinese invented) reached us so late. We shall be still more astonished when we see fathers of the Church adopt these disgusting reveries, or allege them in support of their sins.

We come, at length, from the old covenant to the new one. Let us proceed to Jesus, and to the establishment of Christianity.

CHAP. X.

Of the person of Jesus.

JESUS was born at a time when fanaticism was still dominant, but when decency began to show itself a little. The long commerce of the Jews with the Greeks and Romans had given to the respectable part of the nation manners less vulgar and irrational; but the populace, who are always incorrigible, preserved the same spirit of folly.

¹ Isaiah, xx. 3.

Some Jews, who were oppressed under the kings of Syria, and under the Romans, had then imagined that God would at some time send them a liberator, a Messiah. This expectation ought naturally to be fulfilled in the person of Herod. He was their king, and an ally of the Romans; he had rebuilt their temple, the architecture of which greatly surpassed that of Solomon, since he had filled up a precipice on which that edifice was erected. The people no longer groaned under a foreign yoke; they paid no imposts but to their own monarch; the Jewish worship flourished, and the ancient laws were respected; Jerusalem, we must confess, was then in its greatest splendor.

Idleness and superstition brought forth many factions or religious societies: Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenians, Judaïtes, Therapeutæ, and Johnists, or disciples of John, in the same way as the Papists have their Molinists, Jansenists, Jacobins, and Cordeliers. However, at that time no one spoke of the expectation of a Messiah. Neither Josephus nor Philo, who have entered into such minute details of the Jewish history, say that there was any expectation of the coming of a Christ, an Anointed, a Liberator, a Redeemer, of whom they had then less need than ever. And if there had been one, it must have been Herod. There was, in reality, a party or sect called Herodians, who acknowledged Herod to be the messenger of God.

At all times this people had given the names of Anointed, of Messiah, of Christ, to any one that had been serviceable to them; sometimes it was given to their own pontiffs, and sometimes to foreign princes. The Jew who compiled the reveries of Isaiah, makes him employ a vile flattery, very worthy of a Jewish slave: "Thus saith the Lord to his Anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden to subdue nations before him,"¹ &c. The first book of Kings² call the wicked Jehu, Anointed. A prophet announces to Hazael, king of Damascus, that he is the Messiah and the Anointed of the Most High.

Ezekiel says to the king of Tyrus, "Thou sealest up the sun, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty—thou art the Anointed Cherub."³ If this prince of Tyrus had

¹ Isaiah xlv. 1.² 2 Kings ix. 6.³ Ezek. xxviii. 12, 14.

known that these titles were given to him in Judea, it rested only with himself to have been a kind of demi-god. He had an apparent right to such a title, supposing Ezekiel to have been inspired. The Evangelists have not said so much for Jesus.

However, it is quite certain that no Jew either hoped, desired, or announced an Anointed, a Messiah, in the time of Herod the Great, under whom, it is said, Jesus was born. After the death of Herod, when Judea was governed as a Roman province, and another Herod was established, by the Romans, tetrarch of the little barbarous district of Galilee, many fanatics took upon themselves to preach among the ignorant people, particularly in this Galilee, where the Jews were more ignorant than elsewhere. It is thus, that Fox, a poor cobbler, established in our own times the sect of the Quakers, among the peasantry in one of our counties. The first that founded a Calvinist church in France, was a woollen carder, named John Le Clerc. It is thus, that Muncer, John of Leyden, and others, founded Anabaptism among the poor people in some of the canons of Germany.

I have seen the Convulsionists, in France, institute a small sect among the mob in one of the *Fauxbourgs* of Paris. Sectarians began in this way all the world over. They are generally beggars who rail against the government, and finish either by becoming chiefs of a party, or by being hanged. Jesus was put to death at Jerusalem, without having been anointed; John the Baptist had already been put to death. Each of them left some followers among the dregs of the people. Those of John established themselves towards Arabia, where they still exist. Those of Jesus were at first very obscure, but as soon as they became associated with some of the Greeks, they began to be known.

The Jews, under Tiberius, having carried their accustomed knaveries to a higher pitch than ever, and having likewise seduced and robbed Fulvia, wife of Saturnius, were driven from Rome, and could not be re-established there, except by giving much money. They were likewise severely punished under Caligula and Claudius.

Their disasters served in some measure to embolden the Galileans, who comprised the new sect, to separate

themselves from the Jewish communion. At length, they found some who were a little acquainted with letters, who put themselves at their head, and who wrote in their favor against the Jews. This was what produced such an immense number of Gospels, a Greek word, signifying "Good-news." Each gave a life of Jesus; none of them agreed with the rest, but all of them had resemblance by the number of incredible prodigies which, to vie with each other, they attributed to their founder.

The Synagogue, on its part, seeing that a new sect had sprung up in its bosom, and that it was vending a life of Jesus, very injurious to the Sanhedrim, began to make enquiries respecting this man, to whom it had not hitherto paid any attention.

We have still a stupid work of that time, entitled "Sepher Toldos Jeschut." It appears to have been written many years after the death of Jesus, during the time when the Gospels were compiled. This book, like all others of the Jews and Christians, is full of prodigies, but, extravagant as it is, we must confess that many statements contained in it are much more probable than those related in our Gospels.

It is said in the "Toldos Jeschut" that Jesus was the son of a woman named Mirja, who was married in Bethlehem to a poor man of the name of Jocanam. There was in the neighborhood a soldier of the name of Joseph Pander, a well-shaped, good-looking young man, who fell in love with Mirja or Maria. As the Hebrews do not express their vowels, they frequently take *a* for *j*.

