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● **INFIDELITY AGAINST ITSELF.**

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INFIDELITY AGAINST ITSELF.



DEFINITION.

WE use the term Infidelity in the popular sense, which restricts it to its relation to religion. Still, even when thus restricted, it is not easy to define it. It is Protean shaped. This results in great part from the fact that it is not a system, but a negation, seeking to break up systems without offering one affirmative article in their place. Destitute of a single positive sentiment for a bond of union, it exists, not to give, but to destroy faith; never to build, but always to lay waste. Its

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whole strength is for desolation. Hence it is capable of great versatility, enabling its adroit advocates, at their convenience, to slip from under any specific definition. Still, where exactness of meaning is important, it becomes necessary to define, as near as possible, the thing of which we speak.

The Infidelity now under review is not a mere scepticism. It is true that much which passes under the last term, is more deeply obstinate and malignant than the name properly implies, and not a few who claim for themselves the softer appellation of sceptics, would find their proper place among undisguised infidels. But that which is scepticism, and nothing more, may consist with candour, openness to conviction, and even honest inquiry after truth. It does not necessarily involve

opposition to truth, bitterness toward it, or a reprobate spirit. True, the difficulties in the way of belief, which it presupposes, may be so persistently maintained, in the face of the strongest demonstration, as to show that the boundary of candour is passed, and the point of voluntary and resolute unbelief is reached ; but the time has then come to give another name to this sentiment toward Divine Revelation. In the present discussion, we detach scepticism from infidelity.

Neither can the Infidelity in question properly claim identity with certain doctrines of heathen philosophy, to which it has sometimes turned for countenance. We shall have occasion, in the sequel, to speak of an elementary distinction between such infidelity as is now taught among us, and the

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supposed atheistic features of some of the schools of Greece and Rome. We only refer to it, in this place, for the purpose of reaching a definition.

Neither is the Infidelity before us a simple unbelief. We fall far short of describing the avowed infidel, as he is known in a Christian country, when we say he has no faith in our holy Scriptures. True as it is, that, on the subject of religion, his views aspire to nothing higher than a negation, still we shall directly see that a positive object is before his mind, and his tendencies are ever toward it as the needle to the pole. It may be said that unbelief is all that is meant by the word Infidelity. Etymologically this is true; but words often make out for themselves specific senses, which absorb their derivative meanings. We speak of Infi-

delity as it exists under our notice,— the Infidelity which we meet in open antagonism to Christianity.

Half a century ago, the use of the single term French Infidelity might have stood in the place of any further description. It stood unmasked and could not be mistaken. There is now more occasion for a positive definition, and in giving it, we make the following analysis :

1. The Infidelity here described wholly rejects the doctrine of the Divine inspiration of our holy Scriptures, and wholly repudiates their authority as a rule of faith and conduct sent from heaven.

2. It rejects the Bible in such terms as involve the denial of any sensible intercourse between God and his creatures. Men are placed under no law

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for the regulation of their conduct, higher than their instincts, reason, or the necessities of their condition.

3. It denies any connection between the present conduct of men, and a future state of existence. An occasional dim fancy, borrowed from the heathen doctrine of transmigration, may seem to form an exception to the literal truth of this statement; but these exceptions are rare, and of no practical account when they exist. The denial of any moral relation between the present life, and all beyond it, and generally the denial of any future state of existence, may be set down as one of the characteristics of Infidelity.

4. It wholly ignores the religious sentiment in man. We refer to the instinctive consciousness of the human mind, that religion is a necessity and

duty growing out of our relation to some superior power; and that there must be some moral ligament to bind the actors and events of the present, to some higher scenes and vaster results.

This is not the place to show, as will be shown under the proper head, that, with the single exception before us, people of every age and clime have given some practical response to the call of human nature, for something which may serve as a religion. Infidelity, as we now use the word, repudiates this inborn sense that religion is a want of our moral natures. To give the definition the greatest possible plainness—for so it is—religion itself is abandoned. The religion of the Bible is not exchanged for some other religious system, as that of Confucius or Buddha; not even for the religion

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of reason in any appreciable sense ; but the transition is from religion to irreligion.

5. This Infidelity becomes a principle of active hostility toward Christianity. It pursues the religion of the Bible with an opposition which is bitter and unrelenting. When it feels itself loosened from the restraints of public opinion, it speaks of the holy Scriptures and the Christian church, in terms of opprobrium and virulence which betray a deadly hatred.

Illustrations of these points will come up in their place. Here we have simply mentioned them, to make the definition of the Infidelity under discussion, as accurate as the nature of the case will admit. With this definition before us, we proceed to state

THE ARGUMENT OF THIS TRACT.

When the inner life of Infidelity is exposed, we regard the necessity of an elaborate defence of Christianity against its attacks, as in a great measure removed.

It sometimes appears in disguised forms, professing reverence for the holy Scriptures, and seeming to accept them in certain meanings; but subjecting them to interpretations which, like the weird sisters in Macbeth,

“ palter with us in a double sense,”

until the mind is unconsciously loosened from a true faith in their inspiration from heaven, or from reverence of their divine authority. It is often a laborious task, requiring a deep examination of facts in the natural world, and of truths in the departments of

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reason and ethics, to meet these specious assaults upon Divine Revelation.

But Infidelity, in the form now under review, is a weak, though wily foe. The most satisfactory processes of reasoning against it have been short; they lie mostly within the range of common minds, and they deal largely with the moral sense of men. Where the conscience acts freely, a few obvious principles, aided by such a knowledge of facts as all can acquire, are sufficient to sustain the friends of the Bible in the field of argument.

Let such reasonings as we find in Faber, Leslie, or Nelson, be read with reference to what is said above, and who does not observe, with surprise, the accessibility of the means for

reaching truth, and the directness and simplicity of the way to it?

Gibbon and Hume must watch every turn in voluminous compositions—the labour of the best years of their lives—to get out, through every opening which can be forced, an insidious attack upon Divine Revelation. Ask Volney for an argument; and he takes you into the studio and shows you a picture. Demand it of Paine, and he leads you through a labyrinth after it, and when it is reached, it turns out a burlesque.

The reasonings of Infidelity are never elemental. They are not addressed to the fundamentals of Christianity, but to its minor parts—commonly to its accidentals. The highest seeming triumph of the Infidel, is to rive now and then a chip from the eternal

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pyramid. Some calm eye looks a little more closely for the actual result of so many labours, when, lo ! the proper surface of the structure has not received a scratch. The destructive started a few excrescences from the marble, and then fancied himself standing over a heap of "RUINS."

We feel no call to multiply arguments in defence of Divine Revelation. Incidentally we may run over some beaten ground, but it is not our object to reproduce views which are familiar to such as have read on the subject. The purpose of this Tract is simple. It is to force one reluctant witness to the stand ; to give to Infidelity a voice to speak, not from the pens or lips of those who give it an artificial utterance, but from its own inner soul ; to behold it, not as it writes and lectures,

but as it is and does. We intend to listen to this testimony from various points—from the stand-point of its own history; from that of reason and philosophical inquiry; but especially as it is given by the witness when brought face to face with the holy Scriptures. There we expect it to proclaim itself in such terms as betray its own writhings under the power of God through the word, thus revealing the existence of that power there, as palpably as the contortions of the animalculæ, in the solar microscope, tell of a sun whose burning rays are concentrated on them through the instrument. We have often enough heard its advocates: we have now seated ourselves to hear *it*. We summon Infidelity as a witness.

