

The Great Infidels (1881)

By Robert Green Ingersoll

Get any book for free on: www.Abika.com

The Great Infidels (1881)

Robert Green Ingersoll

I have sometimes thought that it will not make great and splendid character to rock children in the cradle of hypocrisy. I do not believe that the tendency is to make men and women brave and glorious when you tell them that there are certain ideas upon certain subjects that they must never express; that they must go through life with a pretence as a shield; that their neighbors will think much more of them if they will only keep still; and that above all is a God who despises one who honestly expresses what he believes. For my part, I believe men will be nearer honest in business, in politics, grander in art -- in everything that is good and grand and beautiful, if they are taught from the cradle to the coffin to tell their honest opinion.

Neither do I believe thought to be dangerous. It is incredible that only idiots are absolutely sure of salvation. It is incredible that the more brain you have the less your chance is. There can be no danger in honest thought, and if the world ever advances beyond what it is to-day, it must be led by men who express their real opinions.

We have passed midnight in the great struggle between Fact and Faith, between Science and Superstition. The brand of intellectual inferiority is now upon the orthodox brain. There is nothing grander than to rescue from the leprosy of slander the reputation of a good and generous man. Nothing can be nearer just than to benefit our benefactors.

The Infidels of one age have been the aureoled saints of the next. The destroyers of the old are the creators of the new. The old passes away, and the new becomes old. There is in the intellectual world, as in the material, decay and growth, and ever by the grave of buried age stand youth and joy. The history of intellectual progress is written in the lives of Infidels. Political rights have been preserved by traitors -- the liberty of the mind by heretics. To attack the king was treason -- to dispute the priest was blasphemy. The sword and cross were allies. They defended each other. The throne and altar were twins -- vultures from the same egg.

It was James I. who said: "No bishop, no king." He might have said: "No cross, no crown."

The king owned the bodies, and the priest the souls, of men. One lived on taxes, the other on alms. One was a robber, the other a beggar, and each was both.

These robbers and beggars controlled two worlds. The king made laws, the priest made creeds. With bowed backs the people received the burdens of the one, and with wonder's open mouth the dogmas of the other. If any aspired to be free they were crushed by the

king, and every priest was a Herod who slaughtered the children of the brain. The king ruled by force, the priest by fear, and both by both.

The king said to the people: "God made you peasants, and he made me king. He made rags and hovels for you, robes and palaces for me. Such is the justice of God." And the priest said: "God made you ignorant and vile. He made me holy and wise. If you do not obey me, God will punish you here and torment you hereafter. Such is the mercy of God."

Infidels are intellectual discoverers. They sail the unknown seas and find new isles and continents in the infinite realms of thought.

An Infidel is one who has found a new fact, who has an idea of his own, and who in the mental sky has seen another star.

He is an intellectual capitalist, and for that reason excites the envy and hatred of the theological pauper.

The Origin of God and Heaven, of the Devil and Hell

In the estimation of good orthodox Christians I am a criminal, because I am trying to take from loving mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, and lovers the consolations naturally arising from a belief in an eternity of grief and pain. I want to tear, break, and scatter to the winds the God that priests erected in the fields of innocent pleasure -- a God made of sticks called creeds, and of old clothes called myths. I shall endeavor to take from the coffin its horror, from the cradle its curse, and put out the fires of revenge kindled by an infinite fiend.

Is it necessary that Heaven should borrow its light from the glare of Hell?

Infinite punishment is infinite cruelty, endless injustice, immortal meanness. To worship an eternal goaler hardens, debases, and pollutes even the vilest soul. While there is one sad and breaking heart in the universe, no good being can be perfectly happy.

Against the heartlessness of the Christian religion every grand and tender soul should enter solemn protest. The God of Hell should be held in loathing, contempt and scorn. A God who threatens eternal pain should be hated, not loved -- cursed, not worshiped. A heaven presided over by such a God must be below the lowest hell. I want no part in any heaven in which the saved, the ransomed and redeemed will drown with shouts of joy the cries and sobs of hell -- in which happiness will forget misery, where the tears of the lost only increase laughter and double bliss.

The idea of hell was born of ignorance, brutality, fear, cowardice, and revenge. This idea testifies that our remote ancestors were the lowest beasts. Only from dens, lairs, and caves, only from mouths filled with cruel fangs, only from hearts of fear and hatred, only

from the conscience of hunger and lust, only from the lowest and most debased could come this most cruel, heartless and bestial of all dogmas.

Our barbarian ancestors knew but little of nature. They were too astonished to investigate. They could not divest themselves of the idea that everything happened with reference to them; that they caused storms and earthquakes; that they brought the tempest and the whirlwind; that on account of something they had done, or omitted to do, the lightning of vengeance leaped from the darkened sky. They made up their minds that at least two vast and powerful beings presided over this world; that one was good and the other bad; that both of these beings wished to get control of the souls of men; that they were relentless enemies, eternal foes; that both welcomed recruits and hated deserters; that both demanded praise and worship; that one offered rewards in this world, and the other in the next. The Devil has paid cash -- God buys on credit.

Man saw cruelty and mercy in nature, because he imagined that phenomena were produced to punish or to reward him. When his poor hut was torn and broken by the wind, he thought it a punishment. When some town or city was swept away by flood or sea, he imagined that the crimes of the inhabitants had been avenged. When the land was filled with plenty, when the seasons were kind, he thought that he had pleased the tyrant of the skies.

It must be remembered that both gods and devils were supposed to be presided over by the greatest God and the greatest Devil. The God could give infinite rewards and could inflict infinite torments. The Devil could assist man here; could give him wealth and place in this world, in consideration of owning his soul hereafter. Each human soul was a prize contended for by these deities. Of course this God and this Devil had innumerable spirits at their command, to execute their decrees. The God lived in heaven and the Devil in hell. Both were monarchs and were infinitely jealous of each other. The priests pretended to be the agents and recruiting sergeants of this God, and they were duly authorized to promise and threaten in his name; they had power to forgive and curse. These priests sought to govern the world by force and fear. Believing that men could be frightened into obedience, they magnified the tortures and terrors of perdition. Believing also that man could in part be influenced by the hope of reward, they magnified the joys of heaven. In other words, they promised eternal joy and threatened everlasting pain. Most of these priests, born of the ignorance of the time, believed what they taught. They proved that God was good, by sunlight and harvest, by health and happiness; that he was angry, by disease and death. Man, according to this doctrine, was led astray by the Devil, who delighted only in evil. It was supposed that God demanded worship; that he loved to be flattered; that he delighted in sacrifice; that nothing made him happier than to see ignorant faith upon its knees; that above all things he hated and despised doubters and heretics, and that he regarded all investigation as rebellion.