Mirja became with child by Pander. Jocanam, who was seized with confusion and despondency, quitted Bethlehem, and went to secrete himself in Babylon, where there were still many Jews. The conduct of Mirja disgraced her, and her son Jesus or Jeschut, was declared a bastard by the judges of the city. When he became old enough to be admitted into the public school, he placed himself among the legitimate children; however, he was compelled to leave this class.

Hence arose the animosity against priests, which he manifested when he had attained manhood; he lavished on them the most opprobrious epithets, calling them "a race of vipers and whitened sepulchres."

Having, at length, quarrelled with Judas, a Jew, regarding a question of interest, as well as concerning some religious points, Judas denounced him to the Sanhedrim. He was arrested, began to cry, and begged pardon, but in vain; he was flogged, stoned, and afterwards put to death.

Such is the substance of this history. Insipid fables and impertinent miracles have since been added, which injured it much, but the book was known in the second century. Celsus quotes it; Origen refutes it, and it has reached us quite disfigured.

The chief part of what I have just stated is certainly more probable, more natural, and more comfortable, to what passes in the world in our own days, than any of the fifty gospels of the Christians. It was much more likely that Joseph Pander was the father of Mirja's child, than that an angel came from heaven, with God's compliments to a carpenter's wife, in the same way as Jupiter sent Mercury to visit Alcmena.

Every thing that they tell us about Jesus is worthy of the Old Testament, and of Bedlam. They bring I know not what kind of *Agion pneuma*, a Holy Ghost, that had hitherto never been spoken of, and which they have since told us is the third part of God.

Jesus then becomes the Son of God, and of a Jewess; he is not yet God himself, but he is a superior Being. He works miracles. The first he performs is, to have himself conveyed by the devil to the top of one of the mountains of Judea, where he could discover all the kingdoms of the earth. His raiment appeared white; what a miracle! He changes water into wine at a repast, where the guests were already drunk.¹ He dries a fig tree, because it does not furnish him with figs to his

¹ It is difficult to say which of those pretended prodigies is the more ridiculous. Many people give a preference to that of the wine at the marriage of Cana. That God should say to his mother, the Jewess, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" is a strange thing; but that he should feast with drunkards, and should change six pitchers of water into wine for men that had already drunk too much, is a blasphemy as execrable as it is impertinent. The Hebrew text uses a word which answers to "tipsy" or half drunk; the Vulgate says "inebriate."

breakfast in the month of February. Yet the author of this tale has at least the honesty to tell us that it was not the season for figs. He goes to sup with women, and then with publicans, and yet it is pretended, in his history, that he looked upon these publicans as bad characters. He goes into the temple, that is to say, into the large inclosure where the priests resided, in the court where retail dealers were authorised by law to sell fowls, pigeons, sheep, and oxen, and strews their money on the ground. Yet he is suffered to proceed without interruption! And if we believe the book attributed to John, they content themselves with asking him to work a miracle, in order to show his authority, to play pranks like these in a place so respected.

It was a very great miracle, for thirty or forty tradesmen to suffer themselves to be kicked, and to lose their money, by one man, without saying anything to him. There is nothing in Don Quixote which approaches such extravagances as this. But instead of performing the miracle they demand of him, he contents himself with saying, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."¹ The Jews reply, according to John, "Forty and six years was this temple building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?"

It was asserting a great falsehood to say that Herod had been employed forty-six years in building the temple of Jerusalem. The Jews in their reply, could not make use of such a falsehood. By the bye, this alone shows us that the Gospels have been written by men who were scarcely acquainted with anything.

After this foolish enterprise, Jesus is said to have preached in the villages. What kind of discourses do they make him hold forth? He compares the kingdom of heaven to a grain of mustard seed; to a morsel of leaven, mixed in three measures of meal; to a net, that catches both good and bad fish; to a king, who kills his chickens to make a feast at his son's wedding, and sends his servants to invite the neighbors to it. The neighbors kill the servants that request them to dine, and the king kills the people who killed his servants, and burns their

¹ John ii. 19.

city. He then sends to compel the beggars on the highway to come and dine with him, and seeing a poor guest who had no garment, instead of giving him one, he causes him to be thrown into a dungeon. This is the kingdom of heaven according to Matthew.

In the other discourses, the kingdom of heaven is always compared to a usurer, who will absolutely have cent. per cent. profit. They confess that our Archbishop Tillotson preaches in a different style.

How did the history of Jesus finish? By events which have happened both in our own country and in the rest of the world, to many people who wished to stir up the populace, without being sufficiently capable either of arming that population, or of gaining to themselves powerful protectors. They most commonly finish by being hanged. Jesus was put to death, for having called his superiors, "a race of vipers, and whited sepulchres."¹ He was executed publicly, but he rose from the grave privately. At length he ascended into heaven, in the presence of eighty of his disciples, without any other person in Judea seeing his ascension in the clouds, which was, however, easy to be seen, and ought to have made a great noise in the world.

Our Creed, called by the Papists *Credo*, which was attributed to the apostles, though evidently fabricated more than four hundred years after these apostles, acquaints us, that before Jesus ascended into heaven, he went on a tour into hell. You will remark, that not a single word is said about this journey in the Gospels, and yet it is one of the principal articles of the Christian faith. We cannot be Christians, if we do not believe that Jesus descended into hell.

Who was, then, the first that imagined this journey? It was Athanasius, about three hundred and fifty years after the event. It is in his treatise against Apollinarus, on the incarnation of the Lord, where he mentions that the soul of Jesus descended into hell, while his body remained in the sepulchre.

His words are worthy of attention, and show us with what sagacity and wisdom Athanasius reasoned.

¹Matt. xxiii. 27.

Here follow his own words: "It was necessary after his death, that his divers essential parts should perform divers functions; that his body should remain in the sepulchre to destroy corruption, and that his soul should go into hell to vanquish death."