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### INFIDELITY IN THE PRESENCE OF ITS OWN HISTORY.

We look only to a few general facts and features in this history, carefully selecting those which best illustrate the character and spirit of Infidelity.

It will belong more to a future part of the examination, to note a striking significancy in the fact that the whole of this history is limited to one certain field. Infidelity, as known to us, is the growth of a Christian soil, fastening itself like a parasite to Christianity, to draw its support from the life-blood of the church. In its present form, it was unknown to the world, until it awoke to being in antagonism to the Divine mercy, which flows from the cross, and in this form it has followed the gospel of Christ through the

world, never seeking any field, but that which has been consecrated by evangelical toils and triumphs. It cares little who worship false gods and dumb idols ; it enters into no crusade against the Shasters or the Koran ; it reserves all its bitterness for Christ and Christianity, and devotes its whole existence to the war against the Christian gospel. We expect soon to draw, from the very limitations of its history, a signal example of the power and judgment of God over reprobate hearts.

We turn to another fact in its history, which, under all the circumstances of the case, strongly illustrates its atrociousness. We refer to its miserable failure, in regard to success. We do not infer its atrocity from the mere fact that it has met with poor encour-

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agement from the world, for that would be a wild and wicked judgment. Much that is really good, has been crushed under the public frown. But we look at the great facilities of Infidelity for access to men; at the corresponding difficulties of Christianity; at the fact that, notwithstanding all this, the adherents of the latter are, to those of the former, as ninety nine to one hundred, and probably in much greater proportion; and then at the manifest reason why these results are such as they are; and from these premises, we deduce the odiousness of Infidelity in view of the moral sense of mankind.

Infidelity seems to approach the masses of mankind with the highest adaptations for success. It comes to a world lying in wickedness. It finds human hearts depraved, and impatient

of any restraints upon their depravity. The promptings to sin are strong, the restrictions of the Divine law are unwelcome, and the prospect of future retribution is a bitter ingredient in the cup of pleasure. Infidelity proposes to remove these restraints and abolish this retribution. It has but one law of enjoyment—inclination; one law of abstinence—present peril. The man of vindictiveness, lust, or pleasure, could not frame a license for his passions broader than that which is here offered him. The man also who recoils from the grosser forms of depravity, but at the same time revolts from the gospel standard of holiness, may here rejoice in exemption from the duty of Christian self-denial, and from the dread of future accountability.

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We may add to these facilities of access, the fact that Infidelity accommodates itself to the level of the masses. Its reasonings, sarcasms, and jests belong to the stump, and not the professorial chair. This statement is pre-eminently true of the present century. We find some writers who have a finer appreciation of moral proprieties, and loftier aspirations of character, but who are really in hostility with the Bible, taking a higher ground. They are cultivated and intelligent, and they feel the value of both intellectual and moral reputation. Perhaps they shrink from the stigma of an association with those who treat Divine Revelation with open scorn; perhaps they are influenced by the pride of Philosophy, or the ambition to strike out new theories in science; but whatever else be

the motive, all other incitements are under the ever quickening one of alienation from the Divine law. They seek more specious modes of reaching the practical ends of Infidelity. They invent their glossaries, work out their philosophical interpretations, or enforce the authority of new discoveries in science, upon the meaning of the Bible, until they have wrought a semi-infidelity for the aristocracy of mind, which effectually secures the moral repose, without the shame of avowed unbelief.

But Infidelity undisguised turns from the intellectual aristocracy to the people. Among them, it is the better, as it is the bolder warfare. Subtle theories, which keep a hold on the name of Christianity, and yet play into the hands of its adversaries, are not to the taste of the masses. The

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human mind pays homage to consistency and intrepidity, and in both these respects an unmasked Infidelity has the advantage over all semi-infidel theories of interpretation. Duplicity is odious; and to plain minds it will always appear double-tongued to read a Book which says one thing, and apply to it interpretations which speak the opposite.

More than this, outspoken Infidelity accommodates itself best to mental indolence; and with multitudes, this is an influential consideration. It is a laborious work to transcendentalize the language of the Bible; to examine its coincidences with, or divergencies from, the physics and metaphysics of science; to emendate, fill up supposed ellipses, and work out possible renderings; to carry it about among the "ves-

tiges of creation," or trail its genesis among the "types of mankind." It is cheaper to drop it outright. Pseudo-philosophical annotations and rationalistic interpretations tax the mind. But any one who can comprehend a sneer, may find intellectual pastime under an infidel lecture.

Thus Infidelity, pandering to the passions of our race, and accommodating itself to the mental habits which are widely prevalent, would seem to approach the people with every reasonable prospect of success.

This prospect seems largely increased when, on the other hand, we turn to Christianity, and observe how it must encounter the strongest prejudices, and conquer all the moral bias of the human mind, before it can be accepted as the object of faith. Men must be-

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lieve those things which, above all others, their pride prompts them to disbelieve. They must crucify those passions and feelings which are most tenacious in their natures, and the indulgence of which, is the dearest idolatry of the corrupt heart. They must bend under obligations of duty which such a heart always loathes, and they must accept favour upon terms which reduce their boasted independence to beggary.

Infidelity says, Walk after the law of your own nature, and please yourself: the gospel of Christ says that the only fulfilling of the Divine law of life, is in self-denial, or as it is expressed in figures which speak for themselves—bearing the cross, and crucifixion to the world. The promises of Infidelity are carnal secur-

ity in pleasure, with no fear of reckoning beyond the present life: those of the gospel are tribulation and great exposures for the sake of Christ. Infidelity exalts humanity to regal independence: the gospel requires every sinner to become an applicant for mercy, and to receive every kindness of God as a grace.

These contrasts are vivid. We all know the proclivities of human nature, the strength of its unholy promptings, and its impatience of restraint. Leaving a Divine influence over the decisions of men out of view, and reasoning *a priori* of the probabilities in the case, who would not say that, in this race, Infidelity must win the prize? Apart from that Divine control of means and hearts, its appliances have the highest adaptation to the end sought, while

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Christianity is devoid of every essential element of popularity. So we should certainly have said, before knowing anything of the power of God in the holy Scriptures, or witnessing any example of the rival efforts of the two forces in the same field.

But we have now a surer guide than this *a priori* reasoning. Ages of contest have settled the question as one of fact, and not of probabilities. And what is the result? Among all the leading forms of opposition, with which Christianity, in its progress, has had to contend, Infidelity has been least felt. It has been the weakest numerically, and weakest in the character and influence of its champions. Through centuries of effort, it has never come dangerously near to a general ascendancy. It has never enjoyed

so much as a local triumph, except in a single instance; and that one exception proved, in the end, a disaster to it. The only time the world gave it rope enough, it hung itself.