Now and then believers in these ideas, those who had gained great reputation for learning and sanctity, or had enjoyed great power, wrote books, and these books after a time were considered sacred. Most of them were written to frighten mankind, and were filled with threatenings and curses for unbelievers and promises for the faithful. The more frightful

the curses, the more extravagant the promises, the more sacred the books were considered. All of the gods were cruel and vindictive, unforgiving and relentless, and the devils were substantially the same. It was also believed that certain things must be accepted as true, no matter whether they were reasonable or not; that it was pleasing to God to believe a certain creed, especially if it happened to be the creed of the majority. Each community felt it a duty to see that the enemies of God were converted or killed. To allow a heretic to live in peace was to invite the wrath of God. Every public evil -- every misfortune -- was accounted for by something the community had permitted or done. When epidemics appeared, brought by ignorance and welcomed by filth, the heretic was brought out and sacrificed to appease the vengeance of God. From the knowledge they had -- from their premises -- they reasoned well. They said, if God will inflict such frightful torments upon us here, simply for allowing a few heretics to live, what will he do with the heretics? Of course the heretics would be punished forever. They knew how cruel was the barbarian king when he had the traitor in his power. They had seen every horror that man could inflict on man. Of course a God could do more than a king. He could punish forever. The fires he would kindle never could be quenched. The torments he would inflict would be eternal. They thought the amount of punishment would be measured only by the power of God.

These ideas were not only prevalent in what are called barbarous times, but they are received by the religious world of to-day.

No death could be conceived more horrible than that produced by flames. To these flames they added eternity, and hell was produced. They exhausted the idea of personal torture.

By putting intention behind what man called good, God was produced. By putting intention behind what man called bad, the Devil was created. Leave this "intention" out, and gods and devils fade away.

If not a human being existed the sun would continue to shine, and tempests now and then would devastate the world; the rain would fall in pleasant showers, and the bow of promise would adorn the cloud; violets would spread their velvet bosoms to the sun, and the earthquake would devour; birds would sing, and daisies bloom, and roses blush, and the volcanoes would fill the heavens with their lurid glare; the procession of the seasons would not be broken, and the stars would shine just as serenely as though the world was filled with loving hearts and happy homes. But in the olden time man thought otherwise. He imagined that he was of great importance. Barbarians are always egotistic. They think that the stars are watching them; that the sun shines on their account; that the rain falls for them and that gods and devils are really troubling themselves about their poor and ignorant souls.

In those days men fought for their God as they did for their king. They killed the enemies of both. For this their king would reward them here, and their God hereafter. With them it was loyalty to destroy the disloyal. They did not regard God as a vague "spirit," nor as an "essence" without body or parts, but as a being, a person, an infinite man, a king, the

monarch of the universe, who had garments of glory for believers and robes of flame for the heretic and infidel.

Do not imagine that this doctrine of hell belongs to Christianity alone. Nearly all religions have had this dogma for a corner-stone. Upon this burning foundation nearly all have built. Over the abyss of pain rose the glittering dome of pleasure. This world was regarded as one of trial. Here a God of infinite wisdom experimented with man. Between the outstretched paws of the Infinite the mouse, man, was allowed to play. Here man had the opportunity of hearing priests and kneeling in temples. Here he could read and hear read the sacred books. Here he could have the example of the pious and the counsels of the holy. Here he could build churches and cathedrals. Here he could burn incense, fast, wear haircloth, deny himself all the pleasures of life, confess to priests, count beads, be miserable one day in seven, make creeds, construct instruments of torture, bow before pictures and images, eat little square pieces of bread, sprinkle water on the heads of babes, shut his eyes and say words to the clouds, and slander and defame all who have the courage to despise superstition, and the goodness to tell their honest thoughts. After death, nothing could be done to make him better. When he should come into the presence of God, nothing was left except to damn him. Priests might convert him here, but God could do nothing there, -- all of which shows how much more a priest can do for a soul than its creator; how much more potent is the example of your average Christian than that of all the angels, and how much superior earth is to heaven for the moral development of the soul. In heaven the Devil is not allowed to enter. There all are pure and perfect, yet they cannot influence a soul for good.

Only here, on the earth, where the Devil is constantly active, only where his agents attack every soul, is there the slightest hope of moral improvement.

Strange! that a world cursed by God, filled with temptations and thick with fiends, should be the only place where hope exists, the only place where man can repent, the only place where reform is possible. Strange that heaven, filled with angels and presided over by God, is the only place where reformation is utterly impossible! Yet these are the teachings of all the believers in the eternity of punishment.

Masters frightened slaves with the threat of hell, and slaves got a kind of shadowy revenge by whispering back the threat. The poor have damned the rich and the rich the poor. The imprisoned imagined a hell for their gaolers; the weak built this place for the strong; the arrogant for their rivals; the vanquished for their victors; the priest for the thinker, religion for reason, superstition for science.

All the meanness, all the revenge, all the selfishness, all the cruelty, all the hatred, all the infamy of which the heart of man is capable, grew, blossomed and bore fruit in this one word -- Hell.

For the nourishment of this dogma cruelty was soil, ignorance was rain, and fear was light.

Christians have placed upon the throne of the universe a God of eternal hate. I cannot worship a being whose vengeance is boundless, whose cruelty is shoreless, and whose malice is increased by the agonies he inflicts.

APPEAL TO THE CEMETERY

Whoever attacks a custom or a creed, will be confronted with a list of the names of the dead who upheld the custom, or believed the creed. He is asked in a very triumphant and sneering way, if he knows more than all the great and honored of the past. Every defender of a creed has graven upon his memory the names of all "great" men whose actions or words can be tortured into evidence for his doctrine. The church is always anxious to have some king or president certify to the moral character of Christ, the authority of the Scriptures, and the justice of the Jewish God. Of late years, confessions of gentlemen about to be hanged have been considered of great value, and the scaffold is regarded as a means of grace.

All the churches of our day seek the rich. They are no longer the friends and defenders of the poor. Poverty no longer feels at home in the house of God. In the Temple of the Most High, garments out of fashion are considered out of place. People now, before confessing to God what worthless souls they have, enrich their bodies. Now words of penitence mingle with the rustle of silk, and light thrown from diamonds adorns the repentant tear. We are told that the rich, the fortunate, the holders of place and office, the fashionable, the respectable, are all within the churches. And yet all these People grow eloquent over the poverty of Christ -- boast that he was born in a manger -- that the Holy Ghost passed by all the ladies of titled wealth and fashion and selected the wife of a poor and unknown mechanic for the Mother of God.

They admit that all the men of Jerusalem who held high positions -- all the people of wealth, influence and power -- were the enemies of the Savior and held his pretensions in contempt. They admit that he had influence only with the poor, and that he was so utterly unknown -- so indigent in acquaintance, that it was necessary to bribe one of his disciples to point him out to the police. They assert that he had done a great number of miracles -- had cured the sick, and raised the dead -- that he had preached to vast multitudes -- had made a kind of triumphal entry into Jerusalem -- had scourged from the temple the changers of money -- had disputed with the doctors -- and yet, notwithstanding all these things, he remained in the very depths of obscurity. Surely he and his disciples could have been met with the argument: that the "great" dead were opposed to the new religion.

The apostles, it is claimed, preached the doctrines of Christ in Rome and Athens, and the people of those cities could have used the arguments against Christianity that Christians now use in its support. They could have asked the apostles if they were wiser than all the philosophers, poets orators, and statesmen dead -- if they knew more coming as they did from a weak and barbarous nation, than the greatest men produced by the highest civilization of the known world. With what scorn would the Greeks listen to a barbarian's criticisms upon Socrates and Plato. How a Roman would laugh to hear a vagrant Hebrew attack a mythology that had been believed by Cato and Virgil.