The African St. Augustin, in a letter that he wrote to Evodus, seems to agree with him, *Quis ergo nisi infidelis negaverit fuisse apud inferos Christum?*

Jerome, his contemporary, was nearly of the same opinion; and it was during the time of Augustine and Jerome that this *Credo* was composed, which, among ignorant people, passed for the Apostles' Creed.

Thus were opinions, creeds, and sects established. But how could these detestable fooleries be credited? How did they overturn the other absurdities of the Greeks and Romans, and, at last, the empire itself? How have they caused so many evils, so many civil wars, lighted so many faggots, and spilled so much blood? We are going to account for it.

CHAP. XI.

Of the establishment of Christianity, and particularly of Paul.

WHEN the first Galileans spread themselves among the populace of the Greeks and Romans, they found this populace infected with all the absurd traditions that can take possession of ignorant minds enamored with fables. They had gods disguised in the shape of bulls, horses, swans, and serpents, to seduce women and girls. Magistrates, and respectable citizens, did not admit of these extravagances, but the populace fed on them, and these constituted the pagan mob. I fancy I see the followers of Fox dispute with those of Brown. It was not difficult for Jews, possessed with devils, to make their reveries believed by the ignorant, who believed other reveries equally impertinent.

Novelty attracted weak minds, who grew tired of their old follies, and ran to hear new tales, just like the mob at Bartholomew fair, demanding a new farce, and be-

coming disgusted with the old one, which they have so often seen repeated.

If we believe the books of the Christians, we are told that Peter, son of Jonas,¹ dwelt with Simon the tanner, in a garret at Joppa, where he brought to life again the mantua-maker, Dorcas.

In the chapter of Lucian, entitled *Philopatris*, he speaks of a Galilean "with a bald forehead, and large nose, who was carried to the third heaven."

See how he speaks of an assembly of Christians, whom he fell in with: "Tatterdemalions almost naked, with fierce looks and the walk of madmen, who moan and make contortions; swearing by the Son who was begotten by the Father, predicting a thousand misfortunes to the empire, and cursing the emperor." Such were the first Christians.

He who had given the greatest notoriety to this sect was this Paul with the large nose and bald forehead, whom Lucian ridicules. The writings of Paul, it appears, are sufficient to show how far Lucian was right. What nonsense he writes to the society of Christians, forming at Rome the Jewish rabble! "Circumcision verily profiteth if thou keep the law, but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision."²—"Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law."³ "If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory, but not before God."⁴

In thus expressing himself, Paul spoke evidently as a Jew, and not as a Christian.

What a discourse to the Corinthians, "Our fathers were all baptised unto Moses, in the cloud and in the sea."⁵ Was not Cardinal Bembo right in calling these epistles *Epistolaciae*, and advising people not to read them?

What shall we think of a man who says to the Thessalonians, "Let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak,"⁶ and who in the same epistle announces that they ought to pray and prophesy with their heads covered?⁷

¹ Acts ix. 39.

⁴ Rom. iv. 2.

² Rom. ii. 25.

⁵ 1 Cor. x. 1, 2.

⁷ 1 Cor. xi. 5.

³ Rom. iii. 31.

⁶ 1 Cor. xiv. 34.

Is his quarrel with the other apostles that of a wise and moderate man? Does not every thing show him to be a party man? He is a Christian; he teaches Christianity, and goes seven days to sacrifice in the temple of Jerusalem, by the advice of James. He writes to the Galatians, "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing."¹ And he afterwards circumcises his disciple Timothy, who, as the Jews pretend, was the son of a Greek and a prostitute. He obtrudes himself among the apostles, and boasts of being as much an apostle as the rest of them: "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus Christ, our Lord? Are not ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. Have we not a power to eat and to drink? Have we not a power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord? Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges?" What frightful things in this passage! The right of living at the expense of those he has subjugated; the right of making them pay the expenses of his wife or his sister; and, at last, the proof that Jesus had brethren, and the presumption that Mary, or Mirja, was brought to bed more than once.

I should be glad to know of whom he is speaking again in his 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians, chap. xi.: "For such are false apostles. Howbeit, wherein soever any is bold, I am bold also. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they the ministers of Christ? I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Five times received I forty stripes, save one; thrice was I beaten with rods; once was I stoned; a night and a day I have been in the deep."

Behold this Paul, who was twenty-four hours in the deep without being drowned! It is a third of the adventure of Jonah. But does he not here clearly manifest his base jealousy of Peter and the other apostles, by thinking to carry the palm from them, because he has received more stripes and floggings than they have done?

Does not his fury for domineering appear in all its insolence, when he says to the same Corinthians, "This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established. Being now absent, I write to them which heretofore have sinned, and to all other, that, if I come again, I will not spare."¹ To what simple fools, to what kind of besotted creatures, did he thus address himself like a tyrannical master? Those to whom he had the hardihood to assert that he was carried to the third heaven. Impudent and dastardly impostor! Where is this third heaven in which thou hast travelled? Is it in Venus or in Mars?

We laugh at Mahomet, when his commentators pretend that he visited seven heavens in succession, in a single night; but Mahomet, in the Alcoran at least, does not speak of such an extravagance as that which is imputed to him; yet Paul dares to assert that he has performed half of this journey.

Who was this Paul, then, who still makes so much noise, and who is every day quoted at random? He says he was a Roman citizen, which I dare affirm to be an impudent falsehood. No Jew was a Roman citizen, except under the Decii and Philips. If he were of Tarsus, it was neither a Roman city nor a Roman colony for more than a hundred years after Paul. If he were a native of Giscalus, as St. Jerome states, this village was in Galilee, and, assuredly, the Galileans had never the honor of being Roman citizens.