Almost from the moment of its establishment, Christianity has been the accepted system of the civilized world. For strength of influence, it has been the leading religious system in the world. It has attached itself to the most brilliant of the human races, and the most enlightened nations. It has marched with them in all their conquests, settled itself in every territory which they have acquired, and become the life of every empire which they have founded. These are facts in history, and they were never more true than at the present time. There is not now one fully civilized nation,

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but glories in the name of a Christian people; and the influence of any of the leading Christian nations—say Great Britain, with her population of thirty millions—is felt over the globe with fifty times the power of the influence of China, with her two hundred and fifty millions.

In the midst of this strength of Christianity, numerical and potential, Infidelity is lost. True, it lives. Now and then we meet with a man who openly professes it; here and there we see a bill posted, notifying us of a Sunday lecture for denouncing the Bible; and occasionally there is a pompous parade of a challenge for discussion, from one of its champions. There is always more or less of it lingering about the drift-ways of life; and at rare intervals, a man of higher respectability is found

about the purlieus of its places of public assembly. True to its nature as the vampire to Christianity, it comes into higher activity in times of peculiar religious interest. But it is a vigour which soon exhausts itself, and all settles back into the old up-hill track.

Look at New York with its 300 Christian churches, and how many "Halls of Science," or congregations of Infidels, exist beside them? Possibly two or three. Take Philadelphia with its 280 Christian churches, and we have, on the other hand, one "Sunday Institute," and no other Infidel assembly of which we have learned. Counting the attendance, the disparity would be still more striking. Go to Baltimore, Boston, Richmond, or Charleston, and the result would not be materially different. Go even to our western

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cities, into which the German States have poured so largely, not of their rationalism, but of the gross Infidelity which is the proper residuum of a rationalistic ferment; there the proportion of infidels is larger, it is true, but they are still a miserable minority, if we reckon people according to their undisguised professions.

And yet we have always heard that the cities are the hot-beds of Infidelity. If it is so hopeless of triumph there, what must it be in the rural districts where, as an open profession, it has scarcely a name? The great heart of the country is there, and there, however low vital religion may sometimes be, the great mass call Christianity their system, and cases are exceedingly rare—often not one in a township—in which it is boldly denied.

With such results before us, after the experiment of centuries, we do Infidelity no wrong, when we pronounce it a miserable failure. It met Christianity with every apparent prospect of success; it seemed to possess superior facilities for access to the people, in the very respects in which the gospel appeared forbidding; and yet Christianity is, at this moment, the controlling religious system of the world, everywhere known and influential, and fast growing in influence, while Infidelity has sunk to the smallest of the impediments in its way.

What is the moral of all this? The best answer to the question will be given, when we bring Infidelity into the presence of Divine Revelation, and hear it relate its own experience of the power of God through the gospel.

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Not wishing to forestall that point, we will only say here, that Infidelity confesses, through its history, that it is too atrocious for human depravity. It shocks even a sin-loving world. It is so plainly the enemy of all that is pure, lovely, just, and of good report, that the wicked, as well as the good, recoil from it. With all the tendencies in its favour, which grow out of the opposition of depraved hearts to the moral purity of the Bible, still every finer sentiment of the human mind loathes it, and it must find even a worse race than ours, before it can triumph.

This is the decision of the civilized world. It is the world's verdict against Infidelity, on the charge that it is a moral nuisance—the verdict of even a jury with a bias in its favour.

How then could it stand before an impartial judgment?

There is still another point in the testimony of Infidelity, as heard from its history—the witness which it bears respecting its own immoral tendencies.

We should naturally come to the inference that, if it answers in any measure to the description thus far afforded, its influence upon private and public virtue must be deeply pernicious. We have no hesitation in adopting this inference. No assertion could be less hazardous than this, that by removing from vice its most powerful restraints, and proposing no sanctifying influence in their place as the safeguard of virtue, it becomes the foster parent of the most intolerable immoralities. This point might soon

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be argued into a logical necessity, but *unfortunately* there is a shorter way to reach it—through the history of actual sins and sufferings.

As a general rule, the champions of Infidelity have done what, in a better cause, would have been a virtue—their practice has agreed with their preaching; their doctrines have been illustrated in their lives. Exceptions to this statement are cheerfully admitted, but they are few, far too few to invalidate the morale of infidel biography. We may grant to Infidelity all the benefit of a case, like that of David Hume, in which an estimable life before the world accompanied an energetic infidel spirit, while the great host of examples illustrates the general certainty that infidel sentiments and profligate morals go hand in hand.

Read what is known of the personal history of Voltaire, Rousseau, Volney, Bolingbroke, Diderot, D'Alembert, Paine, Mary Wolstonecraft, or of almost any leading infidel lecturer of the present century, male or female; and who among them all would be selected as a pattern of virtue, even in the light of the lowest system which preserves any hold on the name of morality? Is one known among them, whose life was not odious, and are not the names of the most brilliant among them, synonyms for moral putrefaction?

These are not the times, nor is this the country, to see the true moral proclivities of Infidelity. The world has had few good opportunities to see it working freely in the harness. For reasons abundantly given on the preceding pages, it feels itself an object of public

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suspicion. Hence its advocates find it necessary to control themselves, and pay some respect at least to the exterior virtues of life.

We have already alluded to what we must now notice at more length—the one memorable instance in which it sprung into power, and loosened itself from the restraints of public jealousy. A few pages back, we heard the testimony from its failure; let us improve the only opportunity it has ever enjoyed to proclaim its own character from the field of triumph. The experiment was wide enough: the whole of a great empire was its field. It was not straitened in time, for it lasted until it had buried almost a whole generation. It stands alone in the world's history, but it was enough for the life-time of a world. It

has left so enduring records, that no coming age will be uninformed of what the moral instincts of Infidelity are, or what it will do with human virtue when it is once enthroned.

The reader, who has the slightest knowledge of modern history, recognizes in the above, a reference to the state of things in France, for several years preceding and following the opening of the present century, when the nation, morally, politically, and socially, was given up to Infidelity. It had wormed its way into the public heart, through the wiles of the Jacobin clubs, and the brilliant pages of some of the most accomplished writers of the day. The regicidal revolution placed it in political ascendancy, and the National Assembly disowned all allegiance to religion, by a solemn de-

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cree which, in language and intent, dethroned God and made eternity a fable. So much for negation: what for positive devotion? A prostitute was brought out and deified, in the presence of an applauding multitude, as the representative of Reason. *These be thy gods, O Infidelity!*

This was the *religion* of the nation: now what were the morals? The romping career of the most infamous vices is without a parallel in the annals of time. Lewdness cast off shame, forsook the dark corners of cities, and walked unblushingly into the seats of honour. Treachery made even the name of friendship perilous. The sworn confederates of to-day betrayed each other to a blood-thirsty police to-morrow. Men lost confidence in the truth and fidelity of their most intimate

associates. Violence rivalled lust in atrociousness, and private assassination and self-murder vied with the guillotine in rolling a sea of blood over the realm. One third of the births registered in the office of the Prefect of the Police, in Paris, were without the sanction of marriage, and nearly the same proportion of deaths were by public executions, private assassinations, or suicide. The best computation reckons not less than three millions of human beings out of that nation, swept violently into their graves, in the short space of ten years. A graphic writer,\* speaking while these things were yet fresh, says—"The kingdom appeared to be changed into one great prison; the inhabitants converted into felons; and the common

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\* The late President Dwight.