Every new religion has to overcome this argument of the cemetery -- this logic of the grave. Old ideas take shelter behind a barricade of corpse and tombstones. They have epitaphs for battle cries, and malign the living in the name of the dead. The moment, however, that a new religion succeeds, it becomes the old religion and uses the same argument against a new idea that it once so gallantly refuted. The arguments used to-day against what they are pleased to call infidelity would have shut the mouth of every religious reformer, from Christ to the founder of the last sect. The general objection to the new is, that it differs somewhat from the old, and the fact that it does differ is urged as an argument against its truth.

Every man is forced to admit that he does not agree with all the great men, living or dead. The average Catholic, if not a priest, as a rule will admit that Sir Isaac Newton was in some things his superior, that Demosthenes had the advantage of him in expressing his ideas in public, and that as a sculptor he is far below the unknown man of whose hand and brain was born the Venus de Milo, but he will not, on account of these admissions, change his views upon the important question of transubstantiation.

Most Protestants will cheerfully admit that they are inferior in brain and genius to some men who have lived and died in the Catholic Church; that in the matter of preaching funeral sermons they do not pretend to equal Bossuet; that their letters are not so interesting and polished as those of Pascal; that Torquemada excelled them in the genius of organization, and that for planning a massacre they would not for a moment dispute the palm with Catherine de Medici.

And yet, after all these admissions, they would insist that the Pope is an unblushing impostor, and that the Catholic Church is a vampire fattened by the best blood of a thousand years.

The truth is, that in favor of almost every sect, the names of some great men can be pronounced. In almost every church there have been men whose only weakness was their religion, and who in other directions achieved distinction. If you call men great because they were emperors, kings, noblemen, statesmen, millionaires -- because they commanded vast armies and wielded great influence in their day then more names can be found to support and prop the Church of Rome than any other Christian sect.

Is Protestantism willing to rest its claims upon the "great man" argument? Give me the idea, the religions, not that have been advanced and believed by the so-called great of the past, but that will be defended and believed by the great souls of the future.

It gives me pleasure to say that Lord Bacon was a great man; but I do not for that reason abandon the Copernican system of astronomy, and insist that the earth is stationary. Samuel Johnson was an excellent writer of latinized English, but I am confident that he never saw a real ghost. Matthew Hale was a reasonably good judge of law, but he was mistaken about witches causing children to vomit crooked pins. John Wesley was quite a man, in a kind of religious way, but in this country few people sympathize with his hatred of republican government, or with his contempt for the Revolutionary Fathers. Sir Isaac

Newton, in the domain of science, was the colossus of his time, but his commentary on the book of Revelation would hardly excite envy, even in the breast of a Spurgeon or a Talmage. Upon many questions, the opinions of Napoleon were of great value, and yet about his bed, when dying, he wanted to see burning the holy candles of Rome. John Calvin has been called a logician, and reasoned well from his premises, but the burning of Servetus did not make murder a virtue. Luther weakened somewhat the Power of the Catholic Church, and to that extent was a reformer, and yet Lord Brougham affirmed that his "Table Talk" was so obscene that no respectable English publisher would soil paper with a translation. He was a kind of religious Rabelais; and yet a man can defend Luther in his attack upon the church without justifying his obscenity. If every man in the Catholic Church was a good man that would not convince me that Ignatius Loyola ever met and conversed with the Virgin Mary. The fact is, very few men are right in everything.

Great virtues may draw attention from defects, they cannot sanctify them. A pebble surrounded by diamonds remains a common stone, and a diamond surrounded by pebbles is still a gem. No one should attempt to refute an argument by pronouncing the name of some man, unless he is willing to adopt all the ideas and beliefs of that man. It is better to give reasons and facts than names. An argument should not depend for its force upon the name of its author. Facts need no pedigree logic has no heraldry, and the living should not awed by the mistakes of the dead.

The greatest men the world has produced have known but little. They had a few facts, mingled with mistakes without number. In some departments they towered above their fellows, while in others they fell below the common level of mankind.

Daniel Webster had great respect for the Scriptures, but very little for the claims of his creditors. Most men are strangely inconsistent. Two propositions were introduced into the Confederate Congress by the same man. One was to hoist the black flag, and the other was to prevent carrying the mails on Sunday. George Whitefield defended the slave trade, because it brought the negroes within the sound of the gospel, and gave them the advantage of associating with the gentlemen who stole them. And yet this same Whitefield believed and taught the dogma of predestination. Volumes might be written upon the follies and imbecilities of great men. A full rounded man -- a man of sterling sense and natural logic -- is just as rare as a great painter, poet, or sculptor. If you tell your friend that he is not a painter, that he has no genius for poetry, he will probably admit the truth of what you say, without feeling that he has been insulted in the least. But if you tell him that he is not a logician, that he has but little idea of the value of a fact, that he has no real conception of what evidence is, and that he never had an original thought in his life, he will cut your acquaintance. Thousands of men are most wonderful in mechanics, in trade, in certain professions, keen in business, knowing well the men among whom they live, and yet satisfied with religions infinitely stupid, with politics perfectly senseless and they will believe that wonderful things were common long ago, such things as no amount of evidence could convince them had happened in their day. A man may be a successful merchant, lawyer, doctor, mechanic, statesman, or theologian without one particle of originality, and almost without the ability to think logically upon

any subject whatever. Other men display in some directions the most marvelous intellectual power, astonish mankind with their grasp and vigor, and at the same time, upon religious subjects drool and drivel like David at the gates of Gath.

We have found, at last, that other nations have sacred books much older than our own, and that these books and records were and are substantiated by traditions and monuments, by miracles and martyrs, christs and apostles, as well as by prophecies fulfilled. In all of these nations differences of opinion as to the authenticity and meaning of these books arose from time to time, precisely as they have done and still do with us, and upon these differences were founded sects that manufactured creeds. These sects denounced each other, and preached with the sword and endeavored to convince with the fagot. Our theologians were greatly astonished to find in other bibles the same stories, precepts, laws, customs and commands that adorn and stain our own. At first they accounted for this, by saying that these books were in part copies of the Jewish Scriptures, mingled with barbaric myths. To such an extent did they impose upon and insult probability, that they declared that all the morality of the world, all laws commanding right and prohibiting wrong, all ideas respecting the unity of a Supreme Being, were borrowed from the Jews, who obtained them directly from God. The Christian world asserts with warmth, not always born of candor, that the Bible is the source, origin, and fountain of law, liberty, love, charity, and justice; that it is the intellectual and moral sun of the world; that it alone gives happiness here, and alone points out the way to joy hereafter; that it contains the only revelation from the Infinite; that all others are the work of dishonest and mistaken men. They say these things in spite of the fact that the Jewish nation was one of the weakest and most barbaric of the past; in spite of the fact that the civilization of Egypt and India had commenced to wane before that of Palestine existed. To account for all the morality contained in the sacred books of the Hindus by saying that it was borrowed from the wanderers in the Desert of Sinai, from the escaped slaves of the Egyptians, taxes to the utmost the credulity of ignorance, bigotry, and zeal.