He was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel; that is to say, he was one of Gamaliel's domestics. Indeed, it is remarked that he took care of the clothes of those who stoned Stephen, which is the work of a valet. The Jews pretend that he wished to marry Gamaliel's daughter. We see some traces of this adventure in the ancient book which contains the history of Thecla.

It is not astonishing that the daughter of Gamaliel should reject a little bald-headed valet, whose eyebrows hung over a deformed nose, and who was bandy-legged. It is thus that the "Acts of Thecla" describe him. Disdained, as he deserved to be, by Gamaliel and his

¹ 2 Cor. xiii. 1, 2.

daughter, he joined himself with the infant sect of Cephas, James, Matthew, and Barnabas, in order to annoy the Jews.

Any one, who has the least spark of reason, would judge that this cause which has been assigned for the apostacy of this miserable Jew, is more natural than that attributed to him. How can we persuade ourselves that a celestial light knocked him off horseback at noon-day; that a heavenly voice addressed him; that God said to him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Ought we not to blush at such stupidity?

If God had wished to prevent the disciples of Jesus from being persecuted, would he not have addressed himself to the princes of the nation, rather than to Gamaliel's valet? Have they met with less chastisement since Saul fell from his horse? Was not Saul (or Paul) himself chastised? What was the utility of this ridiculous miracle? I call heaven and earth to witness (if I may be permitted to make use of these improper words, heaven and earth), that there never was a legend more stupid, more fanatical, more disgusting, nor more deserving of our horror and contempt.

CHAP. XII.

Of the Gospels.

As soon as the societies of half Jews, half Christians, had by degrees established themselves among the ignorant people at Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and Alexandria, some time after Vespasian, each of these little societies wished to make its own gospel. Fifty of them had been reckoned, and there were many more. It is known that they all contradict one another; this could not be otherwise, since they were all composed in different places. All of them agree only that their Jesus was the son of Mary, or Mirja, and that he was put to death; all of them likewise ascribe to him as many prodigies as are to be found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

Luke dresses up a genealogy for him quite different to that planned by Matthew; and neither of them dreams about giving us the genealogy of Mary, who was his only

parent. The enthusiastic Pascal cries out, "This is not acting in concert." Undoubtedly not. Each has written extravagances for his little society, according to his own fancy. This accounts for one Evangelist pretending that the little Jesus was brought up in Egypt, and another saying that he was brought up at Bethlehem. One of them makes him go only once to Jerusalem, while the others say that he went three times. One of them causes three wise men, whom we call three kings, to be conducted by a new star, and causes all the little children of the country to be put to death by the first Herod, who was then near the end of his days. The others are silent about the star, and the wise men, and the massacre.¹ At length, to explain these contradictions, we have been compelled to make a concordance, and this concordance is less concordant than the matters they wished to reconcile.

Almost all the Gospels, which the Christians never made known but to their own little flocks, were visibly forged after the taking of Jerusalem. We have a very evident proof of it in that attributed to Matthew. This book puts into the mouth of Jesus these words to the Jews: "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, killed between the temple and the altar." A forger is always discovered in some part of his work. During the siege of Jerusalem, there was a Zacharias, son of Barachias, killed between the temple and the altar, by the faction of the zealots. This enables us easily to detect the imposition, otherwise we might have read over the

¹ The massacre of the innocents is certainly the height of folly, as well as the tale of the three wise men conducted by a star. How could Herod, who was then almost on his death-bed, fear being dethroned by the son of a village carpenter, who was just born? Herod died only two or three years after, at the age of seventy. It would have been necessary for this child to make war against the empire. Could such a fear take possession of any man who was not an absolute fool? Is it possible that they have proposed to human credulity such stupid fooleries, which outdo Robert the Devil and John of Paris? Man is a very contemptible being when he suffers himself to be governed in such a way!

whole Bible to enable us to do so. The Greeks and Romans read but little, and the Gospels were entirely unknown to them. Lies were told with impunity.

An evident proof that the Gospel attributed to Matthew was not written till long after him by some miserable half Jew, half Christian Hellenist, is the famous passage: "If he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."¹

There was no church in the time of Jesus and of Matthew. Church is a Greek word. The assembly of the people of Athens styled itself *Ecclesia*. This expression was only adopted by the Christians in process of time, when they had obtained a kind of government. It is clear, then, that an impostor took the name of Matthew, and wrote his Gospel in very bad Greek. I confess it would be comical enough for Matthew, who had himself been a publican, to compare the heathens with publicans. But whoever might have been the author of this ridiculous comparison, none but a mad-cap among the most illiterate of the people would have looked upon a Roman knight, who was authorised to receive the imposts established by government, as a man that ought to be despised. The idea alone is destructive of all administration, and not only unworthy of a man whom God had inspired, but unworthy the lackey of an honest citizen.

There are two Gospels of the infancy. The first relates that a young beggar patted the little Jesus, his comrade, behind, and that the little Jesus immediately killed him. *Kai para kremei peson apeidonen*. At another time he made birds of clay, which flew away. His method of learning the alphabet was quite divine. Those tales are not more ridiculous than that of his being carried off by the devil, that of his transfiguration on Mount Tabor, that of the water changed into wine, and that of the devil's being sent into a herd of swine. Thus this Gospel of this infancy was long held in veneration.

The second Gospel of the infancy is not less curious. Mary, who was conducting her son into Egypt, met with some girls that were deploring the loss of their brother, who had been transformed into a mule. Mary and her

¹ Matt. xviii. 17.

little one did not fail to change the mule into its former shape of a man, but we do not know whether or not the miserable animal was any better for the change. As they proceeded on the road, the wandering family met with two robbers, one named Dumachus, the other Titus. Dumachus was for robbing the Virgin, and doing something still more scandalous, but Titus took Mary's part, and gave forty drachmas to persuade him to let the family go by, without doing them any injury. Jesus declared to the Holy Virgin, that Dumachus should be the wicked thief, and Titus the good thief; that they would one day be executed with him; that Titus should go into paradise, and Dumachus to the devil.