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doom of man commuted for the violence of the sword and the bayonet, the sucking boat and the guillotine. To contemplative men, it seemed for a season as if the knell of the whole nation was tolled, and the world summoned to its execution and its funeral."

The nation was at last fain to accept the return of an intolerant hierarchy, which was little better than a counterfeit of Christianity, as a refuge from the unendurable scourge of utter irreligion. Infidelity, exhausted and terrified by its own enormities, made scarcely a show of resistance to the restoration of Romish ecclesiasticism.

It is too late to ask for proof that this was Infidelity exposing itself under every advantage for appearing in its true temper. Its agency in the moral atrocities following the revolu-

tion, is unquestionable. The ante-revolutionary infidels of the French school made no scruple of ridiculing what we understand by morality. Loosening themselves from all the revealed laws of heaven, they only pushed their principles to the point of consistency, when they disowned any higher law than sensual gratification, or any stronger obligation than obedience to physical compulsion.\*

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\* We are indebted to the writer last quoted, Dr. Dwight, who always took his observations carefully, and made his statements cautiously, for the following incident, which occurred a short time previous to the revolution, and for the truth of which, he regards his authority as good. "A numerous assembly of *French Literati*, being asked in turn, at one of their meetings, by their president, whether there was any such thing as *moral* obligation, answered, in every instance, that there was not." English infidels, though speaking under stronger restraints, have not always

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The influence of Infidelity in the political crimes which stained the movement, which might otherwise have been a noble stroke for human liberty, is scarcely less obvious. Disclosures made, and proofs collected, by cotemporaneous writers, such as Robison and the Abbé Barruel, have revealed the fundamental principle of the Jacobin club—*ruin to altars and thrones*. The blending of these two objects exposes their meaning as a whole. The thing aimed at is, independence of outward control; the means of accomplishment are, the destruction of religion and government. The effort,

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been able to conceal this doctrine, so dangerous to the virtue and peace of the world. Hobbes, for example, declares it lawful to *do* and *get* whatever we can, with *safety*.

when successful, can have but one realization—corruption and anarchy. All our reasonings from the nature of the case, make it probable: experiment has reduced it to a certainty.

Thus we have listened to the witness of Infidelity, as spoken from its own history. We have heard the confession of its inability, after ages of effort, to overcome the detestation of mankind toward itself; and it has told us what corruption and misery might be expected from its universal triumph. We now transfer the witness to another field—the one where it most plumes itself.

#### INFIDELITY IN THE PRESENCE OF REASON

Sparing the reader from a ramble over philosophy at large, we shall se-

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lect the pertinent points for inquiry. Have those who have laboured only in the field of reason, given any countenance to Infidelity? On the contrary, has not rational philosophy always abhorred it; and have not the discoveries of that philosophy always indicated the necessity for such a communion between heaven and earth, as is only realized in the Christian system revealed in our holy Scriptures?

Here we must refresh the reader's memory concerning the terms in which we have defined the Infidelity of which we speak, especially that part of the description which gives to it the positive character of a voluntary abandonment of religion, and opposition to it—a deliberate choice of irreligion instead of religion. It now becomes

essential to keep this definition in mind.

The infidel is generally loud in his boast of being the disciple of nature and reason. But the question, what nature and reason do teach on the subject, is soonest settled by a reference to facts. We must look among those who have been deprived of superior means of knowledge, and left to intuition, nature, and reason alone. If, upon any point concerning religion, these people have all spoken with one voice; if, under all their grades of cultivation, barbarous or civilized, ignorant or learned, and through all their various systems, from the lowest idolatry to the highest philosophy, they have proclaimed for a religion in opposition to irreligion, and have always sought out for themselves something

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which should be to them religion; then we have the highest proof which the nature of the case admits, that there is, in the human breast, an inborn yearning for religion. The form in which this point is often stated is, that *man is naturally a religious being*. If this be true, the conclusion is unavoidable, that Infidelity outrages the human reason and conscience.

It will be understood that the term, "religion" is not here used in its restricted sense, as denoting saving grace in the heart, but as descriptive of all intended acknowledgment and worship of superior beings, in distinction from total irreligion. It is the sense in which Paul employed the word, when he said to the Athenians, while pointing to their heathen altars—"I perceive that

in all things, ye are *exceedingly religious.*" \*

The testimony of the world upon this point is unequivocal. There is no exception to it, but that which comes from the form of Infidelity now under review—an exception which we expect to find, in the sequel, confirming instead of weakening the point before us. That one exception passed, the whole world has proclaimed religion to be a necessity of our moral nature.

A religious instinct certainly seems to lie at the basis of heathen idolatry. Men, without the better light of revelation, still felt a consciousness of some relation to a superior power, which made worship a duty. Their minds were too feeble to scale the conception of an

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\* Acts xvii. 22. In our translation, unhappily rendered, "too superstitious."

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object of worship dwelling for ever in the mysterious unknown, and so they made gods for themselves. They deified heroes, worshipped the noblest visible objects: as, sun, moon, stars, fire; or with their descending civilization, went down to the deification of beasts, reptiles, stocks, and stones. But low as idolatry has sunk, the consciousness of religion, as a moral necessity, has ever abode by it, as a redeeming feature, and an anchor of hope for a coming morning to the night of heathenism.

If the historical assertions which we have made, should be anywhere controverted, the issue would probably be taken, not on pagan ground, but in the field of ancient philosophy. We shall not deny that in the dawn of Grecian philosophy, when the popular

deities—the gods of whom Homer sung—were repudiated as unworthy of the reverence of the wise, and before philosophy had wrought out the problem of a Supreme Power and Intelligence, doctrines were inculcated which, from our present stand-point, seem to reveal atheistic assimilations. It is too true that Thales, Pythagoras, and others among the earliest Grecian masters, left God out of their systems. Had everything stopped with them, philosophy would have remained without a Theism. All this may be granted without disturbing our position.

Still these men afford no countenance to the infidel under Christian light. Their search was for creating energy, and for the vitalizing principle of things. Turning from Polytheism, they took up with a kind of Panthe-

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ism, which was their nearest point towards Infidelity. It was serious in its tone, looking anxiously for higher light, and ever moving away from irreligion. The doctrine of *chance* was never so much as suggested. From the first, the effort of the philosophers was to search out the eternal principle of working, which they saw so abundantly developed in the visible creation, and to discover the relation of the seen to the mysterious unseen—of the transient to the permanent. The first aspirations of philosophy were heavenward. Its earliest inquiries for animating principles and causative energy were the earnest commencement of a reasoning process, which could not and did not rest until God was enthroned, and his creatures were bound to him, at least in the obligation of reverence.

In asking whether the wisdom of that age sustains the point that the religious instinct is universal in men, we are not so much concerned about the personal feelings of certain philosophers toward religion, but we are to inquire of their systems, what were the wants, out of which their inquiries started, and what were the aspirations of those systems. No one can study even the crude notions of the earliest schools, without feeling that they were groaning under the want of something better than Mythology, to bring the created into communion with the Creator, and that the great labour of philosophy was a *feeling after God*.