The men who make these assertions are not superior to other men. They have only the facts common to all, and they must admit that these facts do not force the same conclusions upon all. They must admit that men equally honest, equally well-informed as themselves, deny their premises and conclusions. They must admit that had they been born and educated in some other country, they would have had a different religion, and would have regarded with reverence and awe the books they now hold as false and foolish. Most men are followers, and implicitly rely upon the judgment of others. They mistake solemnity for wisdom, and regard a grave countenance as the title page and Preface to a most learned volume. So they are easily imposed upon by forms, strange garments, and solemn ceremonies. And when the teaching of parents, the customs of neighbors, and the general tongue approve and justify a belief or creed, no matter how absurd, it is hard even for the strongest to hold the citadel of his soul. In each country, in defence of each religion, the same arguments would be urged. There is the same evidence in favor of the inspiration of the Koran and Bible. Both are substantiated in exactly the same way. It is just as wicked and unreasonable to be a heretic in Constantinople as in New York. To deny the claims of Christ and Mohammed is alike blasphemous. It all depends upon where you are when you make the denial. No religion has ever fallen that

carried with it down to dumb death a solitary fact. Mistakes moulder with the temples in which they were taught, and countless superstitions sleep with their dead priests.

Yet Christians insist that the religions of all nations that have fallen from wealth and power were false, with of course the solitary exception of the Jewish, simply because the nations teaching them dropped from their dying hands the swords of power. This argument drawn from the fate of nations proves no more than would one based upon the history of persons. With nations as with individuals, the struggle for life is perpetual, and the law of the survival of the fittest applies equally to both.

It may be that the fabric of our civilization will crumbling fall to unmeaning chaos and to formless dust, where oblivion broods and even memory forgets. Perhaps the blind Samson of some imprisoned force, released by thoughtless chance, may so wreck and strand the world that man, in stress and strain of want and fear, will shudderingly crawl back to savage and barbaric night. The time may come in which this thrilled and throbbing earth, shorn of all life, will in its soundless orbit wheel a barren star, on which the light will fall as fruitlessly as falls the gaze of love upon the cold, pathetic face of death.

FEAR

There is a view quite prevalent, that in some way you can prove whether the theories defended or advanced by a man are right or not, by showing what kind of man he was, what kind of life he lived, and what manner of death he died.

A man entertains certain opinions; he is persecuted. He refuses to change his mind; he is burned, and in the midst of flames cries out that he dies without change. Hundreds then say that he has sealed his testimony with his blood, and his doctrines must be true.

All the martyrs in the history of the world are not sufficient to establish the correctness of an opinion. Martyrdom, as a rule, establishes the sincerity of the martyr, -- never the correctness of his thought. Things are true or false in themselves. Truth cannot be affected by opinions; it cannot be changed, established, or affected by martyrdom. An error cannot be believed sincerely enough to make it a truth.

No Christian will admit that any amount of heroism displayed by a Mormon is sufficient to prove that Joseph Smith was divinely inspired. All the courage and culture, all the poetry and art of ancient Greece, do not even tend to establish the truth of any myth.

The testimony of the dying concerning some other world, or in regard to the supernatural, cannot be any better, to say the least, than that of the living. In the early days of Christianity a serene and intrepid death was regarded as a testimony in favor of the church. At that time Pagans were being converted to Christianity -- were throwing Jupiter away and taking the Hebrew God instead. In the moment of death many of these converts, without doubt, retraced their steps and died in the faith of their ancestors. But whenever one died clinging to the cross of the new religion, this was seized upon as an

evidence of the truth of the gospel. After a time the Christians taught that an unbeliever, one who spoke or wrote against their doctrines, could not meet death with composure -- that the infidel in his last moments would necessarily be a prey to the serpent of remorse. For more than a thousand years they have made the "facts" to fit this theory. Crimes against men have been considered as nothing when compared with a denial of the truth of the Bible, the divinity of Christ, or the existence of God.

According to the theologians, God has always acted in this way. As long as men did nothing except to render their fellows wretched; as long as they only butchered and burnt the innocent and helpless, God maintained the strictest and most heartless neutrality; but when some honest man, some great and tender soul expressed a doubt as to the truth of the Scriptures, or prayed to the wrong God, or to the right one by the wrong name, then the real God leaped like a wounded tiger upon his victim, and from his quivering flesh tore his wretched soul.

There is no recorded instance where the uplifted hand of murder has been paralyzed -- no truthful account in all the literature of the world of the innocent being shielded by God. Thousands of crimes are committed every day -- men are this moment lying in wait for their human prey -- wives are whipped and crushed, driven to insanity and death -- little children begging for mercy, lifting imploring, tear-filled eyes to the brutal faces of fathers and mothers -- sweet girls are deceived, lured, and outraged, but God has no time to prevent these things -- no time to defend the good and to protect the pure. He is too busy numbering hairs and watching sparrows.

He listens for blasphemy; looks for persons who laugh at priests; examines baptismal registers; watches professors in colleges who begin to doubt the geology of Moses and the astronomy of Joshua. He does not particularly object to stealing if you won't swear. A great many persons have fallen dead in the act of taking God's name in vain, but millions of men, women, and children have been stolen from their homes and used as beasts of burden, but no one engaged in this infamy has ever been touched by the wrathful hand of God.

All kinds of criminals, except infidels, meet death with reasonable serenity. As a rule, there is nothing in the death of a pirate to cast any discredit on his profession. The murderer upon the scaffold, with a priest on either side, smilingly exhorts the multitude to meet him in heaven. The man who has succeeded in making his home a hell, meets death without a quiver, provided he has never expressed any doubt as to the divinity of Christ, or the eternal "procession" of the Holy Ghost. The king who has waged cruel and useless war, who has filled countries with widows and fatherless children, with the maimed and diseased, and who has succeeded in offering to the Moloch of ambition the best and bravest of his subjects, dies like a saint.

The Emperor Constantine, who lifted Christianity into power, murdered his wife Fausta, and his eldest son Crispus, the same year that he convened the Council of Nice to decide whether Jesus Christ was a man or the Son of God. The council decided that Christ was consubstantial with the father. This was in the year 325. We are thus indebted to a wife-

murderer for settling the vexed question of the divinity of the Savior. Theodosius called a council at Constantinople in 381, and this council decided that the Holy Ghost proceeded from the Father. Theodosius, the younger, assembled another council at Ephesus to ascertain who the Virgin Mary really was, and it was solemnly decided in the year 431 that she was the Mother of God. In 451 it was decided by a council held at Chalcedon, called together by the Emperor Marcian, that Christ had two natures -- the human and divine. In 680, in another general council, held at Constantinople, convened by order of Pognatius, it was also decided that Christ had two wills, and in the year 1274 it was decided at the Council of Lyons, that the Holy Ghost proceeded not only from the Father, but from the Son as well. Had it not been for these councils, we might have been without a Trinity even unto this day. When we take into consideration the fact that a belief in the Trinity is absolutely essential to salvation, how unfortunate it was for the world that this doctrine was not established until the year 1274. Think of the millions that dropped into hell while these questions were being discussed.