The Gospel according to St. James, elder brother of Jesus, or that of Peter Barjonas, a Gospel known and boasted of by Tertullian, and by Origen, was in still greater repute. It was called *Proto-Evangelion*, or First Gospel. It was perhaps the first which spoke of the new star, of the arrival of the wise men, and of the little children whom the first Herod ordered to be massacred.

There is still a kind of Gospel or Acts of John in which Jesus is said to have danced with his apostles the evening before he died; and the circumstance is rendered probable, as the Therapeutæ were really accustomed to dance in a ring, a ceremony that must be very pleasing to our heavenly Father.

Why does the most scrupulous Christian now laugh without remorse at all these gospels and acts which are no longer in the canon; and why does he not dare to laugh at those adopted by the church? They are nearly the same tales; but fanaticism adores in one name what appears the height of ridicule in another.

At length, four Gospels are chosen; and the great reason for having that number, as stated by St. Irenæus, is, that there are only four cardinal points; that God is seated on cherubim, and that cherubim have four different shapes. St. Jerome, in his preface to Mark's Gospel, adds to the four winds and four-shaped animals, the four rings of the poles, on which the box called the ark was carried.

Theophilus, of Antioch, proves that as Lazarus was dead only four days, we can consequently admit only four Gospels; St. Cyprian proves the same thing by the four rivers that watered Paradise. We must be very impious not to yield to such reasons as these.

However, previous to any preference being given to these four Gospels, the fathers of the two first centuries scarcely ever quoted any except the gospels which are now styled apocryphal. This is an incontestible proof that our four Gospels were not written by those to whom they are attributed. I wish they were so. I wish, for example, Luke had written that which goes under his name. I would say to Luke, "How darest thou maintain that Jesus was born under the governorship of Cyreneus, or Quirinus, when it is attested that Quirinus was not governor of Syria till more than ten years afterwards? How hast thou the face to say, that Augustus ordered all the world to be taxed, and that Mary went to Bethlehem for that purpose? A tax on all the world! What an expression! Thou hast heard that Augustus had a book which contained a detail of the forces of the empire, and its finances; but a tax on all the subjects of the empire is what he never could have thought of, still less could he think of a tax all over the world. No writer, either Greek, Roman, or barbarian, has mentioned such an extravagance. Behold thee, then, convicted of a most enormous falsehood, and yet thy book must be respected!"

But who fabricated these four Gospels? Is it not probable that they were written by Christian Hellenists, since the Old Testament is scarcely ever quoted, except from the Septant version, which was unknown in Judea? The apostles knew no more about the Greek language than Jesus did. How could they have quoted the Septant? Nothing but the miracle of Pentecost could teach Greek to ignorant Jews.

What a collection of contrarieties and falsehoods remain in these four Gospels! Were there only one, it would suffice to shew them to be works of ignorance. Did we find only the single tale given by Luke, that Jesus was born under the governorship of Cyreneus, when Augustus ordered all the world to be taxed; would not

this falsehood alone cause us to throw away the book with contempt? In the first place, there never was such a taxation, and no author speaks of it. Secondly, Cyreneus was not governor of Syria till ten years after the epocha of the birth of Jesus. In the Gospels there are almost as many errors as words, and thus it is they succeed with the people.

CHAP. XIII.

How the first Christians conducted themselves among the Romans, and how they forged verses attributed to the Sibyls, &c.

PEOPLE of common sense ask how this tissue of fables so stupidly offensive to reason, these blasphemies, which impute so many horrid crimes to the Deity, could obtain any credit. They might, indeed, have been astonished if the first Christians had converted the emperor's court, or the Roman senate; but an abject mob addressed itself to a populace not less despicable. This is so true, that the Emperor Julian said in a Discourse to the Christians, "It was enough for you at first to seduce a few servants, a few beggars, such as Cornelius and Sergius. But let me be regarded as the most impudent of impostors, if among those who embraced your sect under Tiberius and Claudius there was a single man of birth or merit."

The first reasoning Christians, then, exclaimed in the public places and victualling-houses, to the Pagans who attempted to reason with them: "Be not startled with our mysteries; you have recourse to expiations to purge yourselves of your crimes, but we have an expiation far more salutary. Your oracles are inferior to ours; and what we offer as a proof to convince you that our sect is the only true one is, that your own oracles have predicted all that we teach, and all that was done by our Lord Jesus Christ. Have you not heard of the Sibyls?"—"Yes," replied the Pagan disputants to those of Galilee, "all the Sibyls were inspired by Jupiter himself; their predictions are all true." "Very well," replied the Galileans, "we will shew you Sibyline verses which clearly announce Jesus Christ, and then you must acknowledge we are right."

Behold them immediately forging the most stupid Greek verses that were ever composed: verses similar to those of Blackmore and Gibson, of Grub Street. They ascribe them to the Sibyls, and for the space of more than four hundred years they did not cease to establish Christianity on this proof, which was on a level with the understandings of both the deceivers and the deceived. This first attempt having succeeded, we find these puerile impostors attributing to the Sibyls acrostic verses, all of which commenced by the letters composing the name of Jesus Christ.