We must remember the darkness from which they emerged. They started from Polytheism; they had imbibed their views of Divinity from that, and

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of course those views were low. The gods of their people were vicious, treacherous, lustful, and revengeful; deified men and women who, in their apotheosis, had parted with none of their terrestrial corruption. They were gods whose bones were scattered about the world. It was the boast of the island of Crete, that it contained the *tomb* of Jupiter, the father of gods and men. Is it then surprising that the first philosophers, in their eager search for something that should sustain to themselves and the world, the relation of first cause and animating principle, never thought of a god as befitting the void which they sought to fill? Are we to conclude, from this natural mistake of theirs, that there was not a deep religious element in their system—the germ of a religious growth, which

must eventually develop itself in God? If, for a time, we fail to find philosophy a fully developed religion, are we to jump to the conclusion that its tendency was not in that direction?

Apply such conclusions to the strictly scientific features of the system, and we can all see the absurdity of the judgment. For example, Thales held the world to be an animal, with water for its soul; he argued that the loadstone must possess a soul, because it has power to stir iron. Do we conclude from this, that his system contained the germ of no higher advances in science? So far otherwise, we behold, through an absurdity, over which a school-boy of this day would laugh, the great principle of causation and life-energy struggling to reveal itself. It was a first looking toward the sublime,

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though still illusory discovery of Plato's world of Eternal Archetypes.

So with the religious element. The first doctrines of Grecian philosophy, with all their negative godlessness, contained the germ of an extensive religious inquiry, and deep religious conviction. It developed itself with increasing distinctness, as the subject passed from teacher to teacher, until it culminated in the one Supreme Divinity of Socrates and Plato—a gleam of Jehovah, seen through the mist of the wisdom of this world, but too shadowy to give a definite notion of what the god of the Athenian Academy really was. It was however sufficient to reveal the fact, that philosophy could not rest, until it had given to the world an object of worship, and established a connection between time and eternity.

—between the creature and his God. It settled the point that *irreligion is the abomination of philosophy.*

And yet philosophy reached its loftiest achievement, only to reveal a still deeper religious want. The mind, once lifted up to the true existence of a God, becomes a prey to an intense longing for some *sensible* communion with him—some coming of God to us in *appreciable* manifestations—something that can be felt as a *participation* of the Divine nature.

The religion of Polytheism confesses to this want, and proposes to supply it with gods of our own moral nature, like us in grossness and perverseness. We need not dwell upon the unfitness of the resort. Too vile to be accepted as a *supply*, that worship is nevertheless a *symptom* of this universal craving for

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*perceptible sympathy* between God and men.

Philosophy, by ennobling God, excites this longing to the point of intensity, but it despairs of providing for it. Plato may talk of our apparent existence as only a transient outward manifestation of an eternal Divine "IDEA," which is soon to reabsorb us; we obtain from the thought no sense of communion; we have no feeling of being brought nearer to God. The excellencies of the Socratic Divinity are abstract, and irrelative to our condition. As God he is as much—we will not say *too high*—but too far out of our reach, as the Jove or Aphrodite of Homer is beneath what we need.

In their conceptions of God, men, without the Bible, have never found a medium between the extremes of

gross familiarity with human nature, on the one hand, and an awful dread-inspiring mysteriousness, on the other. When left to this darkness, the world has cried earnestly, though vainly, for something to bridge the abyss between the human and the Divine. The earnest expectation of the creature has waited for just that coming forth of God from the darkness of the unknown, into actual sympathy with his creatures, which is only realized in the system revealed in our holy Scriptures. Unconsciously, but none the less truly, it has longed for the INCARNATION—for Immanuel, God with us; living, walking, speaking, and suffering with us; giving us *palpable* knowledge of his fellow feeling, yet in such a way as to leave the impression that, so far from compromising the purity or dignity

of his nature, he has met us in our natures, only to raise us to his own.

Such is the call of reason and humanity for religion. Standing forth, the sole exception to this moral sense of the world, Infidelity proclaims itself a crime against nature. In the world of reason, it is a prodigy which could never have been expected—which, from all *a priori* reasoning, would have been pronounced an impossibility.

Had it been told us that, when our holy Scriptures should be offered to the Hindoo, he would reject them, and abide by his Vedas, or that the Mahommedan would refuse to exchange his Koran for them, we should not have regarded the result as improbable. Our knowledge of the attachment of men to early and long-cherished views and customs, would lead us to

expect some demur against a change. And in our estimate of the probabilities in the case, we should attach great importance to the consideration that the religious system which they were asked to abandon, deeply inferior as it is, still provides something for the religious element which is strong in every human constitution. Such men, in rejecting the Bible, do not absolutely repudiate those religious instincts which are interwoven in the manly, as distinguished from the brutish nature. They do not leap into an abyss where all is void godlessness.

More than this: had it been said that some who were speculative believers in our sacred writings, would abandon them, to accept the Vedas or the Shaster in their place, as the word of God, improbable as the event might have

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appeared, we should not have regarded it so outrageous to nature as to defy belief. It would be such a diversion of the moral vision from luminous to absurd theologies, and so deep a descent from the spiritual to the carnal, as to betray a mournfully diseased condition of the moral nature; still an *object* would be left for the grasp of those in-born yearnings of humanity which cry out for religion.

Or suppose the Bible to have come under the notice of Socrates or Plato. They were men of strong religious aspirations, but, unlike the Hindoo, they were without a scrap of writing which claimed the character of a Divine revelation. Theirs was simply the religion of philosophy, but it strove earnestly to penetrate the eternal mysteries which lie beyond sensual vision.

We should look, with great interest, for the result, when they were brought within reach of a direct revelation from God, which, at once, answered their most anxious inquiries for truth. Perhaps, from our knowledge of the Bible, as supplying the great want under which their philosophy groaned, we should hopefully await their decision.

Still we should not regard a prediction that Socrates or Plato would reject the Bible, as out of the range of probability. The refusal of their faith to it would form no parallel to the Infidelity before us. They began their religious inquiries in the school of philosophy. In the case supposed, the existence of a written revelation from God was a thing unknown and unexpected, until the hour when it was laid

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before them. They had never been *consciously* indebted to it for one religious idea: it had not exerted a *sensible* influence over a single conclusion of their minds.\* With philosophy as their guide, they were on the moral ascent, hopeless of the attainment, it is true, but still rising toward truth. If they should reject the aid of Divine Revelation, it would probably be the result of a resolute attachment to their installed teacher, philosophy. It would not betray in them, under their circumstances, any relaxing of the bonds of religion, or any weakening of the religious element within them. It would indeed be the loss of an all-sufficient

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\* This mode of expression is purposely conformed to the hypothesis, that some gleamings from remote revelations might have remained unquenched in the night of heathenism.

means of the very knowledge after which they were reaching, and thus the act would be an irreparable error. But it would not be a deliberate backward step from light to darkness, nor would it be stamped with the infernal mark of apostasy. Still they might push on their researches after the Eternal, and still pursue their labours to exalt humanity nearer to God.

The Infidelity which we are contemplating, differs from all this. And it is a difference which does not consist in degree merely: it is elementary. The Pagan, or the Socratic philosopher, may reject our Bible, without such an inroad upon the ground-work of human nature, as brings organic destruction to the moral sense, as it came from the hand of God. The Infidelity which is propagated in Christian lands, is *radi-*

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*cal* in its destructiveness, revolutionizing the entire moral being. In this respect, it stands alone in the world, a moral prodigy, unaccountable except on the reason which we shall presently assign for it.