This, however, is a digression. Let us go back to Constantine. This Emperor, stained with every crime, is supposed to have died like a Christian. We hear nothing of fiends leering at him in the shadows of death. He does not see the forms of his murdered wife and son covered with the blood he shed. From his white and shrivelled lips issued no shrieks of terror. He does not cover his glazed eyes with thin and trembling hands to shut out the visions of hell. His chamber is filled with the rustle of wings -- of wings waiting to bear his soul to the thrilling realms of joy.

Against the Emperor Constantine the church has hurled no anathema. She has accepted the story of his vision in the clouds, and his holy memory has been guarded by priest and pope. All the persecutors sleep in peace, and the ashes of those who burned their brothers in the name of Christ rest in consecrated ground. Whole libraries could not contain even the names of the wretches who have filled the world with violence and death in defence of book and creed, and yet they all died the death of the righteous, and no priest or minister describes the agony and fear, the remorse and horror, with which their guilty souls were filled in the last moments of their lives. These men had never doubted -- they accepted the creed -- they were not infidels -- they had not denied the divinity of Christ -- they had been baptized -- they had partaken of the Last Supper -- they had respected priests -- they admitted that the Holy Ghost had "proceeded," and these things put pillows beneath their dying heads, and covered them with the drapery of peace.

Now and then, in the history of this world, a man of genius, of sense, of intellectual honesty has appeared. These men have denounced the superstitions of their day. They pitied the multitude. To see priests devour the substance of the people filled them with indignation. These men were honest enough to tell their thoughts. Then they were denounced, tried, condemned, executed. Some of them escaped the fury of the people who loved their enemies, and died naturally in their beds.

It would not do for the church to admit that they died peacefully. That would show that religion was not actually necessary in the last moment. Religion got much of its power from the terror of death.

THE DEATH TEST

You had better live well and die wicked, you had better live well and die cursing than live badly and die praying.

It would not do to have the common people understand that a man could deny the Bible, refuse to look at the cross, contend that Christ was only a man, and yet die as calmly as Calvin did after he had murdered Servetus, or as did King David after advising one son to kill another.

The church has taken great pains to show that the last moments of all infidels (that Christians did not succeed in burning) were infinitely wretched and despairing. It was alleged that words could not paint the horrors that were endured by a dying infidel. Every good Christian was expected to, and generally did, believe these accounts. They have been told and retold in every pulpit of the world. Protestant ministers have repeated the inventions of Catholic priests, and Catholics, by a kind of theological comity, have sworn to the falsehoods told by Protestants. Upon this point they have always stood together, and will as long as the same calumny can be used by both.

Upon the death-bed subject the clergy grow eloquent. When describing the shudderings and shrieks of the dying unbeliever, their eyes glitter with delight.

It is a festival.

They are no longer men. They become hyenas. They dig open graves. They devour the reputations of the dead.

It is a banquet.

Unsatisfied still, they paint the terrors of hell. They gaze at the souls of the infidels writhing in the coils of the worm that never dies. They see them in flames -- in oceans of fire -- in gulfs of pain -- in abysses of despair. They shout with joy. They applaud.

It is an auto da fe, presided over by God and his angels.

The men they thus describe were not atheists; they were all believers in God, in special providence, and in the immortality of the soul. They believed in the accountability of man -- in the practice of virtue, in justice. and liberty, but they did not believe in that collection of follies and fables called the Bible. In order to show that an infidel must die overwhelmed with remorse and fear, they have generally selected from all the "unbelievers" since the day of Christ five men -- the Emperor Julian, Spinoza, Voltaire, Diderot, David Hume, and Thomas Paine.

Hardly a minister in the United States has attempted to "answer" me without referring to the death of one or more of these men. In vain have these calumniators of the dead been

called upon to prove their statements. In vain have rewards been offered to any priestly malingering to bring forward the evidence.

Let us once for all dispose of these slanders -- of these pious calumnies.

JULIAN

They say that the Emperor Julian was an "apostate;" that he was once a Christian; that he fell from grace, and that in his last moments, throwing some of his own blood into the air, he cried out to Jesus Christ, "Galilean, thou hast conquered!"

It must be remembered that the Christians had persecuted and imprisoned this very Julian; that they had exiled him; that they had threatened him with death. Many of his relatives were murdered by the Christians. He became emperor, and Christians conspired to take his life. The conspirators were discovered and they were pardoned. He did what he could to prevent the Christians from destroying each other. He held pomp and pride and luxury in contempt, and led his army on foot, sharing the privations of the meanest soldier.

Upon ascending the throne he published an edict proclaiming universal religious toleration. He was then a Pagan. It is claimed by some that he never did entirely forget his Christian education. In this I am inclined to think there is some truth, because he revoked his edict of toleration, and for a time was nearly as unjust as though he had been a saint. He was emperor one year and seven months. In a battle with the Persians he was mortally wounded. "Brought back to his tent, and feeling that he had but a short time to live, he spent his last hours in discoursing with his friends on the immortality of the soul. He reviewed his reign and declared that he was satisfied with his conduct, and had neither penitence nor remorse to express for anything that he had done." His last words were: "I submit willingly to the eternal decrees of heaven, convinced that he who is captivated with life, when his last hour has arrived is more weak and pusillanimous than he who would rush to voluntary death when it is his duty still to live.

When we remember that a Christian emperor murdered Julian's father and most of his kindred, and that he narrowly escaped the same fate, we can hardly blame him for having a little prejudice against a church whose members were fierce, ignorant, and bloody -- whose priests were hypocrites, and whose bishops were assassins. If Julian had said he was a Christian -- no matter what he actually was, he would have satisfied the church.

The story that the dying emperor acknowledged that he was conquered by the Galilean was originated by some of the so-called Fathers of the Church, probably by Gregory or Theodoret. They are the same wretches who said that Julian sacrificed a woman to the moon, tearing out her entrails with his own hands. We are also informed by these hypocrites that he endeavored to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem, and that fire came out of the earth and consumed the laborers employed in the sacrilegious undertaking.

I did not suppose that an intelligent man could be found in the world who believed this childish fable, and yet in the January number for 1880, of the Princeton Review, the Rev. Stuart Robinson (whoever he may be) distinctly certifies to the truth of this story. He says: "Throughout the entire era of the planting of the Christian Church, the gospel preached was assailed not only by the malignant fanaticism of the Jew and the violence of Roman statecraft, but also by the intellectual weapons of philosophers, wits, and poets. Now Celsus denounced the new religion as base imposture. Now Tacitus described it as but another phase of the odium generis humani. Now Julian proposed to bring into contempt the prophetic claims of its founder by the practical test of rebuilding the Temple." Here then in the year of grace 1880 is a Presbyterian preacher, who really believes that Julian tried to rebuild the Temple, and that God caused fire to issue from the earth and consume the innocent workmen.

All these stories rest upon the same foundation, the mendacity of priests.

Julian changed the religion of the Empire, and diverted the revenues of the church. Whoever steps between a priest and his salary, will find that he has committed every crime. No matter how often the slanders may be refuted, they will be repeated until the last priest has lost his body and found his wings. These falsehoods about Julian were invented some fifteen hundred years ago, and they are repeated to-day by just as honest and just as respectable people as these who told them at first. Whenever the church cannot answer the arguments of an opponent, she attacks his character. She resorts to falsehood, and in the domain of calumny she has stood for fifteen hundred years without a rival.