Lactantius has preserved, as authentic pieces, a great portion of these rhapsodies. To these fables they added miracles, which they sometimes performed in public. It is true, that they did not raise the dead like Elisha;¹ they did not arrest the sun on its course like Joshua; they did not cross the sea dry-shod, like Moses; they did not, like Jesus, cause themselves to be transported to the top of a little mountain in Galilee, where they could discover all the kingdoms of earth: but they cured the fever when on its decline, and even the itch as soon as the patient had been bathed, blooded, purged, and rubbed. They likewise cast out devils, which was the principal object of the apostles' mission. It is said, in more than one Gospel, that Jesus sent them purposely to cast out devils. This was an ancient prerogative of God's people. We know that there were exorcists at Jerusalem, who cured the possessed by putting into their noses a little of the root called Baruth, and by muttering a few words taken from Solomon's Song. Jesus himself confesses that the Jews had this power;² yet no devils durst take possession of the governor of a province, of a senator, nor even a centurion. None but the poor were ever possessed by them.

If the devil ought to have seized hold of any particular individual, it should have been Pilate, yet he never durst approach him. Although the Christian sect was in reality established by this custom, yet it is almost every where abolished, except in States obedient to the Pope, and in some of the German cantons, where the ignorant people are unfortunately in subjection to bishops and monks.

¹ 2 Kings iv. 32.

² Matt. xii. 27.

Thus the Christians gained credit among the ignorant people during a whole century. The government let them alone, regarding them as a Jewish sect, and the Jews were tolerated. They persecuted neither Pharisees, nor Sadducees, nor the Therapeutæ, nor Essenians, nor Judaites; and they had a still greater reason to permit the Christians to creep in on their ignorance, that of their being unknown. They were so little thought of, that neither Josephus, nor Philo, nor Plutarch deigns to speak of them; and if Tacitus says a few words respecting them, it is by confounding them with the Jews, and stigmatizing them in the most contemptible manner. They possessed, therefore, the greatest facility for extending their sect.

They were a little enquired after under Domitian; some of them were punished under Trajan, and it was then that they began to unite a thousand false accounts of martyrs, to some others that were but too true.

CHAP. XIV.

*How the Christians conducted themselves towards the Jews.
Their ridiculous explanation of the prophecies.*

THE Christians could never succeed so well among the Jews as they did among the populace of the Gentiles. So long as they continued to live according to the Mosaic law, which Jesus had observed all his lifetime; so long as they abstained from meats pretended to be impure, and did not proscribe circumcision, they were regarded as only a particular society of the Jews, such as the Sadducees, Essenians, and Therapeutæ. They said that it was wrong to put Jesus to death, that he was a holy man sent by God, and that he had risen again from the dead.

These discoveries, it is true, were punished at Jerusalem; it is said they cost Stephen his life, but otherwise this division produced only altercations between the rigid Jews and half Christians. They disputed; and the Christians fancied that they had found in the Scriptures some passages that might be twisted in favor of their cause.

They pretended that the Jewish prophets had predicted Jesus Christ, and quoted Isaiah, who said to to king Ahaz,¹ "Behold, a virgin (or a young woman, ALMA)² shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall hiss for the fly that is in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired, namely, by them beyond the river, by the king of Assyria, the head and the hair of the feet; and it shall also consume the beard."

Chap. viii. "Moreover, the Lord said unto me, Take thee a great roll, and write in it with a man's pen, concerning Maher-shalal-hash-baz. And I went unto the prophetess, and she conceived, and bare a son. Then said the Lord to me, Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz," which signifies, "Divide quickly the spoils."

"You see clearly," said the Christians, "that the whole of this evidently signifies the coming of Jesus Christ. The young woman who has a child is the Virgin Mary. 'Immanuel' and 'divide quickly the spoils,' signify our Lord Jesus Christ. As for the razor, 'that is hired to shave the hair of the king of Assyria,' that is another matter." All these explanations perfectly resemble those of Lord Peter, in Swift's *Tale of a Tub*.

The Jews answered, "We do not see so clearly as you do, that 'Divide quickly the spoils,' and 'Immanuel' signify Jesus; that Isaiah's young woman is a virgin; nor that *alma*, which is equally expressive both of girl and young woman, signifies Mary." And they laughed in the faces of the Christians.

¹ Isaiah vii.

² By what fraudulent impudence have the Christians maintained that ALMA always signifies a virgin? There are in the Old Testament twenty passages where *alma* is taken for a woman, and even for a concubine, as in Solomon's Song vi. and Joel i. Till the time of Abbé Tutheme none of the doctors knew Hebrew, except Origen, Jerome and Ephraim, who were brought up in the country.

When the Christians said that Jesus is predicted by the patriarch Judah, who was to "bind his foal unto the vine, and wash his garments in wine,"¹ and Jesus having entered Jerusalem on an ass, then Judah is a type of Jesus. This made the Jews to laugh still more.

If they pretended that Jesus was the Shiloh who was to come before the sceptre had departed from Judah,² the Jews confounded them by saying, that, since the Babylonish captivity, the sceptre had never been in Judah, and that even during the time of Saul, the rod was not in Judah. Thus the Christians, far from being able to convert the Jews, were despised and detested by them, and are so still. They were looked upon as bastards, who, under false titles, wished to strip the heir of his possession. They then renounced the hope of converting the Jews to their cause, and addressed themselves wholly to the Gentiles.

CHAP. XV.

Of false quotations and predictions in the Gospels.

To encourage the first they had to instruct previous to baptism, it was thought good to quote old prophecies, and to make new ones. In the Gospels they quoted old prophecies at random. Matthew, or he who took the name, says that Joseph "dwelt in a city called Nazareth; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet: He shall be called a Nazarene." No prophet had made use of these words; Matthew wrote therefore at random.

Luke dares to say, chap. xxi., "And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; the sea and the waves roaring. Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth. For the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Verily, I say unto you; this generation shall not pass away till all be fulfilled." The generation passed away, and if nothing of

¹ Gen. xlix. 11.