It is a fact full of significance, one which alone would be almost decisive in the present argument, that there is no record of the existence of an intelligent human being who renounced all religion, at any time when, or in any land where, the influence of our holy Scriptures was unfelt. We believe time and the world may be searched in vain, for a single exception to the truth of this statement. We may find, among people who have never been brought into familiarity with the heavenly gift, and the powers of the world to come, the grossest absurdities in relation to

religion; we may find Polytheism, idolatries that are loathsome, and rites which violate decency, and shock our compassions; but slimy as is the wading through the records of heathenism, there is even there no corruption so foul, and no descent so low, as the deliberate wilful abandonment of religion.\*

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\* In the foregoing references to ancient philosophy, we have not thought it necessary to bring the later schools of Rome and Alexandria into the account. They would not vary the result. It is true, their general tone was less serious, and sometimes scornful toward certain heathen religious systems. But the religious element was often brought into the foreground of their teachings, and almost always respected. We are not aware that it was ever derided, or even ignored, until we come down to the times when the philosophers, as in the case of Lucian and Porphyry, were brought into the presence of Christianity, and made to feel its power in antagonism with their systems.

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Passing from the faith of the Christian, to the unbelief of the heathen in the holy Scriptures, we pass, it is true, from a consistent and well-compacted scheme of moral accountability; from the record of a long and beautiful administration of a holy government; from a system of redemption which is full and finished, glowing in the brightness of eternal wisdom, and reposing in the softer lights of eternal love: we pass from these, into regions of myths and theological chaos, or into dark and cold speculations which are powerless to supply the moral necessities which they reveal. Still however we find ourselves among systems where the religious element is assiduously cultivated. But passing from our Christian churches, to the schools of Shaftesbury or Voltaire, or to the so-called

“Halls of Science” and “Free Inquiry Associations” of our American cities, we take the wide leap from religion to irreligion. We join ourselves to those who would eradicate every religious instinct from our natures, and cut every fastening which binds the present to the future, or man to his Maker. We go where all this is done, not incidentally or inferentially, but expressly and with a will.

Could we become oblivious of all which we now know of the existence and power of the Bible, and of what has occurred in Christian lands, under its influence, and thus oblivious, look out from the stand-point of natural reason alone, we should unhesitatingly pronounce this an impossible state of mind. We should say that human nature cannot be brought to it. All the experi-

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ence of men would forbid it. A fundamental law of the human mind would forbid it.

But returning to the land of Christian influences, we do see it. How shall we account for it? We must look outside of natural causes. For the solution of this great moral wonder, Infidelity must come, at last, before the light of Divine Revelation, and once more speak for itself.

### INFIDELITY IN THE PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

We shall not burden the examination with quotations from the Bible. A limited number will stand as examples of many which might be cited, descriptive of Infidelity, and—what is especially in point—accounting for its existence. The logical reader will see

the purpose for which they are introduced; not as begging the question, or assuming their inspiration while they are offered in proof of such inspiration; but to show that we can account for the phenomena which they teach us to expect, only on the presumption of their Divine inspiration.

There will be no objection to our assuming the historical fact that the narratives, given by the four evangelists, as contained in our holy Scriptures, are a cotemporaneous record of the sayings and doings, life and death, of a person, known as Jesus, who about eighteen centuries ago, appeared among men, claiming to be the Christ from heaven. Apart from the question of inspiration, the chain of evidence which authenticates these events, is so perfect, that they cannot be denied, except

upon principles which would destroy all our faith in human history.

We may then say that it is now nearly two thousand years, since Jesus publicly announced the influence which his coming, preaching, life, and death, would have upon the hearts of men. "For judgment," said he, "I am come into this world, that they which see not, might see; and that they which see, might be made blind." John ix. 39.

No laboured explanation of these terms is necessary. A moderate acquaintance with the style of description common in the sacred writings, is sufficient to enable us to define them. The words, "which see not," manifestly refer to those who are humble, distrustful of their own wisdom, docile, and otherwise in a frame of mind to wel-

come light from above. They "which see," are plainly those who, in all these respects, are the opposite of the last. Their confidence in their own knowledge, wisdom, and opinions, is too exalted to allow them to accept any instruction from heaven.

The narrative which precedes the quotation before us, affords an illustration of the latter class, in the persons of their then living prototypes. We there see the whole process of Infidelity worked out, first to obstinate unbelief, and then to malignant opposition. The Pharisees, after a long examination of a man, whom Jesus had miraculously cured of a blindness in which he was born, which ended in overwhelming proof of the reality of the miracle, finally ordered him to disown the power of Jesus in the matter. He met the de-

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mand with a few words of manly appeal to their reason, challenging their common sense to answer whether such a proof of the indwelling power of God was to pass for nothing. Their reply was an example of the *last argument* of haughty and bitter opposition to Christ, the world over—denunciation, and scorn of instruction. As much as to say—we know it all, and we are not to be taught, even by a miracle from heaven.

This was wilful unbelief, sought and cultivated, existing in the face of the highest evidence, and manifestly excited by an unconquerable hostility to Christ, in his proposed character of Redeemer of men. It was Pharisaism then, but waiting only for its divorce from Judaism, to become the Infidelity of the Christian ages.

With such a case before him, Jesus pronounced Infidelity a *Divine infliction*. This blinding of those "which see," was to be a *judgment* which his coming should work in the world. If men would deliberately reject the evidences of Divinity, with which his gospel clothed itself; if they would do worse — would meet that gospel with a foregone purpose to disbelieve it, they should experience a darkening, instead of enlightening influence from the heavenly light. Meeting the gospel in that spirit, they could not simply remain unenlightened; they must sink to deeper ignorance, from hour to hour.

The *judicial* character of this blindness is still more fully brought out, in another prediction of the New Testament, bearing upon strongly aggravated cases of opposition to the gospel.

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“For this cause, [*i. e.* not receiving the love of the truth—in other words, hating it,] God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” 2 Thessalonians ii. 11, 12. This delusion differs from the common unbelief of sinners, in the important and fearful particular already named. It is rendered more awful and generally hopeless, by containing this additional element of wrath, that it is a blindness in which God, by an act of holy judgment, confirms the soul.

Among all the lights in which a settled unbelief of the gospel can be viewed, there is no other so terrible as this. It is as if God said to the sinner who had adopted the resolute

purpose not to be convinced—"I met you, in your ignorance, and brought you instruction from the eternal fountain of truth. I found you striving to guide the vessel, laden with your immortal destinies, by the false lights of human wisdom, which were luring you into fatal currents, soon to dash among destructive rocks, and from the shore of heaven, I hung out the lamp of Divine Revelation, warning you what to shun, and where to lay your course. When you were slow to believe the heavenly illumination, I bore with your infirm reason, overwhelming the field of inquiry with evidence that the gospel offered you was indeed the light of God. I did more. After having given Christ to become the Redeemer of sinners, I advanced from your reason to your heart, with pre-

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cious influences from the cross, to win your acceptance of mercy. I drew nearer and nearer, imparting to those influences more tenderness as they approached closer, until it became fully demonstrated that you nourished such a settled, invincible repugnance to the gospel, as led you to wish and resolve to abide in unbelief. Now, after having yourself passed the boundary of mercy, the hour of just and holy judgment has come. You *would not* believe; now, in judicial wrath, I withdraw from you the power of belief. You *would* be deluded; now you *shall* have strong delusion. From henceforth, the lights of conscience and revelation shall cease to stand between you and destruction.”