The great Empire was crumbling to its fall. The literature of the world was being destroyed by priests. The gods and goddesses were driven from the earth and sky. The paintings were torn and defaced. The statues were broken. The walls were left desolate, and the niches empty. Art, like Rachel, wept for her children, and would not be comforted. The streams and forests were deserted by the children of the imagination, and the whole earth was barren, poor and mean.

Christian ignorance, bigotry and hatred, in blind unreasoning zeal, had destroyed the treasures of our race. Art was abhorred, Knowledge was despised, Reason was an outcast. The sun was blotted from the intellectual heaven, every star extinguished, and there fell upon the world that shadow -- that midnight, -- known as "The Dark Ages."

This night lasted for a thousand years.

The First Great Star -- Herald of the Dawn -- was Bruno.

BRUNO

The night of the Middle Ages lasted for a thousand years. The first star that enriched the horizon of this universal gloom was Giordano Bruno. He was the herald of the dawn.

He was born in 1550, was educated for a priest, became a Dominican friar. At last his reason revolted against the doctrine of transubstantiation. He could not believe that the entire Trinity was in a wafer, or in a swallow of wine. He could not believe that a man could devour the Creator of the universe by eating a piece of bread. This led him to investigate other dogmas of the Catholic Church, and in every direction he found the same contradictions and impossibilities supported, not by reason, but by faith.

Those who loved their enemies threatened his life. He was obliged to flee from his native land, and he became a vagabond in nearly every nation of Europe. He declared that he fought, not what priests believed, but what they pretended to believe. He was driven from his native country because of his astronomical opinions. He had lost confidence in the Bible as a scientific work. He was in danger because he had discovered a truth.

He fled to England. He gave some lectures at Oxford. He found that institution controlled by priests. He found that they were teaching nothing of importance -- only the impossible and the hurtful. He called Oxford "the widow of true learning." There were in England, at that time, two men who knew more than the rest of the world. Shakespeare was then alive.

Bruno was driven from England. He was regarded as a dangerous man, -- he had opinions, he inquired after reasons, he expressed confidence in facts. He fled to France. He was not allowed to remain in that country. He discussed things -- that was enough. The church said, "move on." He went to Germany. He was not a believer -- he was an investigator. The Germans wanted believers: they regarded the whole Christian system as settled; they wanted witnesses; they wanted men who would assert. So he was driven from Germany.

He returned at last to his native land. He found himself without friends, because he had been true, not only to himself, but to the human race. But the world was false to him because he refused to crucify the Christ of his own soul between the two thieves of hypocrisy and bigotry. He was arrested for teaching that there are other worlds than this; that many of the stars are suns, around which other worlds revolve; that Nature did not exhaust all her energies on this grain of sand called the earth. He believed in a plurality of worlds, in the rotation of this, in the heliocentric theory. For these crimes, and for these alone, he was imprisoned for six years. He was kept in solitary confinement. He was allowed no books, no friends, no visitors. He was denied pen and paper. In the darkness, in the loneliness, he had time to examine the great questions of origin, of existence, of destiny. He put to the test what is called the goodness of God. He found that he could neither depend upon man nor upon any deity. At last, the Inquisition demanded him. He was tried, condemned, excommunicated and sentenced to be burned. According to Professor Draper, he believed that this world is animated by an intelligent soul -- the cause of forms, but not of matter; that it lives in all things, even in such as seem not to live; that everything is ready to become organized; that matter is the mother of forms, and then their grave; that matter and the soul of things, together, constitute God. He was a pantheist -- that is to say, an atheist. He was a lover of Nature, -- a reaction from the asceticism of the church. He was tired of the gloom of the monastery. He loved the fields,

the woods, the streams. He said to his brother-priests: Come out of your cells, out of your dungeons: come into the air and light. Throw away your beads and your crosses. Gather flowers; mingle with your fellow-men; have wives and children; scatter the seeds of joy; throw away the thorns and nettles of your creeds; enjoy the, perpetual miracle of life.

On the sixteenth day of February, in the year of grace 1600, by "the triumphant beast," the Church of Rome, this philosopher, this great and splendid man, was burned. He was offered his liberty if he would recant. There was no God to be offended by his recantation, and yet, as an apostle of what he believed to be the truth, he refused this offer. To those who passed the sentence upon him he said: "It is with greater fear that ye pass this sentence upon me than I receive it." This man, greater than any naturalist of his day; grander than the martyr of any religion, died willingly in defence of what he believed to be the sacred truth. He was great enough to know that real religion will not destroy the joy of life on earth; great enough to know that investigation is not a crime -- that the really useful is not hidden in the mysteries of faith. He knew that the Jewish records were below the level of the Greek and Roman myths; that there is no such thing as special providence; that prayer is useless; that liberty and necessity are the same, and that good and evil are but relative. He was the first real martyr, -- neither frightened by perdition, nor bribed by heaven. He was the first of all the world who died for truth without expectation of reward. He did not anticipate a crown of glory. His imagination had not peopled the heavens with angels waiting for his soul. He had not been promised an eternity of joy if he stood firm, nor had he been threatened with the fires of hell if he wavered and recanted. He expected as his reward an eternal nothing! Death was to him an everlasting end -- nothing beyond but a sleep without a dream, a night without a star, without a dawn -- nothing but extinction, blank, utter, and eternal. No crown, no palm, no "well done, good and faithful servant," no shout of welcome, no song of praise, no smile of God, no kiss of Christ, no mansion in the fair skies -- not even a grave within the earth -- nothing but ashes, wind-blown and priest-scattered, mixed with earth and trampled beneath the feet of men and beasts.

The murder of this man will never be completely and perfectly avenged until from Rome shall be swept every vestige of priest and pope, until over the shapeless ruin of St. Peter's, the crumbled Vatican and the fallen cross, shall rise a monument to Bruno, -- the thinker, philosopher, philanthropist, atheist, martyr.

THE CHURCH IN THE TIME OF VOLTAIRE

When Voltaire was born, the natural was about the only thing in which the church did not believe. The monks sold little amulets of consecrated paper. They would cure diseases. If laid in a cradle they would prevent a child being bewitched. So, they could be put into houses and barns to keep devils away, or buried in a field to prevent bad weather, to delay frost, and to insure good crops. There was a regular formulary by which they were made, ending with a prayer, after which the amulets were sprinkled with holy water. The church contended that its servants were the only legitimate physicians. The priests cured in the name of the church, and in the name of God, by exorcism, relics, water, salt, and oil. St. Valentine cured epilepsy, St. Gervasius was good for rheumatism, St. Michael de

Sanatis for cancer, St. Judas for coughs, St. Ovidius for deafness, St. Sebastian for poisonous bites, St. Apollonia for toothache, St. Clara for rheum in the eye, St. Hubert for hydrophobia. Devils were driven out with wax tapers, with incense, with holy water, by pronouncing prayers. The church, as late as the middle of the twelfth century, prohibited good Catholics from having anything to do with physicians.