² Gen. xlix. 10.

this kind happened, it is not my fault. Paul says nearly as much about it, in his Epistle to the Thessalonians : "Then we, which are alive and remain, shall be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."¹

Let any one here interrogate himself, whether or not he considers it possible to carry imposture and the stupidity of fanaticism to a higher pitch? When it was seen that such gross falsehoods had been asserted, the fathers of the church did not fail to say that Luke and Paul had understood by these predictions the destruction of Jerusalem. But, I pray you, what has the destruction of Jerusalem to do with Jesus coming in the clouds, in great power and majesty?

There is, in the Gospel attributed to John, a passage which shews clearly that this book was not composed by a Jew. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another." This commandment, so far from being a new one, is enjoined in a much more forcible manner in Leviticus, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."²

In short, whoever will give himself the trouble of reading, with attention, the passages where the Old Testament is quoted, will find only a manifest abuse of words, and the seal of falsehood almost in every page.

CHAP. XVI.

Of the end of the world, and the new Jerusalem.

Not only have they introduced Jesus on the scene predicting the end of the world, even during his own lifetime, but this was also the fanaticism of all those called apostles and disciples.

Peter Barjonas says, in the first epistle attributed to him, "For this cause was the Gospel preached also to them that are dead; but the end of all things is at hand."³ In his second Epistle, "We look for new heavens and a new earth."⁴

¹ Levit. xix. 18.

³ 1 Peter iv. 6, 7.

² 1 Thess. iv. 17.

⁴ Peter iii. 13.

The first Epistle attributed to John says, formally, "Even now there are many anti-christs, whereby we know that it is the last time."¹

The Epistle put to the account of this Thaddeus, surnamed Jude, announces the same folly: "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all."²

In short, it was this kind of madness which served as a foundation for the other respecting the new Jerusalem which was to descend from heaven. The Apocalypse announced this approaching adventure; all the Christians believed it. New Sibylline verses were written, in which this Jerusalem was predicted; this new city even made its appearance, and the Christians were to dwell in it for a thousand years after the conflagration of the world. It descended from heaven forty nights successively. Tertullian saw it himself.

The day will come when every honest man will say, Is it possible that men have spent their time in refuting this tale of a tub?

Behold the opinions that caused half the earth to be ravaged! Behold what has given principalities and kingdoms to hypocritical priests, and which, in all Catholic countries, still precipitates simpletons into the dungeons of a cloister!

It is by means of these spider-webs that they have twisted the cords that bind us, and they have found out the secret of transforming them into chains of iron! Great God! Is it for such fooleries that Europe has weltered in blood, and that Charles I. died on the scaffold! O destiny! When a parcel of half Jews wrote their dull impertinences in barns, did they perceive that they were preparing thrones for the abominable Pope Alexander VI. and for this brave villain of a Cromwell?

CHAP. XVII.

Of Allegories.

THOSE whom we call Fathers of the Church adopted a trick singular enough, to those who were preparing to be baptised in their new belief. In the course of

¹ 1 John ii. 18.

² Jude 14.

time they found disciples who reasoned a little, and adopted the plan of teaching them that all the Old Testament is only a type of the New. The piece of scarlet cloth which the prostitute Rahab hung out at her window to avert the spies of Joshua, signifies the blood of Jesus Christ shed for our sins.

Sarah, and her servant Hagar, blear-eyed Leah and beautiful Rachel, are the synagogue and the church. Moses lifting up his hands when he gave battle to the Amalekites, is evidently the sign of the cross, for we are exactly in the shape of a cross when we stretch out our arms to the right and to the left. Joseph sold by his brethren is Jesus Christ. The kisses given on the mouth of the Shulamite, &c., in Solomon's Song, are visibly the marriage of Jesus Christ with his church. The bride had then no dowry, at that time she was not well established.

The people did not know what to believe; no dogma was yet precisely agreed upon. Jesus had written nothing. What a strange legislator must that man have been whose hand did not trace a single line! This made it necessary to write; they then abandon themselves to this good news: to these gospels, to these acts of which we have already spoken, and all the Old Testament is turned into allegories of the New. It is not surprising that catechumens, fascinated by those who wished to form a party, suffered themselves to be seduced by those fancies that are always pleasing to the people.

This plan contributed more than anything else to the propagation of Christianity, which spread itself secretly from one end of the empire to the other, without the magistrates at that time deigning to take any notice of it.

What a ridiculous and foolish notion to make the history of a horde of beggars, a type and a prophecy of everything that should happen in the world in all succeeding ages!

CHAP. XVIII.

Of falsifications and supposititious books.

THE better to enable them to seduce the uninitiated during the first centuries, they did not fail to state that the sect had been respected by the Romans, and even by

the emperors themselves. It was not enough to forge a number of writings which they attributed to Jesus; they also made Pilate write. Justin and Tertullian quote the "Acts of Pilate," and they are inserted in the Gospel of Nicodemus.

Here follow some passages of the first letter of Pilate to Tiberius, which are curious :

"It has lately happened, and I have witnessed it, that the envy of the Jews has drawn upon them a cruel judgment. Their God having promised to send them his saint from heaven, to be their true king, and having promised that he should be the son of a virgin, the God of the Hebrews did really send him while I presided in Judea. The principal Jews denounced him to be a magician; I believed it, ordered him to be flogged, and then abandoned him to them. They crucified him, put guards round his sepulchre; and he rose again the third day." This ancient letter is very important, as it shews us that, at that time, the Christians had not yet dared to suppose that Jesus was God. They merely say he was sent from God. If he had then been a God, Pilate, whom they cause to speak, would not have failed to say so.

In the second letter he says that if he had not feared a sedition, perhaps this noble Jew would still have lived. *Fortasse vir ille nobilis viveret.* They likewise forged a more detailed account which was attributed to Pilate.