Another prediction—only contingent it is true, but still pertinent when we

see it reduced to reality—presents an additional feature, which we may expect to see more strikingly exemplified in those who fall from a Christian profession, into the embrace of Infidelity. This feature is a mad opposition, added to an abandonment of the gospel. The apostate not only removes himself from the field of hope, but he becomes the bitter adversary of the Bible. The passage to which we refer, says that “if we sin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries.” Hebrews x. 26, 27. This scripture is only quoted as defining the spirit which we are taught to expect as the sign of apostasy from the Christian

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system to Infidelity. Such apostates will not stop at the point of giving up their faith in the word of God. We are taught to expect that we shall meet them in the character of *adversaries*.

Add to these predictions, one of the reasons which the holy Scriptures assign for this revolt from themselves. The Bible is offered as the standing testimony against sin, and the condemning judge of all who will not conform to the holy morals of heaven. When it is accepted as the authorized revelation of the will of God, then the principles and morals of religion have an abiding witness. It then becomes the test to which all human conduct can be forced. There the wrong-doer reads his own condemnation. To sensuality, lechery, falsehood, fraud, avarice, inhumanity, malevolence, soul-

vampires all, it is the rising sun, before which they fly screaming in search of moral darkness. Those who are resolved to sin, wish for the annoyance of no such incessant voice of reproof. But they can shield their consciences from it, only by some violent process, which, by benumbing the moral sensibilities, renders the heart inaccessible to the heavenly warning.

So one of the inspiring motives to Infidelity is thus stated: "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." John iii. 19, 20. Men wish to sin, but they recoil from enduring reproof, either from their consciences

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or from a virtuous community. If they can destroy their own faith in the Bible, they remove the most powerful exciting agent from conscience. If they can destroy the public faith, sin will cease to expose them to the reproach of those among whom they live. Infidelity is the chosen agent for relieving them from all moral restraints.

Carry a lighted lamp into the midnight den of a felon, surrounded by the instruments and evidences of his guilt, and his first impulse will be to escape the light. Follow him up with it, and his next, his desperate effort will be to extinguish it. If he can do this seasonably, he may yet have the protection of darkness in his controversy with the law. So Infidelity generally progresses from personal unbelief to active

opposition—from an attempt to escape personally from the influence of truth, to an effort to destroy its influence in the world. The former achievement might help a man to sin without remorse; only the latter—putting out the light—will enable him to do it without shame. A patient examination of the histories already reviewed will show that the animus of this effort is correctly stated—“lest his deeds should be reproved.”

We have given a few examples of the predictions of our holy Scriptures, bearing upon the Infidelity now under review. They are clear, pointing out a class of people with so much precision, that we cannot fail to identify them when we behold them. We are taught to look for unbelievers who possess striking characteristics, distinguishing them

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from common sinners, and whose infidelity is unlike that of the Mahomedan or Buddhist, who rejects Christianity to abide in another religious system. We are taught to expect the appearance of men, whose error is clearly traceable to the approach of the highest knowledge in the universe, whose lack of faith carries every mark of inveterate obstinacy, and whose bitterest animosity against the truth is excited by those features of it which should render it most acceptable to the sinner. They are to be "men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith." 2 Tim. iii. 8. They are to "deny the Lord that bought them." 2 Peter ii. 1. They are to "tread under foot the Son of God, count the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and do despite to the Spirit of

grace." Heb. x. 29. We are led to expect a desperation of rage against Christ, proportionate to the loftiness of their former standing on the Christian system. The name "Adversaries" is applied to some with peculiar emphasis. The spirit which that name speaks, is satanic. Satan is emphatically *the Adversary*. 1 Peter v. 8. So it is intimated that we shall find those that are eminently adversaries, in the persons of such as have sinned wilfully, after having received the knowledge of the truth.

The argument for the Divine inspiration of the holy Scriptures, which is derived from the fulfilment of prophecies, comes incidentally, but strongly, forward here.

When it is shown that events were predicted thousands of years before

their occurrence; that these events were too improbable to permit the supposition that their prediction was *guess work*; that in truth they were, in their details as well as their general character, contrary to all human experience, and opposed to all the probabilities of human conduct; that still men and things were so turned from their ordinary bent that everything took place in exact accordance with the prediction, then we insist that the coming forth of the result is an evidence that the prophecy originated in the *omniscient* mind of a Being, who also possesses *omnipotent* energy for accomplishment.

We place such passages as we have quoted—especially those in which *judicial* blindness is so distinctly brought out—in the catalogue of remarkable predictions, which have been remarka-

bly fulfilled in all the ages since. We have contemplated Infidelity as a crime against nature, a moral prodigy, without an existence until it arose in special opposition to the gospel, and so foreign even to the worst moral experiences of the previous ages, that no rational expectation of its existence could have been formed. As we have already said, could we become oblivious of our present knowledge of its existence, and transfer ourselves to the stand-point from which the holy Scriptures spoke, we should pronounce the state of mind there described, a moral impossibility. We should regard the modern infidel as an anomaly—a moral miracle.

But we do see this anomaly, just as those holy Scriptures, in the face of the whole moral history of the world,

predicted that we should behold it. We see so many of its characteristics, and so much of its moral likeness, that we unhesitatingly identify it as the object of those predictions—the wonderful fulfilment of a prophecy, too deep for any mind below God's. His Spirit taught us that when we should behold the fulfilling of such wonders, we must believe. The infidel comes unmasked into the field, and even obtrudes his testimony upon us, that in his own person they are fulfilled.

But in the presence of the holy Scriptures, the witness of Infidelity against itself, is chiefly decisive in the exhibition which it affords of the power of God, through the word, on a reprobate heart. The Christian gospel claims for itself, that where it is not accepted as a savour of life unto life,

its power must be felt as a savour of death unto death. 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16. We have exhibited the origin and character of that most fearful condition of the moral faculties, which is known as a judicial blindness; and when we meet with a type of unbelief which perfectly answers to it, then we see the power of God in his awful judgment. When we find the *word*, which is the exciting medium for this state of feeling, we recognize the power of God there indwelling.

We look on the infidel, and see it all. Before him lies an open Bible. Whatever may be said concerning its Divine inspiration, it is beyond question calculated, in its whole character and spirit, to win the regard of all who delight in human happiness. Its precepts enjoin just the virtues which

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administer to the tranquillity, joy, and prosperity of society. Its laws are just, and its morals are pure. It guards holiness, and lays sin, including all human cruelties and wrongs, under the ban of heaven. Its loftiest principles relate to the wants of sinners, providing pardon, and opening the way to holiness and happiness. It comes, loaded with goodness for a wicked world, and comfort for an anguished heart. Its leaves bring healing to the nations.