It was believed that the devils produced storms of wind, of rain and of fire from heaven; that the atmosphere was a battlefield between angels and devils; that Lucifer had power to destroy fields and vineyards and dwellings, and the principal business of the church was to protect the people from the Devil. This was the origin of church bells. These bells were sprinkled with holy water, and their clangor cleared the air of imps and fiends. The bells also prevented storms and lightning. The church used to anathematize insects. In the sixteenth century, regular suits were commenced against rats, and judgment was rendered. Every monastery had its master magician, who sold magic incense, salt, and tapers, consecrated palms and relics.

Every science was regarded as an outcast, an enemy. Every fact held the creed of the church in scorn. Investigators were enemies in disguise. Thinkers were traitors, and the church exerted its vast power for centuries to prevent the intellectual progress of man. There was no liberty, no education, no philosophy, no science; nothing but credulity, ignorance, and superstition. The world was really under the control of Satan and his agents. The church, for the purpose of increasing her power, exhausted every means to convince the people of the existence of witches, devils, and fiends. In this way the church had every enemy within her power. She simply had to charge him with being a wizard, of holding communication with devils, and the ignorant mob were ready to tear him to pieces.

To such an extent was this frightful course pursued, and such was the prevalence of the belief in the supernatural, that the worship of the devil was absolutely established. The poor people, brutalized by the church, filled with fear of Satanic influence, finding that the church did not protect, as a last resort began to worship the Devil. The power of the Devil was proven by the Bible. The history of Job, the temptation of Christ in the desert, the carrying of Christ to the top of the temple, and hundreds of other instances, were relied upon as establishing his power; and when people laughed about witches riding upon anointed sticks in the air, invisible, they were reminded of a like voyage when the Devil carried Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple.

This frightful doctrine filled every friend with suspicion of his friend. It made the husband denounce the wife, the children the parents, and the parents the children. It destroyed all the sweet relations of humanity. It did away with justice in the courts. It destroyed the charity of religion. It broke the bond of friendship. It filled with poison the golden cup of life. It turned earth into a very hell, peopled with ignorant, tyrannical, and malicious demons.

Such was the result of a few centuries of Christianity. Such was the result of a belief in the supernatural. Such was the result of giving up the evidence of our own senses, and

relying upon dreams, visions, and fears. Such was the result of destroying human reason, of depending upon the supernatural, of living here for another world instead of for this, of depending upon priests instead of upon ourselves. The Protestants vied with the Catholics. Luther stood side by side with the priests he had deserted, in promoting this belief in devils and fiends. To the Catholic, every Protestant was possessed by a devil. To the Protestant, every Catholic was the homestead of a fiend. All order, all regular succession of causes and effects, were known no more. The natural ceased to exist. The learned and the ignorant were on a level. The priest had been caught in the net spread for the peasant, and Christendom was a vast madhouse, with insane priests for keepers.

When Voltaire was born, the church ruled and owned France. It was a period of almost universal corruption. The priests were mostly libertines. The judges were nearly as cruel as venal. The royal palace was simply a house of assignation. The nobles were heartless, proud, arrogant, and cruel to the last degree. The common people were treated as beasts. It took the church a thousand years to bring about this happy condition of things.

The seeds of the revolution unconsciously were being scattered by every noble and by every priest. They germinated in the hearts of the helpless. They were watered by the tears of agony. Blows began to bear interest. There was a faint longing for blood. Workmen, blackened by the sun, bent by labor, looked at the white throats of scornful ladies and thought about cutting them.

In those days witnesses were cross-examined with instruments of torture. The church was the arsenal of superstition. Miracles, relics, angels and devils were as common as rags. Voltaire laughed at the evidences, attacked the pretended facts, held the Bible up to ridicule, and filled Europe with indignant protests against the cruelty, bigotry, and injustice of the time.

He was a believer in God, and in some ingenious way excused this God for allowing the Catholic Church to exist. He had an idea that, originally, mankind were believers in one God, and practiced all the virtues. Of course this was a mistake. He imagined that the church had corrupted the human race. In this he was right.

It may be that, at one time, the church relatively stood for progress, but when it gained power, it became an obstruction. The system of Voltaire was contradictory. He described a being of infinite goodness, who not only destroyed his children with pestilence and famine, but allowed them to destroy each other. While rejecting the God of the Bible, he accepted another God, who, to say the least, allowed the innocent to be burned for loving him.

Voltaire hated tyranny, and loved liberty. His arguments to prove the existence of a God were just as groundless as those of the reverend fathers of his day to prove the divinity of Christ, or that Mary was the mother of God. The theologians of his time maligned and feared him. He regarded them as a spider does flies. He spread nets for them. They were caught, and he devoured them for the amusement and benefit of the public. He was educated by the Jesuits, and sometimes acted like one.

It is fashionable to say that he was not profound, This is because he was not stupid. In the presence of absurdity he laughed, and was called irreverent. He thought God would not damn even a priest forever: this was regarded as blasphemy. He endeavored to prevent Christians from murdering each other and did what he could to civilize the disciples of Christ. Had he founded a sect, obtained control of some country, and burned a few heretics at slow fires, he would have won the admiration, respect and love of the Christian world. Had he only pretended to believe all the fables of antiquity, had he mumbled Latin prayers, counted beads, crossed himself, devoured the flesh of God, and carried fagots to the feet of philosophy in the name of Christ, he might have been in heaven this moment, enjoying a sight of the damned.

Instead of doing these things, he willfully closed his eyes to the light of the gospel, examined the Bible for himself advocated intellectual liberty, struck from the brain the fetters of an arrogant faith, assisted the weak, cried out against the torture of man, appealed to reason, endeavored to establish universal toleration, succored the indigent, and defended the oppressed.

These were his crimes. Such a man God would not suffer to die in peace. If allowed to meet death with a smile, others might follow his example, until none would be left to light the holy fires of the auto da fe. It would not do for so great, so successful an enemy of the church, to die without leaving some shriek of fear, some shudder of remorse, some ghastly prayer of chattered horror, uttered by lips covered with blood and foam.

He was an old man of eighty-four. He had been surrounded with the comforts of life; he was a man of wealth, of genius. Among the literary men of the world he stood first. God had allowed him to have the appearance of success. His last years were filled with the intoxication of flattery. He stood at the summit of his age.

The priests became anxious. They began to fear that God would forget, in a multiplicity of business, to make a terrible example of Voltaire.

Toward the last of May, 1778, it was whispered in Paris that Voltaire was dying. Upon the fences of expectation gathered the unclean birds of superstition, impatiently waiting for their prey.

"Two days before his death, his nephew went to seek the cure of Saint Sulpice and the Abbe Gautier and brought them into his uncle's sick chamber, who was informed that they were there. 'Ah, well!' said Voltaire, 'give them my compliments and my thanks.' The Abbe spoke some words to him, exhorting him to patience. The cure of Saint Sulpice then came forward, having announced himself, and asked of Voltaire, elevating his voice, if he acknowledged the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. The sick man pushed one of his hands against the cure's coif shoving him back, and cried, turning abruptly to the other side, 'Let me die in peace.' The cure seemingly considered his person soiled, and his coif dishonored, by the touch of the philosopher. He made the nurse give him a little brushing, and went out with the Abbe Gautier."

He expired, says Wagniere, on the 30th of May, 1778, at about a quarter past eleven at night, with the most perfect tranquillity. Ten minutes before his last breath he took the hand of Morand, his valet de chambre, who was watching by him, pressed it and said: "Adieu, my dear Morand, I am gone." These were his last words.