Eusebius of Cæsarea, book vii. of his Ecclesiastical History, assures us that the woman troubled with the flux, who was cured by Jesus Christ, was a citizeness of Cæsarea; he has seen her statue at the foot of that of Jesus. Round the base there are herbs which cure all kinds of diseases.

They likewise gave out a pretended edict of Tiberius to rank Jesus among the gods. They invented letters from Paul to Seneca and from Seneca to Paul. Emperors, philosophers and apostles were all put to contribution; it was an uninterrupted course of frauds; some of them merely fanatical, the others political.

A fanatical lie, for example, is that of writing the Revelation and attributing it to John, which is only an absurdity; a political lie is that of writing the book of Constitutions and attributing it to the apostles.

All these supposititious books, all these falsehoods, which have been denominated pious, were put only into the hands of the faithful. It was an enormous offence to communicate them to the Romans, who had scarcely any knowledge of them during the space of two hundred years. Thus the flock increased daily.

CHAP. XIX.

Of the principal impositions of the first Christians.

ONE of the oldest impositions of these new demoniacs was the "Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs," and we still have entire the Greek translation of it by John, surnamed St. Chrysostom.

This ancient book, which was written in the first century of our era, is visibly the production of a Christian because it makes Levi say, in the eighth article of his Testament, "The third shall have a new name, because he shall be a king of Judah." This signifies Jesus Christ, who has never been designated but by such like impostures.

They invented the Testaments of Moses, Enoch, and Joseph; their ascension or assumption into heaven; that of Moses, Abraham, Elda, Moda, Elias, Sophonia, Zachariah, and Habakkuk. At the same time they forged the famous book of Enoch, which is the only foundation for all the mystery of Christianity, since it is in this book alone that we find the history of the rebellious angels who had sinned. It is certain that the writings attributed to the apostles were not composed till after the fable of Enoch, which was written in Greek by some Christian of Alexandria. Jude, in his Epistle, quotes this Enoch more than once;¹ he reports his own words, and is so destitute of common sense as to assert that Enoch, who was the seventh man after Adam, had written prophecies.

Here, then, we have two vile impositions well attested: that of the Christian who invented the book of Enoch, and that of the Christian who invented the Epistle of Jude, in which the words of Enoch are related. There was never a more stupid falsehood.

¹ Jude 14.

It is useless to enquire who was the principal author of these frauds, which insensibly gained credit, but there is some probability that it was Hegessipus, whose fables had a great run, and who was quoted by Tertullian and afterwards copied by Eusebius.

The supposititious letter of Jesus Christ to a pretended king of the city of Edessa, which had not then a king, and the journey of Thaddeus (or Jude) to this king, were four hundred years in vogue among the first Christians.

Whoever wrote a gospel, or undertook to teach his little rising flock, imputed to Jesus discourses and actions which are not mentioned in our four gospels. It is thus that in the twentieth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, Paul quotes these words of Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."¹ These words are not to be found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. The travels of Peter, the revelation of Peter, the acts of Paul and of Thecle, the letters from Paul to Seneca, and from Seneca to Paul, the acts of Pilate and the letters of Pilate, are sufficiently known among the learned, and it is useless to rummage among these archives of falsehood and absurdity.

They carried their nonsense to such a pitch as to write the history of Claudia Procula, who was Pilate's wife.

CONCLUSION.

I CONCLUDE that every sensible man, every honest man, ought to hold Christianity in abhorrence. "The great name of Theist, which we can never sufficiently revere,"² is the only name we ought to adopt.

The only gospel we should read is the grand book of nature, written with God's own hand, and stamped with his own seal. The only religion we ought to profess is, "to adore God and act like honest men." It would be as impossible for this simple and eternal religion to produce evil as it would be impossible for Christian fanaticism not to produce it.

Natural religion can never be made to say, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace but a sword."³ Yet this is the first confession they put into the mouth of a Jew whom they call Christ.

¹ Acts xx. 35.

² Shaftesbury.

³ Matt. x. 34.

Men are very blind and wretched to prefer an absurd and sanguinary sect maintained by hangmen and surrounded by funeral piles; a sect which could find no admirers but among those to whom it communicated wealth and power; a particular sect received only in a small portion of the globe, in preference to a simple and universal religion which, even by the confession of Christians, was the religion of the human race during the ages of Seth, Enoch, and Noah. If the religion of the first patriarchs were true, certainly the religion of Jesus must be false.

Sovereigns have submitted themselves to this sect, thinking they would be more respected by their own subjects by loading themselves with the yoke which was imposed upon the people. They did not perceive that they made themselves the first slaves of the priests, and in one half of Europe they have not yet been enabled to render themselves independent. And pray what king, what magistrate, what father of a family would not rather be the master of his own house than be the slave of a priest?

What! the innumerable number of citizens that have been injured, excommunicated, reduced to beggary, killed and their bodies cast on the highway; the number of princes dethroned and assassinated, has not yet opened men's eyes! And when we do open them, we perceive that this fatal idol is not yet demolished!

But what shall we substitute in its place, say you? What? A ferocious animal has sucked the blood of my relatives. I tell you to rid yourselves of this beast, and you ask me what you shall put in its place! Is it you that put this question to me? Then you are a hundred times more odious than the pagan pontiffs, who permitted themselves to enjoy tranquility among their ceremonies and sacrifices, who did not attempt to enslave the mind by dogmas, who never disputed the powers of the magistrates, and who introduced no discord among mankind. You have the face to ask what you must substitute in the place of your fables? I answer you, "God, truth, virtue, laws, rewards and punishments." Preach probity, and do not preach dogmas; be the priests of God, and not the priests of a man.