This is the Bible that goads the infidel to madness. His hostility becomes more intense, as he approaches the loveliest matter of Divine Revelation, that central beaming glory of the gospel, the provision made for sinners in the death of Christ. The shafts of infidel scorn and blasphemy fly

thickest around the cross. Writers and lecturers seem most exultant, when they imagine they are detecting some absurdity in the evangel, or some defect in the statement of Christ's birth, life, death, or resurrection. They have bestowed on his earthly parentage, slanders too vile to repeat. They have sneered at Calvary, and taunted its dying victim. In Voltaire's secret correspondence with the anti-christian clubs of France and Germany, "THE WRETCH," is his synonym for our Saviour Jesus Christ. In a letter to his confederate, D'Alembert, complaining that he is obliged to chafe under a mask before the world, on account of the superstition of men, he says that he would much prefer to "wage open war with the Wretch, and die on a

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heap of Christians, immolated at his feet.”

The gospel accounts for all this. We have seen some of the numerous predictions in point; such, for example, as that the same influence which, to the submissive, is a savour of life unto life, will be, to the rebellious, a savour of death unto death. Those truths which relate more especially to the cross, strike deepest into human pride, soar most sublimely above mortal wisdom, reveal most of the wickedness of the human heart, exalt God highest, and sink the creature lowest. They present the believer most unblemished in the final judgment, and make the same judgment most terrible to the unbeliever. Hence, while among all parts of the Bible, those which have the nearest connection with the cross,

bring most delight to the obedient, that cross becomes the hardest rock of offence to those who revolt from its mercy.

“The vital savour of his name  
Restores our fainting breath ;  
But unbelief perverts the same  
To guilt, despair, and death.”

This power, through the word, has its strongest manifestation in those who have apostatized, from the profession of a Christian faith, to Infidelity. There we generally find a sublimated spirit of opposition to the Bible. In this country, a large portion of the public infidel lecturers belong to this class. Some of them have enjoyed the charity of the church, and occupied Christian pulpits. They often boast of their descending experience, and parade their apostasy before their

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audiences, to give zest to the performance.

The enmity of such people to the gospel is intense and satanic. Their opposition is sleepless, their denunciations bitter to the last extreme, and their language not unfrequently blasphemous. If they are lost sight of for a time, seasons of a religious revival bring them again to the surface, as the viper is warmed into life by the sun. Then they may be known by their efforts to raise a counter excitement, calling assemblies together, sending out challenges for debate, and omitting no occasion to strike at the gospel. Body, soul, spirit, all which constitutes their being, is absorbed in the ceaseless war against Christ. These are the "Adversaries," who in the passage already quoted from the Epistle to the

Hebrews, are said to sin wilfully, after having received the knowledge of the truth. If the reader will refer to the sequel of the passage, he can take his own solemn view of what remains for them. And well may he be alarmed for his own moral sensibilities, if he does not find it in his heart to say—  
“O my soul, come not thou into their secret! unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united!”

Such is the moral condition which we once more characterize as beyond nature. Throughout the records of time, we search for it in vain, until we come below the Christian era, and into the lands of Christian influences. Natural causes fail to account for it. It is an impenetrable mystery, until we accept the solution of the problem which the holy Scriptures offer.

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In the presence of those Scriptures, Infidelity proclaims itself the revolt of a proud and bad heart, from the purity and denunciations of the Divine law, from the conditions of pardon, and from the administration of God, as it is read in the living light of heaven. It is antagonism to Christ, and resistance to the gracious influence which God employs on human hearts. But it has a worse tale for itself than this, and herein is its testimony to the Divine energy in the gospel. When matured, it is God's holy judgment upon the soul, leaving it to fill up its measure of iniquity, and inflicting upon it the strong delusions which it seeks. Why enlarge? We have seen what it is. The Scriptures which predict the infliction of judicial blindness, afford the only rational account of its origin.

It is the weight of the Divine power in the written word. The presence of that power involves the Divine inspiration of the holy Scriptures.

## CONCLUSION.

Thus we secure the witness of Infidelity against itself. From its inner being, a voice is ever heard, proclaiming the falseness of all which comes from its lips. As long as a vestige of it abides in the world, it will be a monument of the power of God in the gospel, producing supernatural changes of mind, in the direction of ruin, as well as of heaven. The scars which it brings out from every battle, are indelible marks on the moral nature, showing for themselves that they are inflicted by the hand of God. It comes before the world with both hands

loaded; one with the bane, and the other with the antidote. It is itself the answer to all its own arguments. Its boasting apostle is ever doomed to confront himself. He is himself a living, moving, and acting testimony to the truth which his words deny. All this is so apparent that, in a world where there is enough impatience of moral restraints, to give popularity to loose religious views, we have found Infidelity shamefully small in numerical importance, and still lower in influence.

If we speak of the great peril of Christian nations from this source, it is not from any apprehension that Infidelity, under its own name, will become very extensive. In our cities—possibly to some extent in the rural districts—the sewers of humanity will empty somewhat of their flow into the halls

of infidel lecturers, and, in rare cases, men who are supposed to be respectable and intelligent may submit to the appellation. But other means of evading the force of truth, involving less peril to reputation, are now too numerous to permit the open emissaries of Infidelity to hope for the countenance of the public. Men who cannot accept the scandal of such an association, but whose hearts are really hostile to the living element in the gospel, will sacrifice candour to reputation, and wear the Christian name, while they repudiate the proper sense of the Bible. The aristocracy of unbelieving intellect now passes the clubs of Paris, as a detestable vulgarity, and pursues its journey to the transcendental regions beyond the Rhine.

But among the people at large, the thing most feared, and which, in fact, has always followed the efforts of Infidelity, is this—that its specious appeal to passions which are naturally restive under the holy sanctions of the Bible, will insensibly weaken the force of Divine truth upon the consciences of speculative believers, and bring about that result which is correctly named Practical Infidelity. This is the danger which prompts the appearance of these pages. They are written, more in hope of a confirming, than a reclaiming influence. They go forth with the earnest desire that the yet unpolluted reader may be warned, never to allow his faith in the word of God to become shaken; never to think of any safe and honourable path of life, but such as the Bible marks out; and never to doubt

that the gospel scheme of mercy is, for him, the true way to heaven. The solemn inference arises from the whole of this examination, that there is fearful danger in trifling with the word of God. From every view which has been taken of the origin, growth, and fruits of Infidelity, the warning comes forth, that those gracious influences which flow through the holy Scriptures, cannot be neglected without placing both the moral character and the soul in peril of ruin.

But though Infidelity, as such, is never to overwhelm the land, still individuals are in danger of even the worst that has been contemplated. The young sinner often shudders at the thought of parting from the Bible, as a system of faith. In time, familiarity with infidel criticisms and

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cavillings, brings him to look upon the word of God, with less reverence. As he feels himself more alienated from its spirit, he insensibly comes to wish it may prove true, that there is no such law and judgment against his sin. With that wish growing upon him, he listens to "the counsels of the ungodly." By degrees dangerous intimacies spring up between himself and those enemies of his soul. Then he stands in "the way of sinners." It is but a step more to "the seat of the scornful." These are the progressive workings of an alienation of heart, from the principles of the holy word. The first movement from the Bible brings the soul upon enchanted ground. Few slumber there without sleeping the sleep of death.

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