From this death, so simple and serene, so natural and peaceful; from, these words so utterly destitute of cant or dramatic touch, all the frightful pictures, all the despairing utterances, have been drawn and made. From these materials, and from these alone, have been constructed all the shameless lies about the death of this great and wonderful man, compared with whom all of his calumniators, dead and living, were and are but dust and vermin.

Voltaire was the intellectual autocrat of his time. From his throne at the foot of the Alps he pointed the finger of scorn at every hypocrite in Europe. He was the pioneer of his century. He was the assassin of superstition. He left the quiver of ridicule without an arrow. Through the shadows of faith and fable, through the darkness of myth and miracle, through the midnight of Christianity, through the blackness of bigotry, past cathedral and dungeon, past rack and stake, past altar and throne, he carried, with chivalric hands, the sacred torch of reason.

DIDEROT

DOUBT IS THE FIRST STEP TOWARD TRUTH

Diderot was born in 1713. His parents were in what may be called the humbler walks of life. Like Voltaire he was educated by the Jesuits. He had in him something of the vagabond, and was for several years almost a beggar in Paris. He was endeavoring to live by his pen. In that day and generation, a man without a patron, endeavoring to live by literature, was necessarily almost a beggar. He nearly starved -- frequently going for days without food. Afterward, when he had something himself, he was as generous as the air. No man ever was more willing to give, and no man less willing to receive, than Diderot.

He wrote upon all conceivable subjects, that he might have bread. He even wrote sermons, and regretted it all his life. He and D'Alembert were the life and soul of the Encyclopedia. With infinite enthusiasm he helped to gather the knowledge of the world for the use of each and all. He harvested the fields of thought, separated the grain from the straw and chaff, and endeavored to throw away the seeds and fruit of superstition. His motto was, "Incredulity is the first step towards philosophy."

He had the vices of most Christians -- was nearly as immoral as the majority of priests. His vices he shared in common, his virtues were his own. All who knew him united in saying that he had the pity of a woman, the generosity of a prince, the self-denial of an anchorite, the courage of Caesar, and the enthusiasm of a poet. He attacked with every power of his mind the superstition of his day. He said what he thought. The priests hated him. He was in favor of universal education -- the church despised it. He wished to put the knowledge of the whole world within reach of the poorest.

He wished to drive from the gate of the Garden of Eden the cherubim of superstition, so that the child of Adam might return to eat once more the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Every Catholic was his enemy. His poor little desk was ransacked by the police searching for manuscripts in which something might be found that would justify the imprisonment of such a dangerous man. Whoever, in 1750, wished to increase the knowledge of mankind was regarded as the enemy of social order.

The intellectual superstructure of France rests upon the Encyclopedia. The knowledge given to the people was the impulse, the commencement, of the revolution that left the church without an altar and the king without a throne. Diderot thought for himself, and bravely gave his thoughts to others. For this reason he was regarded as a criminal. He did not expect his reward in another world. He did not do what he did to please some imaginary God. He labored for mankind. He wished to lighten the burdens of those who should live after him. Hear these noble words:

"The more man ascends through the past, and the more he launches into the future, the greater he will be, and all these philosophers and ministers and truth-telling men who have fallen victims to the stupidity of nations, the atrocities of priests, the fury of tyrants, what consolation was left for them in death? This: That prejudice would pass, and that posterity would pour out the vial of ignominy upon their enemies. O Posterity! Holy and sacred stay of the unhappy and the oppressed; thou who art just, thou who art incorruptible, thou who findest the good man, who unmaskest the hypocrite, who breakest down the tyrant, may thy sure faith, thy consoling faith never, never abandon me!" Posterity is for the philosopher what the other world is for the devotee.

Diderot took the ground that, if orthodox religion be true Christ was guilty of suicide. Having the power to defend himself he should have used it.

Of course it would not do for the church to allow a man to die in peace who had added to the intellectual wealth of the world. The moment Diderot was dead, Catholic priests began painting and recounting the horrors of his expiring moments. They described him as overcome with remorse, as insane with fear; and these falsehoods have been repeated by the Protestant world, and will probably be repeated by thousands of ministers after we are dead. The truth is, he had passed his three-score years and ten. He had lived for seventy-one years. He had eaten his supper. He had been conversing with his wife. He was reclining in his easy chair. His mind was at perfect rest. He had entered, without knowing it, the twilight of his last day. Above the horizon was the evening star, telling of sleep. The room grew still and the stillness was lulled by the murmur of the street. There were a few moments of perfect peace. The wife said, "He is asleep." She enjoyed his repose, and breathed softly that he might not be disturbed. The moments wore on, and still he slept. Lovingly, softly, at last she touched him. Yes, he was asleep. He had become a part of the eternal silence.

DAVID HUME

The worst religion of the world was the Presbyterianism of Scotland as it existed in the beginning of the eighteenth century. The Kirk had all the faults of the Church of Rome without a redeeming feature. The Kirk hated music, painting, statuary, and architecture. Anything touched with humanity -- with the dimples of joy -- was detested and accursed. God was to be feared -- not loved.

Life was a long battle with the Devil. Every desire was of Satan. Happiness was a snare, and human love was wicked, weak and vain. The Presbyterian priest of Scotland was as cruel, bigoted and heartless as the familiar of the Inquisition.

One case will tell it all;

In the beginning of this, the nineteenth century, a boy seventeen years of age, Thomas Aikenhead, was indicted and tried at Edinburgh for blasphemy. He had denied the inspiration of the Bible. He had on several occasions, when cold, jocularly wished himself in hell that he might get warm. The poor, frightened boy recanted -- begged for mercy; but he was found guilty, hanged, thrown in a hole at the foot of the scaffold, and his weeping mother vainly begged that his bruised and bleeding body might be given to her.

This one case, multiplied again and again, gives you the condition of Scotland when, on the 26th of April, 1711, David Hume was born.

David Hume was one of the few Scotchmen of his day who were not owned by the church. He had the manliness to examine historical and religious questions for himself, and the courage to give his conclusions to the world. He was singularly capable of governing himself, He was a philosopher, and lived a calm and cheerful life, unstained by an unjust act, free from all excess, and devoted in a reasonable degree to benefiting his fellow-men. After examining the Bible he became convinced that it was not true. For failing to suppress his real opinion, for failing to tell a deliberate falsehood, he brought upon himself the hatred of the church.

Intellectual honesty is the sin against the Holy Ghost, and whether God will forgive this sin or not his church has not, and never will.

Hume took the ground that a miracle could not be used as evidence until the fact that it had happened was established. But how can a miracle be established? Take any miracle recorded in the Bible, and how could it be established now? You may say: Upon the testimony of those who wrote the account. Who were they? No one knows. How, could you prove the resurrection of Lazarus? Or of the widow's son? How could you substantiate, today, the ascension of Jesus Christ? In what way could you prove that the river Jordan was divided upon being struck by the coat of a prophet? How is it possible now to establish the fact that the fires of a furnace refused to burn three men? Where are the witnesses? Who, upon the whole earth, has the slightest knowledge upon this subject?